

# The Order of Charity

By  
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*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

*-Ephesians 4:11-16*

In this incredibly fractious time, I think that it is important to remember that part of the mission of the church is to create true unity in common faith amongst God’s people. This doesn’t mean that we have to agree about everything, but it does mean that, by having in common the most important and valuable beliefs, we might be able to disagree in a charitable way with those who disagree with us. Among the issues that so commonly, and often needlessly, divide the body of Christ, I think the main offender would be political issues. While it isn’t wrong for Christians to disagree about political concerns, and oftentimes it is healthy and correct for us to disagree, these disagreements ought to be about the specific policy prescriptions and not fundamental disagreements about doctrine or virtue.

Because of this while, as a pastor, it would be inappropriate for me to use my platform to advocate for particular political candidates or policies, it is a necessary part of my calling to provide clear Scriptural grounding for the moral priorities of the church. Depending on the political climate, this role takes on different forms, but, in our current climate, I believe it takes on a very interesting form. The reason for this is because our current Vice President, J.D. Vance, has recently made a claim that the specific policies that he and the president are pursuing are animated by a Christian teaching called the “Ordo Amoris”. So, while I won’t be defending the Presidents’ specific policies, I did think it would be a good idea to take a look at this, mostly forgotten, doctrine and assess whether it is Scripturally sound, and then to explain in detail what this doctrine is so that

the church can have a firm ground of unity when making up our minds about our specific political ideas.

## The Ordo Amoris

So what is the doctrine of “The Ordo Amoris”? The term comes from a Latin phrase which literally means “the order of love”, or “the order of charity”. And at a basic level, what this doctrine teaches is that there is an order, or a hierarchy, of values that teaches us how to appropriately love God and love other people. While there are numerous ways to take this teaching, I am only going to focus on three in this paper, rightly ordered affections, which means that while we are called to love the world, we have higher responsibilities towards certain people. Second, there is an order of authority. While we are called to submit to various authorities, these authorities have an order of importance and specific parameters to their office. And thirdly that there is an order to our virtues. While we are called to practice Christian virtues, we have to balance these virtues against one another, and in many real world scenarios, we have to give preference to some virtues over others. Which means that this teaching is essentially a different way of looking at the Jacob’s ladder to heaven.

*“Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”*

*-Genesis 28:12*

As I have stated previously, the symbols of the Bible are multifaceted, and in some senses, have meaning that expands beyond our total comprehension. What this teaching would suggest is that the ladder symbolizes a hierarchy of values and considerations that help us properly ascend in our love and understanding of God.

However, is this teaching Biblical? Some would argue that since this phrase is never used in the Bible, it therefore can’t possibly be a Scriptural idea. When people make comments like this, they are missing a common practice within the early church. Within the Scriptures, there are many deeply complex ideas that are expressed, not in a singular verse, but are only found when we effectively harmonize many different verses together. Because these ideas are so complex, and because they can only be found when compiling many different verses together, we typically create terms that act as shorthand for these ideas.

Some examples of this would be the Trinity or God’s omnipresence. While both of these ideas are sound and Biblical, neither of these explicit terms are found in the Bible, and neither of these ideas are expressed by a single verse of Scripture. Take the doctrine of

God's omnipresence (which means that God is everywhere at once). While there are places in the Bible that teach that God is everywhere, like Psalm 139, there are also passages where God is present at a single point. Like when He wrestles with Jacob in Genesis 32, when He speaks to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3, when God's presence fills the temple of Solomon in 1 Kings 8, or most notably when Jesus is incarnated.

If one emphasizes the verses that show that God's presence fills the universe, it makes Him seem more like an impersonal force than a personal God that we can know and have experiences with, but if we emphasize all the verses that show God appearing to individuals, He can seem more like a limited pagan deity. It is only when we harmonize all these verses together that God's omnipresence begins to make sense and we can see that while He is everywhere at once, He is still able to commune with individuals.

The "Ordo Amoris" works in much the same way. Even though the specific phrase is not used, and the specific teaching is not expressed by any single verse, when we try to faithfully harmonize various verses within the Bible, it becomes a solid, unavoidable, conclusion. Beyond that, I really do believe that this doctrine is key to us being able to effectively grow in our love towards other people, and it is unfortunately a doctrine that has been widely ignored by the church over the last century or so.

So as we go through this paper, I will provide specific Scriptures to show this teaching as well as the commentary of many prominent theologians throughout the centuries in order to provide not only a good Scriptural grounding, but also to teach us how this works.

## The Need For the Doctrine

*"Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom Nor have knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, If you know?"*

*-Proverbs 30:2-4*

Before we talk about the specifics of this doctrine though, it is important to meditate on why this doctrine is necessary. To most people today, it seems odd to have to order our affections or our virtues. To make this point in a concise manner, if God commands His people to love in the manner of God, even to the point of reflecting the very character and goodness of God, isn't it a denial of this command to serve one group of people

more than another? To give this point a Scriptural backing, consider Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’  
“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, “that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? “And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

*-Matthew 5:43-48*

The reason why this particular doctrine grew in Christianity, in spite of verses like this, is not because Christians were trying to negate their responsibilities, but because they were acutely aware of their limitations. Listen to Augustine of Hippo's (who was one of the first Christians to articulate this doctrine) reasoning on this issue:

*“Further, all men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you. For, suppose that you had a great deal of some commodity, and felt bound to give it away to somebody who had none, and that it could not be given to more than one person; if two persons presented themselves, neither of whom had either from need or relationship a greater claim upon you than the other, you could do nothing fairer than choose by lot to which you would give what could not be given to both. Just so among men: since you cannot consult for the good of them all, you must take the matter as decided for you by a sort of lot, according as each man happens for the time being to be more closely connected with you.”*

*-Augustine of Hippo - “On Christian Doctrine”*

It would be ideal to be able to love everyone equally, or to submit to all authorities simultaneously, or to practice all virtues in perfect harmony, but we are finite creatures in a hostile and complex world. I can no more love equally every human being on this earth than I could give my life as an atoning sacrifice for their sin. It is due to these limitations that we must properly order our affections and our virtues so that we can serve God best in spite of our limitations. This is why the American preacher Jonathan Edwards argued that God had to be the highest end of our affections, or else we would never be able to correctly love those around us:

*“Such a private affection, detached from general benevolence, and independent on it, as the case may be, will be against general benevolence, or of a contrary tendency; and will set a person against general existence, and make him an enemy to it. As it is with selfishness, or when a man is governed by a regard to his own private interest, independent of regard to the public good, such a temper exposes a man to act the part of an enemy to the public. But if a man’s affection takes in half a dozen more, and his regards extend so far beyond his own single person as to take in his children and family; or if it reaches further still to a larger circle, but falls infinitely short of the universal system, and is exclusive of being in general; his private affection exposes him to the same thing, viz. to pursue the interest of its particular object in opposition to general existence: which is certainly contrary to the tendency of true virtue; yea, directly contrary to the main and most essential thing in its nature, the thing on account of which chiefly its nature and tendency is good.*

*-Jonathan Edwards - “The Nature of True Virtue”*

No matter how much I might try to strain my heart and my will to love the world, I will find in myself a necessary limitation in my capacity for affection as well as my capacity to provide even the simplest goods. To put this point more simply, in my attempt to love everyone, I will end up loving no one. But, if I instead orient myself towards loving God first and foremost, then I can see my love for those around me as an extension of God’s love for these people. It is no longer on me to love the world, but God is placed in His proper position as the only One who truly loves the world and has given me a place of participation in His act of loving the world by loving those He has placed in my path.

For most centuries of Christianity this point seemed fairly obvious and non-controversial, however, in the last century we have missed this point, with dire consequences. The reason I believe is two-fold. First, in an overzealous attempt by Protestants to rid ourselves of Catholic influence, we have cast aside some amazingly beautiful doctrines that grew up within the church many centuries ago. Second, in our modern age, where we have erased so many of the horrible issues that plagued humanity for almost our entire history. War, famine, and plague have, on a historical scale, been widely eradicated from our present age. This beautiful truth has paved the way for human arrogance. We no longer wrestle with our limitations and therefore, in our hubris, we have become globalists in our ideologies, thinking that we can actually function in the place of God.

This pride also affects our political discourse. When we understood our limitations, we also understood that political conversations were about getting the least bad solution and not believing the utopian lie that there was a perfect solution that would solve all problems. To put this another way, political differences, for the most part, are not people

arguing about what would be good, but the best possible way to order our priorities. When we fail to recognize that, we can easily see the other side as the enemy and even believe that our policies are free from any negative side-effects.

In order to gain the wisdom of this ancient idea, we have to first wrestle with our need for it. And only in this humility will we be able to properly order our hearts unto God.

## Rightly Ordered Affections

*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” “This is the first and great commandment. “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

*-Matthew 22:36-40*

That being said, let's look at the particular elements of this doctrine, beginning with rightly ordered affections. What this means is that, since I can't possibly love everyone on earth equally, I must give preference to certain individuals. But as we go through this, keep in mind how difficult this is to do. We are trying to operate within God's perfect love, and this means that this will be an ever growing understanding. If we seek to love only those who are near, then we might miss out on loving strangers. But, if we only love strangers, we might miss out on loving those who are near. This is why Jesus says that the first principle of love is that we must orient ourselves towards God in an ultimate sense.

## Loving God First

*“Now the friendship of charity is based on the fellowship of happiness, which consists essentially in God, as the First Principle, whence it flows to all who are capable of happiness. Therefore God ought to be loved chiefly and before all out of charity: for He is loved as the cause of happiness, whereas our neighbor is loved as receiving together with us a share of happiness from Him.”*

*-Thomas Aquinas - “Summa Theologica”*

This is the meaning of the image of the ladder. The ladder has many rungs on it, but its ultimate resting place is at the foot of God. For reasons that we have already discussed in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, God has to be the source and the end of our affections, we can not do this properly unless it is done through Him and for Him. And this love has to be absolute. As Jesus Himself says:

*“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. “And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”*

*-Luke 14:26-27*

The Christian is not called to literally hate our next of kin, but unless our love for God is so profound that we would choose our love for Him over our love for family and community, our love is not properly ordered. This is the profoundly high calling of the Christian, that we must love Christ enough to lose friends and family, and even our own lives on His behalf.

However, what we also must understand is that when Jesus says “the second is like it...” He is also saying that the command to love God is inextricably linked to the command to love my neighbor. Why is this?

*“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”*

*-1 John 4:20-21*

Part of the difficulty that we have in loving God is the fact that none of us has seen Him. What this means is that it is very easy to think we are loving God when in reality we are only loving our own version of God that reflects our own conscience. This is the mistake that the Pharisees made. They genuinely believed that they were loving God in their religion, but when God showed up in the flesh, they didn't recognize Him. This is why when Jesus criticizes the Pharisees at the beginning of His ministry, He doesn't start by condemning their lack of faith in Him per se, but their lack of love for those around them.

*“He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ “But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’ (that is, a gift to God), “then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, “making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”*

*-Mark 7:9-13*

In this particular passage, the Pharisees believed that they were succeeding in loving God more than even their families by encouraging people to give money to the temple under the designation of “Corban” as opposed to giving this money to their families. In this practice they genuinely believed that they were honoring God above all else, when in reality, Jesus says, that they profaned the word of God by ignoring His clear command in favor of their tradition. To put it more simply, by trying to love God directly, they failed to serve God in the relationships that He had provided them. Once again, in the image of the ladder, each rung on the ladder is a means to getting closer to God. While God is the goal, there is no way to reach Him without the ladder itself.

It is through our normal relations that we begin to understand the love of God. The reason why God calls Himself our Father in heaven, the Bridegroom, our friend, our Lord, and so on, is because He is relating His perfect love through these imperfect representations. It isn't that we are supposed to project our normal loves on God, but instead that we learn about God's perfect qualities through these good, yet imperfect, representations. And without these representations, in our most sincere attempts to love God directly, we may be only succeeding in loving ourselves. It is ironic, but if you study the people of God throughout history, when they become more “religious”, meaning that they seek to honor God through elaborate rituals and incredible offerings, they tend to become less loving.

When Jesus began redeeming the worst sinners of His day, tax collectors and prostitutes, the religious leaders didn't rejoice at their repentance, but instead were disgusted by Jesus associating with them at all. When Jesus specifically calls Matthew from his life as a tax collector, this is the reaction of the Pharisees:

*“And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard that, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”*

*-Matthew 9:11-13*

They had forgotten that God desires “mercy and not sacrifice”. The Pharisees were so bent on their “offerings”, which is an encompassing word to refer to all of their religious service, that they forgot to simply show mercy to their fellow man. In our modern church, it is a real danger that we focus so much on religious acts like prayer, reading our Bibles, worshipping God, sharing our faith, and tithing our money (all incredibly important acts) that we might neglect adequately loving our family and our friends. Edmund Burke (a British Christian member of parliament in the late 1700's) commented



on this attitude as it permeated France during their disastrous revolution. They began to destroy the family and the local communities, they even began developing a globalist ideology in which nations would deteriorate and total freedom, equality, and international brotherhood would reign. Though this sounds good on paper, Burke was wise enough to point out its great error:

*“To squander away the objects which made the happiness of their fellows, would be to them no sacrifice at all. Turbulent, discontented men of quality, in proportion as they are puffed up with personal pride and arrogance, generally despise their own order. One of the first symptoms they discover of a selfish and mischievous ambition, is a profligate disregard of a dignity which they partake with others. To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind. The interests of that portion of social arrangement is a trust in the hands of all those who compose it; and as none but bad men would justify it in abuse, none but traitors would barter it away for their own personal advantage.”*

*-Edmund Burke “Reflections on The Revolution in France”*

In their attempts to serve virtue itself, they cut out the very social structures that teach us to be virtuous. Although this is a noble sentiment, it fails not for being crude or distasteful, but for being illogical. The only way to learn affection for God, is to first learn it through loving those nearest to us.

## Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Which leads to another point that Burke brought up. When Jesus commands His followers to love our neighbors as ourselves, He is insinuating that we can't know how to love our neighbors unless we first know how to properly care for ourselves. Just on a practical level this makes perfect sense. I have counseled many people who come from toxic backgrounds that are sincerely trying to love those nearest to them with the same toxic behaviors that were shown to them. Because they had never learned what was good for them, they are projecting these same bad behaviors on others. To make this point more simply, how can you know what is good for others if you don't even know what is good for yourself?

The reason why we must elevate certain nearer relations, like the family, over others is not only because of our limitations, but also for practical concern. If we can learn how to properly function in our families, we might be able to understand the more practical needs of others. And in this understanding, we can offer them genuine help. Consider this verse by Paul in regards to qualifications for elders in the church:

*“...one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);...”*

*-1 Timothy 3:4-5*

If someone doesn't even know what is best for their own household, how could he possibly know what would be best for other people's homes? Again, people who seek to serve in ministries, both local and even international, without care for their own homes, though a noble sentiment, are ultimately misguided and might even be a cloak for their own selfish desires. The one thing that I can say for certain about being a pastor, it is far easier for me to love other families more than my own. The reason is pretty simple.

As a pastor, all I have to do is give general advice and encouragement. I don't have to live with the real life consequences of my words or to go through the difficulty of making a daily relationship work. When someone strives to be a genuinely good parent, the amount of time they need to invest and frustration they need to endure is incalculable. It is far easier to simply minister to people from afar and not need to go through the daily grind of making relationships more fruitful through self-sacrifice and daily patience. So again, it seems good, but the desire to love the world more than your own family or local community might be another more pernicious form of selfishness.

## The Proper Order

Now that we have established some of the practical reasons for this doctrine we must ask, does the Bible give us an idea of what this proper order might be? Once again, the complexity of this question is what gave rise to the shorthand of the “Ordo Amoris” in the first place, however, when we scour the texts of Scripture, a particular order does indeed emerge, though not as clearly articulated as we might like. To establish the basis of this order I believe that Thomas Aquinas does a good job introducing us to this category of Biblical texts like this:

*“One's obligation to love a person is proportionate to the gravity of the sin one commits in acting against that love. Now it is a more grievous sin to act against the love of certain neighbors, than against the love of others. Hence the commandment (Lev. 10:9), "He that curseth his father or mother, dying let him die," which does not apply to those who cursed others than the above. Therefore we ought to love some neighbors more than others.”*

*-Thomas Aquinas - “Summa Theologica”*

To put this point more simply, if we were actually called to love all people the same, the Bible would not contain passages that condemn as sin failure to love particular

individuals. He specifically quotes one set of Biblical passages that tell us to give special honor to our biological families. These passages that tell us to give special honor to our parents and children are all over the Old Testament and are always accompanied by a strict penalty for those who fail to adhere. Even in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul gives an uncharacteristically harsh admonishment to those who neglect their families in regards to charity:

*“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

*-1 Timothy 5:8*

Like the Apostle John, Paul is pointing to the absurdity of someone claiming to love God when they fail to love those who bear His image that are in our immediate proximity. The family we are born into are to be given special attention because we believe in God’s providence in placing us in these relationships as well as we understand that as individuals we need this type of special care especially when we are young. When a child is first born they need almost constant intensive care specifically from their parents, but especially from their mother. This type of care is so potent that children who are denied this type of special intimacy, (even for good reasons like being placed in the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) as a result of being born premature), will still suffer emotional developmental issues.

Because this level of care is something that could really only be possible for someone who is caring for their own child, God gives a special admonishment to parents in caring for those of their own household. To put it another way, although there are countless children all over the world, who for one reason or another, are being deprived of this special bond, me and my wife are not sinning by not providing that care for these children. However, if we fail to provide that special care for our children, we would be sinning in a way that is so obvious that even those who are not Christians would condemn our behavior.

After our families, do we have any other special responsibilities?

*“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

*-Galatians 6:10*

It is that word “especially” that shows this type of favoritism. We are to do good to all, but there is a special command that goes specifically to those in “the household of faith”, meaning other Christians. Just as God has sovereignly placed us in our biological

families, He has also placed us in the particular community of believers that we belong to. Remember, that back in Paul's day, there weren't hundreds of local churches and denominations to choose from. The early church was a small, persecuted minority, which meant that to be a Christian all but guaranteed that your local church would be, essentially, the only local community that you had access to. As such, this admonishment, which we see echoed in passages like 1 Timothy 5, is not to the global church per se, but to your local church, the family of believers that you are serving God with. This is why Paul begins this chapter with this exhortation:

*"Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity."*

*-1 Timothy 5:1-2*

The local church ought to become our spiritual family and as such it is owed a special dispensation of care that we are not required to show the world in general. This principle is also shown in the life of our Savior, for although He came for the whole world, while He was on the earth He showed special care and attention to a select few. After all, He only cared for one woman as His mother and showed her special attention on the cross when He made accommodations for her:

*"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."*

*-John 19:25-27*

And He spent the majority of His ministry with His chosen 12 apostles, even spending the last few precious hours of freedom that He had on this earth washing their feet, teaching them, and praying for them. But even they did not fully understand this principle, because when Mary of Bethany tried to anoint Him with special oil, His followers (instigated by Judas) began complaining that they might have sold the oil and provided for the poor, and yet Jesus rebukes them and says:

*"But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. "For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial."*

*-Matthew 26:10-12*

Jesus allowed for this special gift to be offered to Him, not only because of its spiritual significance, but because He says directly “Me you do not have always...” There will always be those in need throughout the world, but these special relationships that God has given us, these individuals who we are to show love and care for above all others, we do so because we won’t have them always.

Outside of that, it gets a little more complex. It would seem obvious that the order of affection would gradually extend out in sequential circles (I.E. your local community, your city, your state, your nation, and then to the “stranger”) and while I could make some Biblical arguments for this, they do get a little complex and abstract. For instance, it does seem very clear from God’s admonishment to the leadership of particular areas, both local and national, that they have a special responsibility to their own people that does not extend beyond their borders. We get this from most of the prophets, but I will give one quick example:

*“Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, Because you have been a snare to Mizpah And a net spread on Tabor. The revolters are deeply involved in slaughter, Though I rebuke them all. I know Ephraim, And Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled. “They do not direct their deeds Toward turning to their God, For the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, And they do not know the LORD.”*

*-Hosea 5:1-4*

God lays the spiritual failings of Israel on the leadership of the nation and actually judges them on this basis, but God doesn’t judge the leaders of Israel for the spiritual failings of say, the Babylonians. Why? Because the leaders of a nation have a special responsibility to their own people. It doesn’t mean that they can treat other nations however they want, many passages in the prophets have God judging nations for mistreating other nations, but they owe a greater debt to their own people than to other people groups. In the same way, a citizen of a particular nation must adhere to the just laws of their nation and give special honor, like taxes, to their rulers:

*“For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”*

*-Romans 13:6-7*

As a citizen of the United States, though I am ultimately a follower of God, I am required to pay taxes and to follow the just laws of my nation. I am under no such obligation to say, follow the laws of Canada and pay taxes to their government. The same is true for

the state I live in. I must pay taxes to the state of Arizona, but I have no obligation to pay taxes to any other state. From these principles, it would be fairly easy to argue that our locality dictates our next greater responsibilities. While all that I have said so far would agree with local tribalistic thought throughout time, the Bible adds something very interesting to our perspectives on charity, and this is shared by Christ Himself:

## The Good Samaritan

*“But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. “Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. “But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. “So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. “On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”*

*-Luke 10:29-37*

This parable is popularly known as the parable of the good Samaritan, and therefore the term “Samaritan” has become a byword for a charitable person. However, a Samaritan in Jesus’ context was a specific people group who were hated by the Jews at that time. As such, by making a Samaritan the hero of the story, Jesus was saying something truly controversial and provocative. If you notice that the parable is spoken in response to a man who was “wanting to justify himself”, meaning that he wanted a moral system that he was already fulfilling in order that he might feel justified in his own works. When he asked the question “who is my neighbor?” He was expecting Jesus to only mention those who were fellow Jews in his immediate proximity, he never anticipated that Jesus would extend the circle of charity all the way out to those who were despised by the Israelites.

But also notice in this story there is still a sense of locality. Meaning, that while there were probably dozens of people assaulted in Jesus’ day by bandits, the priest and the Levite are not condemned for not saving the world (that is God’s job) but for failing to take the opportunity that was presented to them. In order for them to continue the work that they deemed most holy, they had to literally avoid the body of their fellow Jew in order to go about their business. God will providentially bring to our conscience those

who are in need and we are then to extend our charity to them in accordance with our ability and only if we can do this without neglecting those that we have a special responsibility towards. I love how John Calvin commented on this parable:

*“Our Saviour having shown, in the parable of the Samaritan (Luke x. 36), that the term neighbour comprehends the most remote stranger, there is no reason for limiting the precept of love to our own connections. I deny not that the closer the relation the more frequent our offices of kindness should be. For the condition of humanity requires that there be more duties in common between those who are more nearly connected by the ties of relationship, or friendship, or neighbourhood. And this is done without any offence to God, by whose providence we are in a manner impelled to do it. But I say that the whole human race, without exception, are to be embraced with one feeling of charity: that here there is no distinction of Greek or Barbarian, worthy or unworthy, friend or foe, since all are to be viewed not in themselves, but in God. If we turn aside from this view, there is no wonder that we entangle ourselves in error. Wherefore, if we would hold the true course in love, our first step must be to turn our eyes not to man, the sight of whom might oftener produce hatred than love, but to God, who requires that the love which we bear to him be diffused among all mankind, so that our fundamental principle must ever be, Let a man be what he may, he is still to be loved, because God is loved.”*

*-John Calvin - “Institutes of the Christian Religion”*

So, as the tribal peoples understood, we are supposed to give special care to those near to us, but as the globalists understand, our love ought to extend to all people. If we become too tribal, then we neglect the needs of those outside of ourselves and have not learned true charity, but if we help strangers to the neglect of those near to us, we are being bad stewards of what God has provided and we are sinning in our more intimate relationships. When we balance these correctly and order our hearts unto God, we can learn the true meaning of charity and love.

*“And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. ‘The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”*

*-Leviticus 19:33-34*

## Rightly Ordered Authority

*“But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”*

*-Acts 4:19-20*

I will run through these last two points more rapidly, not because they are unimportant, but for the sake of brevity. Just like with our previous point, we are commanded to have an order of authority because of the limitations of our world, not because of something negative with authority per se. Meaning, that all authority, from our parents, to our local leaders, to our church leaders, and our political leaders, comes from God and are, in principle, to be respected. However, not all of these leaders will give us just laws, which is why Peter and John rebel against the spiritual leaders of their day.

When a Christian is given an unjust law, meaning one that would neglect the higher callings of God, they are required to rebel in some form or fashion. While that principle might be difficult in practice, the principle itself is fairly simple, but if you want to read more about this, I recommend the writings of Deitrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr.

However, for the purpose of this paper, sometimes, leadership will be in conflict with each other, even outside of the principle of sin. To use a simple example, for most of my adult life I have been employed in one form or another. This means that I have answered to a boss and have had to respect that particular authority. However, I also have special responsibilities to my family. So, let's say that I had a particular job that was sending me to a location that, although it wouldn't be immoral, I knew would be bad for my family in several other ways. Who should I submit to, my boss or my responsibilities as a husband and a father? When I word it like that, I hope that the answer is clear that I should submit to my responsibilities over my obligation to my boss. What this simple example should hopefully show is that rightly ordering my heart is also gaining a right understanding of authority.

In ideal circumstances, my authorities will not contradict and I can be equally faithful to all, but every now and then, I will have to pick and choose. And if I don't understand my responsibilities correctly, I can make foolish decisions simply because my authorities are not properly ordered.

Even within my own soul this principle remains true. Some people don't understand this, but in every decision that we make, we are competing against several authorities within our own soul. Ancient man considered man to have a tripartite soul, meaning that they divided up the authorities of the soul into three parts. These parts were the mind, (which was the center of their intellect and rationality), the heart (which was the center of passions and affections) and the stomach (which was the center of their base appetites). All of these things are good in themselves, but what happens when we get the order wrong?



*“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.”*

*-Philippians 3:18-19*

Paul does not say that having a “belly” is a bad thing, only that making that belly your god is a bad thing. This is the order that we are talking about. Our appetites are good in their proper place, but when they begin to elevate themselves above the authority of what we know to be true and above even the affections of our hearts, we fall into turmoil and destruction. This issue of authority is another thing that modern man has limited understanding about. We are taught from a young age to be “true to ourselves” but no one ever stops to ask what part of ourselves we are supposed to be true to. I think that the minister Charles Spufford lays out this problem fairly well:

*“...you are a being whose wants make no sense, don't harmonize: whose desires, deep down, are discordantly arranged, so that you truly want to possess and you truly don't want to, at the very same time. You're equipped, you realize, for farce (or even tragedy) more than you are for happy endings.”*

*-Charles Spufford - “What is Sin?”*

In order to have fulfilling lives, it is absolutely necessary to know which desires ought to take precedence and also how to choose some values over others. Beyond that, another mistake we make is thinking that knowledge is sufficient. Unfortunately for us, simply knowing what the right thing to do is not enough to combat the drives of our “stomach”. For, although the mind ought to rule, the mind can only rule the stomach through the affections. Just as the law ought to be sovereign over the nation, it needs an enforcement mechanism in order to keep the lawless in check. In the same way, your mind needs to learn how to properly lead the heart in order to combat your own appetites. Once again, this topic deserves a much deeper explanation, but for the sake of this paper I feel it is sufficient to simply point out this necessity.

*“Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally.”*

*-Augustine of Hippo - “On Christian Doctrine”*

## Rightly Ordered Virtues

*“I do not admire the excess of some one virtue unless I am shewn at the same time the excess of the opposite virtue. A man does not prove his greatness by standing at an extremity, but by touching both extremities at once and filling all that lies between them.”*

*-Blaise Pascal - “Pensées”*

Virtue works much the same way. Though we are supposed to operate within the virtues of the Bible, these virtues will oftentimes come in conflict with one another. Consider for instance Rahab in the book of Judges who is praised for hiding the Israelite spies.

*“By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.”*

*-Hebrews 11:31*

The writer of Hebrews specifically praises Rahab’s faithfulness for elevating the virtue of charity towards the spies over the virtue of honesty. Some people think of virtue in black and white terms, thinking that the virtuous decision will always be the choice between right and wrong, but this isn’t the case in the real world. We oftentimes must choose the greater good, and if we don’t know how to do this, we will make the wrong decisions. To put it another way, what if Rahab would have chosen to elevate honesty in place of charity? If she would have told the truth to those hunting the spies, they would have been killed, and, we can be all but certain, Rahab would have been condemned rather than praised.

This is a level of moral nuance that most live without. They think that simply trying to elevate a particular virtue, they are necessarily in the right. However reality is far more complex than this ideal, and this simple truth is one of the fundamental problems with our current political discourse. I think that G.K. Chesterton identified this problem fairly well:

*“If, for instance, I had to describe with fairness the character of Mr. Bernard Shaw, I could not express myself more exactly than by saying that he has a heroically large and generous heart; but not a heart in the right place. And this is so of the typical society of our time. The modern world is not evil; in some ways the modern world is far too good. It is full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone.”*

-G. K. Chesterton - "Orthodoxy"

Our current world is not evil, but a world where virtues have gone mad. Why? Because we no longer see them as a hierarchy of good that reaches up to God. We have supplanted God and sought to be good to appease our own morality. The Philosopher Rene Girard pointed out that even our modern concern for victims grows out of this moral madness and not out of a genuine charity that is unified towards God:

*"The modern concern for victims obligates us to blame ourselves perpetually. Our concern for victims is characteristically never satisfied with past successes. It never praises itself or tolerates its own praise. It tries to turn attention away from itself because we should be attentive only to victims. Our concern denounces its own laxity, its Pharisaism. Our concern for victims is the secular mask of Christian love."*

-René Girard - "I See Satan Fall Like Lightning"

It is interesting to see how the modern secularist is obsessed with a victim hierarchy. They are constantly trying to figure out who is the supreme victim that we must give all care towards, and their moral calculations are made almost exclusively on that basis. In the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it isn't really a question of who has the right to the land, or what solution would be most efficacious for all involved, instead it is merely who is more impoverished and has less power.

When someone is unfortunately killed in an altercation with a police officer, or even with a fellow citizen, the question is not, who instigated the altercation, or was the force necessary? The only consideration that seems to matter is the identity of the one who was killed or hurt. That is why our modern culture widely ignores the dozens of white people killed every year by the police, even though more unarmed white men are killed every year by the police than black men. This victim hierarchy is so pervasive, that it even becomes the basis for how we judge each other:

*"The idea of a society alien to violence goes back clearly to the preaching of Jesus, to his announcement of the kingdom of God. This ideal does not diminish to the extent that Christianity recedes; to the contrary, its intensity increases. The concern for victims has become a paradoxical competition of mimetic rivalries, of opponents continually trying to outbid one another. The victims most interesting to us are always those who allow us to condemn our neighbors. And our neighbors do the same. They always think first about victims for whom they hold us responsible."*

-René Girard - "I See Satan Fall Like Lightning"

So while the issues concerning say, the border, do circle on whose well-being should we prioritize? It also circles around the question of victimhood and a correct orientation of virtue. For most, the mere fact that those crossing the border have been victims erases any other concern about what this decision does to our rule of law or our country, when the Christian community ought to be far more thoughtful than this. As C.S. Lewis warned, even kindness can be the cloak for all kinds of pervasive tyrannies:

*“Are we not really an increasingly cruel age? Perhaps we are: but I think we have become so in the attempt to reduce all virtues to kindness. For Plato rightly taught that virtue is one. You cannot be kind unless you have all the other virtues. If, being cowardly, conceited and slothful, you have never yet done a fellow creature great mischief, that is only because your neighbour’s welfare has not yet happened to conflict with your safety, self-approval, or ease. Every vice leads to cruelty. Even a good emotion, pity, if not controlled by charity and justice, leads through anger to cruelty. Most atrocities are stimulated by accounts of the enemy’s atrocities; and pity for the oppressed classes, when separated from the moral law as a whole, leads by a very natural process to the unremitting brutalities of a reign of terror.”*

*-C.S. Lewis - “The Problem of Pain”*

As I said on the outset, my intention here is not to make a specific political statement, but only to point out that just because we are motivated by kindness it does not mean that we are necessarily doing the right thing. It also does not mean that those who are motivated to keep national order or are concerned about national security, the national debt, and so on are necessarily motivated by greed. The road to hell is most often paved by good intentions and so we must be very cautious that we are genuinely trying to weigh the prospective goods and not only seeing one angle of the moral quandary.

Finally, it is important to point out that correctly ordering virtue is not just one command amongst many, but it is the intended end of our sanctification in Christ. Remember that Christ says that all the law and the prophets hang upon the commands to appropriately love God and our neighbor. This means that even a form of kindness might prevent someone from growing in virtue:

*“You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD.”*

*-Leviticus 19:14*

This passage has an obvious literal interpretation, but it also extends in a more symbolic sense. The idea here is that if someone is ignorant of a particular good or danger, we who can see it are obligated to point it out. Barring that, we are certainly not to place a “stumbling block” in their path, meaning that we are not supposed to create a problem

for someone who can't see it. While there are many implications of this verse, let's simply take one facet of this, and that is the error of sloth or laziness:

*“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.”*

*2 Thessalonians 3:7-12*

Paul says that it is not compassionate or kind to give bread to someone if it is enabling them in their laziness. To do this would be tantamount to put a stumbling block in the path of the blind. Think about children for a second. It might seem compassionate for a parent to literally do everything for their child throughout their lives and ask nothing from them. Not only is this child ill-prepared to join the real world, but the parent, through their compassion, has made their child lazy and entitled. In other words, they have encouraged them in sin.

Another crucial consideration that we must make when giving charity is, is our charity encouraging sin? Another simple example would be the consideration that many of us take when we are asked for cash by a homeless person. While we can't actually know for a fact what someone might do with our money, if someone openly told us that they wanted money so that they could buy drugs, get drunk, or buy a prostitute, we would be facilitating sin by giving that person money.

In the same way, while I personally believe that the issue of legal immigration is far from settled and could absolutely be adjusted, what I can say with absolute certainty is that it is not compassionate to encourage someone to violate the law or to in any way facilitate that. Beyond that, it is equally bad to allow this to happen and then incentivize it with welfare systems that are offered to those who crossover illegally. This is not only incentivizing illegal activity, but it is also encouraging an attitude of entitlement and laziness.

To bring this altogether, in order for us to correctly order our souls, they must be oriented towards God. This is why, and most people forget this, but the church was exclusively responsible for charity throughout history. In fact the word “charity” was the

Old English word for God's agape love. But the purpose of giving charity and helping the stranger was to show the love of God in such a way that someone would receive a gift greater than their physical needs, and that is union with God.

This is the exact pattern that we are shown through Christ. He heals those around Him and then proclaims to them the kingdom of heaven. So again, while the church can have significant disagreement about this topic, we should ultimately be able to unite around the purpose of our charity and recognize a similar desire to honor God and properly orient our souls toward Him.