

December 31, 2006 by Steve Brandon



Two Loves in Four Ways

Matthew 22:34-40

1. Love Jesus Christ
2. Love the Bible
3. Love the Body
4. Love the Lost

A few months ago, I was asked a great question by someone interested in learning a bit more about Rock Valley Bible Church. Though I answered the question initially for this person off the top of my head, I've not really been too satisfied with the answer that I gave. Actually, I have been thinking about this question in recent months, because it is such a good question. This morning, I want to take advantage of this church service on New Years Eve to answer this question. Here's the question: "As a pastor of Rock Valley Bible Church, what types of things would you like to see from those who come?" The heart of the question gets at the root of my desires as a pastor for the people of this church. In other words, "What things would I prioritize as predominant characteristics for the people at Rock Valley Bible Church?" This morning, I wanted to take the opportunity to answer this question for all of you.

Of all mornings throughout the year, this is a most appropriate morning for this. It's New Years Eve, which is always a good time to sit back and evaluate your life. It's a good opportunity for you to reflect upon the things that took place in your life in 2006. It's a good opportunity for you to anticipate what sorts of things you want to take place in your life in 2007. People will often make resolutions for the coming year. Here are some of the big ones that people often make: to get out of debt, to lose weight, to quit a bad habit and to spend more time with their family in 2007. (Unfortunately, many of these resolutions last about a week or two, before they are long forgotten.)

This morning, as I seek to answer this question about the things that should characterize us as a church, you might easily take them to be resolutions for your life in 2007. My hope is that these resolutions aren't forgotten in a week. Rather, it is my hope that these resolutions will carry with all of us in 2007. And rather than simply giving you these characteristics, I want to ground them in a text of Scripture. Our focus this morning will be on Matthew 22:34-40.

EXPOSITION

These verses come in the context of Jesus being taken to task by the religious leaders of the day. Various groups had gathered around Jesus and had sought to "trap Him in what He said" (verse 15). The first group had been a political group, the Herodians. They asked a politically motivated question, concerning the paying of taxes. They asked the question in attempts to get Jesus in trouble with the governmental authorities in the land. The second group had been a liberal group, the Sadducees. They asked Jesus a theological question, concerning the resurrection. They were attempting to demonstrate how foolish Jesus was to believe in the resurrection.

Beginning in verse 34, we see a third group coming to trap Jesus. This time, it was a theological group. Particularly, it was a Pharisee who came to Jesus. Matthew describes this man as being a "lawyer. " This wasn't a lawyer in the sense that we normally think of the term. We think of lawyers as merely experts in the civil law of the land. This man was schooled in the Old Testament law, which was the civil law of the land, but it was also much more. I suspect that this was one of the top theologians in the land. The idea being that they would get the smartest guy in the law to trap Jesus with the most difficult question of the law.

Let's pick up the story with verses 34-36, "But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?'"

The trap had been set. As Jesus would prioritize a particular command of Scripture, certainly, there would be a whole series of commands that He might neglect in the process. In so doing, these Pharisees were hoping to show how the theology of Jesus was in error, as it neglected these other commandments. But, the answer of Jesus was masterful. Jesus said, ...

Matthew 22:34-40

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

Jesus boiled the entire teaching of the Old Testament down to two commands: (1) Love God. (2) Love Others. The first command comes from the book of Deuteronomy, which the Jews of that day would have known very well: Deuteronomy 6:4-9. They come from a section of Scripture that is so famous that it has a name. It's called the "Shema," after the Hebrew word that is at the very beginning of this portion of Scripture. Even in our generation, in synagogues all across the world, these words are often quoted by the congregation, as they are quoted from memory. It is probable that these words would have been repeated in every worship service that the Jews conducted in the days of Jesus as well. They were words that were very well known to the Jews of Jesus' day.

The second command comes from Leviticus 19:18. The Jews of that day would also have known this passage very well. In fact, about a decade before this question was asked to Jesus, a Gentile had come to the famous Rabbi Hillel and mockingly challenged him to teach him all of the various laws that the Jewish religion taught while standing on one leg. Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary." [1] Such a summarization gets at the spirit of Leviticus 19:18 correct (although it does cast a negative spin on it, focusing on not doing harm, rather than doing only good to your neighbor, as the verse speaks).

In categorizing the most important commands of the Old Testament in this way, Jesus wasn't alone. Some time before Jesus was asked this question, another expert in the Jewish law had stood up to Jesus and asked him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Jesus turned the question back upon him and asked, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" (Luke 10:26). The lawyer responded (in Luke 10:27), "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus commended the answer, as though he had answered the question correctly (Luke 10:28).

Now, what is particularly helpful about these two particular commands that caused many to look at them with the priority that they did, is that they both speak about a superlative love. They both speak about a love that goes to the n^{th} degree to fulfill them. Regarding a love for God, it is to be full and complete and maximized. As Jesus said, it involves all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind. Certainly, you can try to figure out exactly what differentiates each of these entities: heart, soul and mind. Perhaps the heart is talking about your being. Perhaps the soul is talking about your feelings. Perhaps the mind is talking about your intellect. Indeed, there is some dimension to each of these terms. But, the details aren't so important for us now, because the meaning is so incredibly clear: Our love for God should be entire and complete. Nothing should hold us back from loving God entirely. Our love for God should be 100% 24/7, 365 days each year. All day! Every day! All out! We should love God completely. We should love God continually. We should love God absolutely. A 50% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. A 70% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. A 95% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. A 99.9% love for God doesn't satisfy this command. Nothing but entire, full, total, complete love for God fulfills this command.

In a similar way, the love that should be demonstrated toward others is equally exhaustive. It goes to the n^{th} degree as well. But, rather than using superlatives, like "all your heart ... all your soul ... all your mind," Leviticus 19:18 uses a comparison. "You shall love your neighbor **as yourself.**" The assumption here is that you love yourself a lot! And indeed all of you are lovers of your self. You take great pains to care for yourself. When you hunger, you eat. When you thirst, you drink. When you itch, you scratch. When you are tired, you sleep. When you are cold, you put your coat on. When you are hot, you shed your clothes or turn on a fan. When you are injured, you care for your injury. When you desire, you pursue what you desire. When you want, you work hard to get what you want. When you can't have, you fight and quarrel to obtain (James 4:2). Ephesians 5:29 says it well, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it."

It comes down to this: to the extent that you seek to satisfy your own wants and desires, so are you to seek to satisfy the desires of others. Any lack is a violation of this command. If your neighbor is hungry, this love will fix and serve some food. If your neighbor is thirsty, this love will get up and prepare a drink. If your neighbor is cold, this love will give a coat. If your neighbor is hot, this love will chase down a fan. If your neighbor is hurt, this love will tend to his wounds and help. That's the extent of this command to "love your neighbor as yourself." Nothing but entire, full, total, complete love for your neighbor fulfills this command.

Both of these commands, to love the Lord your God with all your being, and to love your neighbor as yourself, are superlative commands. They take the arena of love and push your obligation to love to its maximum. And when you put both of these commands together, they form a complete whole. Jesus said (in verse 40), "On these commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." In other words, every other command in the entire Old Testament (and we could equally include the entire Bible), in some way can be traced back to one (or both) of these two commands. They either manifest your love for God, or they manifest your love for others.

Many have pointed out how these commands form a good outline to the Ten Commandments. The first half of these commands demonstrate a love for God. The second half of these commands demonstrate a love for others. For instance, take the first commandment: 1. "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3). When you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, it leaves no room for any other gods. Let's try the second: "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex. 20:4). Again, if your love is for the only true God, there is no part of your life that would give any allegiance to an idol. The third commandment is similar. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Ex. 20:7). Love to God means that you honor Him and His name.

The commandments in the second half of the Ten Commandments works in a similar fashion, only this time, it applies the command to "love others." Take the 6th commandment: "You shall not murder." If you love your neighbor as yourself, you certainly wouldn't kill them. The 7th commandment is "You shall not commit adultery." Love for a neighbor would not defile a marriage in this way. And the 8th commandment instructs us "You shall not steal." If you love your neighbor as yourself, you wouldn't take what is theirs.

You could easily take these two principles and apply them to all sorts of laws given in the Old Testament as well. All of the laws regarding the sacrifices to be offered for sin are merely expressions of love toward an offended God. All of the laws protecting the rights of slaves and widows and orphans are expression of love toward neighbors.

These are the two great loves that each of us should have. As a pastor of this church, these are the two great loves that I would desire for all of us to cultivate in our lives, and especially for 2007. These are the things that I would love to see as characteristic of the people of Rock Valley Bible Church. And so, the next time I'm asked a question about my desires for those who attend Rock Valley Bible Church, my answer will be along these lines: It's my desire to see a body of people, who love God, and who love others.

APPLICATION

At this point in my message, I want to transition us to putting a bit more meat on these two loves. We have just covered an **exposition** of our verses this morning. I now want to transition to our **application** of these verses. I want to give you some practical ways in which you can

make each of these commands more real in your life. I have entitled my message this morning, "Two Loves in Four Ways." The "two loves" refer to the loves that Jesus gives us in His answer to this question. The "four ways" refer to the four points of application that I have for you this morning in my outline. I want to take the first command of Jesus (i. e. to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength) and put some flesh to it by giving you two ways in which you can apply this command. I want to take the second command of Jesus (i. e. to love your neighbor as yourself) and help you to see two ways in which you can apply this command as well. And as I flush things out in these four ways, my hearts desire is to see these things be characteristic of everyone of us at Rock Valley Bible Church. You could easily take each of these four applications and easily transform them into your own New Years resolutions. Here's my first point of application:

1. Love Jesus Christ

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we believe in the Triune God. The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. He is One God. But He is three Persons. I don't begin to understand it. But, it's what the Scripture teaches. As such, my application to you to Love Jesus Christ is merely another way of instructing you to love the Lord your God, because, in fact, they are One and the same. But, when you say, "Love Jesus Christ," it puts a bit of reality into your thinking, because, there is seemingly more substance that we can relate to.

In the very first verse in the Bible, we find out that God created the heavens and the earth. And yet, according to Colossians 1:16, Jesus Christ is the creator of the universe. In Isaiah 43:11, God declares, "I, even I, am the LORD and there is no savior besides Me." And yet, Titus repeatedly calls Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 1:3, 4; 2:13; 3:6). Later in Isaiah, God declares, "My glory I will not give to another" (Is. 48:11). And yet, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ is the radiance of the glory of God (Heb. 1:3).

Jesus Christ is God. When you see Jesus Christ, you see God. When you see Jesus Christ, you come to understand God. This is what the first chapter of the gospel of John teaches. We read of how the "The Word was God and . . . The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). As this Lord dwelt among us, "we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). And the great reality in seeing Jesus walk the earth is that His role was to "explain the Father" to us (John 1:18).

And so, the application rightly comes: Do you want to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind? Then, love Jesus Christ with all your heart, soul, and mind. Jesus, Himself, instructed His disciples on the necessity of loving Him. To the twelve, He said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). In other words, Jesus calls His disciples to love Him more than anything or anybody upon the earth. After Simon Peter had fallen, by denying Jesus three times, Jesus restored him. In so doing, three times Jesus pressed him, . . . "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15). "Do you love Me?" (John 21:16). "Do you love Me?" (John 21:17). Crucial to a life that loves God is a life that loves Jesus Christ.

Central to the love that we have for Christ is the cross of Christ. Perhaps as I spoke earlier about the extent to which God demands your love, it may have been the case that your own heart began to sink a bit. See, the command in Scripture to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength isn't good news. Because, the great reality of our lives is that none of us love God with the passion and fervor that He requires of us. None of us are even close to loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Rather, this command shows us our sin. The greatest sin is to break the greatest commandment. The greatest commandment requires all of us. But, none of us ever reach such perfection. The result is simple: we have all transgressed the greatest commandment. We are all great sinners, in need of a Savior.

Apart from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, we would perish in our sin. The good news is that Jesus Christ is that Savior. Through His work of dying upon the cross, our sin, "not in part, but the whole," is nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), and we bear it no more! As Horatio Spafford said long ago, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! O my soul!" (i. e. in the hymn, "It Is Well.").

In this way, Jesus Christ has become everything to us. The message of the cross consumed Paul's ministry (1 Cor. 2:2). The cross of Christ is our only ground of boasting! (Gal. 6:14). In fact, Paul lists three characteristics of those who are genuine believers (Phil. 3:3), one of which is that we glory in Christ Jesus. He is our love, our confidence, our joy, and our delight. Peter affirmed this when he wrote to the scattered churches, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him . . . with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). Jesus Christ should be the object of your affections. And so, I urge you to make it your resolution this year to love Jesus Christ.

This love for Christ is shown well in the story of the sinful woman who invited herself to the home of the Pharisee, because Jesus was there. She was at His feet, weeping profusely. As the feet of Jesus became wet with her tears, she wiped the tears with her hair. She kept kissing his feet and anointing them with perfume (Luke 8:38). When the Pharisee, who owned the house in which these things took place saw this, he said to himself, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." (Luke 7:39). Then Jesus told him the story of . . . a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" The Pharisee answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." Jesus replied, "You have rightly judged." (Luke 10:41-43).

Luke 10:44-47

Then Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

When you see your sin and the forgiveness that Jesus Christ has granted you by faith in Him, love to Jesus will be your only response. The cross of Christ will become precious to you. It will consume your thoughts. It will consume your words. It will drive your praise to God and love for Him. The more completely you see and understand the cross, the more completely you will love the Lord your God. And so, (1) Love Jesus Christ. My second admonition is for you to . . .

2. Love the Bible

Like my first point, this point is a very practical way for you to express your love for God: by loving His Word. By this, I mean that you should have an affection for the Word of God. You should delight in it. You should take pleasure in the truths contained in the Bible. The words of the Scripture should give you great joy. I have even gone so far as to say this: Love the Bible.

I do have Scriptural warrant for such an exhortation. The Psalmist wrote on several occasions of how he loved the Word of God. Psalm 119:97 says, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." Psalm 119:47 says, "I shall delight in Your commandments, which I love." Psalm 119:48 says, "And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love."

Repeatedly throughout the Scripture, we see similar words used to describe how the saints through the ages took great pleasure and delight in the Word of God. Psalm 1:1,2 states "How blessed is the man who . . . delights in the law of the LORD." In Psalm 112:1, the exact same message comes: "How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in His commandments" (Ps. 112:1). David tells us in Psalm 19 that the Scripture is "more desirable than gold, [and] . . . sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10). Paul wrote in Romans 7:22 that he "delighted" in the law of God (KJV). And Job said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job. 23:12). I love the picture that Peter uses to describe our desire for the word of God. He said, "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word" (1 Pet. 2:2). And so, I don't think that I'm any way overstepping the Scriptures to say that you should "Love the Bible."

The Bible is like a letter that is written from a far away loved one. What soldier stationed in Iraq doesn't cherish the letter written to him by his wife at home in the states? What wife at home in the states doesn't cherish the letter written to her by the husband on the battlefield? This is why we should cherish our Bibles. What we hold in our hands are the very words of God. In His kindness, He has chosen to use these words to instruct us and help us and encourage us and warn us. His words ought to be precious to us.

Think about what the Scriptures communicate with us. They tell us what we need to know about God. They tell us what we need to know about ourselves. They tell us what we need to know about Jesus Christ and His crucifixion and His resurrection and His current ministry of intercession. They tell us what we need to know about how to live. They warn us of the consequences of failing to trust in Him. But, the Scriptures go beyond these things. The Scriptures tell us of how God looks upon the world. They encourage us through the failings of others who have found their strength in Him. They tell us where to find strength to endure the hardship of this present life. In His Word, we receive promises of His love and faithfulness toward us. These things give us reason to "Love the Bible." We are to love the Bible, because of the One who wrote the Bible. An expression of loving God is loving His word.

And so, I urge you to make it your resolution to love the Bible this year. Your love for His word can take many forms. It can take an in depth study of a particular portion of Scripture. It can take the form of listening to it being read. It can take the form of listening to quality preaching that teaches the Bible. It can take reading through books that explain the Bible. It can take the form of memorization: memorizing portions of the Scripture. But, at very least, there ought to be some type of daily commitment to read your Bible, whoever big or small your passage.

If you are lacking a plan, I'll help you with a plan. This year, like in years past, we are encouraging all of you to make a commitment to read through your Bibles this year. This year, we intend to follow the plan originally written up by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a Scottish pastor in the 1700's. You can find a copy on the internet here: <http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/BibleReadingPlan2007.htm>. Should you want to choose another plan, you are more than welcome to do so. But, should you be looking for a plan, the one on the back table is a good suggestion for this year. In addition to this plan, we are also encouraging the reading of D. A. Carson's devotional entitled, "*For the Love of God*." Each page of this theological devotional is devoted to commenting on the reading for the day in accordance with the reading schedule that we have provided. Just think of how appropriate the title of this book is for my message this morning: "*For the Love of God*." The aim of the book is to increase your love for God, by providing some helps in understanding the "story line" of the Bible. In loving the Bible, it will help you increase your love for God.

It's what I would love to see characterize the people at Rock Valley Bible Church. I would love for us to be people of the book, not merely knowing the Bible in our heads, but loving the truth of the Bible in our hearts. And a love for the Bible will manifest itself in a commitment of time and effort to continually learn and meditate upon its truths. Let's now turn to my third point, ...

3. Love the Body

By this, I simply mean that you should "love the people of this church." One of the characteristics that I would love to see be true of our body is that we have a deep, genuine love for one another. This point is simply a direct application from the second of the great commandments that Jesus gave to this lawyer who quizzed Him. Jesus said (in Matthew 22:39), "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The Scriptures are literally packed with such an admonition for us to love one another. To the Romans, Paul said, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (In Romans 12:10). In the next chapter, he said, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another" (Rom. 13:8). To the Galatians, Paul wrote of how the "fruit of the Spirit was love" (among a few other things). To the Colossians, Paul showed the priority of love in saying, "Beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:14). The entire context of 1 Corinthians 13, which is well-known as "The Love Chapter," is in the context of church members who are being called to love one another. So high a priority is love that to Timothy, Paul even said, "the goal of our instruction is love" (among a few other things) (1 Tim. 1:5).

But, Paul wasn't the only Biblical writer to emphasize love. Peter wrote to the scattered churches, "fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22). Later, in that same epistle, Peter said, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). The apostle, John is called, "The Apostle of Love." His writings are filled with exhortations to love one another. I give you two of them. "This is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 John 3:11). "Beloved,

let us love one another" (1 John 4:7).

Often, the commands to love are linked to how it fulfills the law. Of course, Jesus said it here in Matthew 22. In Romans 13:8, 10, we read, "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8, 10). In Galatians 5:14, we hear a similar teaching. "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14). And so, the Scripture abounds with instructions to us to love one another.

So, what does this look like? Certainly, there many answers that could be given. I simply want to provide you with one example. It looks like the life of John Fawcett, "who was born of poor parents in . . . England, in 1740. He was converted to Christ at the age of sixteen through the ministry of George Whitefield." At the age of twenty-six he accepted a call to pastor a small and impoverished congregation at Wainsgate in North England. After spending several years at Wainsgate where his salary was meager and his family growing, he received a call to the large and influential church in the city of London. He formally accepted the call to move to this influential church in London, where his salary would be increased and where he would have more opportunities with more people. He then preached his farewell sermon. On the day that came for him to leave his loved congregation, his saddened congregation gathered around his wagons, which contained all of his belongings. At that point, John Fawcett's wife broke down and said, "John, I cannot bear to leave. I know not how to go!" John replied, "Nor can I." And so, they unpacked their wagons and remained in their small, but well-loved congregation. Though he had other lucrative offers to leave this congregation over the years, he refused them all. He remained there for more than fifty years on a humble salary, because his heart was committed to loving these people. [\[2\]](#)

The next Sunday after he made his commitment to remain as the pastor of this small church, he shared the following hymn text with his congregation.

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.
Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes, our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.
When we asunder part, It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart, And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives our courage by the way;
While each in expectation lives, and longs to see the day.
From sorrow, toil and pain, and sin, we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity.

This hymn puts forth what it means to love the body. So linked are our hearts and mind that our fellowship is of such a unity that it is comparable with the unity in heaven. We have the same fears, hopes, aims, comforts and cares, because we are members of one another. We "rejoice with those who rejoice" and we "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). When one portion of the body hurts, the entire body feels the pain. Just yesterday, my daughter received a splinter in her finger, which was about a millimeter in length. She was in tears because of the discomfort that this splinter was causing her. Though it was only her finger that was affected, her whole body felt the pain.

In the case of John Fawcett, love for the body meant that he would set his love for his people beyond his own worldly comfort. At this point, let me simply affirm to all of you that I don't have any desire to be anywhere else than right here in Rockford, Illinois. I would love to be privileged to serve among you for fifty years. Certainly, there are times when things are hard. But, it's my commitment to love all of you and to serve all of you with the strength that God gives. Loving the body means that you set the interests of others above your own. It means that the people of the church are willing to set aside their own priorities to help others in their times of need.

I simply ask, "How are you doing?" Is your heart so set upon other people, that it is their well-being that you delight in above your own? This winter, the women of the church will be going through a book by Cynthia Heald, entitled, "Becoming a Woman Who Loves." The book is filled with practical counsel on how to love others. This study will be a great way to help women increase in their love for others.

4. Love the Lost

At this point, you need to demonstrate a bit of care. I'm not talking about loving the world, nor the things of this world. I'm talking about loving those in this world who are lost, apart from God and on their way to eternal destruction. How I long for each of us to have the love that Paul did for his own people, who were lost in their sin. In Romans 9:2-3, Paul wrote, "I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." In other words, Paul was saying that he had such a heart for his countrymen, that he was willing to spend an eternity in hell, if, by so doing, it would mean that Israel would be saved from their sins. In Romans 10:1, he said it this way, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for Israel is for their salvation." He longed for his fellow Israelites to be redeemed from the path they are currently treading. This is what I'm talking about when I encourage you to "Love the Lost." Have a love for those who are perishing. Have a heart that they would come to faith in Christ Jesus.

Jesus had sorrow in His heart when potential followers refused to repent of their sin, because of His love for them. He lamented over Jerusalem, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matt. 23:37). His agony over Jerusalem was due, in part, because of his great love for the people in the city. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, looking for eternal life, Mark 10:21 tells us that Jesus "felt a love for him" although he was lost and unwilling to give up his riches and follow Jesus (Mark 10:22). Jesus loved this man,

though he had rejected Jesus.

When I say that you should have a love for the lost, I mean that you should be willing to give of your time and resources to help and serve them. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His listeners to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43). We are never to "pay back evil for evil" (Rom. 12:19). Instead, we are to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). Jesus demonstrated how this looks. He put forth the scenario that an evil person slaps you on your right cheek. What are you called to do? "Turn the other to him also" (Mat. 5:39). Jesus instructed us, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also" (Matt. 5:40). He continued on, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matt. 5:41). Certainly, in light of the context in which these instructions were given, there may be a certain amount of hyperbole in these words. But, you can't get away from the fact, that Jesus tells us to extend a measure of kindness and "love" for our enemies. This would certainly include those who are lost in their sins.

I'm not saying that we should run with them in their sin. I'm not saying that we should love their wicked activities. Jude puts it well near the end of his epistle. He said, "Have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh" (Jude 22-23). With these words, Jude is putting forth an ethic for us to follow. We should be merciful and kind, seeking to save the lost from the fire. Our mercy is even to extend on those whose garments are repulsive to us because they are stained on account of their sin.

In seeking to illustrate this point, I can do no better than Jesus. Turn with me over to Luke, chapter 10. In this context, we have the same teaching as we do in Matthew, chapter 22, only the environment was a bit different. Rather than an expert in the law testing Jesus about the greatest commandment, we have an expert in the law seeking eternal life. Let's begin in verse 25, "And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" The expert in the law had come to the right person to ask the perfect question. He was asking about eternal life. If anyone could give the correct answer, it would be Jesus. Rather than answering the question, Jesus turned it back toward this lawyer with a question of his own. And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" (verse 26). And the lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (verse 27). These are the greatest commandments. There are none greater than these. Jesus told him that He had passed the test, saying, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

In affirming the lawyer in this way, I believe that Jesus had several motives. Surely, Jesus wanted to encourage this man, who gave a great answer to the question Jesus set before him. But, also, I believe that Jesus wanted to allow this man to see the difficulty in doing what he had just presented. It's true that if he had lived up to these things, eternal life would be earned by him. But, you simply can't measure up to this standard. It's impossible to love the Lord this completely. It's impossible to love your neighbor with the same love as you had yourself. As helpful as these commands are, they ultimately lead to frustration apart from Christ's saving work on the cross. In verse 29, we see that this lawyer had entirely missed this aspect of the teaching of Jesus, "wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" At this point, Jesus launched into a great illustration demonstrating how it is that we ought to love the lost.

Luke 10:30-37

Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

How is it that we ought to love the lost? We ought to help them. We ought to care for them. We ought to serve them in times of distress, even if they are our enemies. Jews and Samaritans were enemies, who had no dealings with one another (John 4:9). But, the call to love our neighbor crosses enemy lines. Our love for them ought to be in physical and well-recognized way. Certainly, it is important to bring the gospel to those who are outside of Christ. But, the gospel, apart from a demonstration of love and affection will fall upon empty ears. Remember when James talked about the poor among you? He said, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15-16). These words press the importance of our love for the lost to be demonstrated in tangible ways.

Now, admittedly, should you think about any of this for any length of time, and you will realize that your abilities to help and serve those around you who need the gospel are quickly depleted. You need a priority in these things. Galatians 6:9-10 give us a good balance in the process, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time, we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." We are to do good to all. However, when push comes to shove, it should be those within the household of God that receive the priority. There is absolutely no way that we can fully love our entire neighborhood, and yet, we are called to express our love to them. However, the priority should be the church. Love the body, but don't neglect the lost. It's crucial to have a heart that's willing to serve your unsaved neighbors all around you. It's crucial to demonstrate your love and care and service for others with what energy and resources that you do have.

So, how are you doing? May the Lord convict us where we need to be convicted, forgive us where we need forgiveness, change us where we need to be changed, and give us a heart to love the lost.

I want to close my message this morning by envisioning in my mind a conversation taking place somewhere in Rockford among some

people. One of these individuals knows nothing about Rock Valley Bible Church. The other has a bit more detail. Perhaps he has attended our church for some time. Perhaps he have simply visited. Perhaps he has only read our web site and listened to some of the messages out there. Perhaps he knows someone who attends our church.

The one asks the other, "Say, what do you know about the church, called Rock Valley Bible Church." I can envision the other responding, ...

There are many ways that you might characterize a church: by its size, or by its ministries, or by its children's programs, or by its worship style, by its missions emphasis, or by its pastor's personality. But, the thing that really stands out in my mind as I think about Rock Valley Bible Church is the things their love.

First of all, they have a great love for God. I see it in the way that **they love Jesus Christ**. In my interactions with those at the church, they are very aware of the saving grace of Christ that has led them to love Him so much. It seems as if all they can talk about is the cross of Christ and their great love for the Savior. They actually make their boast only in the cross of Christ. I see it in the way that **they love the Scriptures**. They are people of the book. They love reading and studying and memorizing and meditating upon the Bible. When they gather, the truth of the Scripture is always their focus.

Second, they have a great love for others. The strength of their **love for one another** knows no bounds. I have seen some of them make incredible sacrifice for each other. They have helped each other financially. They have helped each other in times of sickness and need. They have a **love for the lost** of this world as well. The saving message of the gospel is always upon their lips. But, it's always more than mere words. I seem them loving in deed as well. They are a church that loves God and loves others.

This is what I would love to see as a typical conversation of those who speak of this church. "At Rock Valley Bible Church, they love God and they love other people. They show that love in four ways: They (1) Love Jesus Christ; (2) Love the Bible; (3) Love the Body; and (4) Love the Lost.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 31, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] D. A. Carson, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8, p. 187.

[2] Much of my information comes from a book entitled, "101 Hymn Stories" (pp. 45-46). Many such hymn stories books tell the same story.