

Worship services are being cancelled until further notice because of Covid-19. However, we will have worship services through the Internet Zoom platform every Sunday at 10:30 AM. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID and password number changes every week. If you need more information, please contact Mr. Vautour. See the bottom of the bulletin the contact information.

If you have friends or acquaintances who want to join in the worship service, please do not hesitate to share with them the Zoom links to join with us in the worship our great God.

The National GCI services will be at 1:00 p.m. each Sunday. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID changes every week.

For more information about special activities happening in GCI, please see the international website at www.gci.org. On the left-hand upper side of the screen, you will see 3 short lines. You simply need to click on it. A drop down menu will appear. Click on **"PARTICIPATE"**.

If you have a prayer requests, other events you would like to announce and/or praise to our great God you would like to share, **please try to contact Mr. Vautour by email, text or telephone no later than Saturday in the morning.**

Certainly, we all need to realize, during this time of crisis, that even if situations appear bleak and evil appears strong, God is still the ruler yet. Jesus sustains all things we are clearly told in Colossians. We could not be in more loving hands! Although we may go through temporary troubles, we have to always keep in mind the hope we have in Jesus.

We need to pray for our civil leaders, those in high positions as well as Christian religious leaders to give appropriate leadership as we traverse difficult periods. God tells us to pray for all people and to do good to everyone especially those of the household of God. (**"1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior," (1Ti 2:1-3 ESV)**)

We all need to remember that this fallen world system will one day be replaced by the fullness of the kingdom of God. Only God knows when Jesus will return to the earth. **"3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."** (Ga 1:3-5 ESV)

For prayer requests, please see www.worshipim.ca under "Members Only". If you have forgotten password for this section only, please contact Mr. Vautour.

If anybody has an older functioning laptop that they are not using and would want to give it away, we could send it to Josephine and James in Kenya. The one we send them several years ago is not working

anymore. Their access to a computer is difficult as they have to go to a public place to receive their emails.

There will be a Bible study Thursday, April 16. Topic: to continue in 1st John. *Anybody is welcome to join.* Please feel free to share Zoom link. Mr. Vautour will send you the link before the study.

Offerings: you can send your offering directly to the following address: **Grace Communion International- Canada, Suite 203A, 2121 Airport Dr., Saskatoon, SK 7S1 6W5.** If you prefer, you can also call **1-306-653-2705.** Thank you for your continued generous giving to God by giving to this part of God's church, his body.

From Mr. Bill Hall – GCI Canadian Director "Our office here in Saskatoon will remain open during regular business hours. I'm self isolating for a couple of weeks, but Kathleen will be available. We will continue to process the donations we receive in Saskatoon. Members are urged to mail them directly to our office for the time-being. They can also donate via phone using a credit card, or via Canada Helps using the donate button on our website www.gcicanada.ca We are waving the provision that all donations given via Canada Helps go toward national expenses for the time being. We will credit all donations received via Canada Helps to a member's local congregation, if we can identify where they attend."

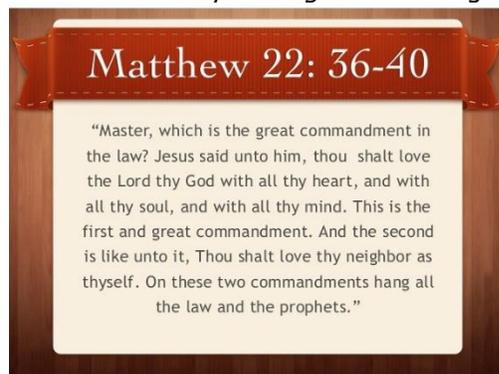
The GCI international conference schedule for this summer at GCI headquarters in the USA has been cancelled because of Covid-19. If anybody has applied, please contact Mr. Vautour to be reimbursed.

A theological ethic, part 3

By Ted Johnston - April 02, 2020

This is the third in a series of posts adapted from the lecture "What is a Theological Ethic?" by [Grace Communion Seminary](#) president Dr. Gary Deddo. For other posts 1 and 2 go to <http://thesurprisinggodblog.gci.org/>.

Developing, then living out an ethic that is *God-centered (theocentric)* rather than *human-centered (anthropocentric)* is a great challenge. Why? Because the *worldview* (mindset) so prevalent in our modern/post-modern West is fundamentally anthropocentric, leading to an ethic that is largely pragmatic, utilitarian and even hedonistic. So how do we as Christians, in this cultural setting, develop, then live out a truly *theological ethic*? A good place to begin is in the Gospel of Matthew.



Theological ethics and the great commandments

According to Jesus, these two commandments (we refer to them as the *great commandments*) are the essence of the instruction found in the Torah (the Law) in that they summarize the central and controlling will of God for humankind. Much can be said about Jesus' statement, but let me address an issue that is at stake in our day. Some speaking within the church along with some outside, say that the church should focus on the second of these two commands. In effect, they advocate collapsing the first into the second, with the result that the second command

is made into the first and only command: *Love your neighbor*. This move, which is a subtle perversion of the core of Christian ethics, is a form of idolatry.

The primacy of the first great command

Though Jesus speaks of two great commandments, they are not equal. One cannot be collapsed into the other, especially the first into the second. Why? Because God is not my neighbor and my neighbor is not God. The command to love God is absolutely unique, applying to no one and nothing else. We are to love God with all that we are and all that we have -- body and soul, mind and heart. There is nothing that is a part of a human's existence that is not to be devoted to loving God. This command is telling us about the true worship of God. God alone is to be worshiped -- to be loved in this total and complete way. Loving anything else in this way is false worship, it is idolatry.

When we treasure God with all we are and have, when we love (*agape*) this God with all we are and have, we are participating in a *worship relationship*. And there is to be only one worship relationship, and that is with the one and only God. All else is idolatry. This first commandment involves a one-of-a-kind relationship that no other even dare approach. This love is absolutely unique because of its absolutely unique object: God, our Holy Triune Great I am, the incomparable One, the one and only Creator, Redeemer and Perfecter—the Lord God, YHWH. This God alone is worthy of the love that is worship. Worship of anyone or anything else with this kind of love is blasphemy, is evil.

We humans have an exceedingly hard time dealing with what is absolutely unique, which has no comparison, which is truly absolutely one of a kind. But that is exactly what is true of God. There is no other God and a right relationship with this God is absolutely incomparable—absolutely one of a kind. This is not an exaggeration, a hyperbole. It is absolutely, literally, realistically true.

Jesus came to seek worshipers of the Father (see John 4, the account of the woman at the well). He came so that we could share in his true worship of the Father in Spirit and Truth (see the book of Hebrews). And that meant he came so that we might love God, as Jesus loved God with all he had and all he was -- heart, soul, mind and strength. That worship included Jesus absolutely trusting in and lovingly obeying the Father -- in our place and on our behalf. We are to serve no other Master, Jesus tells us. He came to take us to the Father and to send us his Spirit.

As Jesus tells us, eternal life is to know the Father through him (**John 17:3**). Jesus' central mission was to reconcile God's own sons and daughters to him through his atoning death and to destroy the source of all rivalry to the worship of God alone. Evil then is represented by the Satan, the deceiver. Jesus is our great High priest, our *Leiturgos* (leader of liturgy/worship), our one true worship leader. He came to enable us to be true worshipers of the Father in the Spirit through him, the Son.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, is the one true worshiper. He alone, in our place and on our behalf as one of us, truly fulfilled the first and greatest command. He alone has perfectly loved the Father in complete worship, with his whole life, from birth to death. That is the law of love that Jesus fulfilled -- and he did it bearing our fallen nature (flesh) for us so that we too might join him in his perfect worship, and so in his perfect and complete love for the Father in the Spirit.

Sadly, the moral crises that we see around us tempt many Christians to neglect the first command and to have an independent focus on the second. This amounts to having an anthropocentric ethic rather than a theocentric ethic. But our lives are not really about us humans (individually or collectively). We were created to be worshipers. That is our meaning, purpose, significance, our destiny. Our worship is our expressing of perfect and complete love for God -- which we can have only by sharing in the Son's perfect loving, trusting, obedient worship of the Father in the Spirit.

Roots of the problem

The separation of the second command from the first, resulting in a focus on the second, is not new. It got a huge boost in the 19th century within the "liberal" church. Influential teachers, such as Adolf von Harnack, insisted on making Jesus into the greatest moral teacher ever to live. It mattered not at all who he was. What counted was the moral code that Jesus gave. But given this approach, anyone else who taught the same code would have accomplished all that Jesus did. Jesus was simply a messenger with a moral message -- nothing more, nothing less. Harnack thus reduced Christianity to an ethic, summarized by saying that the real Jesus behind the misrepresentations of the New Testament taught nothing but "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."

Collapsing the first great command into the second, which is more and more common in our day, has essentially the same result. After all (it is falsely reasoned) both commands are about love (never mind that the objects of love in the two commands are not the same!), thus they are interchangeable. Indeed, they must be interchanged! Why? Because the only way you can prove or demonstrate love for God is by loving your neighbor. After all, how can you love God you can't see. To back up this false reasoning, Jesus, along with his ethical teachings, is brought forth as the greatest human example of love for other humans. According to this line of reasoning, we are to follow Jesus' example of doing good and loving others and to follow his moral teachings. What that requires of us is merely an act of will to treat our neighbor like Jesus did. That is the only way to love God, and so fulfill the requirement of the first commandment. A human moral example and moral instruction is all that is needed.

But notice what has happened in this faulty line of reasoning: our neighbor is put in the place of God. Our neighbor becomes the sole object of love. Of course, those who embrace this line of reasoning would deny that one's neighbor is divine, though this reasoning implies that humans are worthy of ultimate love and devotion. Equating love for God with love for neighbor, eviscerates the worship of the Transcendent God. In essence, it denies direct contact with God. It tends to place God at a deistic distance from us. It says that if there is a God, he gave the world a moral and physical order then left it up to us to make the most of it. All that is left as an object of our devotion and love is humanity -- our neighbor. In short, humanity is deified, and Jesus and the Bible are used to justify this switch.

The net effect

When, for all practical purposes, God is thrown out of the picture and a transcendent moral order with him, human beings put themselves, by default if not by deliberate intention, in God's place. Now deserving the greatest love conceivable, which was once reserved for God, there is little to nothing stopping human beings from becoming tyrants, individually or corporately. With no God in sight, human beings become ultimate ends in themselves. They determine what they want, what they need, what they deserve. Humans set the terms for the deification of themselves, they become their own lords. Being autonomous from any God, humanity now is free to idolize itself. And it can use the Bible to justify this move if it needs to by simply equating the two great commands, making them interchangeable, then declaring that the only way to love God is to love one's neighbor.

Though the whole of modern Western culture has not fallen in all its parts to this level, it seems to be in free-fall. Our culture-shaping institutions have broken all but entirely free from any real Christian influence and conviction. Sadly, much of the church has not only followed suit, but promoted this deistic moralism, which is attributed to Jesus as a human ethical teacher.

This anthropocentric mindset of autonomous human beings attempting to be ethical on their own terms plays out on a smaller scale in the lives of individual people. When love for God is the same as love for neighbor, then the neighbor can demand anything. Refusing the neighbor anything they want is to cease to love them, for love has come to mean granting unquestioned concession to an individual's wants and desires. Anything that might upset an individual's equanimity, such as questioning their integrity, offending their pride or their tastes, is regarded as a violation of their very beings, a hindrance to their absolute right to pursue life and liberty. Any repression or suppression (following Freud's ideas) is evil, since love for a human being requires granting each one absolute free will -- limited only by the absolute free will of another autonomous individual.

Some are now even claiming that everyone has a right to do wrong. No one can be questioned because there is no basis for doing so. Each is a law unto themselves. Each one is a god, with the right to do "what is right in his own eyes" (**Judges 21:25**). Everyone determines for themselves what the pursuit of happiness will be for themselves, and no one has a right to get in the way -- for that would be a violation of their humanity. Each human being is answerable to themselves and for themselves only. That alone is what is good and right.

This perspective, which is characteristic of a modern/post-modern Western, secular worldview has, unfortunately, fed into plenty of contemporary Christian ethical thinking. It would seem that the only option to God being a tyrant himself is to imagine a god who is a means to our humanly fabricated ends. Fulfilling that role, Jesus is depicted as a man specially gifted by God to be a moral example of love. He does so by serving others on their terms and giving them whatever they decide they need, whatever they want. If, then, we are to love others as Jesus did, we would give others whatever they needed/wanted,

never judging anyone, since we are in no position to withhold, question or even warn anyone. Each one stands entirely on their own. In this line of thinking, one's neighbor is an autonomous object of ultimate love.

In this flawed anthropocentric ethic, the will of God is reduced to love for other human beings, though note that love is actually being reduced to *kindness*. What is good and the true, right and meaningful, is relative to each and every individual. Accordingly, the first law of love becomes the obligation to be "true to yourself." For only then will you be true to the divinity within you. Only that which is external to you can corrupt you, turn you from your true destiny and self-realization. Internally, we are pure, good and incorruptible. All we need to do is arrange external circumstances to let that divinity shine forth in all its natural glory.

This anthropocentric ethic represents a *humanistic* ideal. It is not workable, because when everyone is given carte blanche, you end up with a hoard of gods competing for limited goods and opportunities. And since all values are relative, the result is social chaos, self-justification and a lot of self-righteousness going around. Making the two great commands equal, collapsing the first into the second, is a recipe for not only spiritual disaster but also social disaster. Sadly, that seems to be where our culture is headed.

In the next post in this series, we'll look further at the two great commands.

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshipim.ca,
www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the *GCI.org* website.
Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email— evatour47@outlook.com
Cell: 506.874.6765