

Loving God and Neighbor: Matthew 22:34-46

By Bill Whittaker (with minor editing)

What a relief to hear a scientist distill his lengthy research to the most important component! Jurors appreciate gifted lawyers capable of succinctly bringing an involved case to the crucial decision point. An expert in the Old Testament law, who probably had his own carefully constructed thesis, challenged Jesus to state "the greatest commandment."

Jesus provides the bottom line of our spiritual life: "Love the Lord your God ... love your neighbor." This is the marrow of authentic Christian living. Life for now and all eternity hangs on loving God and neighbor.

Bill Whittaker's four-year-old daughter yelled from the back door, "Daddy, how do you spell love?" Bill stopped from his yard work and gave her the four letters. Later at a birthday celebration, her handmade card was printed with "I Love You." How do you spell love? We really spell it as we live it and express love in relationships.

In that way, love may be the most misspelled word in the vocabulary of our lives. Jesus spelled love with unreserved commitment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (v. 37).

Helmut Thielicke said, "We always put God off with installment payments and only give him piece by piece a bit of something from us, but never ourselves." Real love trusts the whole person to God, surrenders the will to God's way, and allows the mind to be guided by the mind of Christ.

Jesus rejected popular usages of love, erotic and friendship, and focused on agape to describe an authentic relationship with God and others. Agape love sacrifices self for the best interest of others. Agape love deliberately chooses the highest good. Lesser love fluctuates with emotions.

Agape love acts. Jesus placed the second commandment on par with the first: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In 1991, racial bias prompted 60 percent of the nation's hate crimes, and religious bias accounted for about half of the remaining incidents. "Whoever says, 'I am in the light,' while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness" (1 John 2:9).

The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) radically expands the limits of our love.

Jesus' response silenced the Pharisees. They found it easier to talk about love than to practice it. While they regrouped for a rebuttal, Jesus threw them a question: "What do you think of the Christ?" (v. 42).

Craig Blomberg observes, "This is the topic they really should be talking about." The possibility of agape love hangs on Jesus: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). As Son of David, he understands our difficulty with love. As Lord, he sacrificed himself to free us from [indifference] and provide the power to love.

All of life hangs on love because Love hung on the cross. What do you think about Jesus? What will you do with Jesus?

You may only want to debate with Jesus about love. He says "Follow me," and start loving God and neighbor.

Let us pray...

Almighty God,

your Son has shown us how to love one another.

May our love for you

overflow into joyous service

and be a healing witness to our neighbors

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.