

The Simple Message of Jesus

by Rev. Robert J. Hater

*Jesus calls us
to see and act
through
God's eyes.*

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:34–40)

These simple yet profound words distill for us the simple message of Jesus as we find it in the Gospels. This message lies at the heart of the New Testament and the challenge it offers to us as Christians.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Mark 10:14)
Children are simple and innocent.

Yet, as we grow up, life becomes complicated and so does the interpretation of Jesus' message. Simple at its core, its implications still challenge us two thousand years later.

Jesus' message of love invites us to follow him along the path of righteousness, justice, and mercy. He calls us to see and act through God's eyes, not the eyes of secular society. As we do so, we more easily appreciate Jesus' puzzling command to love our enemies, be good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who hurt us. (See Luke 6:27.)

Personal issues, social pressure, and business responsibilities sometimes tempt us to dilute Jesus' message. Our busy lives often push it into the background. When we keep it before us, however, Jesus' great commandment helps clarify our priorities.

Jesus commands us to love God and our neighbor. This involves commitment, sacrifice, forgiveness, responsibility, and accountability. Failing to love in this way often leads to sin, which is a distorted condition

brought about by our straying from the path of God's righteousness.

Jesus condemned sin. Yet even as he did, he loved the sinner and offered God's forgiveness. He said to the paralytic, "Take heart; son, your sins are forgiven," Then some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk?' " (Matthew 9:3-5) He also challenged people to conversion. To the woman caught in adultery he said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way,

and from now on do not sin again." (John 8:11)

To sin means to see life through earthly eyes alone; to turn away from sin means to take on the likeness of Christ. There is no universal answer to how to do this, for every person is different. Our "how" depends on our gifts and responsibilities. The key to the "how" is taking time to see ourselves through God's eyes. As this becomes clearer, we can apply more easily God's message of love to complex life circumstances. Although the way we do this varies, God judges us by the way we incorporate the simple message of love given by Jesus into our daily lives.



For Reflection

What favorite stories from the Gospels speak to you most clearly the simple message of God's love?

Reverend Robert J. Hater is an internationally known lecturer and writer and served as professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton, Ohio for many years. Father Hater was the religious education director for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati from 1973 to 1979 and initiated the Lay Pastoral Ministry Program for the Archdiocese. He received the 1994 Catechetical Award from the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership. Father Hater holds a doctorate in Philosophy from St. John's University, Jamaica, New York.