

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

the winding up of the drama of redemption is made to consist in the resignation by the Son of God of His mediatorial power into the hands of His Father, that God may be all in all. This is one of those grand comprehensive statements with which the apostle is wont to conclude important trains of thought. Like all other statements of the same type, it rises to the oratorical sublime; but while inspiring awe it leaves us in doubt. The spoken word makes us feel how much is unspoken. We are taken in spirit to the outermost circle of revelation, whence we descry all around an infinite extent of darkness.

A. B. BRUCE.

*LOVE THE LAW OF SPIRITUAL GRAVITATION.*

“THIS is My commandment,” said Jesus, “that ye love one another as I have loved you”; “Every particle of matter in the universe,” said Newton, “attracts every other particle with a force directly proportioned to the mass of the attracting particle, and inversely to the square of the distance,” are the two monumental deliverances in human knowledge, and the Law of Love in the sphere of metaphysics is the analogue of the law of gravitation in the sphere of physics. The measure of ignorance in Science has been isolation when nature appears a series of unconnected departments. The measure of ignorance in Religion has been selfishness when the Race appears a certain number of individuals fighting each for his own hand. The master achievement of knowledge has been the discovery of unity. Before Newton, gravitation was holding the world together; it was his honour to formulate the law. Before Jesus, Love was preventing the dissolution of the Race; it was His glory to dictate the law. Newton found a number of fragments and left a physical universe. Jesus

found a multitude of individuals and created a spiritual kingdom. The advance from a congeries of individuals to an organized society is marked by four milestones. First, we are simply conscious of other men and accept the fact of their existence; we realize our mutual dependence and come to a working agreement. This is the infancy of the Race and conscience is not yet awake. Then we discover that there are certain things one must not do to his neighbour and certain services one may expect from his neighbour, that to injure the next man is misery and to help him is happiness. This is the childhood of the Race, and conscience now asserts itself. Afterwards we begin to review the situation and to collect our various duties: we arrange them under heads and state them in black and white. This is the youth of the Race, and reason is now in action. Finally, we take up our list of black and white rules and try to settle their connection. Is it not possible to trace them all to one root and comprehend them in one act? What a light to conscience, a relief to reason, a joy to the heart! This is the mature manhood of the Race, and the heart is now in evidence. From an instinct to duties, from duties to rules, and now from rules to Law. State that Law and the Race becomes one society.

Jesus came at a point of departure; He received the race from Moses and led it into liberty. The Jew of Jesus' day was, in spite of all his limitations, the most spiritual man in the world, and the more thoughtful Jews were sick of a code and thirsting for a principle. "Master," said a scribe to Jesus, "which is the great commandment in the law?" (St. Matt. xxii. 36), and this anonymous seeker after truth has suffered unjust reproach. He has been imagined a mere pedant held in the bonds of a vain theology, or a cunning sophist anxious to entrap Jesus into a war of words. He ought rather to be thought of as an earnest

student whose mind had outgrown a worn-out system, and who was waiting for the new order. His desire was not a puerile comparison of rules; he had tasted the tedium of such debates in Pharisaic circles: his desire was to get from the branches to the root. He believed that Jesus had made the discovery. Jesus recognised a congenial mind and placed a generous interpretation on the scribe's words, "Thou art not far," He said, "from the kingdom of God." (St. Mark xii. 34.)

Jesus addressed Himself to the unity of moral law in His first great public utterance, and only concluded His treatment before His arrest in the garden. His sermon on the mount was a luminous and comprehensive investigation of the ten words with a purpose—to detect their spiritual source and organic connection. It was the analysis of a code in order to identify the principle. It was the experimental search for a law conducted with every circumstance of spiritual interest before a select audience; it was a sustained suggestion by a score of illustrations that the law had been found. Moses said, "do this or do that." Jesus refrained from regulations—He proposed that we should love. Jesus, while hardly mentioning the word, planted the idea in His disciples' minds, that Love was Law. For three years He exhibited and enforced Love as the principle of life, until, before he died, they understood that all duty to God and man was summed up in Love. Progress in the moral world is ever from complexity to simplicity. First one hundred duties; afterwards they are gathered into ten commandments; then they are reduced to two: love of God and love of man (St. Mark xii. 30, 31); and, finally, Jesus says His last word: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you (St. John xv. 12).

When Jesus proposes to sum up the whole duty of man in Love, one is instantly charmed with the sentiment and understands how it made the arid legalism of the scribes to

blossom like the rose. How can one conquer sin? How can one come to perfection? How can one have fellowship with God? How can one save the world? And to a hundred questions of this kind Jesus has one answer: "Love the man next you." It is the poetry of idealism; it is quite beyond criticism as a counsel of perfection. But we are haunted with the feeling that this is not a serious treatment of the subject. We are inclined to turn from the Galilean dreamer and fall back on the casuists. It is one of our limitations to imagine that poetry is something less than truth instead of its only adequate expression, and that the heart is an impulsive child whose vagaries have to be checked instead of the imperial power in human nature. We are redeemed by the inspiration of Jesus. Had Jesus repeated the hackneyed programme of negation with a table of "shalt nots," He would have afforded another dreary instance of moral failure. When Jesus published His positive principle of Love, and left each man to draw up his own table, He gave a brilliant pledge of spiritual success. By this magical word of Love He not only brought the dry bones together and made a unity; He clothed them with flesh and made a living body. He may have forfeited the name of moralist, He has gained the name of Saviour.

Jesus was not an agreeable sentimentalist who imagined that He could cleanse the world by rose-water; He was the only thinker who grasped the whole situation root and branch. He did not propose to make sin illegal; that had been done without conspicuous benefit. He proposed to make sin impossible by replacing it with love. If sin be an act of self-will, each person making himself the centre, then Love is the destruction of sin, because Love connects instead of isolating. No one can be envious, avaricious, hard-hearted, no one can be gross, sensual, unclean, if he loves. Love is the death of all bitter and unholy moods of the soul, because Love lifts the man out of himself and teaches

him to live in another. Jesus did not think it needful to eulogise the virtues : it would have been a work of supererogation when He had insisted on Love. It is bathos, for instance, to instruct a mother in tenderness and care ; the instinct will fulfil itself. Jesus has changed ethics from a crystal that can only grow by accretion into a living plant that flowers in its season. He exposed the negative principle of morals in His empty house swept and garnished ; He vindicated the positive principle in His house held by a strong man armed (St. Luke xi. 21-26). The individualism of selfishness is the disintegrating force which has cursed this world, segregating the individual and rending society to pieces. The altruism of Love is the consolidating force which will save the world, reconciling every man to his fellows and recreating society. When Jesus makes Love the basis of social life, He does not need to condescend to details ; He has established unity.

When Jesus gave His doctrine of Love in its final form, one is struck by a startling omission. He laid on His disciples the repeated charge of Love to one another (St. John xiii. 34, 35 ; xv. 12, 13), He did not once command them to love God. While His preachers have in the main exhorted men to love God, Jesus in the main exhorted them to love their fellow-men. This was not an accident—a bias given to His mind by the immense suffering in the world : it was an intention—the revelation of Jesus' idea of Love. Conventional religion divides love into provinces—natural love ; ranging from the interest of a philanthropist in the poor to the passion of a mother for her child and spiritual love, whose humblest form is the fellowship of the Christian Church and whose highest is the devotion of the soul to God. This artifice is the outcome of a limited vision ; it has been punished by a contracted heart. It has ended in the disparagement of natural love and the unreality of spiritual love. Jesus never once sanctioned this

mischievous distinction: He bitterly satirises its effect on conduct. The Pharisee offers to God the gift which ought to have gone to his parents' support—so devoted was he to God, so lifted above ordinary affection (St. Mark vii. 11). Our Master accepted the solidarity of sin, that no one could injure a fellow-creature without hurting God. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you"; and "He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also (St. John xv. 18, 23). He accepted with as little reserve the solidarity of Love—that no one could love a fellow-creature with a pure, unselfish passion without loving God. "He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me" (St. Matt. x. 40). As St. John has it, with an echo of past words, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God" (1 Epist. St. John iv. 7). Life is the school of love, in which we rise from love of mother and wife and child through a long discipline of sacrifice to the love of God. Love is the law of Love.

It was the habit of Jesus' mind to trace the seen at every point into the unseen, and He gave the law of Love its widest and farthest range. He was not content with insisting that the unity of the human stood in Love, He suggested that Love was also the unity of the Divine. The same bond that made one fellowship of St. John and St. Peter was the principle of communion between the Father and the Son. With Jesus the Trinity was never a metaphysical conception—a state of being; it was an ethical fact—a state of feeling. It was a relation of Love which found its life in sacrifice. As the Father gave the Son, so the Son gave Himself, and as the Son gave Himself, so must His disciples give themselves for the brethren. God and Christ were one in love; Christ and man were one in love. The great Law had full course, and God and man were united in the sacrifice of love. "Therefore doth my Father

love Me, because I lay down My life that I might take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father" (St. John x. 17, 18). "This is My commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you" (St. John xv. 12). "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (St. John xv. 10). "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (St. John xiv. 23). Perhaps the most profound symbol of Jesus was the washing of the disciples' feet, and therefore the preamble of St. John, "knowing . . . that He was come from God and went to God." It seemed only an act of lowly and kindly service; it really was an illustration of the Law which holds in one God Almighty and the meanest man who is inhabited by Jesus' Spirit.

Apart from the Incarnation, which is the theoretical ground of a united humanity, and His Spirit, which is the practical influence working towards that high end, Jesus made two contributions to the cause of unity. He has stated in convincing terms the principle which alone can repair the disruption in society and close its fissures. What rends society in every land is the conflict between the rights of the one and the rights of the many, and harmony can only be established by their reconciliation. Peace can never be made by the suppression of the individual—which is collectivism, nor by the endless sacrifice of a hundred for the profit of one—which is individualism. J sus came to bring each man's individuality to perfection, not to sink him in the mass. Jesus came to rescue the poor and weak from the tyranny of power and ambition, not to leave them in bondage. Both ends were His, and both are embraced in His new commandment. For the ideal placed before each individual is not rule but service, and in proportion to his attainments will be his sacrifices. By one stroke Jesus secures

the welfare of the many who share in the success of the one, and the sanctification of the one whose character is developed by his service of the many. It will not be necessary to cripple any man's power lest it may be a menace to his neighbours, because it will be their voluntary servant, nor will his neighbours be driven to the vice of oppression because they will not fear. Where Jesus' idea prevails a rivalry of service will be the habit of society, and he will stand highest who stoops lowest in the new order of life.

Jesus also offered in the Church a model of the perfect society, and therefore He established the Church on an eternal and universal principle. Wherever a number of isolated individuals come together and form one body there must be some bond of unity. With a nation it is geography—the people live within certain degrees of latitude. With a party it is opinion—its members bind themselves for a common end. With a firm it is business—its partners trade in the same article. Jesus contemplated a society the most comprehensive and intense, the most elastic and cohesive in history, which would embrace all countries, suit all times, cultivate all varieties, fulfil all aspirations. It was the ambition of Jesus as the Son of Man, and this was the question before His mind: What delicate and pervasive moral system could bind into one the diverse multitude that would call Him Lord, so that I—some obscure nineteenth century Christian—may feel at home in St. Paul's Cathedral, or at St. Peter's, Rome, or in the Metropolitan Church of Athens, or at a Salvation Army meeting? This were indeed an irresistible illustration of spiritual communion and a prophecy of the unity of the Race. "I belong," said Angelique, the Abbess of Port Royal, "to the order of all the saints, and all the saints belong to my order." What is the bond of this mystical order? Jesus stated and vindicated it in the upper room.

It is the fond imagination of many pious minds that the

basis of spiritual unity must lie in the reason and stand in uniformity of doctrine. This unfortunate idea has been the poisoned spring of all the dissensions that have torn Christ's body from the day when Eastern Christians fought in the streets about His Divinity to the long years when Europe was drenched in blood about His lovely Sacraments. It is surely a very ghastly irony that the immense sorrow of the world has been infinitely increased by the fierce distractions of that society which Jesus intended to be the peacemaker, and that Christian divisions should have arisen from the vain effort after an ideal Jesus never once had within His vision. With St. John and St. Thomas, Matthew the publican and Simon the zealot at the same Holy Table, it is not likely that Jesus expected one model of thought: with His profound respect for the individual and His sense of the variety of truth, it is certain He did not desire it.

Jesus realized that the tie which binds men together in life is not forged in the intellect but in the heart. Behind nations and parties, behind all the divisions and entanglements of society stands the family. Love is the first and the last and the strongest bond in experience. It conquers distance, outlives all changes, bears the strain of the most diverse opinions. What a proof of Jesus' divine insight that He did not make His Church a school—whether of the Temple or the Porch—but a family: did not demand in His farewell that His disciples should think alike, but that they should feel alike! He believed it possible to bind men to their fellows on the one condition that they were first bound fast to Him. He made Himself the centre of eleven men, each an independent unit; He sent through their hearts the electric flash of His love and they became one. It was an experiment on a small scale; it proved a principle that has no limits. Unity is possible wherever the current of love runs from Christ's heart through human hearts and back to Christ again, None is cast out unless he refuse

to love: no one is isolated unless he be non-conducting. Within the Church visible, with its wearisome forms and hideous controversies, lives the Church invisible, the communion of love, and its spirit is a perpetual witness to Christ's mission of atonement: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (St. John xvii. 21).

Whenever doctrine and Love have entered the lists, not as friends but as rivals, Love has always won and so confirmed the wisdom of Jesus. He has had servants in every country distinguished for their devout spirit and controversial ability. Their generation crowned them for their zeal against heresy, but succeeding generations conferred a worthier immortality. The Church forgot their polemics, she kept their hymns. Bernard of Clairvaux, depopulated Europe in order to conquer the Holy Land with the sword for Him who preached peace throughout its borders; but we only remember the saint who wrote:

"Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts."

Toplady divided his time between composing hymns instinct with love, and assailing John Wesley with incredible insolence. His acrimonious defence of the Divine Sovereignty is buried and will never be disinterred, but while the Church lasts she will sing

"Rock of ages, cleft for me."

Rutherford, of St. Andrew's, laboured books of prodigious learning against Prelacy, and the dust lies heavy upon them this day, but the letters he wrote in his prison on the love of Christ have been the delight of Scottish mystics for two centuries. If any one feels compelled to attack a religious neighbour, his contemporaries may call him faithful, his successors will endeavour to forget him. If any one can worthily express the devotion of Christian hearts, his words

will pass into the heritage of Christendom. What is not of love, dies almost as soon as it is born: what is of love, lives for ever. It has the sanction of Eternal Law; it has in it the breath of immortality.

The Christian consciousness grows slowly into the mind of Jesus. First it clings to legalism with St. Peter; afterwards it learns faith with St. Paul; it enters at last into love with St. John, the final interpreter of Jesus. We are now in the school of St. John, and are beginning to discover that none can be a heretic who loves, nor any one be other than a schismatic who does not love. None can be cast out of God's kingdom if he loves, none received into it if he does not love. Usher could not ex-communicate Rutherford because he was not ordained by a Bishop, nor Rutherford condemn Usher because he was a head and front of Prelacy. Channing cannot exclude Faber because he believes too much, or Faber exclude Channing because he believes too little. None can read Jesus' exposition of Love and imagine such moral disorder. It would be the suspension of spiritual gravitation. We are protected from one another by the Magna Charta of the kingdom: we are under a Law that has no regard to our prejudices. He that loves is blessed; he that hates is cursed—is the action of an automatic law. It is the very condition of the spiritual world, which is held together by Love: it is the very nature of God Himself, who is Love.

“ I'm apt to think the man  
That could surround the sum of things and spy  
The heart of God and secrets of His Empire  
Would speak but love, with him the bright result  
Would change the hue of intermediate scenes  
And make one thing of all Theology.

JOHN WATSON.