

1-7-2023, COTR Texarkana

Title: Christianity Simplified

Purpose: Provoke people to live by the 2 greatest commands in the Bible, loving God and loving people.

Truth for Today: Love is more than a feeling; true love is also shown by what we do.

Text: Mark 12: 28-31

Topic: 2 Great Commandments, Loving God, Loving People, Spiritual Priorities, Main Thing

Series Title: The Man in the Mirror...What kind of person will I be in 2024?

Series purpose: Provoke people to prioritize their lives around Biblical values and imperatives in 2024.

## Christianity Simplified

### I. Introduction

- A. Review Series: The Man in the Mirror...What kind of person will I be in 2024? The New Year is a time to pause and reflect on what's most important. Spiritual priorities must be deliberate choices, or they get lost in the busyness of life and we miss opportunities that will affect us for eternity.
- B. [Mark 12:28-31 (NLT)] One of the teachers of religious law...asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”
  1. Scribes found 613 commandments in the OT Law. All were important, but some were more important. He wanted Jesus to sum up the whole OT in 1 command.<sup>1</sup>
- C. [Vs. 29] Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this...<sup>30</sup> you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” ] [Mt. 22: 40 (NLT) The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”] To fulfill these commands is to fulfill all others.<sup>1</sup>
  1. There are 23,145 verses in the OT and 7,957 in the NT.<sup>5</sup> The ESV has 757, 439 words.<sup>6</sup> My SFLB study Bible has 1721 pages. It's easy to get overwhelmed and major on the minors while ignoring what's most important. Jesus simplifies it for us and tells us there are 2 most important commands in the Bible, loving God and loving people. This is what we'll talk about today.

D. Title: Christianity Simplified

### II. We are to, “Love God and love people”. What does love mean?

- A. In Greek, the language of the NT, (1) *eros*, sexual love; (2) *phileō*, friendship based on feelings or liking someone, (3) *storgē*, feeling's and commitment we have toward relatives, (4) *agapē*, love expressed by our actions; what we do rather than how we feel about someone. It is based primarily on principle, duty, and commitment. *Agapē* love often includes feelings but is unconditional. It means to act in a loving way even when we don't feel like it, e.g., Jesus being kind to Judas.<sup>4</sup> This is the type of love Jesus referred to in the 2 great commandments.
  1. God's love for us is the perfect example of agape love. [Romans 5:8 (NLT)] But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were

still sinners.] God loves us when we do wrong or mess up, e.g., prodigal son. This doesn't mean God approves of sin, but He doesn't throw us away. He loves us in spite of what we do, e.g., disciplined Israel. God's love never fails. He wants us to love Him and people like this.

### III. Simplified Christianity: Love the Lord with all your heart

- A. [Vs. 29] The most important commandment is this...<sup>30</sup>...**love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.**']
- Heart, soul, mind, and strength is a way of saying our whole being, not parts of human nature.<sup>3</sup> Everything in our life should be given to the pursuit of God.
- B. So how do we do we love God like this?
- 1<sup>st</sup>, we have feelings of love for God. (Part of agape) Just like we 'feel love' for a person we can 'feel love' for God. Feeling love for God comes from closeness to Him. Closeness to God comes from spending time with Him. Review: Start our day with God. Get out of bed and commit our day to Him. Get up a little early and take some time to be with God in Bible reading and prayer, i.e., talking to God. The feeling of closeness to God comes when we worship Him, awe in kneeling, joy in clapping, surrender in uplifted hands, e.g., E.g., cancer diagnosis got a good report and smiling with both hands raised emotion of love Pic to God. Shout PTL!
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>, we love God, with our actions. (the primary part of agape) We show our love by doing what He asks and obeying His commands. [John 14:15 (NCV)] **"If you love me, you will obey my commands."** Agape love isn't just felt it is shown. E.g. LaNell. Agape love has an aspect of duty to serve Him. Parable servants of God [Luke 17:10 (ESV)] when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; **we have only done what was our duty.**'"] Jesus loved the Father like this. [John 6:38 (NLT)] **For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God** who sent me, not to do my own will.] The primary aspiration of our life should be to love God with our whole being, expressed by worship, obedience, service, giving, sacrificing and faithfulness. [1 John 4:19 (NKJV)] **We love Him because He first loved us.**]

### IV. Simplified Christianity: Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

- A. [Vs. 31] The second is **equally important**: **'Love your neighbor (your fellow man) as yourself.'**']
- B. Who is our neighbor and how are we supposed to love them? To the Jews in Deuteronomy, it was fellow Jews.
- C. (1) Our neighbor is any and every person, especially those who may be different from us. 'Who is my neighbor?', [Luke 10:30-37 (NLT)] A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was **attacked**...<sup>31</sup> "By chance **a priest** came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by...<sup>33</sup> "Then a despised **Samaritan** came along, and... felt **compassion** for him. <sup>34</sup> **Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds...** and bandaged them...<sup>36</sup> "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked... Jesus asked. <sup>37</sup> The man replied, "The one who showed him **mercy.**" Then Jesus said, "Yes, now **go and do the same.**""]

1. Our neighbor is anyone who needs our help. Love, moved by mercy and compassion, helps them. **E.g.**, Jesus in Mt. 25 that feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visit the sick and in prison.<sup>4</sup> Jesus offered good news to the poor, to captives, the blind, the oppressed, and those who were ostracized, or despised.<sup>4</sup> He wants us to imitate Him. This would solve the problem of racism, hatred, and violence in America.
- D. (2) Our neighbor is fellow believers, [**1 John 4:20–21 (NLT)**] If someone says, “I love God,” but **hates a fellow believer**, that person is a liar...<sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also **love their fellow believers.**] **E.g.** [**1 John 3:17–18 (NCV)**] Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a **brother or sister in need**, but does not help. Then God’s love is not living in that person.<sup>18</sup> My children, we should love people not only with words...but **by our actions...**]
1. We show love to fellow Christians by helping one another when in need, resolving our offenses, forgiving, encouraging, etc.
- E. (3) Our neighbor includes our enemies, [**Mt. 5:44–48 (NLT)**] But I say, **love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!**<sup>45</sup> In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven...] **E.g.**, guards converted torturing Christians.
- F. (4) Our neighbor is the lost unbeliever, [**Luke 19:1–10 (NLT)**]...Zacchaeus...<sup>6</sup>... took Jesus to his house...<sup>7</sup> But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a **notorious sinner**,”...<sup>9</sup> Jesus responded...<sup>10</sup> For **the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.**”]
1. Showing the love of God to a lost person is more powerful than a convincing argument, **E.g.**, Stephen while being stoned, ‘Father forgive them...’
- V. Conclusion: Our love for God and people can be lost...yet reignited.
- A. [**Rev. 2:1–5 (NLT)**]...to...the church in Ephesus...<sup>2</sup>... I have seen your **hard work** and your **patient endurance**. I know you **don’t tolerate evil people**...<sup>3</sup> You have patiently **suffered for me without quitting**.<sup>4</sup> “But I have this complaint against you. **You don’t love (agape) me or each other as you did at first!** (*NKJV you have left your 1st love*) (*ESV you have abandoned the love you had at first*).<sup>5</sup> Look how far you have fallen! **Turn back to me and do the works you did at first...**
1. The church was 40 years old and now many were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Christians. Theses churchgoers had lost something they once had. They still went to church, served the Lord and had righteous standards but had (1) lost a deep devotion to Christ,<sup>7</sup> or perhaps they had (2) lost their love for one another or (3) they no longer expressed their love for Jesus by witnessing to him in the world.<sup>8</sup> They had forgotten,[ **Mark 12:29–32 (NLT)**] Jesus replied, “**The most important commandment is...**<sup>30</sup>...**you must love the Lord your God with all your heart...and...**<sup>31</sup> **The...‘Love your neighbor as yourself...**]
  2. If we’re just going thru the motions may the Lord help us love Him more than anything or anyone and show the love of God to everyone...believers, unbelievers, people we know, and even strangers and enemies.
- VI. Response: maybe 1, 2 or all 3 apply to you.

A. Prayer: (1) Maybe your relationship with God has degraded into duty alone, you've lost the feeling of closeness, and you want it back; (2) Maybe your Christian life is more about feelings than obedience or service, (3) Maybe you have a hard time loving other Christians, strangers, or lost people. You want God to repent and ask God to help you have a change of heart. Our Christian life is like a fire that is about to go out and needs more wood.

B. Souls: John 3:16

## VII. Bibliography/ Resources: Logos Bible Software and Library, Platinum Edition, was used to prepare this message.

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2. *B. Šabb.* 31a. I. Epstein, ed., *Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1935–52).
3. Brooks, J. A. (1991). [Mark](#) (Vol. 23, p. 197). Broadman & Holman Publishers.
4. White, R. E. O. (1988). [Love](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1357). Baker Book House.
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7. Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 933–934). Victor Books.
8. Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 230). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

## VIII. Supplemental Material

- A. [Vs. 29 Jesus replied, “**The most important commandment is this:** ‘Listen, O Israel! **The Lord our God is the one and only Lord.**’] Jews called this the *Shema*, Heb. means Hear, the first word of Deut. 6:4-9. These verses were recited morning and evening by devout Jews. It asserted the basis of the Jewish and Christian faith: The Lord our God, *is the only, one true God.*<sup>1</sup> Christians and Jews are monotheists, not polytheists, i.e. we believe there is one God and not many.
- B. \*\*\* Love is more than a feeling; true love is shown by what we do. This enduring loyalty, rooted in an unswerving purpose of good, could be stern, determined to discipline a wayward people, as several prophets warned. But God's love does not change. Through exile and failure it persisted with infinite patience, neither condoning evil nor abandoning the evildoers. It has within it kindness, tenderness, and compassion (Pss 86:15; 103:1–18; 136; Hos 11:1–4), but its chief characteristic is an accepted moral obligation for another's welfare, which no ill-desert or want of gratitude will quench. Nevertheless response was expected. The Law enjoined wholehearted love and gratitude for God's choosing and redeeming Israel (Dt 6:20–25). This was to be shown in worship, and especially in humane treatment of the poor, the defenseless, the resident alien, slaves, widows, and all suffering oppression and cruelty.<sup>4</sup>

- C. *Agapē*. Of Greek words available, *eros* (sexual love) does not occur in the NT *phileō*, spontaneous natural affection, with more feeling than reason, occurs some 25 times, with *philadelphia* (brotherly love) 5 times, and *philia* (friendship) only in James 4:4; *storgē*, natural affection between kinfolk, appears occasionally in compounds. By far the most frequent word is *agapē*, generally assumed to mean moral goodwill which proceeds from esteem, principle, or duty, rather than attraction or charm. *Agapē* means to love the undeserving, despite disappointment and rejection; the difference between *agapaō* and *phileō* is difficult to sustain in all passages. *Agapē* is especially appropriate for religious love. *Agapē* was long believed to be a Christian coinage, but pagan occurrences have recently been claimed. The verb *agapaō* was frequent in the Greek OT Though *agapē* has more to do with moral principle than with inclination or liking, it never means the cold religious kindness shown from duty alone, as scriptural examples abundantly prove.<sup>4</sup>
- D. Heart, soul, mind, and strength is just a way of saying “with your whole being” and is not intended to designate the component parts of human nature.<sup>3</sup> **heart** (control center; cf. Mark 7:19), **soul** (self-conscious life; cf. 8:35–36), **mind** (thought capacity), and **strength** (bodily powers).
- E. In a sinful and suffering world divine love will show itself supremely in compassion and healing for the distressed and in redemptive concern for the alienated and the self-despairing. Hence the kingdom Christ proclaimed offered good news to the poor, to captives, the blind, the oppressed (Mt 11:2–5; Lk 4:18); while the attitude of Jesus toward those ostracized, despised, or grieving over sin in some far country of the soul assured them of forgiveness and a welcome return to the Father’s house (Lk 15).<sup>4</sup>
- F. Matthew 5:44–48 (NLT) But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! <sup>45</sup> In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. <sup>46</sup> If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. <sup>47</sup> If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. <sup>48</sup> But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.
- G. What Jesus meant by loving God is indicated by his own habits of public worship, private prayer, absolute obedience; by the requirement “Him only shalt thou serve,” not dividing devotion with mammon, hallowing the divine name in daily business by avoiding empty oaths; by his zeal for the Scriptures, his defense of the sabbath, his unshaken trust and frequent thanksgiving (Mt 4:1–11; 5:33–37; 6:1–6, 9, 24; 7:21; 12:50; 23:16–22; Lk 4:16; 22:42).<sup>4</sup>
- H. Love for one’s neighbor is nowhere defined but everywhere illustrated. In the parable of the good Samaritan, “neighbor” is shown to mean anyone near enough to help, and love involves whatever service the neighbor’s situation demands. The parable of the sheep and goats shows love feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting with kindness the sick and the imprisoned. In the untiring example of Jesus love heals, teaches, adapts instruction to the hearers by parable and symbolic language, defends those criticized or despised, pronounces forgiveness, comforts the bereaved, befriends

- the lonely. We are to love others as he has loved us and as we love ourselves, which means “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Mt 7:12). Such imaginative transfer of self-love does good without expecting return, never returns ill treatment, ensures unfailing courtesy even to the lowliest, sustains thoughtful understanding that tempers judgment.<sup>4</sup>
- I. Nevertheless love deals frankly with human weakness and wickedness. Jesus prays for Peter, but not that he shall be spared temptation; he rebukes disciples, warns Jerusalem and Judas, makes Peter painfully retract his denials, accepts that love may have to lay down its life. Christ’s love is no timid meekness, no sentimental mildness, inoffensive and ineffectual, helpless in face of the world’s evil. It is a strong determination to seek others’ highest good in all circumstances, at any cost.<sup>4</sup>
  - J. To Jesus the outstanding sin was lovelessness, the willful omission of any possible good, passing by on the other side while others suffer, ignoring the destitute at one’s gate, withholding forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>
  - K. Romans 13:8–10 (NLT) **Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law.**<sup>9</sup> For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>10</sup> **Love does no wrong to others**, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.
  - L. Paul’s description of love in action includes liberality, acts of mercy, and hospitality; avoidance of revenge; sympathy that weeps; rejoicing with others; sharing of weakness, shame, or need; restoring, supporting, and upbuilding others, giving them all honor, kindness, forgiveness, encouragement; restraining criticism, even of the divisive, overscrupulous “weaker brother”—the list is almost endless. More generally, love is revealed as a quality of activity, of thinking, and of suffering (1 Cor 13:4–8). In brief, love does no harm and omits no good; and it is God’s Law. But for motive Paul appeals beyond duty. To love we owe everything in salvation. God shows his love in that Christ died for us;<sup>4</sup>
  - M. *John*. What John later recalled, and reflected upon, forms the crown of biblical teaching about love. For John, love was the foundation of all that had happened—“God so loved the world ...” (Jn 3:16; 16:27; 17:23). This is how we know love at all: Christ laid down his life for us (1 Jn 3:16). The mutual love of Father, Son, and disciples, must be the fundamental fact in Christianity, because God himself is love (1 Jn 4:8, 16).
  - N. We know this by the incarnation and by the cross (1 Jn 4:9, 10). Thus we know and believe the love God has for us, and that love itself is divine (“of God”). It follows that “he who loves is born of God.” “He who does not love does not know God,” nor “the message” of the gospel; “is in the darkness,” “is not of God,” and “remains in death.” No one has ever seen God; nevertheless “if we love, ... God abides in us” and we in God.<sup>4</sup>

- O. **One of the Law teachers** (cf. 1:22), had **heard** Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees (12:18–27) and was impressed with His **good answer** to **them**. This suggested he was probably a Pharisee. He came with no apparent hostile or hidden motive to appraise Jesus' skill in answering a much-debated subject in scribal circles. Traditionally the scribes spoke of 613 individual commandments of the Mosaic Law—365 negative ones and 248 positive ones. While they believed all were binding, they assumed a distinction between weightier and lighter statutes and often attempted to sum up the whole Law in a single unifying command.<sup>1</sup>
- P. **the most important** command and its inseparable companion, which together summarize the whole Law<sup>1</sup>He began with the opening words of the *Shema* (from Heb., “Hear!” [*šema* ], the first word of Deut. 6:4). This creed (Num. 15:37–41; Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21) was recited twice daily—morning and evening—by devout Jews. It asserted the basis of Jewish faith: **The Lord** (Heb., *Yahweh*), namely, **our God**, Israel's covenant-keeping God, **the Lord is One**, that is, unique (cf. Mark 12:32). The command, **Love** (lit., “you shall love”) **the Lord your God** (Deut. 6:5), calls for a volitional commitment to God that is personal, comprehensive, and wholehearted. This is emphasized by the repeated words **with** (*ex*, “out of,” denoting source), **all** (*holēs*, “the whole of”), **your** (sing.), and the various terms relating to the human personality—**heart** (control center; cf. Mark 7:19), **soul** (self-conscious life; cf. 8:35–36), **mind** (thought capacity), and **strength** (bodily powers). The Hebrew text does not mention “mind”; the Septuagint omits “heart”; but Jesus included both terms, stressing the comprehensive nature of the command (cf. 12:33; Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27).<sup>1</sup>
- Q. **Love** (lit., “you shall love”) **your neighbor** (*plēsion*, “one who is nearby,” a generic term for fellowman) **as**, in the same way as, **yourself** (Lev. 19:18). The love a person has naturally for himself is not to focus solely on himself—a constant tendency—but should be directed equally toward others.
- R. **No** (Gr., “no other”) **commandment is greater than these** two because wholehearted love to God and one's neighbor is the sum and substance of the Law and the Prophets (cf. Matt. 22:40). To fulfill these commands is to fulfill all others.<sup>1</sup>
- S. Matthew 22:40 (NLT) The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”
- T. the scribes had identified 613 separate commandments, 365 of which were negative and 248 of which were positive. They divided them further into “heavy” and “light,” i.e., more important and less important. An example of a similar question but a different answer is found in the reply of Hillel (ca. 40 b.c.–a.d. 10) to a Gentile who asked him to summarize the law while he stood on one leg: “What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof.”<sup>2,3</sup>
- U. The inclusion was important for Mark's church in their debates with Jews in order to affirm that they also were monotheists, not polytheists as the Jews sometimes accused

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sing. singular

- them of being. “With all your mind” is added to the statement in Deuteronomy. The piling up of the terms “heart,” “soul,” and “mind” is just a way of saying “with your whole being” and is not intended to designate the component parts of human nature.<sup>3</sup>
- V. The second quotation is from Lev 19:18. In the first part of that verse the neighbor is defined as “one of your people,” i.e., a fellow Israelite. Leviticus 19:33–34 extends the love command to resident aliens. It is not likely that many first-century Jews extended it any further. Therefore one of the most significant elements in the teaching of Jesus was to redefine the neighbor as everybody, including the hated Samaritans and Gentiles (cf. Luke 10:30–37, which follows immediately his account of the discussion about the greatest commandment).<sup>3</sup>
- W. Jesus showed that it was impossible to really love God without loving neighbors. Love for God is expressed by loving others.<sup>3</sup>
- X. 1 John 3:10 (NLT) So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.
- Y. Romans 13:8–10 (NLT) **Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law.** <sup>9</sup> For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup> **Love does no wrong to others**, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.
- Z. Paul’s description of love in action includes liberality, acts of mercy, and hospitality; avoidance of revenge; sympathy that weeps; rejoicing with others; sharing of weakness, shame, or need; restoring, supporting, and upbuilding others, giving them all honor, kindness, forgiveness, encouragement; restraining criticism, even of the divisive, overscrupulous “weaker brother”—the list is almost endless. More generally, love is revealed as a quality of activity, of thinking, and of suffering (1 Cor 13:4–8). In brief, love does no harm and omits no good; and it is God’s Law. But for motive Paul appeals beyond duty. To love we owe everything in salvation. God shows his love in that Christ died for us; <sup>4</sup>