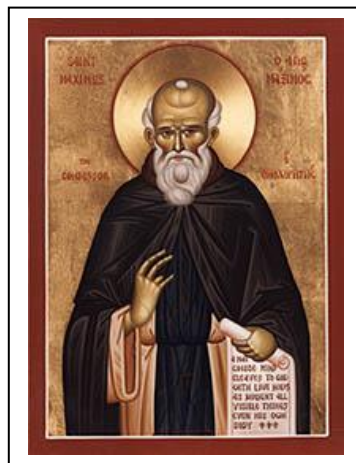


**Love
in the Writings of
St. Maximus the Confessor**



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Preface

I read three texts in preparation for this paper: *The Four Hundred Centuries on Love (CL)*, *Letter 2: On Love (LL)*, and selections from *the Ascetic Life (AL)*. I think that all three should be read again and again throughout one's life. All three texts speak directly to the subject at hand—the true nature of love. All three texts are deeply spiritual writings and leave a vivid impression on the mind. Although love is the immediate subject of the first two, they touch on much more than the subject of love. They illumine the heart and challenge the mind to see life from a new perspective. They inspire and uplift and convict one to seek God more zealously, more faithfully, to understand love in a more comprehensive way. The “400 Centuries” are especially profound and all-encompassing. They touch on virtually every aspect of the spiritual life. After reading them I was left with the awareness that I really do not love God as I should since I usually prefer created, material, temporal, visible things to invisible and eternal realities, the chief among them being God Himself. More often than not I find myself like the little sparrow whose foot is tied to the earth by a cord, who, while trying to fly heavenward, is pulled back down to the ground by this unfortunate attachment. St. Maximus says this is because the mind [nous] is not yet detached from worldly things (Centuries 1:85; cf. 3:56). Lord, have mercy!

Love is certainly a whole lot more than a carnal or emotional, wishy-washy sentimentality. Rather, love is truly the supreme Christian virtue which unites us to both God and man, which is what God desires. Love unites us to God and makes us whole so that we may become gods by grace!

The Life of St. Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662)

“By birth a citizen of Constantinople and at first a high-ranking courtier at the court of the Emperor Heraclius, he then became a monk and the abbot of a monastery not far from the capital. He was the greatest defender of Orthodoxy against the so-called Monothelite heresy, which developed from the heresy of Eutyches. That is to say: as Eutyches asserted that there is in Christ only one nature, so the Monothelites asserted that there is in Him only one will. Maximus resisted this assertion and found himself in opposition to both the Emperor and the Patriarch. But he was unafraid, and persevered to the end in proving that there are in the Lord two natures and therefore also two wills. By his efforts, one Council in Carthage and one in Rome stood firm, and both these Councils anathematized the Monothelite teaching. Maximus's sufferings for Orthodoxy cannot be fully described: tortured by hierarchs, spat upon by the mass of the people, beaten by soldiers, persecuted, imprisoned; until finally, with his tongue cut out and one hand cut off, he was condemned to exile for life in Skhimaris, where he gave his soul into God's hands in the year 662.”

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich
The Prologue from Ochrid

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Champion of Orthodoxy, teacher of purity and of true worship, the enlightener of the universe and the adornment of the hierarchs: All wise Father Maximus, your teachings have gleamed with light upon all things. Intercede before Christ our God to save our souls! (Dismissal Hymn, Tone 8)

By an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, you poured forth streams of supernal teachings for the Church, O all-praised one; and in expounding with divine authority the kenosis of God the Word, you shone forth in your struggles for the true confession of the Faith. O Father Maximus, entreat Christ God that we be granted great mercy! (Another Dismissal Hymn, Tone 3)

Let us, O faithful, worthily acclaim the lover of the Trinity, great Maximus, who clearly taught the God-inspired Faith: that Christ is to be glorified in two natures, wills, and energies; and let us cry unto Him: Rejoice, O herald of the Faith! (Kontakion, Tone 8)

The One Who was well-pleased to become man in His compassion; Who is comprehended in two wills and energies, you proclaimed to all, O blessed Maximus! You stopped the gaping mouths of the most evil ones, who through the wantonness of the devil who contrives all wickedness, wrongly proclaimed Christ with only one will and one energy. (Lord I Have Cried, 1st stikhera)

Introduction

St. Maximus (c. 580-662) has much to say about the true nature of love. His love for God which defended the true Faith (Dyothelitism) against the false teaching of heretics (Monothelitism) cost him his life. Truly he was a remarkable man. Much of what he has to say while speaking about love is about the true nature of the spiritual life: how we can know God, how we can overcome our passions, how we can truly live in accordance with nature as God has intended for us from the beginning. He wrote a whole discourse on The Ascetic Life. He also compiled his 400 Centuries on Love, a “discourse on love...not the fruit of my own meditation, [rather] I went through the writings of the holy Fathers and selected from them... summarizing many things in a few words.” He asks the reader to “please pay careful attention to each chapter... the majority [of which] will require much scrutiny”; read them “with an uncomplicated mind, with the fear of God, and with love... for the sake of spiritual profit” (CL p. 35). These “centuries” touch on many other topics than love, but what he does have to say about love is truly profound and life-changing. He also wrote a letter, Letter #2, On Love, which provides even more insight on this important subject. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss what St. Maximus has to say about love, drawn from these three sources. We shall examine what he says about the commandment to love, the disposition of love, love for God, love for neighbor, love for enemies, the passion of self-love, and the relationship of love and deification.

The Commandment of Love

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus was asked one day by a lawyer (Mt. 22:36). Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 22:37-40; cf. Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18).

There is no greater commandment than the commandment to love: to love God and to love our neighbor remains the high calling and purpose for every human being. All of the other commandments are kept when this one commandment of love is fulfilled. “He who strives to keep this word succeeds with all the commandments together,” St. Maximus tells us (AL, p. 106). Keeping this command is the “sign of our love for God” since the Lord says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me” (Jn. 14:21). St. Maximus says, “Love for one another makes firm the love for God,” (AL, p. 107). The reason we do not do this is because “in our weakness and material-mindedness [we] prefer material and worldly things above the commandment of love... And no one that does not separate himself... from passion for worldly things can genuinely love either God or neighbor” (AL, *ibid.*). “Do not disdain the commandment of love, because by it you will become a son of God. If you transgress it, you will become a son of Gehenna” (CL 4:20). “The whole purpose of the Savior’s commandments is to free the mind from incontinence and hate and bring it to love of Him and of one’s neighbor...” (CL 4:56).

Thus, the Lord has given us His commands to give us the opportunity to become true sons of God. He has given His command of love to set us free from every sinful worldly attachment so that we can truly and freely love both God and neighbor.

The Disposition of Love

Not only are we to keep the commandment of love, we are actually being called to *become loving* to acquire the disposition of love. Real love is about what is going on inside of me; it does not depend on you (i.e. what your disposition or orientation is, whether you are “good” or “bad”). By becoming a loving person on the inside (i.e. by being set free from attachment to worldly things) I am free to love both God and neighbor regardless of how they are to me. This is truly amazing! A life-changing perspective! How I treat you does not depend on you. By growing in true spiritual life, by overcoming the passions, by keeping one’s focus on the Lord, I am free to relate to you out of love. Even though you may mistreat me, I will still love you. Nothing you can do to me can change my love for you. “All His disciples... strove till death for their love of their neighbor and prayed fervently for those who killed them” (AL, p. 108).

It is possible to “fall away from divine love” by letting our brother go to bed angry (CL 1:53), by listening to slander (CL 1:58), by reacting to someone who is tempting us: “Even if in temptation your brother should insist on speaking ill of you, you should not be swept away from your charitable disposition” (CL 4:30). In fact, we are to do “all things in order not to fall away from the purpose of love, which is our God Himself” (CL 3:90). Consider these other texts relating to the disposition of love:

“Love is a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers nothing to the knowledge of God” (CL 1:1).

“The disposition of love is made manifest not only in the sharing of money, but much more in sharing the word of God and physical service” (CL 1:26).

“The one who has acquired divine love in himself does not grow weary of closely following after the Lord his God...” (CL 1:28).

“The unutterable peace of the holy angels is attained by these two dispositions: love for God and love for one another [which] holds true for all the saints...” (CL 4:36).

“For the activity and clear proof of perfect love towards God is a genuine disposition of voluntary goodwill toward one’s neighbor” (LL p. 90).

Love for God

Love for God and love for the neighbor, as we have seen, are what we have been called to do. We become loving. Our whole inner disposition is to be one of divine love. Love is both a command and a disposition. Now, let us consider what St. Maximus has to say specifically about love for God. He speaks about love for God from the outset in his 400 Centuries on Love:

Love is a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers nothing to the knowledge of God. It is impossible to reach the habit of this love if one has any attachment to earthly things. (CL 1:1)

The one who loves God prefers knowledge of Him to all things made by Him and is constantly devoted to it by desire. (CL 1:4)

If we really love God we will truly prefer Him to every created thing; if we are attached to earthly things we do not love God (CL 1:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 18; 2:1, 51; 3:72; 4:74), as difficult as this is and as much as we might like to squirm out of it. Our true preference will be revealed in our choices, in what we think about, in how we live day by day:

When you see your mind dallying with pleasure over material things and taking fond delight in thinking of them, know that you love these things rather than God. (CL 2:51)

The blessed passion of holy love...binds the mind to spiritual realities and persuades it to prefer the immaterial to the material and intelligible and divine things to those of sense. (CL 3:67)

“The one who (truly) loves God...

...is not sad nor does he grieve anyone because of any passing thing” (CL 1:41).

...leads an angelic life on earth, fasting and being watchful and singing psalms and praying and always thinking good of everyone” (CL 1:42).

...looks to God for everything that he does, as doing everything for His sake” (CL 1:46).

...also prays completely undistracted, and the one who prays completely undistracted truly loves God” (CL 2:1).

...cultivates pure prayer and throws off from himself every passion which hinders him” (CL 2:7).

...despises every passing pleasure and every trouble and sorrow” (CL 2:58).

...is naturally eager to do what is pleasing to Him...love, temperance, contemplation, and prayer” (CL 3:10,11).

...[casts] out the passions by this very love. Love for Him means to prefer Him to the world and the soul to the body. It means to despise worldly things and to devote oneself continually to Him through self-mastery, love, prayer, psalmody, etc.” (CL 3:50).

...is always fond of flying off to have converse with Him” (CL 4:40).

How much or how well do we really love God? Our love for God is revealed in what we prefer, in what we actually choose. If we want to grow in our love for God we must think more about God, we must actually pray more, we must choose those things which help us to grow and stop doing those things which keep us from Him. We must refrain those things which keep our minds fixed on earthly things. Lord, have mercy!

Love for Neighbor

As if in the same breath that he speaks about loving God, St. Maximus speaks about loving our neighbor. It is not possible or right to speak only about loving God without at the same time speaking about loving our neighbor. He says in the Letter on Love: “[We do] not divisively [assign] one form of love to God and another to human beings, for it is one and the same and universal: owed to God and attaching human beings to each other” (LL p. 90). And actually our love for God is revealed in our love for our neighbor (cf. 1 John). Also, love for neighbor does not discriminate as to the character or supposed worthiness or unworthiness of the one loved. Based on our own inner disposition of divine love we will love all people equally.

“The one who loves God cannot help but love also every man as himself even though he is displeased by the passions of those who are not yet purified” (CL 1:13).

“Love for God in no way admits of hatred for man” (CL 1:15).

“The one who does not love his neighbor [as the Lord commands as a proof of our love for Him] ...is not able to love the Lord” (CL 1:16).

“Blessed is the man who has learned to love all men equally” (CL 1:17; 2:10).

“The one who loves God surely loves his neighbor as well” (CL 1:23).

“The work of love is the deliberate doing of good to one’s neighbor...” (CL 1:40).

“The one who leads an angelic life on earth...[is] always thinking good of everyone” (CL 1:42).

“Perfect love does not split up the one nature of men on the basis of their various dispositions but ever looking steadfastly at it loves all men equally...It ever manifests the fruits of love equally for all men...” (CL 1:71; cf. 2:30).

“The one who has come to understand the weakness of human nature...never looks down on anyone” (CL 2:39).

“The one who does not love anything human loves all men...” (CL 3:37).

“Love of neighbor prepares the mind to think always well of him” (CL 4:40).

“The one who loves Christ thoroughly imitates Him as much as he can. Treated ungratefully and blasphemed, He was patient; beaten and put to death by them, He endured, not thinking ill of anyone at all. These three are the works of love of neighbor in the absence of which a person who says he loves Christ or possesses His Kingdom deceives himself” (CL 4:55).

“Be as eager as you can to love every man, but if you cannot do this, at least do not hate anyone [which] you cannot do unless you scorn the things of this world” (CL 4:82).

“You are to love every man from your soul...” (CL 4:95).

“The friends of Christ love everyone sincerely [and] maintain the continuity of their love till the end” (CL 4:98).

Such is the power of divine love; rooted in our love for God, flowing from who we have become in Christ, being united to Christ and obedient to His commands, preferring Him to every created thing, we are free to love, both Him and our neighbor. Awesome! But what about loving those who do not love us or who even hate us?

Love for Enemies

“The acid test of the purity of our love is love of our enemies...which is only possible if we free ourselves from the passions: without detachment we are not truly free” (Louth, p. 39). “Why did the Lord command [this; i.e. to love your enemies]? So that He might free you from hate, sadness, anger, and grudges, and might grant you the greatest possession of all, perfect love, which is impossible to possess except by the one who loves all men equally in imitation of God...” (CL 1:61). “Deliberately to do good to those who hate you is a mark of perfect spiritual love alone” (CL 2:49).

In the Ascetic Life, St. Maximus is asked, “How can I love the man that hates and repulses me?” He replies that the Lord “does not command the impossible, but clearly what is possible...All His disciples...strove till death for love of their neighbor and prayed fervently for those who killed them. But since we are lovers of material things and of pleasure, preferring them above the commandment, we are then not able to love them that hate us” (AL p. 108). We cannot escape the connection between purification, living an authentic, ascetic, truly Christian, spiritual life and acquiring and manifesting a life of love. If we want to love God and others we must work on ourselves; there is no other way. Asceticism and virtue go together. Now we come to the root of the problem.

The Passion of Self-Love

“In our fallen state, apart from the call of God, we are in a state of self-love *philautia*” (Louth, pp. 38-9). We do not really love God or our neighbor because we are in love with ourselves, not with true sanctifying divine love but with “the blameworthy passion of love which engrosses the mind in material things” (CL 3:71). Again, our problem is that we have cultivated a life in which we cater to the whims of our flesh, we prefer the pleasures of the flesh and material things to the love of God. Isn’t this really idolatry? But what can break this self-indulgence? “Only God is good by nature and only the one who imitates God is good by his will. [God’s] plan is to join the wicked to Himself who is good by nature in order that they may become good” (CL 4:90). Or, in the words of St. John, “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn. 4:11). “For Maximus, love of the brothers, *philadelphia*, is an important sign that we are beginning to free ourselves from self-love” (Louth, p. 39).

God’s love for us, His grace and mercy, His commandments are all freely given to us to set us free from our inappropriate love for ourselves and material things. We must conquer this self-love since all of the other passions flow from it. Self-love can only be conquered by “spiritual love and self-mastery” (CL 3:43). “If we sincerely love God we cast out the passions by this love” (CL 3:50). “The power of love [is] the adversary of self-love” (LL p. 88).

“The one who throws off self-love, the mother of the passions, will very easily with God’s help put aside the others...Self-love is the passion for the body” (CL 2:8).

“Keep yourself away from self-love, the mother of vices, which is the irrational love of the body. For from it surely arise the first three passionate and capital thoughts: gluttony, greed, and vainglory” (CL 2:59).

“The passion of self-love suggests to the monk that he should be kind to the body and to indulge in food more than is appropriate...To the worldly person it proposes that he make provision for himself right away in the matter of lust” (CL 2:60).

“Self-love is the passionate and irrational affection for the body, to which is opposed love and self-mastery. The one who has self-love has all the passions” (CL 3:8).

“The beginning of all passions is love of self, and the end is pride. Self-love is irrational love of the body, and if one eliminates this he eliminates along with it all the passions stemming from it” (CL 3:57).

“Self-love is...the first sin, the first progeny of the devil, and the mother of the passions...the beginning and mother of all evils” (LL p. 88).

“Love is said to be God Himself which from the beginning the thorns of self-love have covered up” (ibid., p. 91).

Love and Deification

St. Maximus has much to say about the spiritual life. At the heart of the spiritual life is love. The two themes are inseparable. “For Maximus the spiritual life is about how we love” (Louth, p. 38). The goal of the spiritual life is participation in God, union with Him—theosis. This theme is also clearly set forth in the writings of St. Maximus.

“God takes form in each through His great love for mankind out of the virtue that is present in each through the ascetic struggle” (LL p. 90). Through our ascetic effort and the acquisition of the virtues, especially love, we are united to God: “Love is therefore a great good, and of goods the first and most excellent good since through it God and man are drawn together in a single embrace” (ibid., p. 90). “Love is...in a definition: the inward universal relationship to the first good connected with the universal purpose of our natural kind...there is nothing that can make the human being who loves God ascend any higher” (ibid., p. 90). By acquiring love we ascend to God.

St. Maximus speaks clearly about the deifying power of love: “Nothing is more truly Godlike than divine love, nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification” (ibid., p. 85). “The mystery of love [is that] out of human beings [it] makes us gods” (ibid.). “[This] divine and blessed love...will embrace God and manifest the one who loves God to be God himself” (ibid., p. 87). “The all glorious way of love...is truly divine and deifying and leads to God” (ibid., p. 91). “The grace of love...leads one to God who deifies the human being that He Himself has fashioned” (ibid., p. 92). What God desires is that “what He is by essence, the creature might become by participation” (CL 3:25). Love deifies. It unites us to God and makes us gods. The more we purify our souls and bodies from passions and from attachment to created, earthly, temporal, worldly things the more we ascend to God, the more God unites Himself with us, the more we love Him and others. Let us pursue divine love!

Conclusion

St. Maximus concludes his Centuries on Love with these words:

Many people have said much about love, but only in seeking it among Christ's disciples will you find it, for only they have the true love, the Teacher of love...the one who possesses love possesses God Himself since 'God is love'. (CL 4:100)

God is love. God loves man. Man is commanded to love God. Man is commanded to love man. Man must be freed from his attachment to material and sinful things in order to love both God and man as he should. This is what it means to be a Christian, one who knows love and one who loves. By purifying our lives by grace and through ascetic effort we acquire the virtues by which God unites Himself more and more to man. Man becomes god by participation, a union without confusion each person maintaining his/her unique hypostatic reality. Let us start today to make a new beginning to love. Let us begin by opening ourselves to the love of God, by repenting of our sins, by seeking God in prayer. "Lord help us to see You, the source of all love and beauty, and to be captivated by that love so that we may be freed from our attachment to worldly things and be united to You the source of divine love, and so become the people You have created us to be." Amen.

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Selected Quotes from St. Maximus on Love

Letter 2: On Love (c. 626)

Louth: At one pole is self-love at the other is deifying love

Divine love...in its power is beyond circumspection or definition (L 2:85)

Nothing is more truly Godlike than divine love, nothing more mysterious, nothing more apt to raise up human beings to deification (85)

The mystery of love which out of human beings makes us gods (85)

Everything is circumscribed by love according to God's good pleasure...for what form of good things does love not possess?—faith, hope humility, meekness, gentleness, mercy, self-control, patience, long-suffering, kindness, peace and joy (86)

Love is the goal of every good, being the highest of goods with God, and source of every good (86)

Love alone...proves that the human person is in the image of the Creator...persuading the inclination to follow nature (86-7)

The divine and blessed love...will embrace God and manifest the one who loves God to be God himself (87)

The power of love [is] the adversary of self-love (88)

Self-love is...the first sin, the first progeny of the devil, and the mother of the passions...the beginning and mother of all evils (88)

Love gathers together what has been separated (88)

God takes form in each through his great love for mankind out of the virtue that is present in each through the ascetic struggle (90)

Love is therefore a great good, and of goods the first and most excellent good since through it God and man are drawn together in a single embrace (90)

Love is...in a definition: the inward universal relationship to the first good connected with the universal purpose of our natural kind...there is nothing that can make the human being who loves God ascend any higher (90)

[We do] not divisively [assign] one form of love to God and another to human beings, for it is one and the same and universal: owed to God and attaching human beings to each other (90)

For the activity and clear proof of perfect love towards God is a genuine disposition of voluntary goodwill toward one's neighbor (90)

The all glorious way of love...is truly divine and deifying and leads to God (91)

Love is said to be God Himself which from the beginning the thorns of self love have covered up (91)

For the sake of love the saints all resist sin continually finding no meaning in this present life (91)

Love...binds human beings to God and one another (91)

The grace of love...leads one to God who deifies the human being that He himself has fashioned (92)

Love "never fails" since it possesses God who is alone unfailing and unalterable (92)

Four Hundred Centuries on Love

The 400 chapters he calls "this discourse on love" "not the fruit of my own meditation. Instead I went through the writings of the holy Fathers and selected from them...summarizing many things in a few words" "please pay careful attention to each chapter...the majority will require much scrutiny" read them "with an uncomplicated mind, with the fear of God, and with love...for the sake of spiritual profit" (35)

1:1 Love is a good disposition of the soul by which one prefers nothing to the knowledge of God. It is impossible to reach the habit of this love if one has any attachment to earthly things.

1:4 The one who loves God prefers knowledge of Him to all things made by Him and is constantly devoted to it by desire.

1:9 there is nothing greater than love

1:11 All the virtues assist the mind in the pursuit of love, but above all does pure prayer

1:54 How great a zeal we should show to acquire it!

1:85 As a little sparrow whose foot is tied tries to fly but is pulled to earth by the cord to which it is bound, so does the mind which does not yet possess detachment get pulled down and dragged to earth when it flies to the knowledge of heavenly things.

2:48 The mind of the one who is continually with God even his concupiscence (lust) abounds beyond measure into a divine desire (eros) and whose entire irascible element is transformed into divine love...to a never-ending divine desire and an unceasing love, completely changing over from earthly things to divine.

3:37 The one who does not love anything human loves all men

3:100 Love remains for infinite ages in a supreme and ever abounding union with the One who is supremely infinite [and so] the greatest of these is love.

4:100 Many people have said much about love, but only in seeking it among Christ's disciples will you find it, for only they have the true love, the Teacher of love...the one who possesses love possesses God Himself since God is love...

The Ascetic Life:

“Q (p. 106): The Lord's commands are many, Father, and who can keep them all in mind, so as to strive after them?”

A: Though there are many, brother, yet they are all summed up in one word: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God...and thy neighbor as thyself. He who strives to keep this word succeeds with all the commandments together. And no one that does not separate himself...from passion for worldly things (food, money, possessions, acclaim, relatives, and the rest), can love genuinely either God or his neighbor. Indeed at the same time to attend to the material and to love God, simply cannot be.

In our weakness and material-mindedness [we] preferred material and worldly things above the commandment of love; and clinging to them we fight with men, though love for every man must be preferred above all visible things, even the body (p. 107).

This is our sign of our love for God: He that loves Me will keep My commandments...This is My commandment that you love one another. Thus, love for one another makes firm the love for God which is the fulfilling of every commandment of God (p. 107).

Q (p. 107): How can I love the man that hates and repulses me?

A (p. 108): The Lord says, Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you. He does not command the impossible, but clearly what is possible.

All His disciples...strove till death for love of their neighbor and prayed fervently for those who killed them. But since we are lovers of material things and of pleasure, preferring them above the commandment, we are then not able to love them that hate us

The Lord's and His Apostle's purpose [is] to love men and to have sympathy for them when they fall, but by love to war constantly against the wicked demons (p. 113).

Q (p. 114): What should one do, Father, in order to be able to devote oneself continuously to God?

A: It is impossible...except [one] should possess three virtues: love, self-mastery, and prayer. Love tames anger, self-mastery quenches lust...

“there is nothing greater than love...love for God...the love of God...divine love...love one another...love all men equally...loves his neighbor...the disposition of love...the work of love...the one who loves God...fall away from divine love...the gift of love...”love works no evil to one’s neighbor”...”love is the fullness of the Law”...the law of Christ is love...”love your enemies”...the greatest possession of all, perfect love...the yoke of his love...the commandment of love...perfect love...the fruits of love equally for all men...the love of Christ...”the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”...love of neighbor...love of God...five reasons men love one another...you must love everyone equally...progress in the love of God...perfect in love...unceasing love...perfect spiritual love...the passion of self-love...love of money...the blessed passion of holy love (3:67)...the blameworthy passion of love...the praiseworthy passion of love...the love of friends...the loss of spiritual love...saving love...love for God and love for one another...”on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets”...acquire perfect love...the full measure of detachment and of perfect love...the one who loves Christ imitates Him...the reason why love edifies...take hold of love...love God and our neighbor [and] our enemies...the best of all the virtues is love...the love of God is opposite to lust...the things which destroy love...love every man...the purpose of love is God Himself...the one who possesses love possesses God since God is love... God: Out of goodness ever wills his creatures to exist and to receive benefits from Him (3:29) God who is beyond fullness did not bring creatures into being out of any need of His, but that He might enjoy their proportionate participation in Him (3:46) Eternally existing as Creator, God creates when He wishes by His consubstantial Word and Spirit out of His infinite goodness (4:3)...