

Love Thy Neighbor (Part 2)

Defining Who Is Our Brother

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 30-May-09; Sermon #940

In the previous sermon in this series it was given as a premise that maybe we should begin rethinking the two great commandments of the law by shifting our perspective somewhat. The shift would be facilitated by considering that they might really be only one commandment with two parts. The reality is, of course, that when Jesus answered the lawyer's questions in Matthew 22, He answered with the truth that they are two distinct commandments, at least in terms of appearing separately in God's Word. The one is given in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and the other is given in Leviticus 19:18.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

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 LORD.

In addition, Jesus' reply referred to the Deuteronomy 6 command as being the first or foremost. The word is capable of being translated either way. He then referred to the Leviticus 19:18 command as "the second is like" or similar to the first. But even here the Greek word translated into the English word "like" could be translated as "equivalent to," thus drawing the two parts closer to one.

The idea is this: The commandments of God in their fullness give us an overview of God's character. God's character is not like man's. Man's character is fractured by strengths and weaknesses; strong in one area, weak in another.

Any given person may resolve to never lie, but on the other hand he will steal anything that is not welded down. A vivid contrast by God's character is that it is perfectly blended in that it is faultlessly balanced throughout every aspect of life. It is truly without flaw or irregularity. This flawless character is what we are being drawn toward by being created in the image of Jesus Christ.

One of the practical things we must learn is that we cannot devote all our attention to life in obeying *one* of these two commandments while neglecting the other. Some do not want to deal with fellowman because mankind is so flawed that dealing with others guarantees disappointments, and they do not want to be disappointed. They do not want to be hurt. They do not want to feel rejected because somebody refuses their act of love.

If one deals with mankind exclusively, it leaves God out of the picture, and that is not good either. There are many benevolent people in this world who attempt this. They have charitable works that might put any of us to shame by far, but yet they are really irreligious, and any god that they do have is one of their own devising. What I am saying here is not impossible, and it is not impossible for a church member either to put too much emphasis on one and little or no emphasis on the other.

I want you to turn to the book of James because he emphasizes the perfect blending and righteous balance of character we are to strive for. We are going to begin and do a little bit of reading here without a great deal of expounding. I just want you to see what James said.

James 2:4-6 Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?

Are you beginning to see how he is saying that it is perfectly possible for us to be partial in the way we keep one command or the other?

James 2:7-12 Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

Drop back to James 1 and we will see what led into what we just read there.

James 1:19-26 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

I did not put that there. The Creator God did.

Let us look in chapter 3 and see where chapter 2 flows into what is in chapter 3.

James 3:5-12 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 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. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

What James is teaching is the same principle that I am applying in regard to these two great commandments. It is a truth that it is very easy to deceive ourselves that all is well in our relationship with God, but all the while we carelessly conduct our relationships with men.

I think those of us in the church of God have a tendency to focus on the first while ignoring the second. This may be partly due to the preaching about coming out of the world, but the world's condition may be about to throw us into a much more immediate contact with the world.

This brief two-sermon series began with the premise that maybe we should begin rethinking the two great commandments in order to consider that they might really only be one commandment with two parts. Let us be reminded of the scriptures I used at the end of that first message.

Let us go first to Galatians 5.

Galatians 5:13-15 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

Now here is a question to consider. Can you remember the last time that you hugged God? Have you ever shaken His hand or given Him even a brief hello? When was the last time that you had Him over to dinner after Sabbath services?

Did you notice that Paul said all the law is fulfilled by loving your neighbor? Is it possible that this "all" might include the great commandment of the law—"You shall love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your being"? I did not put that there. The apostle Paul wrote it under inspiration of God, that even that first of the two great commandments is fulfilled by keeping the *second* of the two great commandments.

So what is Paul telling us? At the very least, he is telling us that he agrees with James. If you break one commandment, you have broken them all. He is telling us that we express our love for God when we serve His creation. What our attitude is toward, and how we treat His creation, provides our witness of God's reality in our life, and the most important part of God's creation is fellowman. So if we love what God created—man, despite all of his flaws—we are loving God. We express our love for God by treating His creation with love.

Let us turn now to I John 4.

I John 4:12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

With that little introduction, drop down to verse 20.

I John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Are you beginning to understand why Paul said that if you love your neighbor as yourself you also love God?

I John 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

The two great commandments cannot be separated from each other if they are both going to be fulfilled. We cannot afford to put all our emphasis on one and ignore the other. It matters not which one we put the emphasis on and which one we ignore. They both go together. In fact, it is a stunning thing to understand what James said, that the whole *thing* is a whole.

Brethren, I tell you, God has to do a miraculous work in us, and this coordinates perfectly as to why those two loaves still have leaven in them. God is realistically telling us that we will never be free from sin as long as we are in the flesh. The fact that He has the mercy to still transform us wholly and completely into His children into His Kingdom, is an act of grace on His part that is overwhelming to understand for anybody who understands how penetrated, how deeply infiltrated, we are with sin.

In II Corinthians 5, there is an overall guide for our life as to the kind of attitude and approach we should have toward fellowman.

II Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ compels [constrains] us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live [you and me] should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

What he is saying, in effect, is that this becomes one of the driving, guiding factors of our life. We now do everything because Christ did it, and because Christ wants us to follow Him in life and do what *He* did. So the love of Christ in us constrains us to go in that direction because we love Him, and then, because we love Him, we give our life *over* to Him, doing, following, and imitating what He did in His life. Some things, like the miracles He did, we will never do, but we are concerned here about conduct. We are concerned about attitude. We are concerned about what He did and died for, for what we need to do in our life in loving one another, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and loving God directly.

II Corinthians 5:16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Again, Paul was saying that if we are truly converted, then our vision, our perception of other human beings, whether they are converted or not, makes a change, and we can no longer look at them in the same way that we did before. Neither can we any longer think of ourselves with the ego-building puffing up that we naturally do through our carnal nature. It becomes, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," and they have our pity and compassion, our sympathy and empathy, rather than our anger, bitterness, and hatred.

That is the way the love of Christ constrains us. It changes our perspective on *everything*, if we really care. Conversion demands that following Christ's example becomes the guiding principle of our life.

Neither of these sermons I am giving on this subject is about solving issues between people, but rather showing the standard of attitude and behavior God expects. Now considering our varied backgrounds in the world, it is very high, but it is the only way that truly opens the way to lasting solutions that will produce peace.

Now the sermon takes a change here, because there is something that I feel we need to get established in our mind. We are going to go the whole way back to the book of Genesis to one of the most well-known verses in the entire Bible. This verse in Genesis 4 is a biblical classic. It is known by almost everybody—even by those who only have a very slight biblical knowledge.

Genesis 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

This verse contains two brief questions: the one by God being the question that I am sure Cain wished to avoid answering. The other is, of course, Cain's response.

Now for the remainder of this sermon, I want us to look more closely at the term "brother," as I lay a foundation for a better understanding of our responsibility of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The foundational issue we are looking into as we begin is this: Does God require of us that we have the same feeling and sense of responsibility toward, and therefore to act toward, everybody in exactly the same manner? Biblically, this is not as simple as it might seem.

"Is Every Man My Brother?" as that very popular Christian song movingly portrays. Now if we are using the Bible as our guide rather than our feelings, then from personal experiences, this is much more complex than it might appear on the surface, because many relationships are entwined by the Bible. This is partly because the Hebrew word in the Old Testament and the Greek word in the New Testament, both translated "brother," are used in ten different kinds of relationship-circumstances.

Incidentally, as a little aside, it is one of the reasons that Herbert Armstrong taught that you should never build a doctrine on the meaning of a word. It is one of the major reasons why, because of the many, many different contexts in which any given word might appear in the Bible and be used in a different way than you think it *ought* to be used; but there it is, and it is part of the inspired Scripture.

The Hebrew term, transliterated into the English word "brother," is *ach*. It is pronounced with a bit of a guttural sound. It is #251 in *Strong's*. It simply indicates a relationship.

The Greek word is #80 in *Strong's*, and is one we are a great deal more familiar with. It is *adelphos*—phonetically *ad-el-fos*, as in "philadelphia," where it is used as the suffix.

Now if one limits himself to a strict dictionary definition, *adelphos* may seem more specific, being derived from the Greek term "womb." However, in actual usage in the Scriptures, it is most definitely used in a far wider sense than being a blood relative, just like the Hebrew term *ach*.

Here, in Genesis 4, in verse 2 and verse 9 it says:

Genesis 4:2 Then she bore again, this time his [*ach*] brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

Genesis 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your [*ach*] brother?"

Here *ach* is used of a blood brother. Both have the same father, both have the same mother, both came from the same womb.

This might be a little bit of an aside issue, but what Cain did here, incidentally, is kind of interesting, because this was the very first murder within a family in the history of the world. Do you know that even today the highest percentage of murders are committed in families? Father kills mother. Mother kills father. Father kills son. Son kills father. Father kills mother. Father kills brother. Father kills daughter. On and on it goes. It begins to spread out. Brother kills cousin. Brother kills nephew, etc. etc. etc. The largest percentage of murders in the United States of America is committed within a family. Did they love their neighbor who was closest to them—their blood relative? Something is amiss, brethren.

We are going to go to a lot of scriptures. Let us go to Genesis 37. You will begin to notice an expansion of the use of *ach* right here.

Genesis 37:14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

Jacob is speaking to Joseph. This is the beginning of the thing that got Joseph sent off to Egypt and sold there.

The men Jacob called Joseph's brothers were in reality Joseph's half-brothers. They had the same father, but they had different mothers. You begin to see the relationship is going to begin to slide away from Cain and Abel.

Genesis 14:16 So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.

The central person involved here is Abraham. It is when he went out to fight the five kings, and he defeated them, and then he returned. This was just before he met Melchizedek. Lot is called Abraham's brother. Actually Lot was Abraham's nephew. I guess the Hebrews had no specific term for nephew, so we see *ach* used to indicate a near relative. You can see the blood relationship is beginning to get farther and farther apart.

Genesis 29:12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father.

Genesis 29:15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?"

Laban and Isaac were first cousins, but Jacob is one generation farther down the line from Laban. Jacob and Laban are first cousins once removed. They are one generation apart. Despite this widening relationship gap, *ach* is still used beyond the immediate family.

We are going to get farther apart here:

Judges 1:1-3 Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land

into his hand." So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him.

Both the literal Judah and Simeon are long dead; however, having had the same father and mother—(that was at least four generations back)—and so the term *ach* is being used in a *tribal* sense, and that is the word underlying the word "brother." You can see now that it includes everybody in a given tribe as a brother.

Exodus 2:11 Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.

The word *ach* appears in that verse two different times. Moses went out to look at one of his brethren, and so the indication is now a "countryman"—not from just one tribe, it could have been from *any* of the tribes, and "countryman" simply means here "a fellow Israelite." You can see that the relationship is getting farther and farther apart, much broader, much looser.

Elisha the prophet is speaking here:

II Kings 9:2 Now when you arrive at that place, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him rise up from among his associates, and take him to an inner room.

The word "associate" is *ach*. In this context it indicates a companion by choice; a colleague. There is no indication of any blood relationship whatever. It could be a fraternity in a college. It is just somebody you choose as a friend.

I Kings 9:10-13 Now it happened at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king's house (Hiram the king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress and gold, as much *as* he desired), that King Solomon then gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. Then Hiram went from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him, but they did not please him. So he said, "What kind of cities are these which you have given me, my brother?" And he called them the land of Cabul, as they are to this day.

Here is the term "brother." *Ach* is used to indicate an ally in a business relationship. The Bible sees them as brothers in a business covenant. There is a relationship there, but "blood" is completely gone from the scene.

Genesis 29:1-4 So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone was on the well's mouth. Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth. And Jacob said to them, "My brethren [my *ach*], where are you from?"

He did not even know them from Adam, and he called them his brethren! What was the connection? What was the relationship? It was an occupational relationship. They were all shepherds, but they were brothers. It was like belonging to a union, or being a member in a company.

Are you beginning to see why Mr. Armstrong said, "Don't base a doctrine on the definition of a word"? Their languages had fewer words than English does, so they used the words in a large variety of circumstances. English is maybe the most precise language that has ever existed on earth. We have words specifically to mean something in a way other languages do not.

In Genesis 9 we have probably the broadest usage of all in the entire Bible. No, it is not. There is another one that is equally as broad.

Genesis 9:5-6 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother [*ach*] I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.

We are brothers in the sense that we all have one Creator. We were all created by the same Being.

That completes the Old Testament application of *ach*. In the New Testament, the usage of *adelphos* is similar, except it is used much more specifically in relation to *spiritual* relationships.

Matthew 5:22-24 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother [*adelphos*] without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother [*adelphos*], 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother [your *adelphos*] has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother [to your *adelphos*], and then come and offer your gift.

This very broad usage does not distinguish by blood at all. "Brother" here means anyone, just as it did in Genesis 9. This statement here by Jesus begins to lay a foundation for our understanding that a neighbor becomes a relation whenever sin is involved. That is what Genesis 9, in a sense, began for us, and Jesus is picking up right on that same thought. So where sin is involved, whoever the person is becomes your brother, and as you will see as we go along, the person becomes your neighbor at the same time.

There is one more in Matthew 5 which I think is kind of interesting.

Matthew 5:47 And if you greet your brethren [*adelphos*] only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

This indicates a different kind of relationship similar to one of them in the Old Testament, because people are bound together in a family of sorts, but it is a fraternal relationship because of having the same occupation. No blood whatever is required.

As we go through the New Testament you are going to see that "brother" is taking on more and more of a universal meaning. As the church becomes worldwide under Jesus Christ and then the apostles, the term "brother" shifts, and neighbors become brothers.

The speaker in Revelation 22 is an angel, and the angel is speaking to John.

Revelation 22:6-9 Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

What the angel is doing is showing that we are related to the prophets because we, like John and the prophets, have a common spiritual calling. So now we are related to people who were really ancient, and are dead.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He [Christ] had to be made like His brethren [*adelphos*], that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

This is also quite broad. It relates Jesus to us as sharing humanity with us—that is, His spiritual family—but it eventually relates Him to all of mankind, because He shared life with all of mankind.

As you can see, there are many different contexts in which these terms are used.

Matthew 28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

Here it specifically relates Jesus to the disciples, the apostles, and then to us as well, because we share discipleship under Jesus with them.

Matthew 23:8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

There *adelphos* indicates all believers, regardless of sex.

Now I want us to go to I Timothy 5, and we will see something unique. It is the only place in the entire Bible where the feminine *adelphos* is used, and it was rightly translated.

I Timothy 5:2 . . . older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

That is the feminine of *adelphos*.

I Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

aAdelphos there indicates a Christian community of related people.

I Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers.

"Love as brothers" is actually one word. It is *philadelphos*, and it means to have an active fondness for one's brother. It is more specific than *philadelphia*. *Philadelphia* is just general. This is specifically love for a brother. The word *philadelphia* appears in Romans 12:10, and it is merely a noun which means "brotherly love."

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

Here is one more. It is in II Corinthians 11, and this is *pseudadelphos*. It means "false brethren."

II Corinthians 11:26 In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.

As I said earlier, we are related to one another within relationships that connect, but at the same time some of those relationships are not even close, but we still are, to some level, considered by God as being brothers.

Now are all relationships considered by God as being on the same level in terms of priority? Are they all equally important? Except for one relationship making the right use in a given matter, we find that it may require a very acute discernment as to one's level of responsibility. We are going to go to that one exception right now by turning to Luke 14.

Luke 14:26-27 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

This is very clear. This relationship takes top priority above all others, *bar none*. It is a *family* relationship, and it is with our spiritual Brother and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus makes it very clear, that even though we have all kinds of relationships in all kinds of situations throughout our life, and the Bible may consider them as being brothers to us, this relationship with Jesus Christ comes first. However, this is also the relationship that may very well cause us the most difficulty. It is not because we do not desire to fulfill it, but there is something that is working all the time which I will just call "the out-of-sight, out-of-mind" rule.

A Christian has to learn to live by faith in a God who is also his spiritual Brother and Savior, but he cannot see Him. Keeping this relationship in mind is a learning process, but that often requires a great deal of time and many experiences until it is truly accomplished. This is brotherly relationship Number One.

I want you to notice two more factors that were mentioned by Jesus in this that enter into making judgments about this subject. The first is the word "hate." That word "hate" in verse 26 is correctly translated. However, to the Jews of that time it was a figure of speech that means "love less by

comparison." It does not mean "hate" in the sense of being angry emotionally against another. It does not mean to have animosity toward. It is a comparative term that simply means, "You have got to love Me more than you love these others." This is important, because love plays a very important role in making judgments.

Love indicates the closeness and possible intensity of any given relationship in any situation, and so Christ is admonishing us that our relationship with Him must always come first. It must come first *before* the relationship with father, *before* the relationship with mother, *before* the relationship with sister, brother, children, or anything else. That is a demand of His, and it is a demand that has very good loving reasons behind it. But sometimes, brethren, it is going to be very difficult, and we will bend our love toward Him and give it toward a relation more likely than we will give to any other being on earth, and that is not to be done.

With the second factor, notice that every relationship named is a blood relationship. This is because, by nature, these are the people we are going to have the greatest and most intense relationship with and emotional tie to. These are the relationships that are most likely to sway our judgment in making choices that involve our relationship with Christ.

Have you ever heard the saying that "blood is thicker than water"? That phrase came from the world of religion. It means that, from practical experience, ministers have concluded that family ties are stronger than spiritual ties—water being a type of the Holy Spirit. Emotional attachments can be very persuasive and can tip the judgment scale away from Christ, giving favor to a relative who can be seen, rather than what is scripturally right and out of sight. Jesus is not saying here that family ties are unimportant. It is just that our tie to Him is *most* important. I want to confirm this to you from another situation. You will recognize this immediately here.

John 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

You know that He asked Peter this question three times. "Do you love Me more than these?" Nobody knows absolutely, except maybe John the apostle, who the "these" were in Jesus' question. We can pretty much guess and come pretty close that the "these" Jesus was referring to were the other disciples, because the twelve were all there, and it was Peter who bragged before them all, "If all men reject You and betray You, I will be faithful." Well, he did not live up to that.

And now Jesus is saying to Him, "Peter, do you love Me more than these fellows?" This time Peter was a great deal smarter. He refused to say, "If all men reject You, I will not." He just said, "I love You," "I love You," "I love You," and let it go at that. A wise answer he gave back to Jesus, and Jesus was apparently satisfied. Peter was not bragging anymore, but you get the point. "Do you love Me *more* than you love these disciples?" The answer to that was "Yes," and Jesus accepted it.

So what applied to Peter applies to you and me too. We have got to love Him more than the brethren. You begin to see things are being categorized here. Slowly but surely, God is setting up a standard He expects we should live up to.

What do you think comes next? Let us go back to Genesis 2, and I think you ought to be able to know what I am heading toward. Here is the next closest responsibility.

Genesis 2:23-25 And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

I believe that the Bible shows us that this relationship is the next closest on the list. It has the second highest priority—so high that Jesus said man is not to put it asunder except under some very narrow circumstances—meaning that those in which the marriage covenant is broken and love has completely disappeared. The husband and wife are to become one flesh. That is closer, not genetically, but in relationship standard it is the closest relationship that there is given to mankind: husband and wife. That has a very, very high responsibility.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Ephesians 5:28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

These two commands, taken together, appear nowhere else in the Bible in regard to any other human relationship, and thus all relationships among humans might be considered *brotherly* love. This relationship between husband and wife has to be Number Two.

Let us go to I Timothy 5. I think this begins to set a standard here.

I Timothy 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I believe that even though children are not directly mentioned, they are certainly included in this general and very strong statement. I think we can assume, just from the general tenor of the Bible, that children rank just below one's spouse. I think I am on safe ground, though, because the command itself given in Leviticus 19 uses the term "neighbor," not "brother," implying to me a more distant relationship than that of a child.

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 LORD.

You can see that there is a kind of logic to this, but if we keep on looking we can find God has categorized our relationship responsibilities.

Remember that I am giving you this is to show the areas of responsibility for the making of judgments, and that is, "To whom should my love be given?" Well, God kind of categorizes it, does He not?

I Thessalonians 2:7-8 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

This is a pretty strong statement, and therefore the assumption is that loving one's child with greater intensity is expected, and the expectation from God's point of view is pretty intense.

Are you aware there is a great deal more attention in the Bible coming from the other direction—that is, from the child toward the parents? One of the Ten Commandments is directly involved, that we are to honor our father and our mother. That is directed to the children, and about our parents.

Now what about all other situations in which the term "brother" is used but no blood relationship is involved? Before we get to that, we have to look at one other group.

Let us go to Galatians 6. This is kind of interesting.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Paul is telling us that there are going to come times when we have to choose between helping a brother and helping somebody out in the world. He is kind of pointing in a direction there at—"especially to those who are of the household of faith." This does not mean that we ignore the people in the world, it is just that the people in the church have a higher priority than the people in the world. There is a pretty clear distinction between spiritual brothers and the rest of the world. So even as parents must have a special regard toward their own children, so God's Family is to have a special regard toward each other.

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

This is just an encouragement to keep it up. When you get this statement into the whole book, he is in effect saying that in the world virtually everybody is against Christians; thus, we must not fail to persevere in helping one another. We must make efforts to bolster God's Family unity.

Here comes a really interesting verse. At least it was really interesting to me.

I Thessalonians 4:9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.

Paul is indicating here that brotherly love within the church is different because it is God-taught. In other words, He is not teaching the world to love, He is paying special attention to teaching the *church* to love. The kind of love He is talking about has some examples scattered throughout the Bible. It is a love similar to David's and Jonathan's love for each other.

I Samuel 18:1-4 Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

He also shows family relationships that were not so good: Jacob and Esau; Cain and Abel. But there is a better one of brotherly love: Joseph's love toward Benjamin.

A really warm, emotional regard has to come between us who are in the church of God, and it is something that God will promote and enable if we will make the effort to do as He says.

Now there is one group of brotherly association left, and this would be those which were tribal, fraternal, occupational, ethnic, racial, or as merely members of the human race.

Let us go to Proverbs, chapter 3. I want you to notice how far down the list this is.

Proverbs 3:27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so.

That is an interesting verse for a sermonette to be given by somebody. Do you wonder, "Do we owe it to everybody?" Well, the answer to that is "Yes."

I mentioned the word "judgment" here a couple of times, and you will see why in just a little bit.

Romans 12:13 Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

I Peter 2:17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

It is interesting how he broke that down. We give respect to those in the world, but we are commanded to love the brotherhood. That is different.

You put these all together, and we have a responsibility to all, but perhaps even frequently judgments must be made as to how well equipped we are to answer the needs and perhaps at times whether or not we should even give help.

Romans 13:7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

We owe respect, deference, kindness, and tenderness to everybody, but it is not always in the same level.

We are going to turn to one verse here in Jesus' life in Matthew 26.

Matthew 26:11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.

The poor are always there, and at times judgments are going to have to be made. Jesus did this right here. There are no easy answers to this question. Judgments must be made on an individual-occasion basis because there is no end to the reservoir of people needing help. It is like an ocean.

The whole world is in need of *spiritual* help, but even after we go past that, how many poor people are there in the world? How many people need help with their diet? How many people need help with their education? How many people need help in this area and that?

Are you equipped to give people help in every area of life? The answer to that is absolutely no. You do not have the resources either in terms of the education to do it, the financial means to do it, and

the time to do it because there are other things in your life that have a higher schedule of authority-standard from God than these things. You just cannot do it, and that is why Jesus is recognizing this for us—"The poor you always have with you."

So judgments have to be made, and there are going to be times when we would very much *like* to give somebody help, but we cannot, and so we have to walk away from it feeling badly that we are not in a position to be able to give the help we would sincerely like to give. Like I said, there is no easy answer to this.

Let us finish this on a positive note. Perhaps the place to start answering this question is to take a harder look at the lesson of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus shows it is not so much a question of asking who our neighbor is, but instead asking ourselves the question, "Am I a neighbor to this person?" Maybe if we begin to ask this question more frequently, God will show us what it is we need to *do* in any given situation.

There is only so much we can do. That is a fact of life, and it is something we have to live with even though we may have a sincere yearning to be able to give people in the world some assistance of what we have available to us because God has intervened in our lives, and He has not intervened in their lives.

So the answer has to be, that in many cases, we just have to turn it over to Christ, in faith, knowing that it *will* be taken care of in His good time, and still at the same time ask, "Is there anything I can do to help this person right now?" Sometimes there will be, and sometimes we have to pass it off.