



"It is a kingly task, believe me, to help the afflicted."
—Ovid

16-Jan-15

You Shall Love Your Neighbor (Part Two)

A well-known principle of Bible study is that repetition is among the best forms of emphasis. If [God](#) states something once, it is important, and if twice, it is even more important. The Bible contains the phrase that we are to "love the LOORD your God with all your heart" *five* times ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [11:1](#); [Matthew 22:37](#); [Mark 12:30](#); [Luke 10:27](#)). We had better take it to heart!

However, we are told to "love your neighbor" *eight* times ([Leviticus 19:18](#); [Matthew 5:43](#); [19:19](#); [22:39](#); [Mark 12:31](#); [Romans 13:9](#); [Galatians 5:14](#); [James 2:8](#)). The additional repetitions do not make this command more important than the one to love God, but they perhaps suggest that we tend to neglect loving our neighbors and so need to be reminded of it more frequently. It may also suggest that learning to love our neighbors is more difficult than we tend to think.

What is this love that we are to have and show fellow man? The Greek word for "love" in this command is *agapao* (*Strong's #25*), "to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for." This seems like a rather general definition of any kind of love, but Jesus elevates it to an unconditional love, a heartfelt response to do good for another as the occasion requires, no matter who the other is, whether family, friend, enemy, or person on the street.

Showing this kind love to our neighbor, then, goes far beyond wishing him well but extends to actively doing him good. It does not mean doing what will please him, but

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choosing to benefit him by showing him favor and good will. The outworking of this love may involve expressions of [kindness](#) or providence, or it could even be giving discipline and punishment. Its emphasis is on doing what is good for him, not on whether it will necessarily please him.

Then we must ask, "Who is my neighbor?" This question is asked of Jesus, and He replies with the Parable of the Good Samaritan in [Luke 10:25-37](#). The text tells us that this expert in the law wished to justify himself, that is, show himself to be in the right on this matter and thus excuse his behavior. He had no argument regarding loving God, and as for loving his neighbor, he may have indeed been a good neighbor as instructed by the Pharisaical interpretation of the law.

Generally, that interpretation essentially boils down to "love your neighbor as long as they are not Gentiles." Some Pharisees carried this to extremes, turning it into hatred for any racial, ethnic, and religious group but their own. They despised Samaritans (thus Jesus' use of a good Samaritan in His parable) and called Gentiles "dogs" and probably other derogatory names.

We do the same today. We will love our neighbors as long as they are friends or coworkers or of the same race, ethnic group, or social status. We will love our neighbors if they follow our team, political views, or social causes. But that is not what God wants of us!

This can be seen in the parable. The story is of a Jew traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho on business, a journey of about fifteen miles. Robbers hold him up, beat him, and take everything he has, even his clothing, leaving him by the roadside half-dead and bleeding.

First, a man of his own nation, no less than a priest—a man who represents the love, compassion, tenderness, and kindness of God to the world—happens by. Of all people, one would think he would be the first to stop and help the battered traveler. Yet, he passes by on the other side, diverting his eyes, as if he never saw the man in need.

Then comes a Levite, one whose God-given task was to serve in the Temple. He not only sees the wounded man but also takes the time to walk over and examine him. But like the priest, he offers no help, scurrying to the opposite side of the road and continuing on his way.

Finally, a despised Samaritan happens by, and his heart goes out to the suffering man. Without thought for himself, he begins to clean him, pouring wine on the wounds to

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disinfect them and oil to promote healing. Then, putting him on his beast, he walks beside it until they arrive at an inn where the injured man could receive care and rest. He spares no expense and promises to repay the innkeeper for his troubles in helping the man get back on his feet.

Jesus ends the story, asking the rhetorical question, "So which of these three was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" The lawyer, being an intelligent man, whose training had been the proverbial "straining out a gnat", now had to acknowledge the camel he had heretofore swallowed ([Matthew 23:24](#)). With a simple story, Jesus had given him a broad picture of the intent of this second great commandment. So the lawyer answers, "He who showed mercy on him."

It was the Samaritan, loathed by the Jews as heretics and religious frauds, who forgot all the antagonisms and abuses against him and showed mercy, kindness, and care—love—to the wounded Jew lying helpless by the side of the road. Only he displayed the love of neighbor that God expects of His people.

Jesus' instruction for the lawyer—and for us today—is, "Go and do likewise."

Spiritually, this has been done for us. We, like this Jew in the ditch, were wounded unto death, left to waste away. [The world](#) passed us by, even those closest to us and those who claimed to be God's representatives, never giving us the help we needed. Then God, despised by this world, walked by and tended to us, paying for our care. He paid the ultimate price, giving His only begotten Son to save us and the whole world ([John 3:16-17](#)). We could say that the sacrifice of [Jesus Christ](#) is the pouring of wine and oil to disinfect and heal those wounded by [sin](#). It enables sinners from every strata of society, upon belief and [repentance](#), to be justified, to pursue sanctification, and ultimately, to be glorified.

So we see that God the Father and Jesus Christ are the perfect examples, the embodiments, of what it is to be a neighbor. The psalmist writes of God, "The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" ([Psalm 147:2-3](#)). Jesus' mission was not just to preach, but also "to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" ([Luke 4:18](#)). This is how They express Their love to us.

[1 Peter 2:21](#) tells us that we are to follow in our Savior's steps. Christ has given us the instruction and the example of how He expects us to live and how we are to treat each other. More on this in Part Three.

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Coming More Fully Into the Love of Our Brethren](#)

by Bill Onisick

Bill Onisick, reflecting on the difficulty of deleavening his van, asks, "In what secret crevices is sin hiding out in my life?† The physical nooks and crannies mirror spiritual nooks and crannies of our hearts. One major crevice consists of schisms, divisions, or lack of love for the brethren. We are obligated to our brethren fervently and with a pure heart, practicing godly forgiveness. We cannot be an unforgiving servant, storing up grudges and bitterness, refusing to imitate Christ's forgiveness of us. True forgiveness of our brethren is required in order for our sins to be forgiven. Love without works is dead, and the essence of love is self-sacrifice.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Awesome Cost of Love](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We assess costs and values all the time in our daily lives: Is it better to buy used or new? Should we prefer traditional or contemporary? Paper or plastic? John Ritenbaugh employs the same process to God's love for us in giving His Son as the sacrifice for sin. What costs have been paid for our redemption?

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