

Thou Shall Love Thy Neighbor

The Second Greatest Commandment

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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The Sadducees had just been confounded by Jesus concerning the topic of marriage in the resurrection. Their rivals, the Pharisees, were probably gloating at their discomfort. Now it was the Pharisees' turn to try to ensnare Jesus Christ. They therefore sought to find the most difficult question that they had disputed and proposed to ask it of Christ to put Him into confusion.

They selected a lawyer, otherwise known as a scribe, one who was particularly skilled in the law of Moses. The lawyer had heard Jesus reasoning with and putting to silence the Sadducees, and the Pharisees probably felt that he was better equipped to confound Jesus with a difficult question. The lawyer was to test Jesus in His knowledge and understanding of the law.

The problem with the Pharisees was that they never saw the simplicity of the law. They picked at it and dissected it, all with the intent of being thought righteous in all their intellect. In doing so, they missed the point of what God was after. We know that to really understand the law would require personal change and they would not want to have that happen.

Matthew 22:34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

Matthew 22:35-36 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

When one considers the Pharisees penchant for nitpicking rather than doing from the heart, we can see how endless discussions of this particular subject must have taken place over many months. Since nobody could come to a conclusion, this was the question that they felt would stump Jesus Christ.

The Jews had divided the commandments into greater and lesser commandments. The Pharisees were polarized in different camps, such as the laws regarding washings, purifying, sacrifice, circumcision, etc. In short, they were, for the most part, focused on twigs and were missing the entire forest. Thus, to ask Jesus which was the greatest

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commandment—a question upon which they could not agree—seemed to be the ultimate way of drawing Him into their endless arguments and of putting Him down.

Jesus Christ did not hesitate a bit, but He cut through all the chaff and endless arguing and placed the correct answer before them:

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

He did not even bother to expand on that. What He was saying is that you shall love the Lord your God with the entirety of your being—more than the pleasures that Satan sets before you; more than the individual escapes to which you run when you are tired or worn down; more than the pulls of the flesh; more than the opinions of your peer groups, employers, or neighbors; and more than your own intellect and opinions. Put simply, God and His instructions are to be first in our lives in every way.

Matthew 22:38 "This is the first and great commandment."

Jesus states it so simply that it must have been difficult for His audience, who focused on twigs, to comprehend. It is the first, the greatest of all in dignity and in excellence and is the source of all the other commandments. As one commentator put it, "All beings are loved because of their excellence in who they are and what they stand for. Thus, God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are perfect in every aspect of love, mercy, and kindness toward us, are totally worthy of all of our affection."

Then, in verse 39, the verse on which I would like to focus today, Jesus lists the other part of the equation of loving God. He lists the commandment that requires repentance and change in each one of us. He lists the commandment that will eventually be required of every human being on the face of this earth. He lists the commandment that will be the physical instrument, or method, that will assist Jesus Christ in bringing and sustaining peace and harmony to this world among all nations and races. This commandment, when followed, will help all marriages to be a success and all children to be taught and raised correctly. This commandment will produce harmony in the church and, eventually, the world.

Matthew 22:39 "And the second is like the first, you shall love your neighbor as your self."

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When we consider these two great commandments, our attention automatically dwells upon the first—the complete love toward God as listed in the first four commandments. It is easy to understand why this is. God is the Creator, our Savior, our healer; He provides all things to us. He is the One to whom we must answer; He is the One to whom we pray; and He is the merciful One who forgives our sins. It is easy to love God.

However, we normally do not give more than lip service to the second great commandment to love our fellow man. Again, it is easy to understand why. Our fellow man lies, cheats, is rude at times, wants to persecute us for being "Jewish," and nothing can convince him that we are not. Our fellow man does not want us to take our children out of school for the Feast and does not want us taking time off for it, either. Our fellow man wants us to work on the Sabbath and Holy Days. Our fellow man looks at us as if we are pretty close to just coming off the pumpkin truck for believing in God's laws and God's way of life.

Sometimes in our marriages and childrearing, our fellow man, whether man or woman, does not give us the attention, love, or help and encouragement that we desperately need. Our fellow man, under Satan's rule, steals, and promotes lawlessness and pornography throughout the country and the world. Our fellow man promotes wars, tortures, kills, and commits horrendous crimes against his neighbor. The frustrating part is that we do not have the power to do anything about it. In spite of this, the second great commandment is that we are to love him. This is no small thing.

Matthew 22:40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The entire law of Moses is summed up in these two commandments.

Quoting from *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown* commentary:

On these two commandments hang all the Law and Prophets. It is as if he said, "This is all scripture in a nutshell; the whole law of human duty in portable pocket form. Indeed, it is so simple, that a child can understand it, so brief that all may remember it, and so comprehensive as to embrace all possible cases and situations. And from its very nature it is unchangeable. It is inconceivable that God should require from His rational [called] creatures anything else, under any dispensation, in any world, at any period throughout eternal duration.

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What is being stated here is that the principles found in these two great commandments will exist throughout eternity. We must remember this.

In past sermons we have been told that if God states it once it is important; if twice, it is very important. God repeats this phrase that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart five times:

Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the LOORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 11:1 Therefore you shall love the LOORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LOORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Luke 10:27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LOORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

Mark 12:30 "'And you shall love the LOORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment."

It is interesting to note that in this context, we are told to love our neighbor eight times:

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LOORD.

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"

Matthew 19:19 "'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Matthew 22:39 "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

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Mark 12:31 "And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Romans 13:9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

James 2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well.

Again, perhaps learning to love our neighbor is more difficult than we might think. What is this love that we are told to have? The world, of course, thinks of love as being sickly sweet and that type of thing. This is not what God is talking about. We are told to "love," but what type of love is God telling us that we must have toward Him and toward our neighbor?

Strong's #25 is *agapao*: "to esteem or hold our neighbor in high regard, love." This is indicating a direction of the will, a direction of doing, and finding one's joy in something or someone. It differs from *phileo*: "to love indicating warm feelings; the kind of love expressed by a kiss." This is a setting of the mind to do good to your neighbor.

Love, as it refers to God, means the idea of duty, respect, and veneration; meaning to love and serve with fidelity and faithfulness in that which we are required to do in the keeping of God's laws. Love toward others is wishing them well and in doing good to one's neighbors. Regarding one's enemies, loving them does not mean doing that which will please them—being thought well of is not necessarily what God is after here—but choosing to show them favor and good will. This may involve expressions of kindness or even discipline or punishment. This is as an outworking of this love. This is the same love that we have when we correct our children. They may not think it is love, but you are showing them love in the form of punishment to correct them, to teach them the right way.

Who is our neighbor?

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Luke 10:25-29 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Perhaps this expert in the law was wishing to get out from under the questions he asked. There was no argument regarding the loving of God. Regarding the love of his neighbor, this man indeed may have thought that he was doing this correctly, because he certainly loved his fellow Jews. He might have meant, "I can love my neighbor as long as He is not Gentile." This philosophy was carried to extremes by the Pharisees. Indeed, they were not to intermarry or go into business with them, but the Pharisees turned this into hatred at the worst, or dislike at the least, for any race but their own.

Today, we might say in our thinking, "I will love my neighbors as long as they are my friends or are of my race or social status. I will love my neighbors as long as they are of my religion or think about things as I do or treat me fairly." We may have qualifications. This is not what God intended with us at all. He wants much more from us.

Luke 10:30-31 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."

It is quite possible that the priest was not traveling alone, and it is also possible that the wounded man was groaning for help. However, he passed on the other side, diverting his eyes, as if he had never seen the man that needed help.

Luke 10:32-34 "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."

The Samaritans were disliked greatly by the Jews; they hated them. This Samaritan forgave any past feelings. When you love your fellow man, forgiveness is a big part of it. He forgave any past feelings of animosity. He immediately began to clean him: he poured wine on the wounds to disinfect them and oil to heal them. We do not know how long he walked with him on his beast. He held him up until he arrived where this man could be put in a bed.

Luke 10:35 "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.'"

For most of us, having done all this, we would think that our obligation to love our neighbor was fulfilled; but this Samaritan, when he departed the following morning, had the compassion to take as much pressure off the wounded man as possible. He gave his own money to have the man taken care of, with the promise that if the cost exceeded what he had paid, he would take care of the additional expenses when he returned.

Luke 10:36-37 "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."

A big part of loving your neighbor is showing mercy. The lawyer's training had led him to continually examine the minutia, arguing over this and that point of the law. Now Jesus gives him and us a broad picture of the intent of this second great commandment: Everyone is our neighbor.

It was the Samaritan, hated by the Jews, who forgave and forgot all the antagonism held against him and showed mercy and love to the wounded man as his neighbor. Again, the instruction to the lawyer and us is to "go and do likewise."

In a very real way, we can apply this to our calling, in that we were all wounded unto death by Satan and left to waste away by the roadside. Then we were called by God the Father. To God, the principle of healing those who are damaged is, in a real sense, the same as the parable of the Good Samaritan. He is no respecter of persons, because, as He states in Ezekiel 18:4, "All souls are Mine." He includes every soul that has lived, is alive, and will live as belonging to God.

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John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the shedding of His blood is in a sense as the pouring on of wine and oil to heal the wounded. It is to enable mankind, upon repentance to be justified, to have his wounds healed and to go on to sanctification. It is so that the world might not perish but be saved alive. Jesus Christ is the perfect example, the epitome of the perfect neighbor.

Psalms 147:2-3 The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalms 34:17-20 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.

Psalms 34:22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

Isaiah 61:1-3 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

This is the example that Jesus Christ sets. He works to save and to help others. As it says in I Peter 2:21, we are to follow in His steps. How are we to conduct ourselves toward our neighbors?

Leviticus 19:1-2 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the

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congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'

Here we see the specific purpose statement for all the nation of Israel and for the Israel of God, the church today: "You, as My people, shall be holy, different from the world around you, because I the Lord your God am holy." We are to reflect and represent God to this world by the way that we live and the way that we act. In verse 3, God gives the first and most important of the physical instructions in how to treat others:

Leviticus 19:3 "Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God."

The duty of showing reverence to one's parents is placed in connection with the proper observance of the Sabbath, and they form the foundation for harmony appropriate for the church.

Leviticus 19:9-12 "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God. You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."

We are to be considerate of the poor that are around us. We may not have fields to glean, but we are to be concerned with those that are having a hard time. We should take notice of it and help them when we can.

Leviticus 19:13 "You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning."

I have seen cases in the church where people have held back wages. God says you are not to do this. The person must get his wages when he finishes the job. The employee needs the money to feed himself and his family.

Leviticus 19:14 "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block

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before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LOORD."

This has to deal with our thinking, and compassion. We are not to curse the deaf or make dumb jokes about him because he cannot hear nor respond to what is said. You shall be careful to be a good neighbor to one who is blind, never feeling superior or causing him to stumble. However, the intent goes further than that, in that we are never to place a stumbling block in front of anyone because of a lack in his understanding. We are never to take advantage of simplicity, ignorance, or the inexperience of a neighbor. We are in all things to treat our neighbor as we would want to be treated if we were in his circumstances (Matthew 7:12). Why? Because it is right, and God says so; and because He hears and sees all we do.

Leviticus 19:15 "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor."

This is something that we have to do whether our neighbor is in our family, in business, in the church, or whatever it might be. Since we are to become judges, God expects us to do it correctly. We are to always make a righteous judgment. It should not be altered by money, circumstances, or popularity. We shall not respect the person of the poor. We are not to respect the person of the rich or powerful, thinking he can do us favors or think well of us. In God's sight, we are always to judge in righteous judgment that which is brought before us.

Leviticus 19:16 "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LOORD."

Concerning tale-bearing, Matthew Henry states,

It is as bad an office as a person [man or woman] can put himself into, to be the publisher [spreader] of every man's faults, divulging what was secret, aggravating crimes and making the worst of everything that was amiss, with design to blast and ruin men's reputation, and sow discord among neighbors.

Gossip is so easily transmitted throughout the church. The word used for "talebearer" is *peddler*. "one who trades one story of gossip for another."

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James 3:8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

James says that it seems impossible to tame the tongue; and without God's help and deep repentance, it indeed would be. He goes on to say that the tongue can be full of deadly poison; and, if not controlled is a backbiter, a whisperer, and will destroy the reputations of men.

James 3:9-10 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

We use the tongue to thank Jesus Christ and to pray to God, and then we use the same tongue to curse and tear down others. It comes so easily. We must not criticize those who were created by God and are struggling to work out their own salvation. If this is taking place out of the mouth of one called by God, who is to love his neighbor, this should be stopped.

James 3:16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

Of course, the spirit of peace goes away and it is not there. Confusion, anger, hatred, and stress are produced.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

This instruction that comes from God on how to love one's neighbor has the effect on the mind of making it pure, producing a desire to live in peace, being gentle and not stubborn or difficult but being full of mercy and compassion toward one's fellow sojourner. We must think of it this way, because we all are fellow sojourners into the Kingdom of God. Any hypocrisy will be gone, and it will be replaced with genuine love and concern for one's neighbor and all of God's people.

James 3:18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who

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make peace.

You have to consider, too, that there is a fruit produced by living in a contentious manner and that there is a fruit produced by righteous living. That eternal fruit is produced in them that sow peace.

Leviticus 19:16-18 "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ["You shall never be a false witness against your neighbor" is what is being said here.] You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

We are not to harbor any hatred in our heart toward him. And on top of that one shall not meditate on revenge against him.

The *New English Bible* renders Leviticus 19:17-18, "You shall reprove your fellow countryman frankly and so you will have no share in his guilt," or, "you shall go to your neighbor with the problem. The phrase *not suffer sin upon him* literally means, "that you may not participate in his sin. We incur guilt by not going to our brother to correct the situation, and we do him hurt.

From *Today's English Version*: "Do not bear a grudge against anyone, but settle your differences with him so that you will not commit sin because of him [the sin of resenting him]. Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but love your neighbor as your self."

As difficult as it is to love our neighbor, God insists that we do it, and doing it will no doubt involve forgiveness. Just how serious is this to God?

Jesus Christ had been teaching, healing people of all diseases, and casting out demons; and the crowd followed Him in great multitudes.

Matthew 5:1-2 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying . . .

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It is interesting the criteria He sets for those that are His. At the end of this teaching in Matthew 7, the people were astonished at His teaching, because He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. Here we see the very Son of God teaching those at that time and us today the direct teachings of His Father. He is teaching us the truth, the bottom line of what our calling is all about.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

I looked up the word *blessed*, and it means "those who have the favor of God." What He is saying here is that those who have the favor of God are like this.

Matthew 5:4-9 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. [They see all that they lack. They see the flaws that they have in themselves.] Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. [They yearn to be obedient.] Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. [They that want to alleviate suffering and pain of others.] Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. [They want to have the purest heart possible.] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. [They work to prevent complications or conflict and strife in life. They work to love their neighbor.]

Here we see the very Son of God teaching those at that time—and us today—the direct teachings of His Father and what God is after in each of us. He is teaching the truth, and the bottom line of what this calling that you have been given is all about. Jesus goes on to tell us in Matthew 5:13-15 that we who are called by God in this end time are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. How? By living the way that God lives. We are to take on the nature of Jesus Christ and God the Father and live it for all to see. Then Jesus goes on to outline what we must do as it pertains to forgiveness and to loving our neighbor:

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."

He is saying that whoever is angry at his brother without cause or without moderation or without good results shall be in danger of judgment. Whosoever is easily angered at every trifle will eventually be led to go too far. Thus, he will sin and will require judgment. He who shall call his brother *raca*, or an empty-headed, worthless fool, or have that attitude of contempt toward him, shall be brought before the council that oversees the highest of crimes. Whosoever shall say, "You fool!" is one who is a rebel against God and apostate to all good and shall face hell fire. God is deeply serious about this.

Matthew 5:23-24 "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Jesus is saying, "Because of the danger of anger and hatred, consider what I am telling you. Do not attempt to bring any offering to the Father while you are in a spirit of enmity against any person or have any differences with your neighbor that have not been resolved correctly, or until you have at least tried to."

Jesus Christ is saying that God will not accept any worship from us while enmity is in our heart toward any man or while it is in our neighbor's heart toward us, if we have not used every means to try to correct the situation. Then, when your brother is reconciled to you, or when you have done all you can to remove the enmity, you and your prayers will be accepted by God. In short, you are learning to love your neighbor, which is what God wants. This produces peace. In Matthew 5:25-26, Jesus goes on to say that if one neglects to do this and allows the situation to become truly adversarial, one may end up in court and have to pay to the full extent. Again, in His message, He emphasizes the need to forgive our neighbor.

Matthew 6:12 "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

In verse 12, we see that our sins are referred to as a debt or penalty that we have incurred to God. Every one of our sins is an act of ingratitude and lawlessness toward God, who has called us and given His Son for us. We have sinned, incurred debt, and find ourselves with nothing material to pay off the debt. It is interesting to note that the currency that God uses that this debt may be retired: We must forgive others who have offended us. This does not mean forgiveness of loans that are legitimate and not

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causing extreme hardship on families. We are to forgive the injustices and the things that have happened against us.

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

If we forgive others when they have caused us to be offended, whether the offense be imagined or real, our heavenly Father will forgive us. So many times I have seen people become unglued over imagined slights. I recall once at the Feast, a lady came to us and sobbed, "Everybody hates me." Nobody hated her at all, but it just built up in her until she was just frantic. Thus, we forgive, even if the offenses are imagined.

We all make mistakes and say the wrong thing at times, and we do not always do the correct thing. We must forgive others their trespasses and when they stumble from the correct way. This is an extremely important principle and lesson that God wants ingrained in us. This is so important! God wants us to understand that if we do not forgive others that He will not forgive us. (Luke 23:34) Jesus sets the ultimate example: "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." They were beating Him and cutting Him to ribbons, and yet He forgave them. This is our example that we are to follow and not to come apart at little things.

How does God want us to go about this?

Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

If somebody has done something against you, you do not go to the whole congregation and say that so and so has done this and he is a rotten person. You go to the individual and you talk. If your brother, a member of the church, injures you by word or talks against your character, you have the instruction directly from the Son of God: go and discuss the problem, just between the two of you, as commanded in Leviticus 19:17. If he has done wrong, then bring it to his attention with only the two of you present. This will give him a chance in privacy to explain his actions; and chances are that in a friendly two-way exchange, the problem will be solved. When it gets into the public domain, people plant their feet and take sides and it is so hard to solve problems at that time.

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It may give him the opportunity to set things straight, and he or she may well be glad of the opportunity to do so. Going to your brother is hard; people do not like to do it. I do not like to do it. I do not like to correct people. It is a difficult thing, yet God says we must do it that things might be smoothed over. It may well be that he had not realized what he had done, or how it affected the injured party; thus, your taking this step might well be a real help to him. You, too, might find out that it was not really done.

Matthew 18:16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'"

If he will not listen, you bring in two or three more impartial witnesses that you both respect. Do not try to stack the deck. In love for your brother, carefully present your case to these three people.

Matthew 18:17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

Assuming one's case is just, and that even with the two or three impartial witnesses he will still not listen to reason, then the issue should be taken to the church. There has always been some question as to the meaning of *the church*. Some feel it is to the ministry; to others, the ministry and men that can add wisdom to the decision that must be made. Basically, it means just what it says: to take it to the whole church, with perhaps a minister overseeing the proceedings.

Then, if he refuses to conform to what is right, let him be as a publican, or one who is not to be associated with. This does not mean we should not help him in time of need or that we should hate him, but that we should treat him as any other person who is not a member of the church.

From past experience it might be wise to consider what we should bring to a brother or sister. The general rule is that one brings some issue that has caused damage to one's character, or some agreement that had been agreed to and then defaulted by one of the other parties.

Over the years, I have heard people bring things that should never have been brought: "I do not like the way you raise your children; it offends me," or "You never wash your automobile; thus, it offends me," or any other personal issues that are really none of our

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business. Jesus Christ continues to stress the love of one's brother in the area of our forgiving errors.

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

The Jews had a maxim or rule that one never forgave more than three times; thus Peter asked the question that he did. "If I am sinned against, should I forgive up to seven times?" He wanted to do what was right.

Matthew 18:22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Jesus set the bar higher than anyone might think He would by stating, "seventy times seven" (490 times). In other words, we are to continually forgive our brother.

Then Jesus presents a wonderful parable that if listened to should help every one of us realize the absolute need to love and forgive others. Because of the great love and forgiveness that has been extended to us, we must be patient, merciful, and kind with others.

Matthew 18:23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants."

Jesus is stating that He will deal with the church as this king deals with his servants when he takes an accounting of their service to him. In other words, we are going to be coming before God and have to answer for what we have done.

Matthew 18:24 "And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents."

He found that one servant owed him a fortune. The sum owed identifies him as a prince or someone with a great deal of authority. This official owed the king ten thousand talents, probably of gold. This sum would amount, at the time that this was written, to 67,500,000,000 pounds sterling, which would amount to the annual revenue of the British Empire during the time Adam Clarke wrote this commentary. To equate this in a

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different manner, ten thousand talents signifies the highest number known in Greek arithmetical notations. What Jesus Christ is trying to show is that what we owe to Him is a sum so large that it can never be paid. This is the intent of the parable.

Matthew 18:25-34 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. [I think we all know where we are going here. We have been forgiven so much.] Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him."

Though he had been forgiven—this is something I think we all need to remember—he was still being judged by God. He was not forgiven once and for all. He was still being judged. As it says in James 2:13,

James 2:13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

This is something that we have to understand, brethren: we have to show mercy, patience, and kindness.

Matthew 18:35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

That phrase, *forgive from the heart*, means "to forgive, to not remember it; to completely

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forget what has been done and go on." If a person has a particular habit on which you cannot trust him or he drinks too much or he is not honest, you forgive him—but you just do not get involved with that area of sins.

The moral sum of the parable is this:

1. Our sins have been and may still be great.
2. They have been freely forgiven upon our repentance.
3. The offenses committed against us by comparison are very small. So many times when we hold grudges and we hate somebody else, all we can think of is what they have done to us. Here he is saying that, compared to what has been forgiven each one of us, the offenses against us are extremely small.
4. Based on the great forgiveness given to us, we should freely forgive the little that has been committed against us. Sometimes we dwell on it and it just grows in our mind. Of course, Satan helps to build it up into a tremendous wall.
5. We are to realize that if we choose not to forgive, then we will be justly corrected by God.

We are to completely forgive from the heart, not merely in words. We must treat the individual as if the problem had never existed. Sometimes, there can be some big sins, some heavy sins that have been committed against us and our families, and that can be hard. In that case, you are civil and polite, and you give it time.

I recall one time when we had a church outing in the Worldwide Church of God that our daughter attended. There was a young elder over the children. Our daughter got into some trouble, and this young elder came over to our house. He had had a very difficult background, and he felt that the children should come to him instead of their parents.

When our daughter got in trouble, he came and parked out in front of our house and proceeded to list all of the things that were wrong with our daughter. It was under his supervision; there was only one person there on this huge outing. He said that she was to stay home. The more he talked, the angrier I got. I finally had to send my wife into the house because she was getting angry, too. Finally, he said to me, "Mr. Reid, do not hit me." I said, "I am not going to hit you, but I suggest that you leave my property right now."

I went into the house and said, "Father, I hate this man. Help me to love him." I did that for about six weeks. Later, when the man left the church and I came to visit him, he said, "You are the only one that has come." I know that it took that much effort to learn to forgive that man because he really got us mad. This is something that you have to work on. You have to pray to God about it. He knows your feelings just as He knew

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Adam and Eve had sinned when He asked the questions. It is for us to come to God and to ask Him to help us to have forgiveness from the heart.

One of Israel's main problems was that they would not do what God said.

Zechariah 7:1-3 Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass that the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislew, when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD, and to ask the priests who were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?"

Two years after the temple was started, they sent Sherezer and Regem-Melech to pray before God to inquire whether they should continue the fasts that they had started years ago because of their ruined temple. The reason for the question was that the new temple was under construction, which was a joyful occasion; thus, could they discontinue the fastings?

Zechariah 7:3-6 Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?'"

God rejects their fasting and tells them to speak to the people, asking, "Did they fast to Him?" God answered, in effect, "Not hardly. Your fasting and feasting were for yourselves. You can go through the motions." Just as the Jews in Jeremiah 7 said, "We have the temple; we have the temple; we have the exterior religion."

Zechariah 8:7-9 "'Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?'" Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother.'"

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This is what Israel was told to do that they might be an example to the world:

Zechariah 7:10 "Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother."

Execute true judgment, mercy, and compassion to your brother. God commands acts of love, kindness, and assistance to those in need. They were not to plan evil against their neighbor or brother, or the stranger, widow, and the fatherless that were of special interest to God.

Zechariah 7:11-12 "But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts."

Again, not loving your brother produces wrath and disharmony, and God does not want that.

I John 4:20 If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen.?

Isaiah 58:1 "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

He is saying, "Cry loudly and spare not, because the people are stupid and need to be awakened from their condition and see their guilt."

Isaiah 58:2 "Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God."

God is saying that they like to hear what He has to say, to have religious discussions, and to hear the minister speak, as do a people who are righteous. They ask about

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justice and delight in coming before Him.

God says, "You went through many fasts *to bring Me under obligation to you*"—they fasted to make God do what they wanted—"but all the while you indulge in your own lusts, you draw near your idols, bring grief to your fellow man by exacting everything due you while giving near nothing in return. In short, you show no mercy, loading the poor with burdens they cannot bear. You fast for strife and debate in different factions, and instead of being kind, you fast in hatred toward those you debate with. You do not even pretend to love your neighbor."

Isaiah 58:3-4 "'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, o make your voice heard on high."

"You can go without eating all that you want to, but I am not going to hear you because your heart is not right before Me. You are not listening to Me; you are not doing what I say."

Isaiah 58:5 "Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?"

He is asking, "Is dressing up in fasting garb and looking hungry what fasting is all about?" No, it is not.

Isaiah 58:6-7 "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"

"Think of what I am asking you. I am asking you to change inwardly and to love your neighbor."

Isaiah 58:8 "Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing

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"You will be protected and guarded because you are God's people and you are acting the way that He wants you to act."

Isaiah 58:9-10 "Then you shall call, and the LOORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday."

God says that you are going to be blessed tremendously.

Isaiah 58:11 The LOORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

This is what loving your brother and your fellow man is all about, brethren. If you do this, then shall you be healed. Your prayers will be heard and answered, and righteousness shall go before you as your leader.

Physical Israel does not seem to have ever fulfilled this, with perhaps brief exceptions when they were in very difficult times. Today, those called by God are to fulfill this commandment to the best of our ability if we are to imitate God. God has not changed His thinking through all these years.

Zechariah 8:16-17 These are the things you shall do: Speak you every man the truth to his neighbor; execute justice for truth, judgment, and peace in your gates, and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath; for all these are things I hate.

We are called to imitate our Father. It is hard to change, brethren.

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"

This is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, giving us God's Word. The Jews took this as saying, "Love your friends, and those who are not your friends are your enemies." They indeed felt that anyone outside the Jewish race was their enemy and was not worth saving or helping. The Romans charged the Jews with the hatred of the entire human race because they were so prejudiced against everyone but their own race. To love one's neighbor was a law of God that we read in Leviticus 19:18. They were not doing it.

Matthew 5:44 "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?"

Love here reflects a benign, compassionate, outgoing desire for another person's well being. You want the best for them. Romans 12 gives a good explanation of what God wants:

Romans 12:17-21 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Why should we do this? First, it produces peace; and secondly, it sets an example for the offending individual and for everyone else of what God considers the right and proper thing to be done. It sets the right example.

Matthew 5:45 ". . . 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."

We should do this that we might be the children of God who deliberately, with forethought, sends the sun and rain on the just and unjust.

Matthew 5:46-47 "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

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brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"

The principle in this is that in loving those who love you, there is no evidence of God's way of living. When you love everyone, you reflect God. Take on and live by the very attributes of our Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

God loves His enemies and will work with them when the time comes, and He wants us to not hang on to that hatred.

Do we have a living example of this type of love that we are to have toward our neighbor?

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

John 15:12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

All of us, when we stop and think about it, can see the price that was paid for each one of us. Jesus Christ was crucified. He gave His life for us in the most horrible beating that anyone faced—it was called "the near-death." They flayed Him until He could barely move, and then they put Him on a stake and He died. He did this for us that we might be saved and that we might go forward in our calling, that we might be able to repent and be forgiven and eventually become a member of the God family. How did He love us? He loved us completely. How does God want us to love our neighbor? Completely!

Many in this world are identified by their attire or position, such as the military person by his uniform; others, by their wealth, their jobs, or their importance. The disciple of Jesus Christ is to be identified by the fact that he or she loves his neighbor. This is to be a sign, just like the Sabbath. This was labeled as a new commandment not because it had not been commanded before, as in Leviticus 19:18, but because this was the first time a special group—those called by God the Father and given God's Holy Spirit—could be identified by it. Certainly, God wanted Israel, the physical nation, to do it; but the church,

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the Israel of God, must be identified in this fashion.

This love would not be hindered by race, attitude, wealth, or poverty but would be there for all.

Husbands would deeply love and care for their wives and let them know it. Wives would deeply respect and love their husbands, and it would show. Many times we do not think of our husbands or our wives as our neighbors. Children would be carefully taught by both parents in great love for them and for their future. Parents and brethren would be loved and give that love in return. Neighbors outside the church would recognize the honesty, concern, fairness, and trustworthiness of those who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Brethren, loving our neighbor is not easy, because many times we as a people are not easy to love. It is the second greatest commandment, and it is a great part of what identifies us as belonging to Jesus Christ. It is our job to work to achieve obedience to this law, even though it may be difficult. Based on this, brethren, let us all work to love our neighbors as ourselves and to really put our backs into it.