

James

Loving God, Loving Others

October 23, 2011

I. Introduction

- A. In our study of James, we came to James 2:8 which speaks of the Royal Law, and defines the Royal Law as being “Love your neighbor as yourself.” After talking about James 2:1–13 within their context, I chose to return to the topic of the Royal Law and talk about what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. However, loving your neighbor as yourself is only half the picture because loving others begins with loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So that is where we began two weeks ago when we talked about what it means to love God supremely.
- B. Today I want to build on what it means to love God supremely and talk about what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves.
- C. Prayer

II. What It Means to Love Our Neighbor As Ourselves –

- A. **Luke 10:25-28** . . . And a lawyer stood up and put [Jesus] to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" [26] And [Jesus] said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" [27] And [the lawyer] 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." [28] And [Jesus] said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."
- 1. We see from this portion of scripture that God built His entire law on two commandments – with the first dealing directly with our relationship to God and the second dealing with our relationship to the people around us. And as I made clear in the teaching on what it means to love God supremely, the second commandment rises out of the first and it gains its defining boundaries in the first. In other words, we do not just love others as ourselves, we love others as ourselves for God’s sake, or because of our deep and abiding love for God.
- 2. Let me explain what I mean when I say that we are to love others for God’s sake. Who or what you love the most, you please the most. Therefore, when you love God more than anyone and anything else in your life, you will live to please God more than anyone or anything else in your life. This means that when you love God the most, you will love others – not on the basis of how they are treating you, but

in the same way you love yourself – regardless of how they are treating you – because that is what pleases God. And you want to please God because you love God more than yourself, and more than anyone or anything else in your life.

3. With these thoughts in mind, let us take a serious look at what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves.

B. **Luke 10:29-37** . . . But wishing to justify himself, [the lawyer] said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" [30] Jesus replied and said, "A man [*who was obviously a Jew given the context of the story*] was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho [*History tells us that about twelve thousand priests and Levites lived in Jericho, and because their temple duties were in Jerusalem, they were constantly traveling this road going to and from their work.*], and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. [31] "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. [32] "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] "But a Samaritan [*despised as half-breeds and heretics or heathens by the Jews*], who was on a journey, came upon [the robbed, beaten and half dead Jewish man]; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, [34] 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. [35] "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' [36] "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" [37] And [the lawyer] said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

1. Let me remind all of us that this story and its answer was Jesus' answer to the question by the lawyer: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
 - a. Now Jesus' answer is both straight forward and simple: "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."
 - b. And yet, that straight forward, simple answer requires so much from us that few of us even approach living accordingly.
2. The same is true with the second commandment. Loving our neighbor as ourselves seems straight forward and simple enough, but the reality is, it requires so much from us that few of us give the kind

of thought time and personal energy to living according to the requirement of this commandment.

- a. It is as if we think that knowing the answer is equal to living according to the answer, or as if our salvation coupled with God's grace and quick forgiveness makes it safe to not take this second commandment as serious as we ought.
 - b. However, loving our neighbor as ourselves directly challenges our selfishness and what we often think are – or at least ought to be – our rights. It also challenges our personal freedom and our privacy. And beyond all that, loving others as ourselves often requires self-sacrifice far beyond what is convenient or comfortable. Therefore, I felt it wise to have us spend our time today considering what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves.
- C. Jesus' story of the Samaritan who cared for the robbed, beaten, and half dead Jewish man gives us a basic idea of what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. In this story Jesus makes it clear that to love others as we love ourselves is to want for them and do for them what we would want for ourselves and what we would want done for ourselves in that same situation.
1. The first problem with this explanation of loving others as we love ourselves is our tendency to think in shallow ways, especially when it comes to seeking and protecting the greater good of the community. Therefore, I want to take a few minutes and clarify what love is so that we have a rational sense of what it means to love ourselves and love others as ourselves.
 2. Love is seeking the good of everyone who in any way is affected by my choices and behavior. This means that love does not seek the good of one person at the expense of others – unless the only "other" is myself.
 - a. For example, when I love myself at your expense, we call that selfishness, not love.
 - b. In the same way, when I love you at the expense of the community, it is not love but foolishness based on some other goal than seeking the good of others.
 - (1) Maybe I am seeking your approval or acceptance or some other benefit from you and so I am trying to please you without regard to what my pleasing you is costing others. We see this when parents spoil children or when adults appease other adults.

- (2) Maybe I am trying to avoid conflict with you or keep you from being angry with me, and in so doing keep you happy at the expense of others. My point here is that this is not love. It is foolishness based on some other goal than love.
 - c. So keep in mind that when we talk about loving others as ourselves, we are not, and I emphasize the '**NOT**' talking about doing something for them that harms the good of the community in any way.
 - d. And I want to add one more point here. We are not loving God, and we are not loving our neighbor when we do things for others or give things to them or appease them or please them in any way that does harm to their faith in God, their obedience to God, and their relationship with God.
 - (1) In other words, there is no love in doing something for others that makes them less inclined or less interested in seeking and properly responding to God.
 - (2) A scripture that can help us stay on track in loving others as ourselves is found in **I Timothy 1:5** . . . But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.
- D. To help us work out in a practical way what it means to love others as ourselves, I want us to examine several scriptures that speak to this matter in a very direct way.
 - 1. **Leviticus 19:17-18** . . . 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. [18] 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.
 - a. Loving others as ourselves means not hating them.
 - b. Since we want to learn and improve and since we don't want others acting selfishly toward us, we are to reprove others for their sake and the sake of those they affect by their choices and behavior.
 - c. Loving others as ourselves means giving them a second or third or fourth chance to get it right, rather than taking vengeance (seek to get even) or bearing grudges (want bad to befall them).
 - 2. **Matthew 5:21-22** . . . "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry

with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

- a. Loving others as ourselves means not hating them.
 - b. Loving others as ourselves includes not thinking of them worthless so as to refuse to give them opportunity to prove themselves worthy of our trust.
 - c. Loving others as ourselves means always wanting a relationship with them even though such a relationship may be impossible because of their behavior toward us.
3. **Matthew 5:23-24** . . . Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.
- a. Loving others as ourselves means taking the initiative in working out disagreements, differences, and conflicts with them.
4. **Matthew 5:27-28** . . . You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; [28] but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- a. Loving your spouse as you love yourself means being faithful outwardly and inwardly so as not to desire any improper relationship with anyone of the opposite sex.
5. **Matthew 5:31-32** . . . It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'; [32] but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
- a. Loving your spouse as you love yourself means remaining faithful to her and loving her even in your mid-life years and old age.
6. **Matthew 5:33-37** . . . Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' [34] But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

- a. Loving others as ourselves means keeping your word.
- 7. **Matthew 5:38-42** . . . You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' [39] But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. [40] If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. [41] Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. [42] Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.
 - a. Loving others as ourselves means being patient and even long-suffering with others who try your patience or do not seem to learn the lessons they need to learn fast enough to make your life easier or happier.
- 8. **Matthew 5:43-45** . . . You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons 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.
 - a. Loving others as ourselves means meeting basic, essential needs as needed in spite of the condition of the relationship between you and your neighbor. **Romans 12:20** . . . 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.
 - b. Loving others as ourselves means wanting and hence praying for the spiritual good of others, including those who have made themselves your enemy.
- 9. **Matthew 7:3-5** . . . Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.
 - a. Loving others as ourselves means putting sin out of your own life and replacing it with godliness as zealously and purposefully and persistently as you want others to do this.
- 10. **Ephesians 4:25-26** . . . Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. [26] Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

- a. Loving others as we love ourselves means being honest, speaking the truth, letting go of anger quickly and resolving differences.
- 11. **Ephesians 4:28** . . . He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.
 - a. Loving others as we love ourselves means we do not take what belongs to them without their permission.
 - b. Loving others as we love ourselves means working to have enough to meet our own needs and still have some left over to share with those who are in need.
- E. If I were to give you a single scripture portion that sums up what it means to love others as we love ourselves, I would choose **Colossians 3:12-14** . . . So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. [14] Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

III. Conclusion

- A. In summary, to love others as we love ourselves is to want for them and do for them what we would want for ourselves and what we would want done for ourselves in that same situation.
- B. Jesus put it this way: “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (**Matthew 7:12**).