

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

Once again from Mindanao, Philippines, we convey our love and greetings to all our brothers and sisters of the remnant group of God's true church.

In Matthew 23:23, Christ rebuked the Pharisees by saying, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

I am sure all of us would agree that everything God tells us is important. But some things are more important than others. In this verse cited, Christ identified judgment, mercy and faith as weightier, or more important matters of the law. But even these are not the most important aspects of God's law, nor the most important facets of building godly character.

In Luke, chapter 11, we once again find our Lord Jesus Christ speaking to the Pharisees. He begins much the same on this occasion as He did in the verse cited above:

"But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs" (verse 42). But what comes next is a little different. Whereas in Matthew, Christ berated the Pharisees for neglecting judgment, mercy and faith, He now accuses them. "[You] pass over judgment *and the love of God*: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

About 2000 years ago, we find the Pharisees—as was their custom—questioning Christ, hoping that He would be tripped up and discredited. One of their leading scholars asked: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:36).

Christ did not say everything in the Bible is just as important as everything else. On the contrary, Jesus replied:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second

is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (verses 37–40).

This is the critical concept for us to grasp. When properly understood, every part of God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation, ultimately relates to love toward God and love toward others. This is not ordinary human love as can be found in every society on earth, but this is God's love, a love so great that God was willing to send His only Son to suffer and die on our behalf, while human love inherently has some aspect of selfishness involved. As Mr. Armstrong often pointed out, the purest form of human love is probably that of a mother for her child, and yet even this is somewhat inwardly directed, for her child is part of her empirical self. Her devotion, then, falls short of true godly love since the mother does not have the same degree of love for all children.

None of us will ever perfectly attain and express God's own love while in the flesh. But we can—and must—be growing in this love, and be expressing more of it and less of our own selfish love. As we continue in our Christian walk, true godly love flows through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

. . . because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] which is given unto us (Romans 5:5).

We cannot adequately return to God the inconceivable love that He has extended to us. Even if we were to lay down our very lives for God as Jesus Christ did for us, it would not be repayment in kind. Our sin-stained human lives are not worth as much as the sinless, perfect life of Christ our Creator, who was sacrificed to remove our sins. But we can show our love to God when we keep His commandments and love His revealed truth.

Christ said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). For there is no love without the commandment of God.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3–5).

Fortunately, our God does not expect most of us literally to die prematurely in His services. He does, however, expect us to be living sacrifices.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1).

Sacrifices inspired by the Holy Spirit are a major way we return godly love to our Creator.

Prayer is a living sacrifice. We dedicate our time and attention to God to tell Him what is on our minds, to ask Him to fulfill our personal needs and the needs of others, and especially to thank and praise Him.

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High (Psalm 92:1).

Studying the Word of God and meditating on it are also living sacrifices. Just as prayer is the means by which we talk to God, Bible study is the means by which He talks to us, instructing us in His ways, maintaining us in the Christian path, and helping us to grow to more mature Christianity. The Apostle Paul tells us to study God's Word so that we will be approved of Him.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Perhaps the greatest way we return love to God is by interacting with others in a positive, uplifting way. Fellowshiping with the brethren is not just important for our own spiritual health.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24–25).

It is participated in by God Himself who lives in all true Christians.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

Helping those less fortunate than ourselves, especially our brethren, is also a living sacrifice.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction (James 1:27).

We also express godly love to the Almighty when we pay tithes and give offerings (Mark 12:42–44), when we personally serve as witness to God's way of life (Matthew

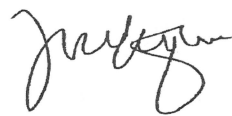
5:14–16), and when we accept the trials and persecutions that will inevitably accompany true Christianity, looking to our Maker to deliver us from them (1 Peter 4:12–14).

Christ identified loving others as being the "second" great commandment in which Christ said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We do not usually stress that it is required to love ourselves. On one level, it is a character trait everyone already has (Ephesians 5:29). Nevertheless, so many of us do things that are clearly against our self-interest. For instance, we may drink to excess, overeat, use tobacco products, and put wrong food in our bodies. This will harm us, and we will have difficulties in our health, as Mr. Brisby emphasized in his series of sermons about diet. We even probably know it is wrong as we do some of these things, but it seems too hard to stop. But as we ask for God's help to overcome these character flaws, we should feel all the more motivated to break free of them by realizing that they are not only harming us, but are robbing others as well. How? If we are sick and having health difficulties, there probably is not any time or energy left to help others. And *helping others is the very essence of loving our neighbor*. Overcoming our personal faults and taking care of our health and general well-being are necessary elements of serving others.

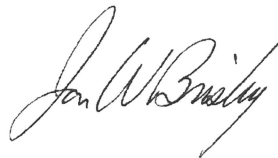
We must remember that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). How can the Spirit flow out from us if its temple is not well cared for? With this motivation, such proper and non-prideful attention to ourselves is also, then, an expression of divine love.

So the proper way of showing love toward ourselves has the effect of enabling us to help others all the more. And loving others is really a way to extend love to God. Why? Because we are caring for something God loves immeasurably—the future sons and daughters of His Kingdom. And in turn, loving and serving God ensures our own well-being for all eternity.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mario Y. Roque".

Mario Y. Roque

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby