

LOVE LOVE **THY** LOVE **NEIGHBOR**



Love Thy Neighbor

Part 1

September 3, 2023

The Gospel of Saint Matthew 5:43-48, “⁴³You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” May the Lord add His Blessing to the Reading and the Hearing of His Word today in Jesu Name! Amen!

Since the dispensation of the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, the Hebrews began the process of adhering to the strict order of the Ten Commandments and the six hundred and thirteen moral, sacrificial, and civil laws outlined by the Torah.

The commandments that were given were very stringent and covered a multiplicity of things ranging from sexuality, to legal procedures for theft, to the processes of atoning for one's sins and moral failures being found in violation to God's Law and Statutes.

From the Sacrificial System to the Legal System, the Israelites strove for Generation after Generation to atone for their sins, develop a social system of peace and stability, and to ultimately build a Nation whose cornerstone of existence was based upon God's and His Divine Leadership. Down through the centuries, the Nation of Israel experiences great peaks of success and, regrettably so, dark dungeons of despair.

But could it have been that all the religious zeal that the nation of Israel and the followers of the Law of Moses had, they were missing something? Could this one key ingredient have fortified their successes and defused their descent into exile and slavery due to forgetting their God? Could this one key have saved this nation of people from despair?

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew chapter twenty-two, there is a conversation that is recorded between a group of Pharisees and Jesus. The verbal conflict that ensued was quite interesting and bares weight in the process of attaining the revelatory understanding of the Law and the Prophets.

Did Jesus truly come to abolish the Law and the Prophets all together or did He come to fulfill them by His Death and His revealing of the Gospel Message; Peace with God through the Cross. Point #1...

1. We are only enabled to Love our Neighbor when we have had an encounter with the Love of God Through the Cross of Christ!

- a. Notice the text in the Gospel of Saint Matthew Chapter 22:34-40, “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

- b. When Jesus was addressing the Pharisees in response to their question, it can be ascertained by investigating the previous verses that the Pharisees were coming on the scene after Jesus had confounded the Sadducees. It is important to bear in mind that there were two major sects of ultra-religious Judaism; namely the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
- c. Each of these sects were at odds with one another but, as the old adage says, “An enemy of my enemy is my friend.” These two sects were, in their own way, seeking to trap Jesus in so that they might rid this troublemaker from the religious circles of Judea. The Sadducees, interestingly enough, were arguing over the resurrection of the dead and the response that Jesus provides totally frustrates this educationally elite sect of Judaism.
- d. The Pharisees, with their impeccable timing, seem to come on the scene as if they were seeking to validate their ideology by attempting to outdo the Sadducees in the arena of intellectuality and deal with this “heretic” who was nothing more than a troublemaker who was stirring up the people against the Temple.

- e. In the Gospel of Saint Matthew when it is recorded that Jesus battles with the Pharisees over the answer to their question, it seems that in the midst of Jesus' amazing response He was also unveiling a revelation of the Law and the Prophets that the Pharisees, in all of their wisdom and knowledge, could not seem to comprehend nor grasp. This revelation is the Key to the walk of Faith.
- f. Notice that Jesus addresses the question professionally but astutely as He answers their question and gives one of the greatest revelations of the entire New Testament in regards to the fulfillment of the Law of Moses.
- g. Point #2...

2. The Love of God is revealed through His Son and Realized Through His Spirit!

- a. The key to the Cross is found in the Love of the Father! This simple and yet complex response has become the moniker of Christianity when dealing with Man being reconciled with God and one another.

- b. Notice the last section of this line of verses, **“This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”** The entire pivot point of equality of the first command versus the second is when Jesus states, **“This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it.”**
- c. Simply put, the two commandments that Jesus gave are equally important. Loving God is just as important as loving your neighbor and vice versa. In the Gospel of Saint John in the fourth chapter, the Apostle John unveils the deeper truth of what Jesus is teaching in response to what the Pharisees asked.
- d. The Apostle John said in the Gospel of Saint John in chapter four and verse twenty, **“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”**
- e. When Jesus is coming to the end of His answer to the Pharisees, He makes it clear that on the two commandments that He presented hinge all of the Law and the Prophets.

- f. Simply put, the entirety of the Jewish faith finds its resting place upon the Love of God and the Love of one's fellow man. Notice the text in verse forty, "On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
- g. The very cornerstone of the faith is Love and the Law is fulfilled by and through Love.
- h. Point #3...

3. When our relationship with the Father deepens, our desire through His Spirit empowers us to embrace His Character!

- a. Jesus establishes this line of thinking in the Gospel of Saint Matthew when He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

- b. Notice in these series of verses how Jesus points to two specific themes that are important to take note of. First off, Jesus says, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”**
- c. Jesus establishes the boundaries of His purpose and sets some cornerstones from which He will stand and make His ministry known. He did not come to abolish the Law away but rather to fulfill the requirements for us; the requirements that spelled Doom for this fallen and debased humanity.
- d. The Second half of this powerful truth is that He is the Messiah that the Prophets had been speaking about for thousands of years and He was the fulfillment of their words.
- e. Thus Jesus fulfilled the Law for us by living a sinless life and dying in our place to take the wrath of God upon Himself in so that Man might find Peace with God through His Dear Son, Jesus.
- f. And second, Jesus fulfilled the words of the Prophets by doing all that they had spoken about this coming Messiah of Israel. Jesus did not do away with anything but rather fulfilling the requirements of the Law and fulfilling the words of the Prophets. He truly is the Lamb slain before the foundations of the Earth!

- g. The last verse of this discourse from The Gospel of Saint Matthew chapter five declares, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”
- h. It seems to be almost ironic that Jesus would make this statement in chapter five and then seem to flip the script in chapter twenty-two when He tells the Pharisees that to fulfill the Law of Love is to fulfill the entire Law of Moses. Do these two scriptures seem to complicate things or do they provide some deep answers that are needed to gain insight into the Law of Love?
- i. Jesus tells the crowd that their righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees who were very revered in their day. The modern day Christian views the Pharisees as evil people who were out to get everyone but that isn't necessarily the case.
- j. Pharisees were quite the upstanding character who held strict convictions and had strong adherence to holiness codes. Truthfully, these men had pure intentions because they simply wanted to please God and to lead others in their way of life. They wanted to inspire Holiness. Is it such a bad thing to inspire right living?

- k. The issue is when there was a transition from provoking unto righteousness and inspiring the masses to seek the face of God into a self-righteous position of dominance above the masses.
- l. It was this hypocrisy that Jesus addressed in the Gospel of Saint Matthew in chapter twenty-three and verse twenty-seven, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.”
- m. Friends, our lives should provoke others to be better, not drive them farther from the Father! Point #4...

4. Jesus came in so that we would immolate His life, Character, and Power through His Spirit and not through a Pharisaical Mindset!

- a. Here again, Jesus seems to create more confusion because in chapter five He says that the hearers must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees to gain Heaven and then in chapter twenty-three He is rebuking the Pharisees for being “full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.”

- b. So which is it? Are the Pharisees righteous or unrighteous? It would seem that they are both. They are righteous concerning their code of ethics but they are unrighteous in the sight of God because of the iniquity found beneath their outward holiness.
- c. To state it plainly, the Pharisees seem to be pure and holy on the outside but they are full of all manner of impurity because they lack the key to the entirety of the Law; Love. They are missing the most important part of the entire text; Love.
- d. Can it be that their striving to fulfill the Law was making them loveless because the harder they tried to remove the stain of sin the more frustrated that they became with themselves. Thus causing them to fall prey to their own guilt and shame.
- e. Perhaps it was that the Pharisees were so concerned with their code of ethics that they missed the Law of Love? Jesus came to fulfill the Law by dying for our sins and bringing reconciliation between God and Man.
- f. Might it be that the rage of the Pharisees was the byproduct of their seeing the love life of the Lord Jesus with Father God and they hated what they could not have? Perhaps it was man's desire to attain righteousness which drove him to hate the only person who could ever set them free?