

“Loving Others as We Love Ourselves”

Leviticus 19

When Jesus answered the teacher of the law who asked him which was the greatest commandment in Mark 12,

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

He made it clear with both statements that loving God and people are equal. Jewish teachers loved to debate what was the greatest commandment because they would use one Scripture to cancel out another Scripture so as to avoid obeying it. Especially when it meant helping someone out. ‘Sorry, I have to love God first! The most obvious one was the Sabbath. Obeying the Sabbath was considered one of the most important commandments in the Law. For example,

Matt. 12:9 ... he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” ¹¹ He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

The Pharisees valued ‘no work on the Sabbath’ higher than helping others, accused Jesus of Sabbath breaking even though He did something good. They used the Sabbath commandment as an excuse not obey a ‘lesser’ commandment. But Jesus pointed out that the Law said helping out a neighbor in an emergency doesn’t break the Sabbath. Helping others is obeying God. Here’s another in Mark 7

⁹ And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

They elevated a tradition about their offerings [this is earmarked for God] and used it as an excuse to avoid honouring their parents. Jesus’ answer ‘Love God and love others as yourself’ brilliantly takes away the concept of a greater and lesser commandments. To obey God is to love others. And since Jesus quoted Lev. 19, let’s look at what He meant when He said to love others.

Lev. 19 is a list of laws Israel were to do and not to do. There are two verses that say ‘love others as yourselves, that’s why Jesus quoted it. As we’ll see, the whole chapter is full of examples of how you loved God by loving others.

¹⁸ “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

³³ “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. ³⁴ The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

We see that the command to love others as yourself means caring about fellow covenant members (v.18) as well as non-covenant members [unbelievers] (v.33) because at one time you were like them.

The chapter has a 2-verse introduction which gives us the reason up front why we need to obey God’s words:

The Lord said to Moses, ² “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

The apostle Peter quoted this verse and applied it to us in 1 Pet. 1:12 when he said,

¹³ *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴ As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

Being holy then is a mental decision to act out who God has called us to be by obeying His words. Why should we love others as ourselves?

To Model God’s Holiness **(19:1-2)**

God says this is for all the congregation; everyone in a covenant relationship with Him. They were under the Mosaic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. The Mosaic covenant ended when Jesus fulfilled it on His death and resurrection. The Abrahamic covenant continues of which we are grafted in (Rom. 11) but we are also included in the New Covenant through Jesus. So, as Peter points out, God’s people no matter what age they lived are all called to be holy. To model what He’s like to each other and those who are outside this covenant.

‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

And now, as a reminder that this whole chapter is how practical holiness looks like we have a short version of v.2 repeated 15 more times; seven of the full “I am the Lord your God” and 8 “I am the Lord’s”. This is a constant reminder of the covenant connection; as God’s covenant people this is what’s required of you. And the many things listed are to show us that we need to model God’s holiness in every area of our life. Because that’s exactly how Peter interpreted it *“be holy in all you do”*. And holiness is really another way of saying show others how distinctively God’s people are to treat others; love.

So when Jesus quoted v.18 and 34 as part of the greatest commandment He was referring to all this chapter which is a summary of many areas of our life helping us understand why we are to love others. The most basic reason we are to love God and others is

To Model the Holiness of God **(19:1-2)**

This whole chapter is full of examples of what holiness looks like. When we obey God's words, we do what He does. Since He is holy – distinctly set apart from what we see around us – we too, show we are distinctly set apart from what we see around us. And holiness is rooted in love. That's what's so distinct about God. Everything He does He does out of love. So the command to be holy is to be like God, and we are most like God when we love others. John 3:16 is a perfect example of how holy God is as seen in His love.

¹⁶ *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Why does God love the world since most of the world doesn't love Him back? Because He made them. And He wants people to know Him and grow in Him and spend eternity with Him because that's the best thing for us. Godly 'Love' means giving at great cost what means the most to you for other's greatest benefit, a life in God's presence now and forever. Everyone in a covenant relationship with God is expected to be holy like God – that's what vv.1-2 are about.

'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

What does holiness or love look like? In vv.3-10 God gives us some examples of what it means

To Show our Life is Centered on God **(19:3-10)**

Vv. 3-4 summarize the 10 commandments. There are two parts to the 10 commandments: #'s 1-4 are our responsibility towards God and #'s 5-10 are our responsibility towards each other. Here he mentions three: honouring your parents, keeping the Sabbath, and not making idols. Obeying each of them is an example of how we are making God the center of our life. Obeying God's commands show

His words are directing our lives (vv.3-4)

Respecting your parents was huge in that culture. You could earn the death penalty for high-handed rebellion of your parents. Your parents are the ones who brought you into the world, provided for you, taught you the ABC's of life. They were there for the key moments of your development. They know you better than almost anyone. Honour your parents is a command from God. And there are no conditions here. Yes, some parents don't deserve honour by experience but in obedience to God we can show honour by forgiving them if they hurt us and model God's holiness since the world will tell us not to do that. God disagrees. Whether they repent and reconcile, is not up to us. 'Be at peace with everyone, so long as it depends on you' (Rom. 12:18). Does God still love us when we've dishonoured Him?

The Sabbath was the center of your schedule. Life doesn't revolve around your work but your stoppage of work (Sabbath) . That's when you get replenished, enjoy the fruits of your labour, spend time strengthening your relationships that you may not have time for during the week and worshipping God.

Not making idols. We make idols out of the creation. Whether its things or people, when we make them the center of our life, we disobey God. We live distinctly holy lives when created things are not the center of our life. Those who don't know God don't know any better. They've never wondered why they focus their lives on goals to have this or look like that or be this? We're created for worship but we're wired only to be satisfied with God. And worship is next.

We show our life is centered around God when

His words are directing our worship (vv.5-8)

There were five main offerings. The burnt offering was the required offering of showing your indebtedness to God. Then there was the sin offering, the general admission of one's failure to please God and the guilt offering, the offering for clearly known deliberate sins. You always came with a gift of thanks to God, called the grain offering because that was your income. He provides for You, show Him gratitude. When you finished all those offerings then you made the peace offering. He only mentions the peace offering here because it assumes you've done all the others. You are right with God and others.

The peace offering was the only offering you could share with family and friends. It was large enough that you needed to share it with others for it to be eaten. God allowed that to extend to a second day but since its holy – set apart for God – it had to be burned after that. If you disobeyed, God said there were grave consequences. If you still had meat and grain left after 2 days that means you didn't share enough of it. You weren't showing proper thanks and love for others. The sacrifices were a great illustration of loving God by giving Him what was due Him and loving others by sharing the peace offering because you were all right with God and one another. And in vv.9-10 we show our life is centered on God

By His words directing our possessions (vv.9-10)

In an agricultural society, most everyone worked the land. They had crops. Wheat and barley were the staples. Wine was a staple. So God said when you reap your harvest don't selfishly hang on (hoard) every head of grain or every grape for yourself. Leave some at the edge of your field unpicked so the poor could grab some for their needs. Don't be selfish with how God has blessed you. The book of Ruth is a great example of Boaz' generosity towards the poor as well as his kindness to his own workers. Now we're starting to see this movement for how loving God by living a holy life results in loving others.

Vv. 11-18 is all about how you treat others. Listen to all the 'you shall nots ...'

¹¹ "Do not steal. "Do not lie. "Do not deceive one another.

¹² "Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. ¹³ "Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. "Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

¹⁴ "Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.

¹⁵ "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

¹⁶ "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. "Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord.

¹⁷ "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Now we know why Jesus said the last part of v.18. Think of vv.11-18 as one long sentence of 'do not's' ending with the positive flipside of that *"but love your neighbour as yourself."* Why should we love others? Because we have a responsibility

Build Up Fellow Image Bearers **(19:11-18)**

Do we lie to ourselves, steal from yourself, defraud yourself, curse yourself, slander yourself, hate yourself ... Not usually! But we've had it done to us by others. How did that feel? Not very nice. So don't do it to others. Another reason why Jesus picked this passage as a summary of loving others because it includes both loving God and others. I skipped the other positive 'but' in here among all the do nots.

'Do not, Do not, Do not, Do not, ... but fear your God, I am the Lord. [v.14] ... Do not, Do not, Do not, Do not, But love your neighbour as yourself.' Remember what I've said a few hundred times; when Jesus or a New testament author quotes a verse from the Old Testament, the listener/reader understands He's referring to the context surrounding that verse.

Everyone is a limited edition, creation of God, made to reflect God's image. That's how we are look at each other as believers in Christ and look at the unsaved with compassion saying, they don't know how special they are to God. I need to share Christ with them so they'll realize their full potential and find eternal life and joy and true purpose.

Eph. 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

James 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

Whose character did we assassinate privately, publicly or mentally this week? We're all made in God's image. We need to be built up not torn down. The world does a good enough job of that; let's not act like the world. This grieves God's Spirit who lives in the believer we just slandered. This should not be.

I'm not going to spend much time discussing vv.19-37, which are a list of commands that deal with God's way of handling unjust situations and instructions about how not to live like the culture around you, as Israel prepares for Canaan. God says you need to go into the culture and live holy lives – loving Me and loving others,

Being a Witness to How God's Love has Changed You **(19:19-37)**

How do God's people handle sinful behaviour in our local communities? (vv.20-22) How do God's people work God's land? (v.20, 23-25) Why do God's people not follow the godless practices of those around them? (vv.26-29, 31) Why do we keep a sabbath? (v.30) Why do we look after the elderly better than the culture (v.32)? Why do we reach out to the immigrants and refugees who moved into our neighborhoods? (vv.33-36) Because we're commanded by God to love God – make Him the priority of our lives – which is seen in how we treat God's people and those who don't know God; even those who hate Him and us.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had developed a religion whereby God was more concerned with rule-keeping than showing compassion. Jesus showed His culture what the Bible really says. God is a gracious and compassionate God, who mercifully and graciously has invested everything in us. Making this world for us. Creating us individually and your neighbour uniquely. Modeling what loving others looks like by allowing His Son to be one of us and die for us. Giving us hope beyond this world to remind us that our future lies elsewhere.

Do we love God with all our heart, soul and strength? And are we loving others the way we love ourselves? If we're honest, we're not all in. Confess that to God and say 'Lord, I struggle to love You with all I have and I'm not great at loving others the way I love myself.' And now ask for His help just for today, to obey a command from His Word that He brings to your mind or your eyes, and commit to that today. Maybe He already has this morning. Maybe it's hard. But He dwells inside you by His Spirit and you have resurrection power to accomplish showing Your love for God. Most likely it involves responding to a person, to love them the way Jesus said to love them. Again, ask for His strength to do what you know you are to do. Today. Do that one thing today. And then tomorrow, when God reveals to you one more way you need to obey Him in or show compassion to others, obey Him. Lovingly fear Him and model His holiness.

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