

Love Your Neighbor Cody Westbrook

Love your neighbor. The sentiment seems simple enough but the practice is much more difficult than we may realize. The problem is not that people are unfamiliar with the idea—"love each other" is a refrain heard on a daily basis. The real issue is meaning. What is love? What does it mean to love your neighbor? People tend to answer those questions based on their own philosophy and such is problematic because it produces a chaotic inconsistent atmosphere where one person's love is another person's hate. Evidence of this problem is clearly seen in the social justice movement that is currently alive and well in our society. We are told that failure to acquiesce to what certain societal figures deem appropriate is unloving and a failure to treat our fellow man with respect and dignity. But what does God's word say about the subject? How does God define "love your neighbor?" In Luke 10:29 a lawyer asked Jesus "And who is my neighbor?" His question prompted Jesus to teach the parable of the good Samaritan. The parable illustrates a truth that the Mosaic Law taught clearly—every one of our fellow man should be considered as our neighbor (cf. Lev. 19:18; Ex. 22:21). Rich, poor, black, white, those who agree or disagree with us politically, all people are created in the image of God and possess a soul that is more valuable than the whole world (Matt. 16:26). God requires that we view them accordingly.

But, what does it mean to love them? Biblical love is defined by action. "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Paul said, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). Loving our neighbor means serving and caring for them. The Law of Moses identified some concrete actions that illustrate this love. Leviticus 19 commanded Israel to leave the corners of their fields for the poor (vss. 9-10), to be honest (v. 11), not to curse the deaf or trip the blind (v. 14), to be fair (v. 15), and not gossip (v. 16). Proverbs 14:21 demands mercy be given to your neighbor. Isaiah 1:17 says "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Numerous passages in the New Testament also illustrate the principle. Consider Matthew 5:21-48—do not hate your brother, do not lust, be faithful to your spouse, keep your word, go the second mile, and do good to your enemies. Matthew 7:12 says, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Galatians 6:10 commands, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Scripture clearly teaches that we must understand the importance of loving our neighbor and striving to serve and help him in whatever ways we can (cf. Matt. 25:31-46). But scripture also teaches us that the greatest action of love is not meeting physical needs, but spiritual. Jesus fed the multitude but also commanded "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you..." (John 6:27). Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He took care of physical needs but His primary emphasis was spiritual. He came to save man from sin, not from poverty. We must follow His example. We must love our neighbor in the way God defines it. As

opportunity arises (Gal. 6:10), help in whatever way we are able. But above all, seek opportunities to help our neighbor enter into a right relationship with God.