

## Love in the Lord

### **Matthew 22:34-40** New American Standard Bible (NASB 1995)

<sup>34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup> The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

**Note:** [You are about to hear the word ‘love’ referenced over 70 times in this sermon. I want to clarify that all of them refer to agape—divine, unconditional love.]

### **Introduction**

An English man was about to retire, looking forward to a life of simplicity. To his friend, he said: “All I want for my retirement is a dog and a good book!”

We all have ideas about what we need for a happy life. But God’s Word simplifies our focus. According to Scripture, there are only three essentials: **Faith, Hope, and Love**. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.” If any one of these is missing, our life as a believer is incomplete.

It is God’s will that these three (faith, hope, and love) continually shape our lives. We need faith to trust God with tomorrow. We need hope to look forward to tomorrow. And we need love to keep life warm, whole, and meaningful.

Over the past two Sundays, we reflected on Faith in the Lord and Hope in the Lord. Today, we come to the greatest of these: **Love in the Lord**. Jesus Himself tells us that love is our highest priority.

In Matthew 22, He says that everything in the Law and the Prophets (that is, God’s Word) depends on two commandments— loving God and loving our neighbor. These two loves are the foundation of everything. Christmas reminds us of this truth: that we are **loved by God first**, and we love Him back. God also calls us to live out this divine love with the help of His Spirit.

This morning, we will look at love in three ways: **Love Received from God, Love Shared with others, and Love Practiced through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

## Content

### I. LOVE RECEIVED from GOD (The Source)

If I were asked to summarize Christmas in one word, I would choose this word: **Love**.

As the poet Christina Rossetti wrote, “*Love came down at Christmas*” (1885). And she was right. Christmas is the moment God moved toward us in love. God’s love didn’t just appear—God sent His love to us through Christ. John 3:16 tells us,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”

The love we celebrate at Christmas is not human love. Human love is often emotional, fragile, and conditional. The love of Christmas is **divine love**—the Bible calls it *agape*.

Agape is **unconditional** and **sacrificial**. It is a love that only God can exercise, demonstrate, and give. It is the love that sacrificed His sinless Son on the cross so that undeserving sinners could be forgiven their sins freely.

When it comes to love, we must always begin here—with the **(agape) love we have received from God**. God lavished His love on us—even when we were sinners, disobedient, and far from Him. We received His love freely, by grace, through faith, by believing in what Christ has done for us. Think of God’s love this way.

E.g., Imagine a massive dam holding back a river. Below the dam, the riverbed is completely dry; nothing can grow. That is what our hearts were like before God intervened. But when God’s agape love broke through, it was like the dam bursting: a flood of undeserved, life-giving water rushes into our dry hearts, bringing life where there was none. We must never forget how deeply we have been loved by God, because that love is the source of everything else, especially the way we love others.

### II. LOVE SHARED with OTHERS (The Command)

But God’s love was never meant to stop with us. It always creates an overflow, compelling us to fulfill the two great commandments: love God, and love your neighbor.

Jesus commands us to reciprocate agape love in Matthew 10:8, saying: “Freely you received, freely give.”

In other words, the same God who loved us in Christ expects and commands us to respond, and to return that love back: to Him first, and then to love our neighbors, and even to our enemies. This love is not optional. Furthermore, it is the natural, undeniable fruit of a life transformed by God’s grace. Every born-again believer bears this fruit of love in their words and deeds.

The Apostle John makes this unmistakable:

*“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”* (1 John 4:20). Here’s an image to think about.

E.g., If you pour clean, sweet water into a cup, and the cup overflows, you know the source is pure. But if the cup only spills out mud and poison, you know its contents are impure, regardless of what the label on the outside says. Likewise, **the way we treat our neighbors is the overflow that reveals the true condition of our hearts.** To love your neighbor is the sure sign that you know God, for God is love (1 John 4:8). Love we received from God naturally overflows from our heart to others. That is love that we share with others—freely.

Now, here is where many of us struggle.

### III. LOVE PRACTICED in the SPIRIT (The Power)

You may want to love your neighbors with God’s love, but you find it almost impossible to genuinely love someone who is difficult or obnoxious.

That’s always the case when we rely on our own **willpower**. Our love runs dry.

We must understand: Christian love, *agape* love, is not powered by our own strength—it is powered by the **Spirit of God in us**. When we rely on the Holy Spirit, we can actually exercise this divine love and vice versa. True love is only possible in the Lord.

Listen to Romans 5:5: “...the love of God has been **poured out** within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot truly love our neighbors—much less our enemies. But when God’s love is poured out into our hearts, we can do it. Consider the example of Rev. Son Yang Won, a Korean pastor, who adopted the man who murdered his own son. The world was stunned, because that kind of agape love defies human reason. Yet, through that radical act of forgiveness and love, the man (perpetrator) was transformed and later became a pastor himself. That kind of agape **love does not come from human effort. Agape love is never possible by our own might, but is always possible through the Spirit of God.**

When you reach your limit, be honest with God: admit you can't do it by yourself. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to take over and grant you the willingness to obey. God is faithful to help—I’ve seen it happen in my own life time and again.

## Conclusion

Let me close by returning once more to the words of Jesus: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”*

Everything we believe and everything we practice as followers of Christ rests on these two loves—love for God and love for our neighbor.

At the first Christmas, God has lavished His love on us and given us His Son. We celebrate the Son who fulfilled the Law perfectly on our behalf. And, the same God also has given us His Spirit, who now lives in us and pours agape love into our hearts.

So this Christmas, let us respond to this high calling in the following two ways—not in our own strength, but empowered by the Spirit who lives within us:

- Love the LORD your God *with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind* (Matthew 22:37).
- Love your neighbor as yourself.

This is the whole Law. This is the true spirit of Christmas.

And because God loved us first, we can now live lives of love—this Christmas and every day.

Amen.