

# The Great Commandments: To Love

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*Preparatory*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 22:37-40

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Scripture reading this evening is Matthew, the Gospel according to Matthew, and we'll read parts of two chapters beginning in verse 43 of chapter 5. Matthew 5, beginning at 43, and then the text will be found in Matthew 22, and we'll read a portion of that chapter too. We begin in Matthew 5 because Jesus says some very important things about love, a correction, a very common thinking in the church. This is the word of God, Matthew 5, beginning at 43,

43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Then notice the kind of sarcasm in these next two verses. The Scripture does not have sarcasm very often.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only [that is, shake their hand and say hello to them], what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Then we turn to Matthew 22 and read that familiar section that we probably hear every Sunday morning after the reading of the law in the summary of the law here, and the summary of that law is our text for this evening. Matthew 22, beginning at verse 34. This is the word of God.

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. 35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, 36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? [And now come the words of our text] 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy

heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Sometimes the result of a test tell you more about the teacher or the teachers than about the students who took the test, and I had that experience recently when I gave a little test to some of you at Covenant at the beginning of a Chapel speech. Those of you who were in ninth grade or older remember in the Spring I handed out a little piece of paper like this and asked you to answer this question: what is love? And before you were to respond to that question, you were to write on the top of the paper, "God loves me. I love God. I love my neighbor. I love my enemy. And I love myself." And the definition that the students were to give for love was to fit, and had to be able to fit in each one of those statements. God's love for me, mine for him, mine for the neighbor, mine for the enemy, and mine for myself.

Love, what is love? A very simple question but a profound question. I got 350 different answers and I'm not criticizing the students and I'm saying nothing about their teachers at Covenant, but I'm saying that the results of tests as that one indicated, say more about the preachers and the elders and parents than about them. Why is it that in a Reformed denomination that has a fine Catechism curriculum and an excellent Christian school education, we could not come up with any consistency of answers among 350 young people to a very simple question, what is love? Now, not all of the answers were bad answers. They simply weren't answers to the question, what is love?

Love. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets, love God, love your neighbor as you love yourself, and we do not know how to define love? Jesus said to his disciples, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another." And if a non-Christian asked us, "What does that mean?" What would we say? Would we be able to give him or her a good answer to that question?

Our faith works by love, after all, Paul says to the Galatians, and there are three great graces that the Holy Spirit gives to the church: faith and hope and love, and the greatest is love. And though I think that our young people would be able to give because of their Catechism instruction a pretty good definition of faith, probably venture a fairly good definition of hope, confidence of good in the future, 350 different answers to the question, what is love? Shall we do that tonight and all of us take the quiz and see what we would come up with? That's not a criticism of you, it's a criticism of the preachers if there is any criticism to be offered at all. It would be very interesting to know what we would give to that answer besides a defensive answer like, "Well, why would you ask me that? Everyone knows what love is."

Well, let me ask you for a moment a rhetorical question, you men who are married. The first time before you were married, you said to your girlfriend, "I love you," the first time, and you saw her eyes brighten because she'd never heard you say that before, what did you mean? And ladies who are married, when he said that to you and you felt your heart

skip because it was what you were waiting for, it made you so glad, what do you think he meant? What is love, your love for your neighbor, your love for me, your love for your spouse, your love for the other congregational members, but more important, what is your love for God?

That's what we want to see this evening as we study Matthew 22:37-40, that, I judge, is probably read every Sabbath morning at the end of the Commandments. The summary of the law, the people that Jesus spoke to when he answered that question, "What's the great Commandment in the law?" I dare guess we're not surprised when they heard him quote from Deuteronomy, the great Shema, that's the Hebrew word for "hear." In the great Shema, all the Jews knew was, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love," and so forth. Even though the second Commandment isn't also from Deuteronomy but from Leviticus, no one was surprised at that either because, as I've said here before, the book of Leviticus was the Catechism book that the children needed to memorize in their youth. I wonder what they would have said to a question put to them, what is love? Well, we won't know that until the Lord brings us to glory and we might be able to ask them, but let's learn from the Scripture very clearly in such a way, I pray, that the children will understand what love is as we look at these great Commandments to love, and then see what is required toward God, what is required toward the neighbor, and then what is required that we learn.

What is required toward God is very simply this: love God. And if your children would say, "Well, how do we love God? What does that mean that we are to love God?" Then God says this to you, he says this, listen, "Watch me," God says, "as I love you, and just as I love you, you must love me. Just watch me." We, the children of God, learn how to love him by watching him love us. It's like a little robin. You wonder, children, don't you, when that little bird first comes out of the egg, how does the robin learn to find worms in the grass, jumping here and there and cocking its head to look down quietly to get the worm? How do they learn that? Well, they learn that by watching their mother and their father catch worms and avoid danger, and when God, your Father, says to you and to me, "Love me," and we say, "How do we love thee?" he says, "Watch me. Watch me."

And the Old Testament makes that very plain. The Old Testament makes plain that we are to love God not only because he loved us, that's clear, "I am the Lord thy God who redeemed you," that is, "I loved you. Now because I did, love me," that's how Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 start and that's what Deuteronomy 4 says, "because he loved thy fathers, thou shalt therefore keep his statutes," that is, love him, but it's also this, "Just as I love you, you are to love me."

So let's watch how God loves us and you Covenant students will remember a little bit of this. First of all, God loved us by deciding to do us the greatest good that could be done to fallen man by making a decision, by determining to do us good, by formulating a decree. All those words start with "d," you only need to remember one of them, by determining to do us the greatest good that God could do to us.

Then by desiring to do that good. It's not as though God made a determination, a plan, and said, "But I really don't feel like carrying it out. I will anyway but I don't like to." Sometimes we have that. Tomorrow morning, for example, we have to do something. We make a plan to do it. We really do not want to do it but we are going to do it anyway because we must. That's not God's love for us.

He not only determined to do us good but he desires to do us good and then he does that good to us which is deliver us from our misery by redeeming us, and then by drawing us to himself, into his bosom, and dwelling with us. All "d's." Not to be cute, but so that you remember them. He determines to do us good, desires to do us good, and then he does us the great good that we need by delivering us from our misery, by redeeming us, and then drawing us to himself and bringing us so close that we can't get any closer, and that's what he loves. That's what he delights in. That's love.

That's not my opinion, that's what the Bible says about love. Think about what it says in the Old Testament about election. That's really his determination, isn't it? He said in Deuteronomy 10, "the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose them." In the very same breath close together in the sentence are love and choosing. His love is that he chose. That is, he made a decree, the decree of election or choosing a people to be his own and give them the greatest good that anyone could give fallen man. And that's what Deuteronomy says also in chapter 7, "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you." There they are again, right in the same vicinity. In Hebrew poetry, it means that you look for the same meaning in words that are near to each other and that's the case here.

He loved you, that is, he chose you. That's first, which means that his thoughts toward you are not thoughts of evil but thoughts of peace, and it reminds you of what the prophet said in Jeremiah 29:11, and the fact that that love is a desire to do us good comes out from the New Testament when he in Ephesians, for example, speaks of God's decree in terms of his eternal good pleasure. You remember that language. His decree is his eternal good pleasure, that is, what he planned, he pleases to do. Everything that he planned, he pleases to do. It's good. He wants to do it. He will not let anything stand in his way of doing it. He desires to do us good.

Then in the third place, he does that greatest good that can be done to a people, and we know that from John 3:16, for example, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." That's love. He so loved that he gave. He spent himself. He delivered up his own Son for us. That's why Jesus said to his disciples, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Love. What is love? He lays down his life for his friends.

Then having delivered us from our sin and misery, with those same cords of love, now he draws us to himself and brings us close into his own bosom and embraces us and speaks to us and says to us, "You're mine. I've done good to you and for you and I always will, and I will never do anything different than that." That's his love for us. To use Old

Testament language, "I chose you. I redeemed you from the land of Egypt in the house of bondage and I brought you unto myself," Exodus 19:4.

Now you understand why the Old Testament word for love is a word that in the original means "to breathe after; to pant for." I use that expression in my prayers, "Just as a deer hunted in the chase finally gets away and is hardly able to walk any longer and pants for the living waters and then drinks those living waters, so my soul pants for thee." That's the word for love, to pant after; to breathe for; to yearn for, and to understand now that love is so much more than a feeling. We're inclined to give that answer, aren't we? We don't really know what kind of feeling to put on the little quiz but we're inclined probably to say, "Well, it's something I feel." And when we understand God's love for us, we say "The eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth who determined to do us good, desires to do us good, and then does that greatest good, that's his love, is only a feeling that I really can't put my finger on to describe?" Of course not. It's so much more than that.

Then understand the implication here is also, then we need to move on, the reality that love isn't based on us. God's love for us, remember we're watching, children, we want to know how to love him and we're watching him love us and it's not the case that God said, as it were, "I'm going to scan the human race to see if there was any that did good, that did understand, that seek me. There's one, I'll choose him and love him. There's another, I'll choose and love her. There's a family that's going to be good and I'll embrace them in my arms." No. The word of God testifies in Psalm 14:53 quoted in Romans 3, "He looked upon the children of men to see if there were any that did seek him and do good and there was not one." Not one, and yet out of that mass he chose some. Every one of them unattractive. Every one of them filthy. And that's what we confess tonight, too. That's our preparation for the Supper next week. That's who we are, but he loves us not because of us but because of him.

Now children, as a little robin learns from the big robin, we learn from God's love for us how we are to love him. How? Well, in the very same way: we must determine to do God the greatest good that any man can do, or woman; we must desire that and then we must do it. It's easy, isn't it? We must make a plan, pray for the grace that that plan is not something that we do just because we must do, but because we want to do it, and then we do it, and we do the greatest good that anyone, a creature, could do the God in heaven, which is, of course, not deliver him from some misery that he can't find a way out from or give to him something that he doesn't have that we do. It's not that, but we make a determination and desire to do this, that is, glorify him and enjoy him forever.

Our Presbyterian brothers and sisters in the other Reformed tradition from the Reformation have a creed that asks at the beginning, "What's the chief end of man?" And the answer is very simple, that we glorify and enjoy him forever, and when I see that answer, I say, "That's love. That's the chief end of man. That's the great Commandment for us. Love him." And if you ask, "How do you love him?" There's the answer: you glorify him and you enjoy him forever.

When I wake up in the morning, I need to make a decision, a plan, and have a determination for my day. The very center of my plan for every day must be to glorify and enjoy God forever, and then before I get out of bed, I must ask God for the grace that I not only carry that out but that I want to and I do it with joy, desire to do God the great good that any man is able to do, and then do it. Do it and do it by giving myself, by sacrificing myself, by spending myself. It's costly. Of course it is. Remember, children, look at how God loves us and see what it cost him and what he didn't spare, and say, "That's how I must love him."

Children, are you the only child maybe? Probably not, I don't see any children by themselves. Imagine that you were the only child and your parents loved you and they needed to do something, they knew they had to do it, and the only way they could do it would be to give you up and your parents would say, "Oh no. Nope. I will not give my only begotten son or daughter." But God did. He didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all in his love for us, and so don't be surprised that it's very very costly for us to love him. It's not only that I give up a boat if I wanted a boat but now can't afford it because I support the church and the Christian schools. Or I forego a nicer home because whereas I could have it if I didn't support the church and the Christian schools, I don't. That's somewhat costly but the costliness of love is this, love for God remember, the costliness of love for God is this, I give up everything. I give up myself. I'm willing to die but I'd rather die, that sounds easy, than to give up my wife or my children, my parents or my brother, and yet that's what must choke out of my throat tonight, that I so love him that if it would cost that, I would be willing to give up my spouse. And when I answer that question that we asked in Psalter 204, verse 3, "In heaven and earth who is there that I love compared with thee?" My answer is I love my wife more than I love God and that's a sin and I must love God more than her. That's costly but that's what love is. Love him.

So when you come to the text and you read in the text that it says love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength, you say, "Yeah, I knew that. That's redundant." It isn't. It's a good reminder to us. But we're tempted to say that when we understand the nature of love. Love is that you give everything for the object of your love. Everything. The center of your life's plans are God. The center of your life's passions are God. The center of your life's productions are God. Everything is God. God. God. Love him with all your being.

Heart, mind, soul and strength. Well, the point of the text is not so much that we need to know the difference between heart and mind and soul and strength, as it is to say this is everything. It's everything. There's nothing left. Then you would understand the text. Nothing left. Love him with your heart. Yes, with your feelings, with your passions. Love him with your soul, with everything that is in you. But love him with your mind, your thoughts, with your plans and determinations and what you meditate on. And love him with all your strength, that is, what God gave you for your body. With everything that you are, love him.

Love him and that reminds us, again, love is so much more than a feeling. If anyone ever asks you who is a non-Christian, asks you, a Christian, what it means to love God, now

you have something to say and not be embarrassed. It means that when I wake up in the morning, I plan to give him glory and I want to give him glory and I give him the glory due unto his name. I do. That's love for God. It isn't merely a feeling, although it is a feeling so deeply. And we ought never say, we ought never say, "I love ice cream." I like chocolate ice cream but I don't love chocolate ice cream. I love a certain sport. No, I don't. I may say I do but I'm not using love in the biblical sense of the word when I say I love that sport. We ought not use that language. We love God and we love our neighbor, we'll come to that in just a moment, and we love ourselves, but we don't love those things.

Then when you read the Commandments on a Sunday morning, you understand how they ought to be heard. This is how you love God, now listen, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." But translate that into the positive. God says to you, "Have me. Have me." It's like a wife saying to her husband, "Have me." Or a husband to his wife, "Have me. You may have me. You may have all of me." And that's what God says to us, "Have me. Don't have other gods, have me. And when you have me," that's the second Commandment, "have me properly, not just outwardly so that you appear here in the body but you're not here in the soul and you worship me with some images, pictures, formally, outwardly you draw near to me with your lips but your heart's gone. No, not that. Have me spiritually. Have me from deep within. That's how I want you to have me." Just as a wife says to her husband or a husband to his wife, "Have me not just outwardly, not just for those things that please you, but have me from deep within and devote yourself to me from deep within," and then you work out how the third and fourth Commandments go and that's the first table of the law. That's what's required of us toward God. Love God.

The second Commandment is like unto it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and then it becomes fairly straightforward, doesn't it? But before we see what that means, understand that relationship between that first and great Commandment and the second one that's like unto it. There are three things that you have to say to relate them, the first and great, love God; and the second, love your neighbor.

The first relationship is that love for God is the pattern for love for the neighbor. The second is like unto it. So now we have another comparison, don't we? The first one was, "How do we love God?" God says, "Watch me love you." Now the second question is, "How do we love the neighbor?" And the answer is just as you loved God. The first Commandment, "Love God," and the second, "Love your neighbor," the second is like the first. It's a pattern. The first is a pattern for the second.

Secondly, the relationship between the two is that the first is the source of the second. That's the nature of that word "first" in the Bible. Just as the firstborn makes the way for the others to be born, the others cannot come out from the womb unless the first comes first, so also the second comes because of the first, and maybe the best way to think of that is Christ as the firstborn of every creature. That's New Testament language. Christ is the firstborn of every creature in this sense, that without Christ there could be no other creation, but because of Christ, there is and all of the creation flows out of Christ. So also

with the second Commandment, the second Commandment flows out of the first. Put very simply it's this: if you love God, you will love your neighbor, and if you don't love your neighbor, it's proof that there is no love in you for God. The first produces the second.

Then the third relationship between these two Commandments, love God and love your neighbor, is that the first is the Great Commandment and the second is less great. It reminds me of what Genesis 1 says about the two lights that God put in the sky. Children, when God made the heavens and the earth, he set one to rule the day, and that's setting out in the West, and he made another to rule the night and that's dark now but it'll come up again in a couple of weeks when the reflection of the sun shines on the moon. That's the great light and that's the lesser light. We like the lesser light, it does give us some light during the night, but then this, understand that that's the source, the sun is, of that. There could be no light from the moon except there were also light from the sun.

So when you think of the first Commandment and the second Commandment, love God and love your neighbor, that's the relationship that you need to think of between the two but, as I said, now it's not so difficult to understand how to love the neighbor. When you wake up in the morning and you say, "My life has a center," your life has a center, doesn't it? There's something most important in the very middle of it and we said that that center is love God. You wake up in the morning and you make a plan, a decision, a determination to love God, right outside that center is your plan and determination and decision to love your neighbor. Not yourself first, love your neighbor. Love your neighbor. Love God and then love your neighbor. Make a plan to love him or her, probably the one on the pillow next to you if you're married, or the children sleeping in the other room if you have children. Make a plan to do them good and then pray for the grace before your feet hit the floor for a desire to do it because we can make plans but not want to carry them out, and so we pray for grace that we desire to do good to the neighbor and then we do it. And because the greatest good that we can do any other person is to give them the only real good that they need, God, the greatest good that we can do to any neighbor is to lead them to God.

So when I get up in the morning, if I can, I'm going to open up this word and read it to my wife and to my children and if that's not possible, as soon as I get home I'm going to open up this word and read it to my wife and to my children because I love them. That is love. What else is love than giving them the greatest good that you've determined to give them and desire to give them. You say, "That's costly." Yes, of course it's costly. Watch God love us. It cost everything. And watch us love God. It cost everything. And if we love God and spend ourselves for that, we are going to do the very same thing as we love the neighbor. Of course it's costly. It takes 15 extra minutes in the morning and another hour in the evening or whatever else it is, to manifest the good and to do the good that I am called to do to the neighbor whom God put in my vicinity.

I do what I can to promote their bodily welfare. Because God loves us in the body as well as in the soul, I love you in the body as well as in the soul, and though I'm not able to do you good in the body because I'm a minister, my function is to do you good in the soul. I



spend myself to study this word and bring it to you and train men to do that same. Then the deacons have their function. If you have need for the body, God provides your needs if you can't provide them yourselves through the deacons. But we love one another. We love one another in the soul, and we love one another in the body. We determine to do them good, we desire to do them good, and then we do it. We bring them to God and we spend ourselves.

When I think of the costliness of that, though, it's not so much how much time it may take me to do you good that makes me realize how expensive it is and how much I have to pay, it's this that makes me realize that you are called to love me and that's costly, and I mean by that there's no one here that knows me better than I know me. I know my sin. I know my weaknesses and when you see them, as you will and do, of course we live together, then I say, "They must love me? They must do good to me? They must think of me in the morning when they wake up and pray for the grace to want to do that and then do it with joy? They're going to love me?" Then I realize how costly his love.

So don't think of how difficult it is for you to love him or her or them because they're so unattractive, think of how difficult it is for them to love you, because if they only knew, and they do some, and yet they're going to love you. Not because they see something good in you. They don't. They don't need to. God says love your neighbor, and if you have a difficult time loving an ugly neighbor, an unattractive neighbor, a mean neighbor, a neighbor who's never done any good to you, a neighbor who has maybe hurt you, then look at God's love for you and ask yourself what it was in you that made him do good to you, what good there was in you before he gave you any good to have, and then humble yourself and let me humble myself and let me say, "I'm going to love you anyway. I see no good in you but I'm going to love you. I'm going to do you good."

That now makes you understand why I read what I did in Matthew 5 and why Jesus comes with that sharp word, that biting word, "If you love those who love you, what use is that? Even the non-Christians do that. If you greet with a handshake and embrace with arms of kindness those who have done that to you, brought you a meal, visited you when you were in the hospital, what use is that? Even the non-Christians do that. You must be like your heavenly Father who when you hated him and still hate him, does you good, did you good, and is going to do you good. Be ye therefore perfect even, that is complete, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Love your neighbor as you love yourself. There's nothing lovely in ourselves but we love each other anyway. A couple of implications of this. Very important. First, you understand, then, that with regard to the unbelieving neighbor, I can do everything except draw him to my bosom and have sweet fellowship with him. But I can do everything else and that's why the word of God says love your enemy, and that's just not merely your personal enemy but your enemy, believer or unbeliever. Love him. Love him and that's easy now, isn't it? Determine to do him good. Desire to do him good and then do him what good you can, witnessing to him, calling him to repentance in faith, showing him Jesus Christ, warning him of the wrath to come, and if that does not bring him to faith in the good graces of God, then you stop short of that last element of love where you draw

him into your fellowship. You may not. The word of God forbids that, but that does not mean that you do not love him. Love your neighbor, all of them, whoever God puts in your path.

Second, the implication of this is that no one may say, "I don't love you," without condemning himself with the worst condemnation anyone could ever imagine. Think about that for a moment. I've had men come into my study, women come into my study and say to me about their spouse, "I don't love them anymore," and what I ought to say, I will eventually, maybe I should immediately, is, "Do you realize what you just said? Do you realize that, although I know what you mean, you don't have feelings in your heart for her any longer, do you realize that you just said, 'I've determined not to do her good any longer. I don't want to do her good anymore. I will not do her good and, in fact, I'm determining to do her evil. I desire to do her evil and I'm going to do her the greatest evil I can, or him.' Do you realize what you've just said?" Elders and ministers and parents need to say to young men who are older, men or women who say that, "The word of God says, 'I don't care what you feel.' The word of God says it doesn't matter what you feel. This is what matters: love them. Love them just as you love me," he says, "As I love you, love me and love your neighbor, your closest neighbor." And if the feelings never come back, then that will be my chastisement for you. But they will. I believe they will when you obey God and do the good that you're called to do to your closest neighbor and love them. No one may say, "I don't love you," without condemning himself or herself with the worst condemnation you can imagine.

The third implication, there is no such thing as falling out of love or falling in love. You young people who aren't married yet and are thinking about a boyfriend or a girlfriend, maybe have one, you think about the question I asked your parents a few minutes ago, what your dad meant when he said to your mom before they were married, "I love you," think about that question when you're dating and you first touch his hand and you have a feeling that you've never had before, or you smell her, men, and you feel her soft hand and you've had a feeling like you've never felt before. I'm not judging that feeling, now. I'm simply saying that's not love. You're tempted to say, "I just fell in love." No, you didn't because then you're going to be able to say in a few years if things go sour, "I just fell out of love and I don't need to love her or him anymore." That's not how marriage works, that you fall into something. Marriage works this way, that you see someone whom God in his providence has put in your company, who is godly, who you believe will be a godly spouse for you and with you, and you determine by the grace of God, come what may, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, "I'm going to love him or her." You don't fall into and you do not fall out of love.

Then the fourth implication is this, and maybe the best. This is how now I understand that I am able to love myself. Love God with all your being. Love your neighbor, you love your neighbor as you love yourself. That's a command. I judge it to be a command. There are others who take a different view but it doesn't really matter. We all love ourselves. We should. We should, is my judgment, and not because I see something good in myself. I don't. When I examine myself as I must for next week coming to the Lord's Table, the conclusion I come to is that I abhor myself and I repent in dust and ashes. I examine

myself and I say, "There's filth and I hope that nobody else in the congregation sees it." But then we're tempted to say, "I can't love myself," and mean by that, "I have no good feelings for myself," but we've learned by now, haven't we, that that's not love, that we have good feelings for ourselves. It's not love that we have to find something that's appealing to us that becomes then the object of our desires. That's not love. This is love, that I determine to do myself good; that I pray for the grace of God to desire that and then I do it.

So we come back to our life center, the center of our life plans our determination to do good to God. Right around that is a determination to do our neighbor good. And right outside of that is a determination to do myself good and if I do not do myself good with the greatest good that I can do myself, feed myself, come into his presence, draw near to God, then I can't do my neighbor good either. So before I read the word to her, I've got to be reading the word to myself. Before I try to explain and apply the word to my children, I ought to explain and apply the word to myself. I love myself. The only real good I can do myself is to take care of myself in my body, of course. I need to love myself in my body too. God redeemed me in my body and in my soul so I do good to myself there as well: exercising, eating well, sleeping enough and so forth.

But I do good to myself in my soul. That's love, even when I find nothing in me that's attractive and I become depressed when I find nothing in myself attractive. I still love myself because love isn't a feeling, love isn't something that I see that makes me feel good, but I love myself anyway. What I learn from all this, people of God, in the first place is the most important. I've never seen myself as a sinner as when I've seen this requirement of me. I've never understood how great a sinner I am except this word of God came to me because I do not determine and desire and then do what I ought with regard to God and with regard to you and with regard to myself.

This Commandment, not the 10 Commandments spelled out, unthought about, but this Commandment and that's why in the Heidelberg Catechism you understand at the end comes the explanation of the 10 Commandments, but at the beginning when the question is, "How many things ought you to know in order to be comforted and to live and to die happily?" And the answer is three: how great my sins and miseries are; how I may be delivered from that misery; and then how I may show gratitude. Gratitude. There is the 10 Commandments spelled out individually but back here at the very beginning, "How do I know my misery?" And the answer is out of the law of God. "What law?" This law: love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

"What does the law tell me?" the Catechism asks, and it's this: I'm prone by nature, I'm prone, I'm inclined, that's the only inclination I have naturally, to hate him and to hate you. Not that I have bad feelings about you, maybe I do, but not to do you good and to find evil in you and say, "That's a reason why I'm not going to plan any good things for you, not going to extend the hand of fellowship or say anything that would benefit you." And I don't have time to give my...there's nothing, nothing in all of the Scripture that exposes me and my sin besides this, this mostly, and that's why this Commandment leads

me to Christ and the cross. I need him. I need him badly and so do you, and I find refuge there. After this Commandment skewers me to the ground and makes me cry for mercy, I have no good in me until God gives it to me, then I cry for mercy and only then I cry for mercy and I find it in the cross of Christ where the love of God is manifested to me.

The second thing I learn from this in these Commandments, is that I'm eager for heaven. I can't wait for the perfection that's proposed to us in the life to come. Do you recognize that language? There is a perfection that's proposed to us in the life to come. That comes way late in the Catechism in connection with the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment. You look that up later. There's a perfection that God is proposing for us in the life to come. There is imperfection now and the imperfection is mainly this: I don't love God as I should, and I don't love you as I should, and I don't love myself as I should and that's a miserable way to live. But all those imperfections of our failure to love are going to be gone when we get to heaven and we're going to see the great love of God. That's why one of the old church fathers wrote a work about heaven and entitled it something to this effect, "A World of Love," and he was right, the perfection that's proposed to us in the life to come is going to be perfect love of God for us. I'm not going to doubt it for a moment. And perfect love of me for him, and it will have no sin mixed in it. And perfect love of us for each other and no sin mixed in that either, where we're all doing each other good, we're never doubting motives because the motives are pure, all the words we speak are spoken in truth and in love. That's heaven.

And the third thing I learn from this is how much I love God's law. I don't think Caleb knew at the beginning what I was going to say at the end of the sermon but the songs that he chose for us to sing at the beginning fit perfectly here and the order, you ought to take notice of the order. I think I saw some good order in those song choices and we started with this, "How love I thy law." It's my meditation, Psalm 19. Then we went to Psalm 119 and more testimony about the love for God's law. If you only knew God's law as having this use, you'd say, "I don't like it. I don't want it to be my meditation. I don't consider it more precious than gold and silver, sweeter to me than honey." But after the law skewers you and makes you cry for mercy because there is no hope or help for you in yourself and you cry for mercy and find it in the Lord Jesus Christ, then the law comes back to you as a redeemed Christian and that law has God saying to you, "I'm your God. You are my people. I have redeemed you. I've loved you. Now this is the way we're going to live together and that's the first table, this is how to love me." And I say, "God, thanks for showing me the right way to love thee." "And this is how you love your neighbor, the second table, Commandments 5 through 10," and I say, "God, thanks for showing me how to love my neighbor. How love I thy law. It becomes my meditation day and night and that is to be sweeter than honey and more precious than gold." I love and you love that law in which God says, and he'll never stop saying this, "Love me. I love you." And that law that has me saying in response to it, to every one of you, to every one of you so that no one calls the police because an old man is saying to the young ladies in the congregation that he loves them, he says to every one of you, all of you, "I love you." And that's how we ought to greet one another on the way out tonight, "I love you." You don't have to. I might not dare but we can. I love you, you love me as Christians because we love God because he loved us. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy love and mercy and grace and peace. Send us home with thy blessing, with the blessing of conviction of sin and a blessing of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to repent and to live anew in obedience to all the Commandments. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*