

Love People

*“Love your neighbor as yourself”
is seeking the highest good,
for all people, in all circumstances,
at all times, through the Spirit’s power.*

Let’s admit here, people are the source of most of our frustrations in life. While loving God is the greatest commandment, the greater challenge is the second greatest commandment: love people like ourselves. Even though we know we are forever family, as Christians, we generally find it difficult to love people as we do ourselves. It is often easier to love God apart from people. But we must understand that God desires us to show love to all others even when it is difficult and complicated. Jesus taught that when we love others as we should, we show love toward Him as well (cf., Matthew 25:40). “Love your neighbor as yourself” is a substantial opportunity to demonstrate personal holiness and obedience to God. This commandment must flow out of our lives to include the numerous, daily interactions with co-workers, family, friends, and even people checking us out at Walmart. Loving our neighbors as ourselves requires dedicated, day-to-day commitments both large and small.

People do all kinds of things that intrude into our emotions. However, with that said, I am reminded that I am a “people;” therefore, I am a source of

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frustration to others! When we think about our actions with others, we know that we have let others down in numerous situations and moments in our lives. We blow it as children, teenagers (especially), young adults, adults, and seniors citizens. It is in our fallen nature to do so. At the heart of our shortcomings is self (or our selfishness). We tend to *care about ourselves* to the highest degree, but we don't place people on the same level. Hence, God has commanded us to bring others up to the same level as we treat ourselves.

Also, love your neighbor as yourself *is the minimum standard for God's people, not the highest*. "Be the servant of all" is a higher standard. "Be the slave of all" is the highest standard of all (cf., Matthew 20:26, 27). (These are covered later in the book.) To live out the second greatest commandment, we must "treat others better than they deserve."⁹ Isn't that how God treats us: better than we deserve every moment of our lives?

Why is it so difficult to treat our neighbor as our self? What stands in our way of walking in equality with our spiritual family? What bad habits do we fall into that keep us from living this out? Let's cover a few of them.

Setting the Ideas of Love Too Low

We often set "Love your neighbor as yourself" to a comfortable, recognizable, common, worldly standard of love. For example, love of family. Loving our family is good, but it is not *exceptional or unusual* in God's kingdom. Read what Jesus said about these matters while paying particular attention to verses 32 and 33 of Luke 6,

"But I [Jesus] say to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 To the person who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other as well, and from the person who takes away your coat, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone

⁹ 33 Series Video, "Die to Live," A Man and His Marriage, Volume 5, part 2, presented at Fellowship of Huntsville Church, Sept. 16, 2019.

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who asks you, and do not ask for your possessions back from the person who takes them away. 31 Treat others in the same way that you would want them to treat you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same” (Luke 6:27-33).

Jesus taught that “sinners” (lost people) love their families and people who love them back. This kind of love is comfortable, recognizable, and a humanistic, common standard of love.

Holy means to be set apart from the common. In other words, holy is the opposite of common. Until our love exceeds the commonness of everyday experience, it is not the transformational, holy love.

Furthermore, let us not think that we will receive a special reward from Jesus for loving family and friends. For it is of no “credit” to us as Jesus taught (v.32). The love of family is excellent but universal, a duty not exception. By contrast, the love of our enemies is an uncommon love indeed; a Christian duty by and through the power of God.

Setting Our Own Value Too High

One bad habit most of us struggle with is an inflated opinion of ourselves. These bloated opinions keep us from having a proper view of ourselves, therefore, hindering us from a loving attitude toward others. God wants us to rise above our inflated self-worth and our base humanistic, common thoughts. When we are determined to live our lives in puffed up and proudful ways, we are limiting, often fully demising, the spiritual actions and attitudes Jesus desires us to live by.

Many Christians are spending great portions of their lives choosing to daily live in their base natures and human egos. These lower natures of ours demand human respect, honor, and recognition. Instead, we need to identify these bloated attitudes, confess them, and turn away from them with a renewed commitment to humility. Often, we are guilty of only “giving a brief smile” at

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the second greatest command and then continue to live our lives indifferent to the highest ideas in the Bible. As a result, we continue to move in the opposite direction of God's directives. Paul taught, "For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment" (Romans 12:3a). As we proceed in this life, we need to evaluate ourselves continually, not according to our education, family name, or the accolades of others or, as we so often do, according to the worst Christians around us, but instead according to the Person of Perfection, Jesus. It is when we evaluate ourselves according to His perfection that we can then evaluate how we are doing in our walk of loving *holiness and love*. When we do this, we are humbled anew and reminded that we are no better than anyone else apart from God's grace and power. If we do not stay humble, then the command, "love your neighbor as yourself" is impossible. Love and haughtiness cannot coexist.

Paul most clearly reintroduced this clear thinking to the Church by articulating our condition apart from God. He wrote, "Just as Isaiah predicted, 'If the Lord of armies had not left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have resembled Gomorrah'" (Romans 9:29). Talk about a humbling truth. We must conclude that we are not morally superior to *anyone*. It is God who has delivered us from the *potential evil* that lives inside of each one of us.

Setting Our Value Too Low

While most of us go around with an inflated image of our value and worth, others do not think enough of themselves. This, too, is another detriment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Most of the people I have met in life that carry a low value of themselves have a terrible testimony of pain. Evil entered their life, usually when they were a child or in adolescence, and their life recovery has been elusive. Most often, this type of pain involves a felony crime(s) (often unreported), but it can also stem from parents that possessed no skills whatsoever at raising children. Some of these hurting people have not been proactive in finding solutions and healing for their emotional wounds.

Others prefer their pain instead of confronting it. Instead of dealing with it to receive closure, they prefer to embrace the “victim” role for the duration of their life! They use past events as a crutch and excuse for being spiritually unproductive.

(Note: Dealing with deep-rooted emotional problems resulting from past pain is beyond the scope of this book, but if this describes you today, please seek out professional counseling from a licensed Christian counselor. At times, we need experienced people to help us work through tragedy. If you need help finding a trusted counselor, advice on doing so is given in “Appendix A” at the end of this book.)

Some pain is very significant and will never be forgotten, but it should never mold our lives into low living as it often does. Christians *must take action to heal*. Jesus is our healer. If hurt Christians don’t deal with the mistreatment they have endured—in a biblical way—then they may form an unbiblical self-image. The doctrine of, “Life hasn’t been good to me; why should I be good to others?” will govern the thoughts and actions of the “victim.”

Value has been placed on us by God and through His Son’s death and resurrection. Jesus, in speaking to people of faith, reminded them of their value. Jesus taught, “Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. Even all the hairs on your head are numbered. So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31). At times, we may be prone to forget the value God places on us. Christian, you are valuable.

Separating the Love of God From the Love of People

There is a fundamental flaw, too, in our thinking at times: we attempt to separate the love of God from the love of people. Separating these loves is impossible; they are permanently bonded by God. There are sinful ways that we attempt to divide our love of God from our love of people.

One common way is through good old-fashioned ignoring people, along with an attitude that people are not needed or don’t matter much. This belief is both familiar and unequivocally wrong. Christians are to live in community,

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as family. Paul taught that all believers are needed, for we make up “one body”—the Body of Christ. We cannot look at each other and say, “I do not need you” (1 Corinthians 12). Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit to make the Body work properly. We dismiss our brothers and sisters to our own detriment. Each Christian has a role and is a valuable part of making a difference in others’ lives (1 Corinthians 12-14).

John also taught us that we cannot show love by ignoring people’s physical needs. “But whoever has the world’s possessions and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion against him, how can the love of God reside in such a person?” (1 John 3:17). Love of neighbor is proactive and physically tangible.

God wants our desires, will, and actions to be directed toward Him *and others*. We are all linked together spiritually. When we love people, we love God. The Lord said, “I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me” (Matthew 25:40b).

These are a few healing truths to consider:

- All people have been hurt by others; therefore, we all carry the consequences of the sin of others in life. Our experience may vary by degree, but it is not unique.
- We have all hurt others; we have all sinned against others.
- God loves us in these damaged lives of ours. He has proven His love through His Son’s death and resurrection.
- God cannot love us more; He loves us perfectly. Everything He does, He does to perfection.
- We should love others as ourselves, for we have great value to God. To accomplish this, it may involve forgiving ourselves for a serious crime(s), or it may require us to forgive others who have caused us great pain.
- We must have a balanced, biblical view of ourselves. We should not think too much of ourselves with our ego driven self-worth or too little of ourselves discounting God’s sacrifice for us.
- With a proper belief in these foundational truths, we can start practicing living lives that treat our neighbors as ourselves.

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Scripture Passages

John 13:31-35

John 14:15-21

Questions

- 1) What is the mark of a loving Christian according to John 13:35?

- 2) Read John 14:21 again. Write the opposite of what Jesus taught.

- 3) Are you loving your enemies as Christ loved you as His enemy? Yes or No

- 4) Do you desire to restore broken relationships fully and completely? Yes or No

- 5) If “no,” what sin(s) are you allowing to take root in your life to keep you from love?

- 6) If “yes,” what steps will you take today to restore these relationships?

- 7) Have you withheld forgiveness toward someone— anyone? Be honest. Yes or No

- 8) Do you hate someone now? Yes or No

- 9) Galatians 5:22-23 , “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,

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kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Below are the displays of love of the Spirit. Circle which answer applies to your actions most frequently below.

Love.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Joy.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Peace.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Patience.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Kindness.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Goodness.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Faithfulness.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Gentleness.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never
Self-control.....always—usually—sometimes—rarely—never¹⁰

Aim Point

1) Look at question 9 from above. Ask the Lord to help you with the fruit of the Spirit that you circled that is “sometimes, rarely, or never.”

2) Ask the Lord to bring to your mind people you are keeping at a distance. Think about it carefully; write an initial below of all the people you would prefer not to be around. Pray for these people.

3) Ask the Lord to bring to your mind people that you think may be keeping you at a distance due to your actions and/or poor choices. In other words think about the people you have hurt. Think about it carefully; write an initial of all the people you think would prefer not to be around you below. Pray for these people.

4) Confess to the Lord these things.

5) Take time to call or write to someone from your past to help facilitate

¹⁰ From Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1994 ed.), 209.

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forgiveness. Set things right. Only you can forgive; others may not forgive you, but that is not your responsibility. Take action.