Demonstration 2 On love

Aphrahat the Persian Sage (c. AD 270–345)

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DE CARITATE

TRANSLATED FROM THE SYRIAC OF APHRAATES By Frank Hudson Hallock 1. Surely, beloved, all the law and the prophets depend upon the two commandments, as our Saviour said: ”The law and the prophets are too little to convince him who will not be persuaded.” Therefore our Saviour said: ”On these two commandments hang the law and the prophets,” that is: ”A man shall love the Lord His God with all his soul, and with all his might, and with all his substance”; and that a man also ”shall love his neighbor as himself.”

2. And when thou proceedest to the examination of these two commandments, upon the power of which depends all the law and the prophets, thou mayest perceive if these two commandments, on which depends all the power of the law and the prophets, are received in the hearts and in the minds of men, or if the law and the prophets which have been written, have not been sought, as it is written that ”for the just the law is not appointed, but for the evil doers. On account of the wicked, therefore, the law has been appointed. And if righteousness had remained among men law would not have been needed. Again, if a law had not been appointed, the power of God would not have been known in all our generations, and in all the miracles which He showed. By the transgression of the commandment of the house of Adam death was decreed against the world, and the power of God manifested when all men arise at the end which removes the rule of death. On account of the sinners which were in the days of Noah the power of God was manifested in the waters of the flood. And Abraham, because he observed the righteousness which is in the law before the law was appointed, had manifested in him the power of God by means of righteousness, when he brought back the spoil of Sodom by the power of his God and did not put forth his hand upon the booty;

and God said to him after that day: ”Thy reward is multiplied by thy righteousness. And he upon whom the law had not been imposed manifested the works of the law, which the law of his righteousness did not require. Thus also in the case of Isaac and Jacob his sons, there was no necessity for them (to obey the law), because the law had not yet been imposed for their righteousness, for their father commanded them to act worthily and justly; as it is written that the Lord said concerning Abraham: ”I know him, that he will command all his

sons after him that they keep all My commandments. Also Joseph kept the righteousness which is in the law when he was not obedient to his mistress. For he said: "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God? And Moses also, for he observed the righteousness which is in the law when he denied that he should be called a son to the daughter of Pharoah; on account of this the Lord made him worthy that through him He gave the law to His people. For all these manifested the works of the law, also for their righteousness the law had not been imposed and they were a law unto themselves.

3. When the time of the law was at hand it was added on account of transgression. And He showed that it was an addition. And wherefore, then, was this addition? except on account of the calling of the Gentiles which was foretold before the law was promised. And that law was the keeper and teacher until that Seed should come in whom the Gentiles were blessed. For the word of the oath which was promised to Abraham is also a covenant of the promise; God said unto him, "In thy seed shall all the Gentiles be blessed." And this word, which is a covenant, placed four hundred and thirty years before the law, was a promise to Abraham that the Gentiles in his seed, which is Christ, should be blessed. And the law was four hundred and thirty years after these things. For when Abraham received this promise he was eighty-five years old, and from that time until Jacob went to Egypt was two hundred and five years, and from the time that Jacob went to Egypt and until the people came forth by the hand of Moses was two hundred and twenty-five years.

4. And the cause of their sojourning is designated, for the children of Israel abode four hundred and thirty years in the land of Egypt. And wherefore, beloved, when they dwelt there two hundred and twenty-five years was four hundred and thirty years written for them? if not on account of that hour of which God said to Abraham: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a sojourner in a land which is not theirs, and they shall serve among them, and they shall bring them into bondage four hundred years. For at that time in which this word was spoken to Abraham, there shall be unto thee an offspring, by faith it was formed in the heart of Abraham, as it is written: "Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." And also the word concerning the servitude which his sons should serve in Egypt was conceived in the heart of Abraham, and he began to be anxious as to how his seed should be in servitude, and his heart was serving in Egypt. Likewise also Isaac and Jacob were taking thought about the servitude, and they were in thought serving in the midst of Egypt. And the bondage was promised concerning the seed of Abraham before they were born; for the word was fifteen years before the birth of Isaac, and the promise of the bondage was two hundred and five years before their entering Egypt, and the promise that in the seed of Abraham all peoples should be blessed was four hundred and thirty years before the law. And the law was not able to make void the promise, henceforth the law was an addition with regard to this word of promise until the time should come.

5. And that word was preserved one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four years from the time it was promised to Abraham until the Advent, and that word was in observation one thousand three hundred and sixty-four years after the imposition of the law. And the

word was four hundred and thirty years older than the law, and when it came it made ineffectual observances of the law. And the law and the prophets are included in these two commandments or which our Lord spoke, for the word is written: "All the law and the prophets prophesied until John the Baptist." And our Lord said: "I have not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them." Again it is written: "The truth of the law is through Jesus."

6. And how, then, were the law and the prophets lacking, when it was necessary that they should be fulfilled? if not because the testament was hidden in them which is itself the word of promise. For that testament which was given to Moses was not sealed until this last testament should come, which is also the first, because it was promised, it was signed by the death of Him who was to come of the testament, and the two testaments were confirmed (N.B. this whole passage is obscure and the translation, following the Latin rather closely, little more than a guess): "And He made them both one, and the law of the commandments He abolished by His precepts. For the uses of the law are abolished by the advent of our Life-giver, and He offered up Himself in the place of the sacrifices which are in the law, and He was led as a lamb to the slaughter in the place of the lambs of propitiation, and He was killed for us (as) a fattened bull, that there might be no necessity for us to offer the offspring of cattle. He came and He was lifted up upon the cross; oblations and sacrifices are not required from us; He gave His blood in place of all men, that the blood of animals might not be required of us; He entered the sanctuary which was not made by hands, and He became the priest and minister of the holy place.

For from the time in which He came He abolished the observances which are of the law, and from the time that they bound Him the festivals were bound for them by chains; and because they wished to judge the innocent One He took the judges away from them; and because they rejected His kingdom He took away the kingdom from them, for He came whose the kingdom is; and He ascended a living sacrifice in our stead and abolished their sacrifices, and the children of Israel remained without sacrifices and without altar, and without putting on the ephod and placing of incense; and He took away from them seers and prophets because they had not heard the great Prophet; and the former covenant was fulfilled by the latter, and the works which are in the law have grown old and become antiquated and fit for destruction, for from the time the new was given the old was abolished. And it was not only from the time of the advent of our Saviour that sacrifices were rejected, but even before (that) time their sacrifices did not give pleasure to Him, as it is written: "I will not eat the flesh of calves, and the blood of goats I will not drink"; but "sacrifice to God thanksgiving and accomplish thy vows to the Highest. And again He said: "A broken heart God does not reject. And again He said: "I have not desired sacrifices and by holocausts of peace (offerings) I have not been reconciled.

"The sacrifices of God are an afflicted spirit. And also Isaiah the prophet said: "A multitude of your sacrifices I have not required, said the Lord. And again He said to them: "I hate and reject your feast days, and I will not smell in your sacrifices."

7. And this again is the word on which our Saviour says the law and the prophets depend, beautiful and good and seemly. For our Lord spake thus: "A single letter yudh shall not pass from the law or the prophets until all is done." For He took the law and the prophets and made them depend upon two commandments, and did not abolish anything from them. And when thou shalt look well at this word, so it truly is. The observation of that which is in the law and of everything which is written in it is an example of that word, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and with all thy might, and with all thy heart"; and of everything which was done by the law, for it lead them to love the Lord their God; and a man shall love his neighbor as his own flesh. And these two commandments above are from the whole law. And when thou shalt set thy heart and look intently unto the law, in the beginning of all the law (thou shalt find) it is written thus: "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee up from the land of Egypt. Thou shalt not make to thyself, My people, any image or any similitude." And the man who does not make another god has under him the word on which hangs the law and the prophets. Remember, beloved, that I have written for thee that the law is not imposed for the righteous, for he who observes righteousness is above the commandments and the law and the prophets; and the word which our Lord speaks is true: "The letter yudh shall not pass from the law and from the prophets," for by the two commandments He seals (them) and makes them depend.

8. Hear now, beloved, the persuasiveness of this word. If a man should say: "Why was this word written, that the seat of the children of Israel should remain in the land of Egypt four hundred and thirty years, when in the promise which had been made to Abraham it was said to him that there should be four hundred years? And thirty were received in addition?" Now I will show thee, beloved, even as it was. For when the time of fulfillment of the four hundred years was come, Moses was sent that he might deliver them. "When he killed the Egyptian, and they rejected him as their saviour, and Moses fled to Midian, wrath was upon them so that they remained thirty years in Egypt. For they said to Moses: "Who has appointed thee ruler and judge over us?" And when they rejected their salvation the wrath of God withheld them for thirty years in the midst of Egypt, and Moses was thirty years in Midian. Then, when affliction increased upon them, He lead them out of Egypt. God manifested this patience of His spirit; first He chastised them because they had rejected Moses, and secondly because they had completed the sins of the Amorites. He exceeded that which had been promised to Abraham and added thirty years to the people, and He had patience with the Amorites seventy years, thirty in Egypt and forty in the desert. And when the four hundred and thirty was completed, and the forty years for the consummation of the iniquities of the Amorites, He brought them into the land of promise.

9. Know moreover, beloved, that there is no law for God. For sometimes He increases and diminishes, and sometimes He adds to because it is little. For in the days of Noah on account of the sins of men He promised that the days of men should be one hundred and twenty years, and in the six hundredth year of the years of the life of Noah He destroyed them. For He said: "A hundred and twenty years they shall be upon the earth." And in the six hundredth year of the years of the life of Noah they were destroyed, and he took away these twenty

years. And again it is written that when iniquity increased the sins of the house of Ephraim, when Jeroboam ruled over them, the son of Nebat, that he sinned and caused Israel to sin, and when they sinned He promised in their behalf by the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet, who said to them that after sixty-five years He will cut off Ephraim from the people. This word was in the first year of Ahaz, and in the fourth year of Hezekiah Shalmanasar, King of Assyria (’Ôtûr), came up against them, and after him Taglathphalasar, and he carried them into exile from their land. For Ahaz reigned over them sixteen years, and in the fourth year of Hezekiah the kings of Assyria ruled over them; so there were only twenty years and He cut off Ephraim from the people of Israel, and He took away from them forty-five years, and this time which at first He had appointed He did not complete according to that which He had decreed.

10. It was not as though it were unknown that He had promised in their behalf that things should be thus, and then the years were diminished and also were increased, but as known; for He knew the measure of that which was to come, and on account of His mercies He gave a time for repentance that men might be without excuse; and men despised the longsuffering of God, and when they heard that there was much time until the wrath which was promised should come, becoming bold they sinned before Him and said: ”That which the prophets say is prophesied for a remote time. On account of this when there arose a disputing concerning these things in the days of Ezekiel the prophet and they said: ”That which hath been prophesied is for a remote time,” He said to Ezekiel: ”As I live,” saith the Lord of dominions, ”there shall not again be a delay to My words, for the word which I shall speak I shall shortly accomplish. And He cut off that which He had foretold, to give to men a time for repentance, that perhaps they might repent; but they despised the longsuffering of God and did not repent, and He also changed the time which He had appointed and decreed to them. And it was not done as if it were not known, but as it is written: ”Woe to him that destroyeth! Ye were not destroyed; and who hath spoken falsely, and He did not speak falsely against you.

For when ye have wished to destroy ye have been destroyed, and when ye have wished to speak falsely it hath been spoken falsely against you. Again it is written in Jeremiah: ”If I shall speak against a people and against a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy them and to cause them to perish, and that nation shall turn from its wickedness, I also will make false My word, and I will turn away from them everything which I have spoken against them. Again Jeremiah said: ”If I shall speak concerning a people and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant, and that people shall do iniquity before Me, I also will make false My word, and I will turn from it the good thing which I have spoken to benefit it.”

11. Now, beloved, all these things have I written to thee because in what was said before, that is in the former discourse concerning faith, I have shown thee that in faith may be placed the foundation of this covenant in which we are established; and in this second discourse which I have written to thee I have reminded thee that all the law and the prophets

depend upon two commandments, those which our Saviour spoke, and in these two commandments are included all the law and the prophets. And in the law faith is included, and by faith true love is established, which is from those two commandments, that after a man loves the Lord his God he shall cherish his neighbor as himself.

12. Now hear, beloved, concerning the love which is produced from those two commandments. For when our Life-giver came He showed the eagerness of love, for He said to His disciples: "This is My commandment that ye love one another." And again He said to them: "A new commandment I give you, that ye love one another." And again, when making clear concerning love, thus He warned them: "Love your enemies, and bless him who curses you; pray for those who deal hardly with you and persecute you." And this again He said to them: "If ye love him who loves you what is your reward? For if thou lovest him who loves thee thus also do the Gentiles, who loves them they love him." Again our Life-giver said: "If ye do good to him who does good unto you what is your reward? thus also do the publicans and sinners. But ye, because ye are called sons of God who is in heaven, be ye like Him who showeth mercy also upon those who renounce goodness." Again our Saviour said: "Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you; loose, and ye shall loosed; give, and it shall be given you." Again He spoke and put fear in us: "Unless ye forgive men who sin against you their sins, neither will the Father forgive you." For thus He warned and said: "If thy brother shall sin against thee, forgive him; and even if he shall sin against thee seven times in one day, forgive him."

13. And when Simon Peter (Kipho) heard this word he said to our Lord: "How many times, if my brother sin against me, shall I forgive him? Seven times?" Our Lord said to him: "Not only seven, but until seventy times seven (and) seven." Even if he shall sin against thee four hundred and ninety times, forgive him in one day" (this sentence has the particle indicating a quotation). And He is likened to His good Father who multiplied His forgiveness upon Jerusalem when He caused the children of Israel to go into captivity to Babylon, He scattered them seventy years, and when His mercies were revealed He brought them together to their land by means of Ezra the scribe, and He increased forgiveness unto them by the division of His day (which is) seventy weeks of years (cf. Ps. 90:4), four hundred and ninety years. And when they shed innocent blood He did not again exempt them on account of Jerusalem, but He delivered it over into the hands of its enemies, and they rooted it up, and they did not leave in it stone upon stone, and they did not leave its foundations for the Lord. And He did not say to the children of Edom that vengeance should be recompensed them because they did not cry out against Jerusalem, "reveal it, reveal it, even to its foundations." But God by the division of His day forgave four hundred and ninety years, and He bore their iniquities; and then He rooted it up, and also He delivered Jerusalem into the hands of strangers. So our Life-giver commanded them that in one day a man should forgive his brother four hundred and ninety times.

14. But be not offended, beloved, by the word which is written unto thee, that by the division of His day God spared Jerusalem; for thus it is written by David in the ninetieth Psalms: "A thousand years in the eyes of the Lord are as a day which was completed and has passed

away." And also our learned teachers say thus, that in the similitude of six days God made the world, and for the consummation of the world six thousand years were appointed, and there was to be a Sabbath of God in the similitude of the Sabbath which was after the six days, as our Saviour revealed and showed us concerning the Sabbath, for He spake thus: "Pray that your flight may not be in the Winter or on the Sabbath." And also the Apostle said: "There remaineth still a Sabbath of God. Let us give diligence also that we may enter into its rest."

15. Again when our Lord taught a prayer to His disciples, He said to them: "Thus shall ye pray, Forgive us our debts, and also we shall forgive our debtors. And again He said: "When thou desirest to offer an oblation, and thou rememberest that thou hast anger against thy brother, go away and be reconciled with thy brother, and then come (and) offer thy oblation. Lest when a man prayeth: "Forgive us our debts, and also we will forgive our debtors," he should be ensnared out of his own mouth, and it should be said to him by Him who receiveth prayers, thou thyself has not forgiven thy debtor, how shall it be forgiven to thee? And thy prayer shall remain upon the earth. And again our Lord shows us an example of that man who began to take a reckoning from his servants, and when his servant came into his presence who owed him ten thousand talents, and when his lord urged him that he give him what he owed him, and when he was unable to pay his debt to his lord, his lord commanded to release him and forgave him all that he owed. When that servant in his wickedness did not remember the forgiveness of his lord, how much he had multiplied forgiveness towards him, and when he went forth he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred pence, and he held him, and choked him, and said to him, give me what thou owest me;

and he did not receive the prayer which his fellow-servant asked from him, but going away he bound him in prison. And because he to whom much had been forgiven did not forgive his fellow-servant a little, he was given up to the officers who beat him until he gave what he owed. And He said to them: "Thus will My Father who is in heaven do to you if ye do not forgive each one his brother."

16. See again, beloved, how greatly the blessed Apostle magnified love when he said: "If ye are zealous of great gifts I will show you what is a more excellent gift. And he said: "If I have prophecy, and know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and all faith, so that I might remove a mountain, and love is not in me, I have gained nothing. And if I give all that I have to the poor to eat, and also deliver my body that it may be burnt, and love is not in me, again I have gained nothing. For he spake thus: "Love, its spirit is long-suffering and kind, and not envious, and also it is not boastful, and it is not puffed up, and does not seek anything which is pleasant for itself alone, but what is expedient for many. Love hopeth all things, suffereth all things, love is never cast down. Again he said: "Love is greater than all things. And the Apostle shows and demonstrates that after faith love excels, and on it a firm building has been established. And he shows prophecy to be built upon love, and mysteries to be made known by love, and knowledge to be fulfilled by love, and faith to be confirmed by love; and

he who having faith moves a mountain, but has not love, profits nothing; and if a man give all that he has to the poor and his alms are not given in love, there is no advantage to him;

and even if for the name of his Lord his body has been burnt in the fire, he has been in no wise profited. And again he shows that long-suffering, and patience, and kindness, and for a man not to envy his brother, these things are found in the fulness of love; and also patience, and humility and sweetness have been established in him by love. For faith has been erected upon the rock of a structure, and love is the bonds of the structure, and by it the walls of the house have been held together. And if a defect is found in the bonds of the house the whole structure will fall; so also when dissention is found in love all faith falls. And faith was not able to drive away jealousy and contention until the love of Christ came, just as a structure cannot be well built until the walls have been fastened by bonds.

17. Again I will show thee, beloved, that love is more excellent than anything else, and by it the righteous ones of the old times were perfected. For it (i. e. the Scripture) shows concerning Moses that he gave himself in behalf of the sons of his people, and he wished that he might be blotted out of the book of life (if) only the people might not be blotted out. And also when they rose up against him to stone him, he offered up prayer before God in their behalf that they might be saved. And David also showed an example of love when he was persecuted by Saul, and a trap was continually set for his life so that they might kill him, and David by love was generously performing acts of mercies in behalf of Saul his enemy, who was seeking his life; and he was twice delivered into the hands of David, and he did not kill him and repaid good in place of evil. Because of this good did not depart from his house, and he who forsook him was forsaken. And Saul who repaid evil in place of good, evil did not depart from his house, and He called to God and He did not answer him, and he fell by the sword of the Philistines, and David wept over him bitterly. And David fulfilled beforehand the precept of our Saviour, who said: ”Love your enemies,” and ”forgive, and it shall be forgiven unto you.” Thus David loved and was loved, and forgave and it was forgiven unto him.

18. And Elisha also showed love in respect to this, when his enemies came against him to take him so that they might do evil to him, and he, doing good to them, set forth bread and water before them and sent them away from him in peace; and he fulfilled the word which is written: ”If thine enemy is hungry feed him, and if he thirsts give him to drink.” And also Jeremiah the prophet in behalf of those who made him a captive in a pit and were continually putting him to torture, but he also prayed ardently for them before God. And it was (by) this example of those who went before (that) our Saviour taught us that we should love our enemies and pray for those who hate us. And if He commanded us to love our enemies and to pray for those who hate us, what shall be our excuse to Him in the day of judgment, who have hated our brothers and our own members? Because we are of the Body of Christ and members of His members. For he who hates one of the members of Christ will be separated from the whole body, and he who hates his brother will be separated from the sons of God.

19. And it was thus that our Saviour taught us diligently to manifest love. For first He perfected it in Himself, and then He taught those who heard Him. And He reconciled our enmity with His Father because He loved us, and He yielded up His innocence in the stead of the debtors, and the Good in place of the evil ones was put to shame, and the Rich in our behalf was made poor, and the Living died in behalf of the dead, and by His death made alive our death. And the Son of the Lord of all took for our sake the form of a servant, and He to whom all things were subject subjected Himself that He might release us from the subjection of sin. And by His great love He gave a blessing to the poor in spirit, and He promised the peace makers they should be called His brothers and sons of God; and He promised the humble that they should inherit the land of life; and He promised the mourners that by their supplications they would be comforted; and He promised to the hungry fulness in His kingdom; and to those who weep that they should rejoice in His promise; and He promised to the merciful that they should be shown mercy; and to these who are pure in heart He said that they should see God; and again He promised to those who are persecuted on account of righteousness that they should go into the kingdom of heaven;

and to those who are persecuted on account of His Name He promised a blessing and rest in His kingdom. And He changed our nature of dust and made us the salt of truth, and He delivered us from being the prey of the serpent, and He called us the light of the world; and He delivered us from the power of death; and He made us good instead of evil, and pleasing instead of hateful; and He appointed for us mercy instead of hatred; and He imparted to us the perfect man; and He brought forth good things from His treasures, and delivered us from him who brought forth evil things from the superfluities of his heart.

20. And because of His overflowing love He healed the plagues of the sick; He healed also the son of the centurion because of his faith; and He silenced the waves of the sea by His power; and because of His favor He drove from us the evil spirits who were legion; and by His mercy He restored to life the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue; and again He cleansed the woman from the pollution of blood; and He opened the eyes of two blind men who had come to Him; and also He gave to the Twelve power and authority over all disease and infirmity, and also to us by their hands. And He prohibited us from the way of the Gentiles and of the Samaritans. And He gave power to us by His mercy that we might not fear when they brought us before the rulers of the world. And He set a division in the earth because of His great peace. And He forgave the many sins to the woman who was a sinner because of His mercies. And He made us worthy because of His grace that we might build a tower at His expense (S. Lk. XIV: 28; here there appears to be a certain play upon words; tower, magdol, being suggested by the reference to S. Mary Magdalene in the preceding sentence).

And He cast out from us unclean spirits, and He made us a lodging place of His divinity, and sowed in us a good seed which should give fruit a hundredfold, and sixtyfold and thirtyfold. And He was placed in the midst of the world in the likeness of a treasure which is put in a field. And He manifested the power of His greatness when He was cast down from on high to the depth and was not harmed. And He satisfied the hungry who had grown faint with

five loaves and two fishes, five thousand men besides woman and children, and manifested the greatness of His glory. And on account of His abundant love He heard the Canaanitish woman and raised up her daughter from her infirmity. And by the power of Him who sent Him He loosed the tongue of the man who was dumb, and who was also deaf; and the blind saw His light, and by means of Him they glorified Him who had sent Him. And when He went up into the mountain to pray the rays of the sun were overcome by His light. And He made His power known in the case of that boy upon whom a spirit had come, and at His word the demon went away. And He gave us an example and a pattern that we should become as children and enter the kingdom of heaven.

And He spoke and made clear concerning the little ones that a man should not despise them, that their angels always see the Father who is in heaven. And again He showed His healing perfectly in the case of that man who was infirm thirty-eight years, and He magnified His mercy towards him and healed him. And again He gave us a command, that weshould forsake the world and be turned to Him; and He revealed to us that he who is a lover of the world is not able to be pleasing to God, by the example of the rich man who trusted in his goods; and by the case of that man who was made merry by his riches, and his destruction was in sheol, and he asked for water on the tip of his little finger, and no man gave to him. And He hired us as laborers that we should work in His vineyard, which is the vineyard of truth. All these things our Saviour did unto us because of His great love. And we also, beloved, should be partakers of the love of Christ, while we love one another and fulfil these two commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets.

The Demonstration Concerning Love Is Completed. This text was transcribed by Roger Pearse, 2006. All material on this page is in the public domain - copy freely.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.