

## Lesson 2

# Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands,” Matthew 22.39-40.

## Introduction

Previously we examined the first great commandment, Matthew 22.37: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* Then Jesus does something not done before. With authority, He inseparably ties Leviticus 19.18 to his answer.<sup>13</sup> By doing so he answers the question of how one proves his love to God. True love for God demonstrates itself in sacrificial love and service to others. Neither command is to be raised above the other. The second great command is equal to the first. In fact, it is linked to it. The force of each depends on each other.

## Love Others

The love in 22.39 is the same kind of love mentioned in v. 37. Genuine love for others reveals itself by the choices it makes. Sentiment or emotion may play a role, but more so it is a love driven by purposeful, intentional, and action.

Let's refer to the Leviticus command:

Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord, Leviticus 19.18.

Looking back at Leviticus 19.16-17, love is the answer for the refusal to slander someone else. Love is the solution for the bad behavior of taking revenge or holding a grudge. Love is the counter to harboring anger or resentment in your heart. It is a conscious choice that does not always involve warm sentiment or emotion. Also, in Leviticus 19 we find instructions on not stealing, dealing falsely, lying, swearing falsely by God's name, defrauding others, placing a stumbling block before the blind, or rendering unjust judgment. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is the antidote to these things.

## *How this love is measured*

Note that the amount of love we pour out to others is to be in the same amount as we love our self. In other words, just as you already love yourself, care for yourself, and think about yourself, you are to love your neighbor in the same way.<sup>14</sup> When we are hungry, we see that we are fed. When we are thirsty, we find something to drink. If we are suffering, we look for a remedy . . . because the priority is self-care. A person never dismisses his own needs, *for no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it,*

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<sup>13</sup> There are some Jewish texts where we see these two ideas tied together. These extrabiblical writings are thought to have come after Jesus, but some date them before Christ. Three examples are found in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The *Testament of Dan*, 5.3 says: *Throughout all your life love the Lord, and one another with a true heart.* See Charlesworth, James H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1. New York; London: Yale University Press, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 809.

<sup>14</sup> Courson, Jon. *Jon Courson's Application Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003, p. 164.

Ephesians 5:29. We value our own personal welfare. It is part of the human condition. As you love yourself, love others.

We must not separate love for God from loving our neighbor. It is incredibly easy to do. We can worship God in church on Sunday, praising Him, and yet act rudely and condemn someone who doesn't drive like we do on the way home. We deceive ourselves into thinking that the way we treat others has no bearing on our relationship with God. Yet, how we treat others is how we treat God. The supreme obligation to God includes a duty love and care for our fellow man.

Barclay has written:

It is only when we love God that other people become lovable. The biblical teaching about human beings is not that we are collections of chemical elements, not that we are part of the brute creation, but that men and women are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). It is for that reason that human beings are lovable. The true basis of all democracy is in fact the love of God. Take away the love of God, and we can look at human nature and become angry at those who cannot be taught; we can become pessimistic about those who cannot make progress; we can become callous to those who are cold and calculating in their actions. The love of humanity is firmly grounded in the love of God.

To be truly religious is to love God and to love those whom God made in his own image; and to love God and other people, not with a vague sentimentality, but with that total commitment which issues in devotion to God and practical service of others.<sup>15</sup>

## On These Two, Every Other Law Hangs

Everything else God requires are summed up in these two dual commands. Imagine two pegs upon which garments hang, these great laws uphold all the other precepts in the Law and the Prophets. Every command of God will fall under one or the other of these and all the subsequent instructions show us how to fulfill them. The New Testament declares:

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love, 1 John 4:7-8.

Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law, Romans 13:8-10.

MacArthur writes:

If people loved perfectly there would be no need for law, because the person who loves others will never do them harm. In the same way, the believer who loves God with all his being will never take His name in vain, will never worship idols, and will never fail to obey, worship, honor, and glorify Him as Lord.<sup>16</sup>

## What This Looks Like

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<sup>15</sup> Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Third Ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, p. 324-25.

<sup>16</sup> MacArthur, Matthew, Vol. 3, p. 342.

Loving your neighbor is not always easy. We often must choose to follow through. We need to be intentional. What are some ways we can demonstrate love to our neighbor?

- **Move with compassion.** We cannot sit by when someone else suffers a need. Will we help according to our ability?
- **Look out for the wellbeing of others.** We need to pay attention. We need to think of their needs.
- **Seize opportunities to serve.** Love is kindness in action.
- **Speak kindly.** Words build up or tear down, so use words to build others up. Encourage them. **Magnify the good.** Pay compliments. Speak your appreciation.
- **Give others the benefit of the doubt.** Don't take offense easily. *Imperfect people often do dumb things, including yourself.*
- **Share in the joys and sorrows of others.** Be there with your heart open with arms wide in support.
- **Practice forgiveness.** Forgive others as you have been forgiven.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. How can we demonstrate true love for God?
2. Why do you think Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor? Is it always easy to love our neighbor? Explain.
3. How could you tie Matthew 7.12 together with the second greatest commandment? Do they fit? Explain.
4. Barclay said: "It is only when we love God that other people become lovable." What does this statement mean to you?
5. Look back over the 7 bullet points of the previous section. Find a scripture or two that supports each point.