**Loving God through Your Neighbor**

Based on [Matthew 22:34-46](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt22.34-46)

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“If anyone says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

No one has seen God, yet many people claim to love Him. It’s easy to profess love, but how do you know if you love Him? There’s a way to know if you don’t. When you don’t love your neighbor, you don’t love God.

Love is the greatest commandment, not in the sense that it is the best on the scale of all others. It is not a commandment, like an 11th commandment in sequence. Rather, it is a *summary* of all of God’s commandments. Love is the reason and the purpose behind everything God says. All the ten commandments depend on love, and without love they only serve selfish pride. “Faith, hope and love these three abide, but the greatest is love.” We won’t have faith in heaven, because we will see God face to face. We won’t have hope in heaven, because there we will have what we hope for. But we will have love, because love is what binds all things together in perfect harmony...and God Himself is Love.

Jesus teaches that loving your neighbor is evidence of loving God, and hating your neighbor is hating God. It’s easy enough to *say* you love the invisible God. But if you despise someone Christ died for, you do not love Him who died for you. Imagine if someone said, “I think your great, but I just can’t stand your wife (or husband).” What would you say, “yeah, I can’t stand him either.”? No. If you are a person of integrity, as I know each of you are, you would instead say, “if you hate my spouse, you hate me.”

One of the most sobering teachings of the Bible is that on judgment day, there will be those who *thought* they loved God and Jesus, but they will find out they didn’t, because Jesus will say, “What you did to these, the least of my brothers, you did to me.” ‘What you did to those you see, you did to me whom you do not see.”

When you love Jesus, you will love your neighbor. When you do not love your neighbor, you do not love Jesus. When you do not love Jesus, you do not trust in him or rely on him. When you do not trust him you lack faith and are still in your sins. When you are still in your sins, then out of love I have this to say to you: repent and believe in the Gospel Jesus Christ who is the messiah.

We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is possible for us to live a responsible life. It is possible to help your neighbor, to go to church, to keep your commitments, to pay your taxes, to volunteer, to lend a hand. We have a powerful capacity to move our bodies to do what we tell them to. But none of us has the power to love from the heart. You can help your neighbor and still hate him. But love is not simply outward help. Love is desiring from the heart what is best for them so that you want to help them more than yourself. And this not just for those whom you have kinship and natural affection for, but even for enemies and those who stubbornly resist your help and good counsel. That’s the love Jesus has for the world, and he is our example.

But if Jesus were only our example, somebody to live up to, we would still be lost. He is not just our example of love, he is our ransom for sin. He does not only show us righteousness, he is our righteousness. Jesus asks the pharisees, who believed in their own goodness who they thought the messiah was. It is a great question. Think about it. If you can keep the law of the scripture perfectly (as they thought they did)...why does that same scripture promise a messiah? Only the sick need a physician; only sinners need a savior; and Jesus came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. If they are already saints, why does scripture promise them a messiah?

There is a need for the messiah because you can’t overcome your sin. You need a savior. You try to emulate Jesus, but you also know that you have not succeeded in loving your neighbor as yourself. And if you have failed to love even once, you have failed God, the Judge who has a righteous responsibility to deal with lawbreakers the way they deserve.

You cannot make up for your lovelessness. You cannot atone for your failures, because there is no way for you to do more than God requires of you. Did you murder your brother in your heart; lust after a stranger; coveted your neighbors property? It’s not like you can simply put a little more in the offering plate next week. You are already expected to give whatever you end up giving, no more, no less. You cannot buy the gift of God with money...the world is his and everything in it. You cannot make up for your sin by putting in a few hours of volunteer work. God already expects you to love and serve your neighbor, and if you are doing less now than you would if you had to, then you are already failing. You cannot do more than God requires, therefore you cannot make up for your sin.

Friends, this is why there is a messiah. He was sent to pay for your sins. You have no collateral before God. But the messiah does. He is David's son and David’s Lord. He doesn’t owe God anything because he is equal with God. But he took on the form of a servant, came to us in our likeness, placed himself under the law even though he was by nature above it. And in keeping the law he earned the right to make us children of God. And he has given us His Spirit in our hearts. By the power of His Spirit we can do the acts of love and mercy that he intends for us, not to earn His forgiveness, but because we are forgiven in Christ.