

Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law [of Moses]. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)¹

Introduction

Most of us are familiar with the phrase “love your neighbor as yourself.” It comes from the Bible, and I have referenced some of the Scripture passages that say it in a few of my written Bible studies. I usually use it in the context of treating everyone the same and doing so in a loving and nonjudgmental manner. I was either taught or I simply assumed that the phrase meant or implied that we are to love others as we love ourselves. But is that what this phrase means?

During a group Bible study, we read the above passage in the context of being ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). Frankly, I had not really examined the phrase “love your neighbor as yourself” until one of our members offered his insight after reading the passage—an insight based on something he had read that was different than I had previously considered. First, he noted that the phrase does *not* say “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” He added that perhaps it means to love others by letting Christ work through us as who we are (e.g., using our personality, talents, etc.). Another person suggested that it has to do with the *Golden Rule*, meaning that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. She added her personal concern about how to reconcile loving others as ourselves while also standing firm in our faith. This brief discussion was intriguing and most welcome—I saw merit in both observations. I immediately decided in my mind that I wanted and needed to investigate Scripture.

Who is our neighbor? How are we to love our neighbor? Am I to love my neighbor as I love myself? What does the Bible say about it? The following study represents my thoughts on the meaning of this phrase for your consideration, based on my understanding of the Bible references that are included. Now I see this phrase in a new light, and I hope this study provides new insight to you.

“Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

There are eight passages in Scripture that contain the phrase “love your neighbor as yourself.” The first appearance is part of a commandment of the Lord God to the people of Israel through His prophet Moses. Therefore, it is part of the Law of Moses.

“You shall not hate your fellow countryman [brother, *Israelite*] in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him [*share in his guilt*]. You shall not take

¹ All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible (NASB Side-Column Reference Edition, Copyright © 1996 by The Lockman Foundation)* unless otherwise noted. Nonbolded words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version (KJV)* or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons [children] of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:17-18)

Jesus used this phrase in four passages in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. On the first occasion He answered a question by associating loving our neighbor with the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:16-19). The other three passages may all be equivalent passages that refer to another occasion where Jesus answered a question from a teacher of the Law of Moses by saying that the Law is summed up or fulfilled by loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28).

And someone came to Him [Jesus] and said, “Teacher [Good Master], what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good [that is, God]; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor Your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 19:16-19)

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher [Master], which is the great commandment in the Law [of Moses]?” 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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:34-40)

One of the scribes [teachers of the Law of Moses] came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and 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.’ The second is [like] this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:28-31)

And a lawyer stood up and put Him [Jesus] to the test, saying, “Teacher [Master], what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And He said to him, “What is written in the Law [of Moses]? How does it read to you?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and [love] your neighbor as yourself.” And He said to him, “you have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” (Luke 10:25-28)

This phrase also appears in the book of James. In this instance, James was saying to kingdom believers of Israel and to those who professed to be believers (false brethren from among the people of Israel) that if a person did not love his neighbor as himself, then he was guilty of transgressing the entire Law of Moses.

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law [of Moses] as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He [the Lord God] who said, “Do not

commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11)

The Apostle Paul used it twice in his letters. In both instances he was exhorting the brethren—members of the body of Christ—to love one another because love is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law [of Moses]. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

For you were called to freedom [liberty],² brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law [of Moses] is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Galatians 5:13-14)

So, we have seen that the phrase “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” first appears as a commandment in the Law of Moses, and then is used by Jesus and Paul to say that it sums up the entire Law. James implied the same thing but through a different perspective by saying that disobedience to this commandment meant that the person was transgressing the entire Law of Moses.

Three of the above passages include the commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. Neither this commandment nor the one to love our neighbor as ourself is in the Ten Commandments. However, both are part of the Law of Moses and are the foundation of the entire Law (Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Leviticus 19:17-18). That is, if a person truly kept these two commandments, then all the others would automatically be kept. Does this mean that God expects us to obey the Law of Moses? I address this question near the end of this study.

Who is Our Neighbor?

We are commanded to love our neighbor, but who is our neighbor? Are our neighbors people who live near us, people who are similar to us, people we like, other Christians, or everyone? Neighbors are mentioned throughout Scripture. One well-known passage about *the good Samaritan* even answers the question, “And who is my neighbor?”

And a lawyer [a teacher of the Law of Moses] stood up and put Him [Jesus] to the test, saying, “Teacher [Master], what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And He said to him, “What is written in the Law [of Moses]? How does it read to you?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and

² Paul was referring to freedom from the bondage and curse of the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1-14; 4:21-31). Because the Law is perfect and we are not, it condemned all people to death (II Corinthians 3:4-6). However, even though we are no longer under the Law, we should not take advantage of our freedom and continue to intentionally sin and live under its control (Romans 6:1-19).

you will live.” But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii [*silver coins*] and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” and he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.” (Luke 10:25-37)

There is much prophetic significance to this passage regarding Christ and Israel’s future but let us limit ourselves (mostly) to the example at hand. The hypothetical man who was robbed and beaten apparently was a Jew from Jerusalem. Both the priest and the Levite, representing spiritual leaders of Judea and, therefore, fellow Jews of the man, both decided to pass him by without rendering assistance. The Jews were not to associate with Samaritans (I Kings 12:19; Matthew 10:5-6; John 4:7-26),³ and yet it was a Samaritan who went above and beyond to help the injured man. The account does not say whether the Samaritan knew that the injured man was a Jew. When Jesus asked the Jewish lawyer who among the three proved to be a neighbor to the injured man, he correctly responded that the Samaritan was the neighbor.

An important lesson we can derive from this story is that a person’s background does not determine whether he or she is our neighbor. Stated another way is that we are to help others in need regardless of their background. In this example, therefore, the same lesson applies if the roles were reversed (i.e., the Samaritan was beaten and a Jew rendered assistance). Although the Jews of Judea were not to associate with Samaritans, they were to treat them as neighbors.

Other verses and passages, including those that follow, describe who a neighbor is and support the above passage about the Samaritan.

“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native [*born*] among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

³ The Samaritans were Jews by heritage but of the tribes that split from Judah (referred to as *Judea* in the New Testament) after King Solomon’s reign. They were alienated from God by worshiping their own gods and worshiping in the city of Samaria instead of God’s chosen city of Jerusalem (I Kings 11:9-13, 31-35; 12:16-20; 16:29). As part of God’s prophetic plan, He will reunite Judea and Samaria (also often referred to as *Israel* in the Old Testament, thus we have the record of the kings of Judah and Israel) into the full nation of Israel sometime after the rapture (Ezekiel 37:15-23; Micah 2:12-13). That is why in Jesus’ last commands to His disciples He instructed them to preach the gospel of the kingdom first to Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the rest of the world (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:6-8). The fulfillment of this command was prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24:14 and apparently will be fulfilled by the 144,000 witnesses during the time of great tribulation (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5). See my study **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** for more information on this subject.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I [*Jesus*] say to you, love your enemies and pray for those [bless them] who persecute you, so that you may be sons [children] of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles [*heathen*] do the same?” (Matthew 5:43-47)

So then, while we [*believers*] have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith [*fellow brethren*]. (Galatians 6:10)

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted [*timid*], help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

From these passages, we see that our neighbors are not only our fellow believers but everyone with whom we come in contact—even those who hate us or treat us unjustly. Furthermore, we are to be good to our neighbors, and our goodness is to be applied without discrimination. It makes no difference regarding race, color, gender (or sexual identification), nationality, creed, physical or mental challenges, financial status, level of education, political affiliation, etc.—our neighbor is our neighbor.

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario. My next-door neighbor is a generally mean person and never has a kind word to say to me or my family, and I do not and probably should not associate with him. One day he falls and hurts himself. As his neighbor, what should I do? I hope I would do everything I can to help him, with no thought about how he has treated me and others, and expecting nothing in return.

How Do We Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves?

We have seen that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and that everyone is our neighbor without distinction. How do we do this? I think that it is important to investigate what is meant by *love*, and then what it means to love our neighbors *as ourselves* and how we ought to do it.

Love

Brethren, we cannot love our neighbor as we are to love God (Mark 12:28-30). No one compares to the righteous and Almighty God (Romans 11:33-36; Psalm 139:1-4). We are not to worship our neighbor, and our neighbor has nothing to do with our salvation. Nor do I think we are to love our neighbor as we should love our parents, spouse, or children. The familiarity and intimacy associated with our loved ones are different and greater than we can bestow on others. However, I believe that our loved ones fall under the general category of *neighbor*. That is, what applies to our neighbor should also apply to our loved ones. So, how are we supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves?

God’s Love for Us

Before we look at how to love our neighbors as ourselves, it is necessary to understand what love is and the source of love. Brethren, God is not only the author of love, but He is love (I John 4:7-8). Please

consider the following passages that reveal how God expressed His love toward us and continues to do so.

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

For I [Paul] am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions [sins], made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (I John 4:9-11)

We love, because He [God] first loved us. (I John 4:19)

Think about it, brethren. The Almighty God, creator of the universe, loved us unrighteous sinners so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. He sent His Son to pay the penalty that we deserve to pay—spiritual death and eternal separation from God (Acts 2:22-36; Romans 3:21-26). He sealed that payment by raising Christ from the dead, whose death was both physical and spiritual (Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:5-11). Christ was temporarily separated from His Father because the sin of the world was imputed to Him (II Corinthians 5:21). Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to pay for our sins is the gospel (good news) of salvation. If we believe it, then we are adopted by God as His own children and have the certain hope of eternal life (Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 1:3-8). Do you believe that Christ died for you?

Now I [Paul] make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the

washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

Love Ourselves?

As noted at the beginning of this study, the Bible does not say that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. But is it correct to interpret the commandment in this way? What does it mean to love oneself? We must be careful to understand what Scripture says about this subject.

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked [*resentful*], does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends. (II Corinthians 10:17-18)

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:16)

Let us not become boastful [*conceited*], challenging one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:26)

(See also I Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:2-3)

A danger of loving oneself is pride, and pride leads to so many other problems and sins. The book of Proverbs has much to say about pride (e.g., Proverbs 11:2; 16:18-19; 21:24; 29:23). The Jewish religious leaders in Jesus' day were hypocrites because of their pride (Matthew 23:1-33). Most of the problems among the Corinthian and Galatian brethren were rooted in pride (I Corinthians 3:1-4; 4:6-7; Galatians 3:1-3). Unfortunately, the Apostle Paul warned that the display of man's nature will only get worse because the last days leading up to the rapture will be characterized by men who are lovers of themselves, boastful, and arrogant among many other vices.⁴ These seem to be common traits today, or at least have become increasingly noticeable.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers [blasphemers], disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. (II Timothy 3:1-5)

Is there a proper manner that we ought to love ourselves? I believe there is. For children of God (believers), our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16-17)—we are in Christ and He is in us (Romans 8:1, 9-11; I Corinthians 1:30; 12:27; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 1:25-27). Therefore, I

⁴ Paul was referring to the last days of this dispensation (God's administration) of grace prior to the rapture (see also II Timothy 3:10-13; 4:3-4). He was not referring to the prophetic last days that began at the time of the conception of Jesus and the appearance of John the Baptist and will end at the final judgment at the great white throne. See my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** that addresses the rapture and the prophetic last days.

believe that God wants us to take care of our bodies both spiritually and physically. This is supported by Paul's instructions for a husband to love his wife as his own body, which he should naturally nourish and cherish.

Or do you [*believer*] not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. (Ephesians 5:28-30)

He who gets wisdom⁵ loves his own soul [*life*]; he who keeps understanding will find good. (Proverbs 19:8)

We must be careful, however, because even this type of self-love can be motivated by, or lead to, pride. It is easy to focus our attention on our physical appearance as if we are in competition with our neighbors to be better than them (I Timothy 4:8). The same can hold true for spiritual nourishment if we want to be seen or recognized as more spiritual than our fellow brethren by openly praying more, studying more, or by being more active in our church or mission (Matthew 6:1-8). Our goal should be to grow in our salvation and be better servants for our Lord and not to show others how spiritual we are (Philippians 3:7-11; Ephesians 4:11-16).

There is another perspective regarding self-love that needs to be addressed here. I think there are many believers (perhaps all of us at times) who feel worthless—they do not feel loved and, correspondingly, have difficulty loving others. This overwhelming feeling can be caused by many factors but, perhaps, a major one is how inconsiderately, poorly, or judgmentally they are treated by others including family members and fellow believers. The first thought that comes to mind is to honestly evaluate how am I treating people. Furthermore, I believe that we can help our suffering brethren by showing them what they, and *all* believers, have in Christ through salvation. Among other things, all believers are in Christ at the right hand of God, all are equal in Christ, and all have been blessed by God with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6, 18-23; 2:4-7; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). Every believer has been justified and made righteous by God through the work of Christ at the cross (Romans 5:6-11, 18-19; I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 5:21). We have been made complete in Christ, and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Colossians 2:9-10; Romans 8:38-39). Reassured with these truths, I hope that they, too, can go forward and love their neighbors as themselves.

Love Others as Ourselves

We are to love ourselves not in a prideful way, but in a physically and spiritually nourishing way because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that the Bible does not say that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Unfortunately, we struggle at physically and spiritually nourishing ourselves. Therefore, loving others should not be dependent on how successful we are at loving ourselves. Thankfully, the Bible tells us both how and why we ought to love our neighbors.

⁵ We are to seek and conform to the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of this world (I Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-13; Ephesians 1:15-21; 3:8-10; Colossians 1:9-12; 3:16).

“A new commandment I [Jesus] give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Let all that you do be done in love. (I Corinthians 16:14)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Therefore I [Paul], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [salvation] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Therefore be imitators [followers] of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ [God] rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints [children, believers]. (I Thessalonians 3:11-13)

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atonement sacrifice] for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (I John 4:9-11)

(See also John 15:12; II Corinthians 5:14-15; Ephesians 3:14-19; 4:32; I Peter 4:8; I John 4:21)

Basically, therefore, we are to love others because God loves us and He wants us to love them. How do we go about doing this? Besides the example of the Samaritan, Scripture provides many real-life examples for us. The following representative verses and passages contain the word *neighbor* and instruct us about how to consider or treat our neighbors.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification [to build him up]. (Romans 15:1-2)

All things are lawful [permissible], but not all things are profitable [beneficial]. All things are lawful, but not all things edify [are constructive]. Let no one seek his own good [welfare], but that of his neighbor. (I Corinthians 10:23-24)

Therefore, laying aside falsehood [lying], speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25)

“You shall not bear [give] false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16)

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17)

“You shall not oppress [defraud] your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:13-14)

“You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer [show favoritism] to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:15-16)

O Lord, who may abide in Your tent [tabernacle, sanctuary]? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend. (Psalm 15:1-3)

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,” when you have it with you. Do not devise harm against your neighbor, while he lives securely [trustingly] beside you.” (Proverbs 3:27-29)

The righteous [person] is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. (Proverbs 12:26)

He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor. (Proverbs 14:21)

(See also Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Proverbs 24:28-29; 27:10)

These verses and passages provide the following instructions to us. Some other verses and passages that provide supporting exhortations on how to treat others, including those that do not contain the word *neighbor*, are enclosed in parentheses for your consideration.

- We are to please our neighbor for his good, to his edification (I Corinthians 10:31-33).
- We are to speak truth with our neighbor (Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:14-16).
- We are to be a guide or good example to our neighbor (I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:6-8).
- We are not to covet anything that belongs to our neighbor (I Timothy 6:7-8; Philippians 4:11-13).
- We are not to bear false witness against our neighbor (Mark 14:53-59; Acts 6:8-14; 24:1-9).
- We are not to judge our neighbor unfairly by showing partiality or favoritism (I Timothy 5:19-21; James 2:1-4).
- We are not to defraud or rob our neighbor (I Corinthians 6:7-8; Ephesians 4:28).
- We are not to slander or do any evil toward our neighbor (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8).
- We are not to despise our neighbor because God considers that to be sin (Proverbs 11:12).

Of course, there are many other passages in the Bible that do not mention the word *neighbor* but that provide instructions on how we are to treat or respond to other people. For example, please read the following verses to see some more things that God expects of us. Each passage contains more than one attitude or action to love our neighbor or, conversely, demonstrates our lack of love (or the opposite of love).

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints [*fellow brethren*], practicing hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13)

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [*nonbelievers*], making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

We urge you, brethren, admonish [*warn*] the unruly, encourage the fainthearted [*timid*], help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

(See also II Corinthians 13:11; Colossians 3:14-17; Romans 14:4; James 4:12)

Evil for Evil?

Perhaps the most difficult exhortation associated with loving our neighbors as ourselves is to not respond in like manner toward those who hate or persecute us. Payback (revenge) for actual or perceived words or actions against us is part of our nature as amply demonstrated by mankind since the beginning. As believers, however, not only are we commanded by God not to respond to evil with evil, we are commanded to love our enemies, help them in time of need, and, *if possible*, be at peace with them. Further still, we are to bless those who persecute us. Please carefully consider the following passages.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but

leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (I Thessalonians 5:15)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I [*Jesus*] say to you, love your enemies and pray for those [bless them] who persecute you, so that you may be sons [children] of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles [*heathen*] do the same?” (Matthew 5:43-47)

Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, “Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render [*pay back*] to the man according to his work.” (Proverbs 24:28-29)

To this present hour we [*Paul and his coworkers*] are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate [*answer kindly*]; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now. (I Corinthians 4:11-13)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)

(See also Psalm 15:1-3; Luke 6:27-36)

Brethren, it is not always possible, or perhaps it is rarely possible, to be at peace with (or reconcile with) those who hate or work against us. We may have the desire to do so, but often those working against us do not have a similar desire—the barrier appears to be too great to overcome. However, we are to treat them as our neighbor anyway and leave vengeance, or whatever outcome, to God. We never know when God may work through both sides and provide the peace that we thought was impossible.

Do Unto Others

What does it mean, then, to love our neighbor as ourself? We have looked at love, from the love of God to the exhortations to love others because of His love for us. From the scriptural perspective, loving ourself appears to be limited to spiritually and physically nurturing our own body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit and because we are members of the body of Christ—the church that Christ cherishes (Ephesians 5:29-30).

We have also examined who our neighbors are and how we should treat them. It turns out that our neighbors are everyone with whom we come in contact, even those who treat us as enemies. There is no lack of exhortations on how we should demonstrate our love for our neighbors as well as how not to treat them. In Romans 13:8-10 we see that love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Upon considering all the passages that are presented in the study, and more that I did not type out or reference, I believe that the exhortation does not mean that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Instead, I believe that to love our neighbors as ourselves means to treat them how we want to be treated. This is by no means an original thought because the Bible says that we ought to treat people as we want them to treat us. This is the so-called *Golden Rule*⁶ about which multitudes of people—believers and nonbelievers alike—are familiar. The source of the *Golden Rule* is our Bible, as demonstrated through the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31.

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is [sums up] the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

“But I [Jesus] say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners⁷ love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons [children] of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:27-36)

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus said that treating others the way we want to be treated sums up the Law and the Prophets. Because He also said that loving our neighbor as ourself also sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:34-40), I believe that these two commands are one in the same. Think of all of instructions on how God expects us to treat others, through both our thoughts and our actions. It seems obvious that we would want to be thought of and treated the same way. Additionally, He tells us how not to treat others. No one would want other people to treat us in that manner.

When recalling my own experiences, several things come to mind regarding treating others in the way I want to be treated. Please consider the following examples and think of your experiences and expectations. I appreciate it when:

- Someone is thinking of me, praying for me, or tries to help me in my time of need.
- I am treated fairly.
- People are kind and courteous to me.
- I receive a smile.
- People do not lie or make excuses to me.
- Something I have done or said is accurately represented by others and not used to slander me.
- I receive a sincere “Thank you” when I have done something for someone.
- My apology is sincerely accepted.

⁶ The name *Golden Rule* does not appear in the Bible but its concept is from the Bible.

⁷ Everyone sins, but *sinners* in this context refers to those who are not of God or are opposed to Him—nonbelievers.

How Do We Do It?

We have seen how God wants us to think about and treat our neighbors and why we should do so. Scripture furnishes many responses that are not what we might normally do or even consider doing. Are we really supposed to treat others with goodness and love despite our differences? Are we really to respond to evil directed against us with goodness? Yes, but how do we do what God expects us to do?

As suggested at the beginning of this study, I believe that the only way that we can love our neighbors as ourselves is by letting Christ work through us. We cannot do what God wants us to do through our own natural ability. Our natural self is sinful and contrary to God (Romans 3:9-18; 8:5-8; I Corinthians 2:14). Upon believing the gospel of salvation, however, God imputed the nature of Christ to us when He adopted us as His children—we are in Christ and He is in us. The only true goodness that can come out of us is by the working of God through us (Ephesians 2:10).

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;⁸ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Furthermore, God works through us by using our individual personalities and personal skills—everyone is different. Timothy and Titus, coworkers of the Apostle Paul, come to mind. Through Paul's letters to Timothy, we get the sense that Timothy was unassertive and perhaps physically frail (I Timothy 4:12; 5:23; 6:20-21). On the other hand, Paul's instructions to Titus indicate that he was a more confident and outgoing person who could convince people to do the right thing (Titus 1:5-6; 2:11-15; II Corinthians 7:13-15). Both men were different but were used mightily by God. Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband who one would assume would have different perspectives and would work with people in different ways, also were used by God in their service to Paul and by helping others understand the word of God (Acts 18:1-3, 24-26; Romans 16:3-5). We should not try to be someone we are not, which gives a false impression. Sooner or later others will see through our façade, and we will lose their trust.

We are ambassadors for Christ; that is, we are His representatives on this earth (II Corinthians 5:20). Just as with our political ambassadors, however, we can either be good ambassadors or poor ambassadors. God has provided us the capability and tools through His Holy Spirit and Christ to do what He expects of us (II Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 4:12-13). We need to humbly submit ourselves to God and desire to do the right thing (Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 13:5-8; I Peter 3:13-17). This requires a conscious effort (self-discipline) to suppress our sin nature and focus on God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:8-14; I Timothy 4:6-8; Colossians 3:1-17). Brethren, obedience to God and His word does not come naturally, so there is no room for boasting when we actually do obey God except in God Himself (I Corinthians 1:26-31; II Corinthians 10:17-18).

We are not to live for ourselves but for God and our Lord Jesus Christ because of what Christ did for us at the cross (Galatians 2:20). If we are living for God, then we are more apt to obey the many aspects of the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. May the light of Christ shine through us as we deal with our neighbors (Philippians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:9-14; Ephesians 5:8-14).

⁸ Paul was not saying that we are to earn our salvation, which we cannot do, but to humbly walk worthy of the salvation that God had graciously given us (Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9; 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12).

For the love of Christ controls [compels] us [believers], having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. (II Corinthians 5:14-15)

Therefore if [because] you [brethren] have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly [walk honestly] as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:12-14)

Stand Firm in Our Faith

The Bible has much to say about loving our neighbors as ourselves, even if our neighbors mistreat or do evil to us. How can we reconcile these commandments and exhortations with our instructions to stand firm in our faith (and in *the* faith—Ephesians 4:11-13; Colossians 1:21-23), which the Bible also says that we should do? Please consider the following passages that are just as true as the ones we have already looked at.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast [firm], immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (I Corinthians 15:58)

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [the Law of Moses]. (Galatians 5:1)

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I [Paul] come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (Philippians 1:27-28)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one [Satan]. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)

(See also I Corinthians 16:13-14; Philippians 4:1; I Thessalonians 3:6-8)

From these passages we see how we are exhorted to stand firm in our faith. Please note that the armor of God that we are to put on is for the purpose of protection. Our true enemy is Satan and his spiritual forces of wickedness; therefore, those who persecute us are tools of Satan and are not our real enemies. How can we stand firm while at the same time loving our neighbors as ourselves? Standing firm in the faith involves depending on God for our strength (using His armor), not denying the truth of God, and using opportunities to share the word of God.

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form [appearance] of evil. (I Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. (Philippians 2:14-16)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [*nonbelievers*], making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

But the Bible, through Paul's exhortation to Timothy and his own contemplation when he faced his imminent execution (II Timothy 4:1-8), speaks of fighting the good fight of faith. Is this contradictory to the passages above? No. We usually think of fighting as an aggressive action, but the context of fighting the good fight of faith is standing firm (unwavering) in the faith through love and gentleness. We are not to attack those who oppose the word of God or our stand on it to intimidate or force them to believe the truth (or judge them if they do not do so). Instead, we are to make known His word through our stand for, or defense of, the gospel in a gracious manner (Philippians 1:3-7). Brethren, we cannot make anyone believe God or His word. We must always remember that only God, through His Spirit, opens our eyes to understanding His truth (Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:9-12; Acts 16:14; Luke 24:44-45).

But flee from these things,⁹ you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (I Timothy 6:11-12)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (II Timothy 2:24-26)

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and

⁹ Paul was telling Timothy that we must flee from the love of money, which leads to all sorts of evil (I Timothy 6:6-10).

reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. (I Peter 3:13-16)

Loving our neighbors as ourselves does not require us to be like our neighbors or do as they do. We are not to conform to the ways of this sinful world; instead, we are to flee from sin (the deeds of the flesh) by behaving properly according to the Spirit of God (Romans 13:12-14; Galatians 5:16-25; Colossians 3:1-17). Brethren, we need to seriously evaluate what we do with our friends and acquaintances. Do our actions or associations bring honor or dishonor to God? Are we being good ambassadors for Christ?

Therefore I [Paul] urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [reasonable] service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons [children] of disobedience [nonbelievers]. Therefore do not be partakers with them;¹⁰ for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn [proving] what is pleasing to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:6-10)

If we live for Christ we will also suffer for Christ because this sinful world, which includes our neighbors, will react to the truth of God by working against us (Philippians 1:27-30). The question is in what manner or attitude should we respond to those who disparage our Lord or our faith or try to get us to join in their sinful ways? We are to do so with love and grace, and we must always remember to never pay back evil for evil.

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (II Timothy 3:12)

Unfortunately, our opposition may not come so much from nonbelievers as from fellow brethren and those who profess to be saved¹¹ (Galatians 5:13-15; Ephesians 4:25-32). For example, they may verbally attack or slander us for our understanding of (and our stand for) the word of God or for not conforming with them in activities that are contrary to the will of God. Consequently, standing firm in our faith may require us to correct fellow brethren or even separate ourselves from them (Romans 16:17-18; II Thessalonians 3:6; II Timothy 2:20-26). This is exceedingly difficult to do, but it is for our own good as well as for our fellow believers (I Corinthians 5:1-13). However, we need to do so in the same way we would want to be treated. That is, without hate and in a humble manner that edifies instead of tears apart (Ephesians 4:29-32).

¹⁰ Paul was exhorting the Ephesian believers to not live according to sinfulness as the nonbelievers live (and as they themselves once lived—Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-24), but to live as representatives of Christ and the truth of God—the light of God—so that perhaps some may see their need for salvation (Ephesians 5:11-14).

¹¹ *Professing believers or false brethren* are those who falsely claim to believe the truth of God and the gospel of salvation, sometimes for some form of personal gain (Acts 8:9-24; II Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4; I Timothy 6:3-5). Paul referred to them as believing in vain (I Corinthians 15:1-2). It often may be difficult or even impossible for true believers to know if a person is a false believer—only God knows a person's heart.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training [instruction] in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

We urge you, brethren, admonish [warn] the unruly, encourage the fainthearted [*timid*], help the weak, be patient with everyone. (I Thessalonians 5:14)

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame [*feel* ashamed]. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. (II Thessalonians 3:14-15)

Brethren, standing firm in our faith is not an easy task, nor is doing so while loving our neighbors as ourselves. We need to scrutinize ourselves to make sure that we are not reacting to people in ways that serve our own purposes or satisfy our own ego. Standing firm is not a competition and should not be conducted at the expense of others. In all things we do involving others, we must remember and endeavor to love them as ourselves (I Corinthians 16:13-14).

The Law of Moses

As noted earlier in this study, each instance of the phrase “love your neighbor as yourself” in the Bible is associated with the Law of Moses. If the listener of the message actually obeyed this command, then he or she would be fulfilling the entire Law of Moses (Galatians 5:13-14). If not, on the other hand, then he or she would be demonstrating disobedience to the entire Law of Moses (James 2:8-11). This leads to the question, “Does God expect us to obey the Law of Moses?”¹²

Many believers—children of God—believe that we are to obey the Ten Commandments and at least parts of the rest of the Law of Moses (e.g., tithing, dietary laws, observances of the Sabbath, Passover, or other holy days, etc.). Most realize, however, that we are not supposed to offer sacrifices for our sins because Christ paid that penalty for us. There appears to be confusion among brethren on the matter of obedience to the Law of Moses. What does Scripture say?

The Law of Moses was God’s righteous law to His people Israel revealed through His prophet Moses. It is presented, described, and reiterated from Exodus 20 through the book of Deuteronomy. It consists of the Ten Commandments as well as the specific judgments associated with breaking them, descriptions of nearly all sins and associated consequences, what is considered *clean* and *unclean* (including dietary restrictions), tithing, peace and thanksgiving offerings, sacrifices, observances (holy days, months, and years), and other worship requirements.

The Law of Moses included, and was summarized by, the following commandments restated by Jesus when He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (see Deuteronomy 6:5), and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (see Leviticus 19:18). That is, if a person genuinely kept these two commandments, then all the others would

¹² See my study **The Law of Moses** that describes the Law and explains why we are no longer under its jurisdiction and why we are not to claim its promises.

automatically be kept. Besides Christ Himself, has anyone ever kept these commandments (Matthew 5:17; II Corinthians 5:21)? No.

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher [Master], which is the great commandment in the Law [of Moses]?” 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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:34-40)

The Law of Moses is righteous, and *no one* could keep these two commandments, let alone the entire Law, because of our sin nature.¹³ Because the Law is righteous and we are not, it was a curse not only for the people of Israel but for the whole world—no one could attain the righteousness of God (Galatians 3:10-14; Romans 3:9-10). In truth, the Law killed us (II Corinthians 3:6). Only those who believed that the Law was the word of God, humbly acknowledged their sinfulness and inability to attain righteousness through their own works, and diligently tried to obey it by faith were adopted as children of God. Moses and some of the people of Israel in his day and afterward understood this (e.g., Psalm 32:1-2).

We are not to try to keep parts of the Law of Moses, because then we would be obligated to keep the entire Law (Galatians 3:10; 5:1-6). Through the Apostle Paul, we learn that the Law of Moses was taken out of our way—it was figuratively nailed to the cross with Christ (Colossians 2:13-14; Galatians 2:21). In his letters to the Roman and Galatian believers, as well as in some of his other letters and in the book of Acts, Paul emphasized that we are no longer under the Law of Moses in this dispensation (administration) of the grace of God (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 6:14; Galatians 3:19-26; Ephesians 3:1-12).

Now we know that whatever the Law [of Moses] says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed [shut] and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; who God displayed publicly as a propitiation [atonement sacrifice] in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.¹⁴ (Romans 3:19-26)

But what about the Ten Commandments? I was taught that, at the very least, we are to keep them. Brethren, we are not bound to the Ten Commandments, either, because they are part of the Law of Moses. That does not mean that principles of the Ten Commandments or other parts of the Law do not

¹³ However, when God redeems His people of Israel and establishes their prophesied kingdom on earth, they will automatically keep these two commandments (and, therefore, the entire Law of Moses) because it will be written on their hearts—they will be changed to sinless people (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 37:24-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

¹⁴ Those who believe that Christ died for our sins are justified and considered righteous by God (Romans 4:22-25; 5:1-2, 6-11, 18-19).

apply to us. I have referenced several verses and passages from the Law of Moses in this study to demonstrate how we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of clarification, however, let us take a brief look at the Ten Commandments.

A fact often overlooked by many Christians is that the punishment for disobeying *four* of the commandments was the death penalty. These are breaking the Sabbath requirements (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:15), striking or cursing your mother or father (Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17), murder (Exodus 20:13; 21:12), and adultery (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10). Bearing false witness could also result in the death penalty, if such false testimony resulted in the unjust death of another person (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 19:18-21).

Although we are not under the Law of Moses and subject to its associated penalties, the intent and purpose of nine of the commandments (excluding keeping the Sabbath) were true before the Law was instituted and continue to hold true for believers in this dispensation of grace. They are unchanging principles of God, and He expects His children to believe them and live accordingly.

- First commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3). This principle applies to us (Galatians 4:8-9).
- Second commandment: You shall not make yourself an idol or worship idols (Exodus 20:4-6). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 8:1-6).
- Third commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain¹⁵ (Exodus 20:7). This principle applies to us (II Thessalonians 1:11-12; Ephesians 4:29-30).
- Fourth commandment: Keep the Sabbath day holy (Exodus 20:8-11). There are no Sabbath days or any other holy days, weeks, months, seasons, or years to observe in this dispensation of grace (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17).
- Fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 6:1-2).
- Sixth commandment: You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13). This principle applies to us (Romans 1:28-32; I Timothy 1:8-11).
- Seventh commandment: You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 6:9-10).
- Eighth commandment: You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:28).
- Ninth commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:25, 31).
- Tenth commandment: You shall not covet (Exodus 20:17). This principle applies to us (Romans 7:7-8; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:5).

¹⁵ Not only is it wrong to use God's name (or *Christ* or *Jesus*) in a curse against someone or something or as an oath (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12), it is also wrong to attribute something to God that is contrary to, or in addition to, the written word of God. This is done through misrepresenting the word (Galatians 3:1-3; Ephesians 5:6; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 4:3-4) or claiming to have received an imagined or fabricated dream, vision, or other special revelation (Colossians 2:18). God's word to us is complete (Colossians 1:24-27; Ephesians 3:8-12; Revelation 22:18-19).

Please consider again that Jesus told His people, to whom the Law of Moses was given and directly applied, that the entire Law is summed up by the commandments to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind, and to love their neighbors as themselves. How do these two commandments do this? Loving God with all their means covered the first four commandments, while loving their neighbors covered the last six commandments. So, if they truly did both of these things (which they did not do because of their sin nature), all of the details of the rest of the Law of Moses would automatically be obeyed.

If no one could keep it, why did God give the Law—His Law—in the first place? Not until the Apostle Paul was it definitely revealed that the Law was provided to show us our sin (through the Law we have the knowledge of sin—Romans 3:19-20) and that we are unable to attain the righteousness of God through our own works (e.g., by completely obeying or fulfilling the Law—Romans 3:21-26; 4:4-5). Besides showing us what sin is, Jesus told His disciples and His people of Israel that the Law of Moses is broken by not just outwardly disobeying the requirements of the Law but also by the sinful intent of the heart (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28). Because the Law condemned all people to spiritual death, we needed Christ's sacrifice for us to obtain the righteousness of God and eternal life through faith (Romans 5:6-11; Titus 3:4-7).

Why the Law [of Moses] then? It was added because of transgressions [sins], having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed [Christ] would come to whom the promise had been made.¹⁶ Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law [the Law]. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law [Law], being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.¹⁷ (Galatians 3:19-25)

Brethren, we must be careful how we use the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law of Moses (I Timothy 1:8-11). We are not to obey it, or even parts of it, because God has taken the entire Law out of our way. The Galatian brethren, who were personally taught by Paul and understood the gospel of the grace of God, were convinced by false brethren to put themselves back under the Law to be justified by their works. Paul was very upset by this and did not hold back in telling them they were foolish for doing so for they were disobeying the word of God (Galatians 3:1-3; 4:19). We are no longer under the Law but under grace (Romans 6:8-15).

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law [of Moses] could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement [righteousness] of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

¹⁶ See Genesis 22:15-18 regarding God's promise to Abraham.

¹⁷ That is, we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses.

Even now, in this dispensation of the grace of God, loving our neighbors as ourselves is still applicable because love is the fulfillment of the Law as stated by the Apostle Paul (Romans 13:8-10). It should be our desire, therefore, to obediently live according to God's love and to love our neighbors as ourselves. But again, thankfully, we are no longer under the Law of Moses with its requirements and consequences.

A Worthy Walk

We have seen that loving our neighbors as ourselves is accomplished by treating them as we want to be treated. The many ways we are exhorted to treat, and not to treat, those with whom we associate or come in contact are included under another over-arching exhortation contained within the gospel of grace revealed to us through the Apostle Paul. That is, we are to walk worthy of our calling.

Therefore I [Paul], the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [salvation] with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

For this reason also, since the day we [Paul and Timothy] heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask [God] that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness [endurance] and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

Brethren, our calling referred to in Ephesians 4:1 is not about a ministry for the Lord or a job. Instead, it refers to our salvation—what God has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ (see the first three chapters of Ephesians that describe our salvation in Christ). Our daily walk, which includes what we do and say every day, is to be done in a manner that honors God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the gift of salvation that we have received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-10).¹⁸

This study is not focused on walking worthy of our salvation, but a worthy walk means that we should live each day in a manner that is becoming or befitting a child of God and it includes all the aspects of loving our neighbors as ourselves. To understand how God wants us to walk worthy requires us to use the word of God correctly (II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17). A critical aspect of this is understanding that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under the grace of God as briefly described in the previous section. Then, we need to understand that the gospel of the grace of God was revealed to us by the resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ through the Apostle Paul—to Jews and Gentiles without distinction (Galatians 1:1; 3:23-28; Romans 3:19-26; 10:12; 11:13; I Corinthians 12:12-13). Therefore, if we want to find out how to walk worthy of our calling—to live for God—we need to go to Paul's letters

¹⁸ See my study **Walk Worthy** that addresses this subject in more detail.

first (Romans through Philemon).¹⁹ For example, through Paul's letters we are exhorted (among many other things) to:

- Walk in Christ by the Spirit (Colossians 2:6-7; Galatians 5:16, 25).
- Walk in love (Ephesians 5:1-2).
- Be thankful (I Thessalonians 5:18).
- Be humble (Philippians 2:3-8).
- Walk honestly—behave properly (Romans 13:12-14; I Thessalonians 4:9-12).
- Yield ourselves to God (Romans 6:11-13).
- Be a living sacrifice (Galatians 2:20).
- Walk by faith (II Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:6-7).
- Walk in wisdom (Ephesians 5:15-17).
- Be above reproach (Philippians 2:14-15).
- Walk in good works (Ephesians 2:10).
- Do all things for the Lord (Colossians 3:17, 23).
- Speak the truth with grace (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 4:6).
- Bless those who persecute us (Romans 12:14-21).
- Walk in peace (Colossians 3:15).

Many of these aspects of walking worthy of our salvation have already been mentioned under the discussion on loving our neighbors as ourselves. One could say, therefore, that we are not walking worthy of our salvation if we do not love our neighbors as ourselves.

Humble Reality

If we diligently try to love our neighbors as ourselves, will we reach a point where one could say, “I love my neighbor as myself”? If we think that we can or have already done so, we will become prideful in our perceived perfection. Brethren, because of our sin nature we will never reach that point—we will never be able to always obey all of the requirements by God associated with loving our neighbors (see footnote on page 19). However, if we honestly examine ourselves (II Corinthians 13:4-5), we will be more aware of our shortcomings. When we see them, we ought to be thankful that God loves us and has already forgiven us (Romans 3:23-26; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32; Colossians 2:13), and endeavor to correct our behavior while depending on the grace and strength of God.

Our goal should be to love our neighbors as ourselves and to walk worthy of our salvation. God has revealed what He expects of us. However, we should not even try to keep track of our successes, for this, too, leads to pride.²⁰ God's desire is that we set our minds on our glorified Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1-4). That way, we will be more likely to set aside the desires of the flesh and live according to the fruit of the Spirit (Colossians 3:5-17; Galatians 5:16-25).

¹⁹ See my studies **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** and **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** that address the distinctions between the gospel of the kingdom (God's prophetic plan for Israel) and the gospel of the grace of God that He is administering to us today.

²⁰ See my study **Are Rewards Our Goal?**

Summary

So, what does the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves mean? First, it is directed to all believers, and we are to consider everyone with whom we come into contact as our neighbor, even those who hate or do evil to us. Furthermore, the Bible does not say that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, for the manner in which we love (or not love) ourselves may have a detrimental effect on how we love others.

What is the scriptural context of this commandment? It is a commandment that first appears in the Law of Moses, and all subsequent exhortations to love our neighbors as ourselves are provided in reference to the Law of Moses. In the New Testament we are informed that keeping the commandment fulfills the Law. When we look at all the Scripture references regarding who our neighbors are and how we should treat them, it appears that the commandment can be restated or described by the exhortation to do unto them as we would want them to do unto us—the so-called *Golden Rule*. I believe that Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 22:34-40, where Jesus said treating others as we want to be treated and loving our neighbors as ourselves *both* sum up the Law and the Prophets, support this perspective.

Although we are not under the Law of Moses in this dispensation of the grace of God, the righteousness of the Law still holds true, and we are to genuinely love those we come in contact with—our neighbors. This love is not generated within us by our own effort but is the love of God. To obey this commandment, we need to let Christ work through us, using the word of God and the personal tools that He has granted to us as individuals. If we do so, then we are also obeying the instruction to walk worthy of our salvation.

To love our neighbors as ourselves does not mean that we are to join in the sinfulness of this world. We are ambassadors for Christ and are lights in this dark world; therefore, we must flee from sin and its temptations. However, we must also stand firm in the faith and, when necessary, admonish our fellow brethren who are caught up in sin and even separate ourselves from them to avoid falling into sin with them. Doing so must be without hate or judgment—we are to deal with everyone, including our fellow brethren, with love and humility.

Each of us needs to carefully consider how we are treating our neighbors. How do we talk about or treat those who we do not agree with? Are we prepared to help a stranger in time of need, or do we tend to judge some people as unworthy of our help? Would people, whether relatives, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, or strangers consider us to be good neighbors? May we endeavor to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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