

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF? (Part 5)

Mark 12:28-34

“No life is more secure than a life surrendered to God.”

By Rev. Paul R. Shockley ©
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²⁸And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ ³⁰And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³²And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.¹

This series is part 5 of a 5-part series on Mark 12:28-34: *The Greatest Commandment of Scripture*. This last study is concerned with what it means to love your neighbor as yourself whereas the previous four studies considered what it means to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I. Introduction:

- A. This evening I would like to begin by juxtaposing two stories.
- B. **First story is told to us by Vernon Grounds:**

“Questions about God’s existence often troubled H. A. Hodges, a brilliant young professor of philosophy at Oxford University. One day as he strolled down the street, he passed by an art store. His attention was gripped by a simply picture in the window. It showed Jesus kneeling to wash His disciples’ feet. Hodges knew the story recorded in John 13-God incarnate washing human feet. But suddenly the sheer meaning of that scene gripped the heart of this young philosopher. God-God!-humbling Himself to that lowliest of tasks! He thought, If God is like that, then that God shall be my God! Seeing that painting was one of the circumstances that caused Hodges to surrender his life to the true God-the foot-washing God.

¹*The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mk 12:28-34.

As we read John 13 thoughtfully, we see that God is serving others. His unfathomable, sacrificial love for us should cause us to surrender to Him too.²

C. **Second story is by Dave Egner:**

“A spectacular air battle raged outside our window. Skilled, speedy flyers swarmed through the air, diving down from above, zooming in from left and right, climbing from underneath to knock the others out of the flight. The air was alive with sound they attacked, eluded, hovered, and struck out at one another.

“Scrappy little things, aren’t they?” My wife, Shirley, observed. Six hummingbirds filled the air with darting motion, hovering and whirring as they fought for the three positions on our red hummingbird feeder. “Why can’t they just be patient?” She wondered.

Like so many disputes and quarrels that plague the church, these battles were totally unnecessary. The feeder held plenty of nectared water. We refilled it every day. Yet, for hours at a time, no hummers can near it until they all wanted it. They seemed to prefer a good scrap.

Quarrels among believers in Jesus Christ bring dishonor to Him. They create wounds in our brothers and sisters, leaving scars. “It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel,” says Proverbs 20:3. And “He who has knowledge spares His words” (17:27).³

D. The first account which displays God in the flesh washing the feet of disciples whereas the second account offers a description of the quarreling that takes place with others, especially within the church.

E. **What does this communicate to your neighbor?**

1. Loving your neighbor points people to God whereas quarreling with others may lead people away from God.
2. Loving your neighbor fosters immediate feelings of affirmation and agreement in the lives of others whereas quarreling with others fosters immediate feelings of disapproval in the lives of others.
3. Loving your neighbor promotes the well-being of others whereas quarreling with others reflects an attempt at self-affirmation.
4. Loving your neighbors promotes a mindset of servanthood in others whereas quarreling promotes a mindset of cynicism, suspicion.
5. Loving your neighbor reveals the character of servanthood whereas quarreling with others reveals one’s selfishness.

² *Our Daily Bread*, “The Foot-Washing God” –August 22nd 2008 (June-July-August 2008: Volume 5: 3,4,5). RBC Ministries.

³ *Our Daily Bread*, “The Foot-Washing God” –August 22nd 2008 (June-July-August 2008: Volume 5: 3,4,5). RBC Ministries.

- F. Let me put it this way: When you love your neighbor you are promoting God's interests in His ways. When you do not love your neighbor, you bring dishonor to His name.
- G. But these stories and statements beg a number of questions. Consider the following:
1. What does it "**biblically**" mean to love your neighbor?
 2. How does the greatest commandment to love God with every aspect of your being **relate** to the second commandment to love one's neighbor as yourself?
 3. **Who is your neighbor?** Are they those who are only in your sphere of influence or are they even those people who live in remote places whom you may never meet?
 4. **To what extent do I love my neighbor?** Are there **any constraints** to this command? What if my neighbor take advantage of me, my resources, time, and energy?
 5. What is the **best way** to love my neighbor?
 6. What does it mean to love your neighbor "**as your self**?"
 7. Does that mean I need to love myself first **before** I can love others?

This evening we are going to attempt to answer at least some of these questions. However, I must say this is one of the most difficult studies to consider because so much is at stake. Why do I say so? Because I'm talking about how to minister to others in such a way that it brings honor to God. What kind of testimony, what type of distinctiveness, what type of representation of Jesus Christ am I offering to others in the way I interact with them? Do they see Jesus Christ? Is the fruit of the spirit evident? Do they know that I minister to them because it is a result of my whole hearted pursuit of God for His own sake...that I really take pleasure in him and strive both carefully and impulsively after Him?

This study is also difficult for another reason. While the commandment to love my neighbor seems to me so clear and simple, consider the following:

You meet a hungry man; what shall you do? Give him what you have-very well. Ten and a hundred others come; shall you give to each? Shall you give until you have nothing left for yourself? And shall you not await their coming-shall you seek them out? You hear your neighbor is sick and is in need. You visit him, you help and console him, as well as you can. Shall you go farther? Shall you seek the sick and the needy everywhere? I'm sure you that within your community there are always hundreds of them, and that they need help and consolation...shall you always be on the road from one to the other? And what is to become of your own situation, your own affairs? Shall you calmly neglect them and always look out for others? There are hundreds of families in your area whom you might assist, by word and by deed, in bettering their conditions: shall you visit all of them, shall you look for them, help them, love them? Is this the meaning of the commandment to love your neighbor?

Let me put it this way: Is the duty to love your neighbor, always and under all circumstances, first to look after the affairs of others before attending to your own needs, the way this commandment is to be fulfilled? Or should caring for the welfare of others grow out of what God has given me? In other words, should I first seek to develop and exercise the capacities, powers, and resources that God has given me in order to meet the needs of others? If so, then the duty to care for the welfare of others is limited.

II. Exposition:

What does loving your neighbor as yourself mean? This is now where we direct our attention. Look closely at the words:³¹^x*The second is this:*^y*'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* *There is no other commandment*^z*greater than these.*⁴

- A. First observation is that this is a commandment: **“You shall.”** This command is not something that is conditional. Rather, it is obligatory from the mouth of Jesus Christ. Moreover, this commandment is not new:
1. It is originally found in Leviticus 19:18: ⁸^s*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but*^y*you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*
 2. Then a bit later in Leviticus 19:34 it states, *“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and*^k*you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*⁵
- B. Second observation is that the scribe had requested one commandment, but Jesus gave him two.
1. Thus, Jesus’ total answer is a combination of two passages from the O.T. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.
 2. The bottom line is that these two commandments belong together; they cannot be separated.
 - a. Why? “Love for man in Leviticus 19:18 grows out of love for God in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and is inseparable from it philosophically.”

^x [1 John 4:21]

^y Cited from Lev. 19:18; See Matt. 19:19

^z [Matt. 23:23]

⁴*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mk 12:31.

⁵ Prov. 20:22; Rom. 12:17, 19; Heb. 10:30

⁸ Matt. 5:43; Cited Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8

^k Deut. 10:19; See ver. 18

⁵*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Le 19:34.

C. **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

1. Notice the word “love.” Just like in the previous verse “*agape*” is used. This expressed a love of intelligence and purpose that is far above brotherly love (*phileo*). This is a love that is more than just “liking” or “affection.” It is a sacrificial love, a qualitative love that is used in the previous verse. However, it is different in that verse 31 pertains to love from one person to another.⁶
2. Leviticus 19:18: What does “*love*” mean when originally used in O.T. [*’ahab*, *’ahab* /aw-**hab**/] v. A primitive root; TWOT 29; GK 170; 208 occurrences; AV translates as “love” 169 times, “lover(s)” 19 times, “friend(s)” 12 times, “beloved” five times, “liketh” once, “lovely” once, and “loving” once. **1** to love. 1A (Qal). 1A1 human love for another, includes family, and sexual. 1A2 human appetite for objects such as food, drink, sleep, wisdom. 1A3 human love for or to God. 1A4 act of being a friend. 1A4A lover (participle). 1A4B friend (participle). 1A5 God’s love toward man. 1A5A to individual men. 1A5B to people Israel. 1A5C to righteousness. 1B (Niphal). 1B1 lovely (participle). 1B2 loveable (participle). 1C (Piel). 1C1 friends. 1C2 lovers (fig. of adulterers). **2** to like.⁷

D. **What does “neighbor” mean?**

1. The word, “*neighbor*” is a very rich concept in the O.T.
2. “*Neighbor*,” in the OT is one who lives nearby (Exod. 12:4; Jer. 12:14; Prov. 27:10) or, figuratively, one who is a fellow Israelite (Exod. 2:13; 1 Sam. 28:17). In the latter sense, one is also termed ‘brother’ (Lev. 25:25; Deut. 15:2-3; Neh. 5:1).
3. “As members of a community united by divine covenant, law, and teaching, the Israelites’ obligations to God were reflected in their moral obligations to each other. They were to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6). Thus, they were commanded concerning each other not to covet their neighbor’s wife or possessions (Exod. 20:16-17; Deut. 5:20-21); not to hold a neighbor’s garment for pledge past sunset (Exod. 22:25-26); not to steal, deal deceitfully, swear falsely (Lev. 19:11), or defraud (v. 13); not to gossip, or to be passive while injustice is being done to another (v. 16); not to hate one another (v. 17), to avenge or bear a grudge (v. 18), to take usury (Lev. 25:36-37), or to enslave (v.

⁶ ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*): vb.; **show love**, demonstrate love (1Jn 3:17); **3**. LN 25.104 **take pleasure in**, to love based on its regarded value (Jn 12:43)⁶

TWOT Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

GK Goodrick-Kohlenberger

⁷James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996), H157.

39); not to oppress (vv. 43, 46), to withhold loans or charity (Deut. 15:7-11), or to ignore a neighbor's stray animal or lost property (Deut. 22:1-4). The Israelites were obligated to each other for the property placed in one's care (Exod. 22:6-14), 'to love your neighbor as yourself' (Lev. 19:18), to help the poor through free loans (Lev. 25:35), or hiring the poor for pay (vv. 39-40), and the like. One who has harmed his neighbor will be punished in kind (Lev. 24:19-20, 22). God will destroy those who slander their neighbors (Ps. 101:5; cf. Prov. 11:9). To despise one's neighbor is to be devoid of wisdom (Prov. 11:12) and to sin (14:21)."⁸

4. In Leviticus 19:18 the neighbor is identified as "*one of your people*" i.e., fellow-Israelites. Then Leviticus 19:34 expands the neighbors to include resident aliens.
5. Interestingly, Jesus' contemporaries included only Jews and full proselytes. So, what we have here is revolutionary because Jesus redefined the term to mean "anyone with whom we have dealings at all (cf. Luke 10:25-27).
6. So, when Jesus quoted Lev. 19:18, he broadened it beyond the bounds of fellow Israelites and resident aliens. How do we know: Turn to Luke 10:25-37 and let me read the passage: The Parable of the Good Samaritan.⁹

LET'S READ LUKE 10:25-27.

7. Therefore, as he made clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37), references in the NT to loving one's neighbor are to be understood as referring to any human being (e.g., Rom. 13:8-9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).

Based upon the Good Samaritan we come to know that Jesus expanded the O.T. idea of "neighbor" to include every human being, whether near or remote.

- E. What does it mean to love your neighbor **AS YOURSELF**?
1. One interpretation we often hear is that in order to love others you first must love yourself. In other words, we need to learn to love ourselves. Consider the words by Chantique Brown in the popular song sung by Whitney Houston: *The Greatest Love of All*:

I believe that children ARE our future
 Teach them well and let them lead the way
 Show them all the beauty they possess inside
 Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
 Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be

⁸Paul J. Achtemeier, Publishers Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Includes Index., 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 695.

⁹ Idem.

I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadows
If I fail, if I succeed
At least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me
They can't take away my dignity
Because the greatest love of all
Is happening to me

Everybody's searching for a hero
People need someone to look up to
I never found anyone who fulfilled my needs
A lonely place to be
And so I learned to depend on me

I found the greatest love of all
Inside of me
The greatest love of all
Is easy to achieve
Learning to love yourself
It is the greatest love of all

I believe that children ARE our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be

I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadows
If I fail, if I succeed
At least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me
They can't take away my dignity
Because the greatest love of all
Is happening to me
I found the greatest love of all
Inside of me
The greatest love of all
Is easy to achieve
Learning to love yourself
It is the greatest love of all

And if by chance, that special place
That you've been dreaming of
Leads you to a lonely place
Find your strength in love
By Chantique Brown.

2. Mark 12:30 has been used to say that we are commanded to love ourselves. Therefore, there are those who unpack this verse this way: “You *shall love your neighbor just as you are to love yourself.*”
 - a. However, this interpretation is plainly wrong. Rather, self-love is assumed in this passage, not commanded.¹⁰
 - b. But does that mean that self-love is biblical? Actually it is biblical but it assumed to be true; however, self-love is not commanded. Moreover, any argument that says that the focus ought to be on self like Whitney

¹⁰ This portion is adapted from Dr. Dan Wallace’s article, “Is Self-Love Biblical: Matthew 23:39” at www.bible.org. He offers an outstanding argument based upon N.T. Greek grammar.

Houston sang across the radio waves needs to consider passages such as Philippians 2:3 that states that we are to regard one another as more important than yourselves.

- b. Finally, the example of the Lord Jesus follows this statement in Phil 2:3. Then in vv 6-11 Jesus is seen as the supreme example of self-sacrifice. In fact, verse 5 in Philippians 2 links Jesus' attitude to what should be our own: "*Have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.*" Thus, we too are to embrace this mindset of humility as a way of life.
 - c. Thus, I take it that the way to love your neighbor as yourself is to love them in the same way that you love yourself. Loving yourself is easy to do.
 - d. The love a person has naturally for himself is not to focus solely on himself—a constant tendency—but should be directed equally toward others.
3. **Moving on to verses 32-34. In vs. 32 we have the following statement: No (Gr., "no other") commandment is greater than these. Why? Because the two wholehearted love to God and one's neighbor is the sum and substance of the Law and the Prophets (cf. Matt. 22:40). To fulfill these commands is to fulfill all others.**¹¹
 4. What does it mean when a person is "not far from the kingdom of God" in verse 34? Consider the words of Warren Wiersbe. "It means he or she is facing truth honestly and is not interested in defending a "party line" or even personal prejudices. It means the person is testing his or her faith by what the Word of God says and not by what some religious group demands. People close to the kingdom have the courage to stand up for what is true even if they lose some friends and make some new enemies."¹²

III. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

- A. Because both commandments are related in Christ's answer to the scribe we need to realize that if we fervently love God, we will experience His love within and will express that love to others. We do not live by rules but by relationships, a loving relationship to God that enables us to have a loving relationship with others.
- B. At the beginning of the sermon I asked the question whether the commandment is to be defined as starting: always and under all circumstances, first look after the affairs of others before attending to my own.

¹¹John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:164.

¹²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Mk 11:27.

- C. I take it that this commandment to love one's neighbor, whether near or far, has certain constraints. I'm deriving these constraints from the whole of Scripture with particular emphasis on stewardship and skilled wisdom. Thus, let's consider what is the best way to love my neighbor? Let's consider Jesus' teaching on the stewardship of responsibilities in Luke 19:11-27 (cf. Matthew 25:14-30).
- D. This Parable of the 10 Minas sums up Jesus' teaching to the disciples. Each disciple had duties given to him by Jesus, and each was to carry out his responsibilities. But if you recall, the parable was addressed not only to a disciple but to the nation Israel at large, to show that it too had responsibilities. If the nation did not turn to Jesus, it would be punished.¹³

Read the passage.

- E. Therefore, applying this parable as we await for the king's return we need to be a wise steward of what God has given us. With that being said, I would like to offer three constraints on how to live this commandment out with the most biblical wisdom possible.¹⁴

First constraint:

1. Perhaps the best way to love my neighbor is by being placed in a position whereby my moral and intellectual excellence, my resources, and capacities develop. Let me unpack this by giving an illustration.
2. Let's say my grandma left in her will a large sum of money that would enable me to go to seminary. For a student to receive a Th.M at Dallas Seminary cost at least \$40,000 unless scholarships are provided. So, what should I do? Would I better fulfill that commandment by giving it to an organization that would feed the hungry and clothe the poor? Or would it be better for me to take this money, attend DTS, graduate and use the resources God has given me to more effectively minister to the hungry and the poor.
3. Or should I take this money, abandon the opportunity to study, and feed the hungry and clothe the poor by giving it all away. While you would perhaps praise the self-sacrifice, reminiscent of the rich young ruler, you would perhaps not applaud my choice nor would you recommend this example to other young dashing red-heads. No, you would perhaps say he could and ought to have put his grandma's resources towards the opportunity to study so that he could have done more for others in the long run. By developing his capacities and training, he could be better effective in sacrificial living and self-surrendering acts of love.

¹³John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:252.

¹⁴These three constraints are adapted from my reading of Friedrich Paulsen's *System of Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1899), 639-63.

4. One fear I have about this approach of developing one's resources in order to better fulfill this command as a wise steward of what God has given me, is that once I receive the training, once I develop the resources, I won't minister to those who are in need. I will become self-focused and somehow think my needs are more important than others or develop some entitlement mentality: I deserve more because I was educated at seminary. The reason why this is a concern is because the temptation exists that I will "see my brother in need and shut up my heart from him. And people will ask...and God will ask (rhetorically speaking), does the love of Christ abide in him? I say to that, "may it never be!" May I always be so tender to God that I'm moved with love, compassion, and care to Christ-worshipping action in loving my neighbor.

In sum, the first constraint to this command is perhaps limited by the duties which grow out of one's own life. Perhaps I can best care for the welfare of others by being placed in a position whereby my moral and intellectual excellence, my resources, and capacities develop.

Second constraint:

5. But there is another constraint I've thought about as I seek to fulfill this command.
6. I must guard against destroying the independence of the one I'm serving-for every person is made in the image of God and my assistance may foster laziness, selfishness, entitlement mentality if I fail to realize that my goal is to equip, to enable, not foster dependence or even an attitude that says by me the giver-"You owe me!"
7. In other words, as I seek to fulfill this command to my love my neighbor, my actions must not weaken his independence; otherwise it ceases to be beneficial-it may become an evil.

Let me illustrate: If I solved every problem my son faces, then I would not be helping him in the long run. Rather, I would foster dependency. Rather, my goal is not merely to assist them, but to enable others unto moral and intellectual excellence-for the glory of God.

8. So, in the same way I want to love my neighbor without my neighbor becoming dependent upon me. No, I want my neighbor to depend upon the Lord and allow Him to see the privilege of being used by Him with what God has given me. The idea is to give in order to equip instead of fostering dependency.

Third constraint:

9. We each possess, I hope at least, special relationships with certain people. For some it may be their children, their siblings, their nephews, nieces, parents, grandparents, dear friends, church family, and others with whom we have special relations or certain sympathies. But if anyone were to give away his fortune to strangers and beggars or to all kinds of charitable enterprises to the neglect of his family, then this commandment was not honored.

In Paul's list of deacon qualification of overseers he writes in 1 Timothy 3:4-5:
"He must manage his own household well and keep his children in control without losing his dignity. But if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for the church of God?"

IV. CONCLUSION:

Nevertheless, there may be a time, an opportunity, a duty, whereby you have to sacrifice everything for your neighbor unto the glory of God. If that time comes, you may be called to sacrifice your livelihood to minister to others. There may be an occasion where people have to depend upon you. And third, you may have to love those whom you may never have the privilege of ever knowing. One example of such a case where all three constraints are superseded is found in the book of Esther.

In the Book of Esther we have a story of love, sacrifice, and God's timing. Mordecai, a Jew in exile, refused to bow to Haman, second in command to King Ahasuerus. Haman became furious and plotted to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews. So Haman deceived the king and persuaded him to issue an edict condemning the Jews to death. When Mordecai told his cousin Queen Esther about the edict, he urged her to intervene. "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" He said (Esther 4:14). Approaching the king uninvited was punishable by death. But Esther seized the moment to save her people! "If I perish, I perish." God used Esther to save her people.¹⁵

Though God may not call you to submit your life unto sacrifice, you are called to surrender yourself to minister to the needs of others. What is the best way?

When you open your mind to know Christ, your heart to love Christ, and your will to obey Christ, He inflames your mind to see the needs of others, your heart to love others, and your will to serve others. Therefore, love God with all your deep-seated affections, with all your thoughts, with all your mind, and with all your bodily powers and you will love your neighbor in a way that points people to Jesus Christ whose sacrifice saved us from our sins.

Father, we are your living representatives...people who seek to represent you and your ways in fulfilling the command to love your neighbor. Help us Father, I plead, to follow your will, to exercise your will, to offer a testimony by our words and works of the glorious grace that is found in you. Help us to be more compassionate, more loving, more serving, more merciful, and more giving. Help us to give without exploiting. Help us to give without fostering dependence upon us, but to foster dependence upon you. Lastly, Father, "assists us to do great things as though they were little, since we do them with Your power; and little things as though they were great, since we do them in Your name" (adapted from prayer by B. Pascal).

¹⁵ *Our Daily Bread*, "For Such a Time As This" by Marvin Williams-June 13th (June-July-August 2008).