

Love Your Neighbour As Yourself

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Mark 12:28–34; Leviticus 19:9–18

3 Areas, Responsibilities, Reputations, Relationships.

Being part of a church means much more than showing up for the worship service on Sundays.

We are church members, and so Sunday mornings are an essential part of our lives. Here we worship God together, find ways to encourage one another, receive teaching from the word of God, and pray together.

On Monday through Saturday, we still live our faith. Over these two weeks, we are looking at what does it mean to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength and how can we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Today's message has got a lot of takeaway instruction. We have some practical ways to love our neighbors. This message is not just to make us smarter, it is to help us learn from God's word how to love. My prayer is that for each one of us, that God would put one or two very practical ideas from this teaching at the front of our minds this whole week, and we would be more loving as a result.

The command to love your neighbor can be found throughout the New Testament.

I will read you a list, and as I read, remember that for New Testament congregations, the Old Testament was the only Bible that they had. Our message today will be from Leviticus, and that is the portion of scripture that would be going through the minds of the first century church as they were taught and instructed on how to love our neighbours.

1 Corinthians 16:14 HCSB

Your every action must be done with love.

Galatians 5:14 HCSB

For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

James 2:8 HCSB

Indeed, if you keep the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, **Love your neighbor as yourself**, you are doing well.

Romans 13:10 HCSB

Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

Mark 12:29–31 HCSB

“This is the most important,” Jesus answered:

Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

“The second is: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** There is no other command greater than these.”

When Jesus says that this is the second greatest commandment, he is quoting Leviticus 19. And so, to better understand what is being said here, we are going to learn from that portion of Scripture.

Let the Bible interpret the Bible.

I’ve categorized the way that we can love our neighbor from this passage into 3 different categories, which all start with the letter R.

The 3 R’s of loving your neighbor, (and no, it’s not reduce, reuse and recycle.)

The categories are Responsibility, Reputation and Relationships.

Responsibility (Leviticus 19:9-10, 13-14)

Leviticus 19:9–10 HCSB

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you are not to reap to the very edge of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You must not strip your vineyard bare or gather its fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor and the foreign resident; I am Yahweh your God.

There are people who depend on you. People that you are responsible to God for.

When we think of who we are responsible for, our minds first go to family and good friends.

Yet God’s word teaches that we are also responsible for the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society.

- foreigners, the orphan and the widow, the poor, those with disabilities

An example of this is found in the way that the Israelites were to harvest their crops. They were to leave the corners of their crops untouched, and if some of the grain was dropped during the harvest, then leave it on the ground.

Then those who were in need, could come and glean from what was left.

This is what Ruth did. She was in a very disadvantageous situation.

- Her husband and father in law had both died, and now she was living as a foreigner with her mother in law Naomi. In order to survive, Ruth went to the fields of a man named Boaz, and there she would work all day to gather grain.

- How were Ruth and Naomi provided for, because Boaz carried out his responsibility to his neighbour. In this way Boaz loved God and loved his neighbour.

There are two principals at work here.

1. Its right to work for what you get.
 - a. Ruth worked all day gleaning the food.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 HCSB

In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: “If anyone isn’t willing to work, he should not eat.”

2. Leave the corners for the poor
 - a. Don’t consume all of your earnings. Allocate some for others.

This shows that you are taking responsibility for your neighbor. A practical way to love your neighbor as yourself is to make it possible for a portion of your income to be seen as seed to help the vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Set a portion aside and think about, pray about and talk about how it can be used for others, maybe God will give some of us creative ideas for how we can put this into practice.

Verses 13 and 14 also speak about taking responsibility for our neighbours.

Leviticus 19:13–14 HCSB

“You must not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages due a hired hand must not remain with you until morning. You must not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you are to fear your God; I am Yahweh.

Have you ever done a job, and then not been paid for it?

Have you ever done your part of a contract, and then had your partner fail to do their part, leaving you on the hook?

There is more than one way to oppress and rob your neighbor.

- The obvious way is to bully and steal from others.
- The less obvious way is to withhold that which your neighbor has earned.

If those being addressed by the Levitical law did not pay their hired workers at the end of the day, then those workers would go to bed hungry, and their families would have no food.

God forbids this. This is not love, to withhold what is due another. If you have made a deal, then honour that deal.

How does this apply today?

We are to be responsible for those who we hire:

- people we employ,
 - in our business.
 - those we contract
- people we hire for services
 - I include here the people who serve you in restaurants and coffee shops.
 - You have a responsibility to not only pay them, but to treat with all kindness and love. The way that you would want to be treated if the roles were reversed.

Your responsibilities to love your neighbor include the poor, the vulnerable and those who you hire.

Reputation (Lev 19:12,15, 16)

Leviticus 19:12 HCSB

You must not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God; I am Yahweh.

What does it mean, to swear falsely by God’s name? Make a promise or a commitment and use God’s name as your collateral.

ex: “I promise to help you move next Saturday, so help me God.”

- now what happens if you don’t show up on Saturday to help? Was God unable to help you? A better promise is, “I will help you move next Saturday”.

But there is a subtler way that we can profane God’s name.

If people know that we are Christians, and I pray that they do, because loving God out to be a part of our personality, then they will associate our behaviour and our attitudes as being Christ like. If you profess Christ with your lips, then live for him.

It should be that if someone asks you, “How does a Christian live?” that you will be able to say to them, “Follow me for a week and you will see how a Christian lives.”

If you are called a Christian, then represent Christ well. It is loving to our neighbours to represent God’s name well.

We also have a firm duty to guard the reputations of our neighbours.

Leviticus 19:15–16 HCSB

“You must not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly. You must not go about spreading slander among your people; you must not jeopardize your neighbor’s life; I am Yahweh.

Do you ever hear a news report about a court case and immediately come to the conclusion that justice was not served? I do, I hear about people getting away with terrible things, or maybe receiving a sentence that is far too easy for the gravity of the crime that was committed.

When I see that, there is a part of me that cries out for justice. I am not part of our judicial system, and so I have a very limited influence there. I do know that in time, all people will give an account to God, and that ultimately justice will have the day. Yet, in every situation where we do make a judgement, we must do so as fairly as possible.

Have you considered how slander and gossip can be in the same grouping as judging. The way that we speak about others when they are not present impacts the opinions and judgements that your community make about the reputation of whom you speak.

The Bible is very clear on this issue.

Proverbs 10:18 HCSB

The one who conceals hatred has lying lips,

and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

Psalms 101:5 HCSB

I will destroy anyone

who secretly slanders his neighbor;

I cannot tolerate anyone

with haughty eyes or an arrogant heart.

Proverbs 16:28 HCSB

A contrary man spreads conflict,

and a gossip separates close friends.

Here is a poem called "Remember Me" about what gossip is and does (from *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul 2*)

My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice. I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives. I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age. The more I am quoted the more I am believed. My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face. To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become. I am nobody's friend. Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same. I topple governments and wreck marriages. I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip. I make headlines and headaches.

Before you repeat a story, ask yourself: Is it true? Is it harmless? Is it necessary? If it isn't, don't repeat it.

We love our neighbours when we refuse to gossip and when we refuse to listen to gossip.

Love guards the reputation of neighbours.

What about the times when your neighbour is doing wrong, things that will hurt their reputation? Does that give you license to talk to others about them? What if its truth that you are talking about?

No, because loving your neighbor also means that you show them love through the relationship that you have with them.

Relationships (Leviticus 19:11,17-18)

Leviticus 19:11 HCSB

“You must not steal. You must not act deceptively or lie to one another.

Those of us who are familiar with God's Ten Commandments know that this deals specifically with the eighth and ninth commands. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony. And for that reason alone, we should understand that it is unloving to steal and to be deceptive.

James 1:17 HCSB

Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights; with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning.

I love that God is pure, and true, and I never have to question if his word is trustworthy.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to have said about God's children as well. That you, child of god, are pure and true, and that no one needs to question if your word is truth-worthy. I love that thought, and I pray that God makes this true for each of us.

Leviticus 19:17–18 HCSB

“You must not harbor hatred against your brother. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.

If gossip is wrong, yet your neighbor is in the wrong, what do you do?

The first thing is don't harbor hatred. The command is to love your neighbor, so don't give hatred for others a foothold in your life.

Ephesians 6:12 HCSB

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.

You can hate Satan. You can hate the powers of evil. But don't hate people. Pray for people. Love people.

Martin Luther King Jr famously has said,

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself. So, what does love look like when your neighbor is wrong. Leviticus 19:17 says “Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him”.

So instead of becoming a harbor for hatred, be courageous and go to your neighbor and rebuke the wrong. That sounds very hard, that sounds like a good way to make enemies. But do it well, and it will bring life.

I have so much respect for people who are willing to have these hard conversations. Instead of taking the easy road of gossip, they go and speak with love and grace in order to win their neighbor.

This principle also applies inside of the Church, and it comes with even more specific instructions.

Matthew 18:15–17 HCSB

“If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won’t listen, take one or two more with you, so that **by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established**. If he pays no attention to them, tell the church. But if he doesn’t pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you.

This leaves no room for gossip, and no room for slander. Both are sin, they both breaks down relationships.

The Law of God as found in Leviticus, and as quoted in the New Testament is convicting. We immediately recognize that we are not keeping it perfectly. It penetrates to our hearts, and we say, “Its beautiful, but its beyond me.”

God’s law points us to Jesus.

He lived out perfectly, what we could never do. If the law shows us how to love God and how to love people, then Jesus is the prime expression of love. Because Jesus kept the law perfectly, and Jesus loves perfectly.

Jesus is the prime example of how to love our neighbor as ourselves. In him we see the servant of all, who spoke truth and love. He took our punishment, he paid our debt, he defeated the grave, he is worthy of all our love, and we can never hope to love as God intended, until Jesus is the Lord of our lives.

Aren’t you glad that Jesus took responsibility for us, the lost sinners. He bore our debts on the cross. He made a way where there was no way.

Aren't you glad that Jesus has changed our reputation. When you repent of your sins, accept his forgiveness and believe in his name, you get a new reputation. Because now God the Father sees you as righteous, as holy and as loving. And he helps you live into this reputation.

Aren't you glad that Jesus has made relationship possible between you and God. Thank him today for the love that he has shown.

We can't do this by willpower. But when our lives are put inside of Christ's life, and we accept his rule and his ways, this is what we become, a people who love.