

10-25-2012

# There Is No Commandment Greater Than These (2012)

David Rutkowski  
*Valparaiso University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholar.valpo.edu/core\\_reader](http://scholar.valpo.edu/core_reader)

---

## Recommended Citation

Rutkowski, David, "There Is No Commandment Greater Than These (2012)" (2012). *The Valpo Core Reader*. Paper 23.  
[http://scholar.valpo.edu/core\\_reader/23](http://scholar.valpo.edu/core_reader/23)

This Leadership and Service Essay is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Valpo Core Reader by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at [scholar@valpo.edu](mailto:scholar@valpo.edu).

# There Is No Commandment Greater Than These

*By David Rutkowski*

Leaders are at the foundation of every society. Thus, every great leader must have a strong foundation to build upon for a society to succeed. One leader that is known for success in leadership is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He always fell back on his foundation, and never settled for anything different. For, it was his roots and determination that formed his leadership style led Dr. King to become a champion for peace and justice. The moral and ethical base that Dr. King developed can be an example to all who read his writings. By reading one of his more well-known writings, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," we can see that God's love was the foundation that Dr. King built upon. Through a better understanding Dr. King's use of God's love, we may realize that is essential for the strength of a leader and the society that he leads.

From the very beginning of his life, Dr. King was submerged in the Word of God. He says on page 52 of "Pilgrimage," "for as a Christian I believe that there is a creative power in the universe who is the ground and essence of all reality." King's Christian faith was the foundation and "ground" of his life. He believed that everyone "is a child of God" (52), and should be loved in that manner. This played a big role in his methods of nonviolence that defined him as a leader. His Christian instruction

seemed to be King's main motivation for all of his actions. He wrote on page 52 of "Nonviolence," "The Christian ought always to be challenged by any protest against unfair treatment of the poor." He even backs this statement up with Jesus' own words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (53). Throughout his whole writing, Dr. King keeps going back to the importance of following Jesus' example of loving and helping those who are down-trodden. This shows the readers the importance of following what God wills for us and for striving to love how Jesus loves. Dr. King used this inspiration from God in his leadership. He thought about the concerns of others and worked to help them.

Although King's loving leadership style provided some very positive effects, many critics say that love is not necessary, and sometimes even harmful, in society. They feel that "loving" others by helping them should not be the main focus in the lives of citizens in a society that strives to succeed. One writer that exemplifies this view is William Graham Sumner, in his writing "What Social Classes owe to Each Other." In this writing he explains, "Every man and woman in society has one big duty. That is, to take care of his or her own self" (79). By this, he means that he thinks that every individual would benefit more from "minding one's own business" rather than focusing on the problems of the less fortunate. For this, Sumner gives two reasons. The first, being the danger that

getting involved in other people's affairs will lead an individual to lose sight of what needs to be done in his own life. Second is the possibility of negatively interfering with the lives of others (79). These are the reasons why Sumner suggests that a society in which the citizens focus on their needs above others would function at a higher level, and advance as a whole. There are further arguments that stand against King's model of love. Love is, by the way, considered an emotion. Often times, emotions skew the thought process and decision making of those who succumb to it. If a leader lets such an emotion as love guide the way that he thinks, his decisions may be affected in a negative way. This goes along with William Graham Sumner's idea that too much involvement in the lives of others can lead to negative interference.

The arguments of potential critics do make some interesting points; however, they cannot contest the power of the true love and word of God. Dr. King's Christian background guided him in his attempts to closely follow the word of God. As he described in *Pilgrimage*, "my mind, consciously or unconsciously, was driven back to the Sermon on the Mount" (56). By saying this, Dr. King showed how much he valued what Jesus has told us to do through his many sermons. One major aspect of Jesus' teachings was love, as he proclaims in with commands in Mark. The first command is to love God with all of our hearts, and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus goes on to say, "There is no commandment greater than these." Near the conclusion of "Pilgrimage to

Nonviolence,” King explains this love that Jesus was talking about. This love, King writes, is not an emotion, but “It is the love of God operating in the human heart” (57). This silences the opposition who may say that the emotion of love can complicate the decision of a leader. For the love that King talks about is one that is above human emotion, and works only to the good of others. He goes on to say that what he was doing in his leadership could only be done “by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives” (57). Dr. King explains that this love is not given for self-gain, but again for the interest of others.

Sumner described in his writing that it is better for society to only look out for the concerns of oneself. However, what Dr. King shows us demonstrates the contrary. By loving in a way to help others, Dr. King led one of the biggest civil rights movements of all time. The kind of love that King referred to in his work is called *agape*. *Agape* means unconditional love, and is a love that can come only from God. This kind of loving made him a great leader because he looked out for everyone and “made no distinction between friend and enemy” (57). He included everyone and their needs, as opposed to Sumner’s model that only included the needs of one. Sumner’s description of his societal ideas almost gave a feeling that he disliked, or even hated people in society that did not carry their own weight and depended on others. King’s approach encourages the support of others, “by meeting hate with love” (58). Sumner also brought up the point that involving oneself in the lives

of others could actually do harm to them, even if it wasn't the intention. However, King describes that when involving ourselves in the lives of others we are going "against forces of evil rather than against persons" (56). By this he meant that when we try to fix the problems around us, we should focus on getting rid of the evil that caused them, while still loving and helping the person involved in this evil. King continues to say that this takes persistence to be done correctly and that the display of God's love includes a "willingness to go to any length" (58). This persistence was a major characteristic of Dr. King throughout his work. As we read Dr. King's description of God's love, we see that it is the driving force behind his leadership, speeches, and writings that could silence anyone who opposes his leadership style.

There were many aspects of Dr. King's work that led him to become the man that our society honors. However, the most prevalent is how he showed God's love through his actions, speeches, and writings. Other theories on what a society should function around cannot stand up to the method that Dr. King strove to uphold through his leadership. Through many examples, King showed us that "Love is the only cement that can hold this broken community together" (*Pilgrimage*, 58). Therefore, if carried out in God's way, love is not at all harmful to society as some may say, but absolutely necessary for it to function properly. For, when we work to bring God's love to the lives of others, His power is

ever present with us. And, as God's power is present, nothing can stand in the way.

#### Works Cited

Martin Luther King, Jr. "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," from *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. Valparaiso University Core Coursepack, 2011. Fountainhead Press. Pp. 51-58.