

Leviticus 19:13-18

¹³“DO NOT DEFRAUD OR ROB YOUR NEIGHBOR. DO NOT HOLD BACK THE WAGES OF A HIRED WORKER OVERNIGHT. ¹⁴DO NOT CURSE THE DEAF OR PUT A STUMBLING BLOCK IN FRONT OF THE BLIND, BUT FEAR YOUR GOD. I AM THE LORD. ¹⁵DO NOT PERVERT JUSTICE; DO NOT SHOW PARTIALITY TO THE POOR OR FAVORITISM TO THE GREAT, BUT JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR FAIRLY. ¹⁶DO NOT GO ABOUT SPREADING SLANDER AMONG YOUR PEOPLE. DO NOT DO ANYTHING THAT ENDANGERS YOUR NEIGHBOR’S LIFE. I AM THE LORD. ¹⁷DO NOT HATE A FELLOW ISRAELITE IN YOUR HEART. REBUKE YOUR NEIGHBOR FRANKLY SO YOU WILL NOT SHARE IN THEIR GUILT. ¹⁸DO NOT SEEK REVENGE OR BEAR A GRUDGE AGAINST ANYONE AMONG YOUR PEOPLE, BUT LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. I AM THE LORD.”

JOHN 13:31-35

³¹ WHEN HE (JUDAS) WAS GONE, JESUS SAID, “NOW THE SON OF MAN IS GLORIFIED AND GOD IS GLORIFIED IN HIM. ³² IF GOD IS GLORIFIED IN HIM,^[A] GOD WILL GLORIFY THE SON IN HIMSELF, AND WILL GLORIFY HIM AT ONCE. ³³“MY CHILDREN, I WILL BE WITH YOU ONLY A LITTLE LONGER. YOU WILL LOOK FOR ME, AND JUST AS I TOLD THE JEWS, SO I TELL YOU NOW: WHERE I AM GOING, YOU CANNOT COME. ³⁴“A NEW COMMAND I GIVE YOU: LOVE ONE ANOTHER. AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, SO YOU MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER. ³⁵ BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”

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WHY EVER WOULD JESUS HAVE SAID THAT LOVE IS A NEW COMMANDMENT. WHAT IS SO NEW ABOUT LOVE?

TRULY, IT MAKES NO SENSE WHEN WE REMEMBER THAT LOVING GOD AND OTHERS AS SELF IS A REPETITIVE THEME IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

JESUS HIMSELF SPOKE ABOUT LOVE MORE THAN ONCE, AND GAVE THE GREAT COMMANDMENT TO LOVE GOD WITH OUR WHOLE HEART, MIND, AND STRENGTH; AND TO LOVE NEIGHBOR LIKE WE LOVE OURSELVES.

WE KNOW JESUS WAS NEITHER IGNORANT OR CONFUSED ABOUT GOD’S COMMAND FOR US TO LOVE.

THEREFORE, WE MUST CONCLUDE HE MEANT WHAT HE SAID, AND HE SAID WHAT HE MEANT.

WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO WHY HE SAID LOVE IS A NEW COMMANDMENT FOR HIS FOLLOWERS-HIS CHURCH.

HIS PURPOSE WAS TO FOCUS THE DISCIPLES’ ATTENTION ON LOVE AS JESUS EXHIBITED IT-TO THEM IN THE WASHING OF THEIR FEET.

ALSO, IN HOW JESUS LOVED THOSE REJECTED BY OTHERS, AND HOW HE WOULD SHOW LOVE FOR THE WHOLE WORLD ON THE CROSS.

AND THE COMMANDMENT WAS NEW IN THE SENSE JESUS WAS TELLING HIS DISCIPLES HOW HE EXPECTED THEM TO BEHAVE ONCE HE WAS NO LONGER WITH THEM.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR HIM WAS THAT HIS DISCIPLES LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

WE CAN UNDERSTAND THIS TO ALSO MEAN JESUS INTENDED ALL OF HIS FOLLOWERS WERE SUPPOSE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

THIS DOES NOT DIMINISH THE COMMAND TO LOVE GOD OR TO LOVE EVERY PERSON LIKE WE LOVE OURSELVES,

INSTEAD, IT REMINDS US THAT JESUS SAID THE BEST WAY WE CAN SHOW THE WORLD WHO JESUS IS, AND WHAT HE CAME TO EARTH TO DO, IS FOR CHRISTIANS TO LOVE EACH OTHER.

THE NEW TESTAMENT'S RECORD SHOWS CHRISTIANS DID THIS PRETTY WELL IN THE BEGINNING.

YES, THERE WERE DIFFERENCES, BUT FOR THE MOST PART LOVING ONE ANOTHER PREVAILED.

BUT THE CHURCH GREW AND GREW, AND THEN SHE NO LONGER WAS PERSECUTED MUCH BY THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE.

IT DID NOT TAKE LONG FOR CHRISTIANS TO BEGIN TO HATE AND PERSECUTE ONE ANOTHER IN VIOLENT WAYS.

SADLY, EVEN TODAY ON A LESSER SCALE SOME CHRISTIANS CONTINUE TO FOCUS MORE ON WHAT DIVIDES US THAN ON THE LOVE OF CHRIST THAT UNITES US.

THIS IS TRUE AMONG DENOMINATIONS, THEOLOGIES, POLITICAL OR SOCIAL VIEWS, AND EVEN SOMETIMES WITHIN CONGREGATIONS.

WHEN WE DO NOT VISIBLY LOVE ONE ANOTHER, WE SHOW HOW GREATLY WE HAVE FAILED JESUS AS WITNESSES TO HIS LOVE FOR US AND THE WORLD.

THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS THAT CHRISTIANS ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, HIS FLESHLY PRESENCE IN THE WORLD TODAY.

WE ARE HIS VOICE AND HANDS AND FEET AND THE WAY IN WHICH MOST PEOPLE FIRST LEARN WHO JESUS IS.

BUT HOW CAN WE CONVINCe THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW JESUS THAT HE LOVES THEM, WHEN WE CANNOT CONVINCe THE WORLD WE LOVE OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS?

THE PROBLEM IS, WHILE THE COMMAND TO SIMPLY LOVE IS SIMPLE IN THEORY, IT IS COMPLICATED IN PRACTICE.

THE PEANUTS CHARACTER LUCY EXPRESSED THE DIFFICULTY BY SAYING SHE LOVED HUMANKIND BUT CANNOT STAND PEOPLE.

HER WORD ARE MORE ACCURATE THAN WE MAY WISH TO ADMIT.

FAR TOO MANY CHRISTIANS SIMPLY THINK JESUS' COMMAND "LOVE ONE ANOTHER" - APPLIES ONLY TO PEOPLE WHO LIVE LIKE THEM.

CONSEQUENTLY, THEY EXCLUDE CHRISTIANS WITH DIFFERENT BELIEFS OR WORSHIP PRACTICES.

THIS REVEALS HOW HARD IT CAN BE TO DO THE ONE SIMPLE THING JESUS ASKED OF HIS DISCIPLES BEFORE HE WENT TO THE CROSS.

SADLY, PART OF HUMAN NATURE, EVEN FROM OUR YOUTH STRUGGLES WITH ACTIVELY LOVING.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF WE READ CHILDREN'S LETTERS TO GOD, WE WILL FIND THAT THEY CAN BE FUNNY AND INSPIRATIONAL.

BUT THEY ALSO CAN BE PROFOUND IN THE SENSE THEY EXPRESS THINGS THAT CAN MAKE ADULTS FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.

ONE CHILD WROTE TO GOD: "DEAR GOD, I BET IT IS VERY HARD FOR YOU TO LOVE EVERYBODY IN THE WHOLE WORLD. THERE ARE ONLY FOUR PEOPLE IN MY FAMILY AND I CANNOT DO IT"

THIS IS VERY OFTEN TRUE EVEN AMONG SMALL GROUPS OF CHRISTIANS, AND MUCH HARDER WITH THOSE OUTSIDE OUR NATIONALITY, RACE, SOCIAL, OR ECONOMIC SPHERES.

AND EVEN WHEN WE STRIVE TO LOVE CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT FROM US-OUR LOVE IS NOT ALWAYS ACCEPTED.

IN FACT, THERE IS NOTHING HARDER THAN LOVING THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE US, AND COULD CARE LESS IF WE LOVE THEM, BECAUSE WE BELONG TO THE “WRONG” CHURCH.

THE SAME IS TRUE FOR CHRISTIANS WHO REJECT US BECAUSE OF OUR THEOLOGY, WHICH KIND OF BIBLE WE READ, OR OUR LIFE STYLES, AND IN SOME CASES POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS.

PERHAPS WE CAN LEARN FROM EDWIN MARKHAM’S SHORT POEM ABOUT LOVE ENTITLED: “OUTWITTED.”

“HE DREW A CIRCLE THAT SHUT ME OUT. HERETIC, REBEL, A THING TO FLOUT. BUT LOVE AND I HAD THE WIT TO WIN, WE DREW A CIRCLE THAT TOOK HIM IN.”

THIS POEM, WHEN PUT INTO THE PLURAL FORM COULD BE ABOUT JESUS AND THE WORLD.

JESUS DREW A CIRCLE OF LOVE FROM THE CROSS THAT TOOK IN EVEN ALL WHO REJECTED HIM:

HIS FELLOW JEWS, HIS FAMILY, DISCIPLES, AND OTHER FOLLOWERS, AS WELL AS THE GREEKS AND ROMANS AND THE WHOLE WORLD.

SO WE ONLY NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE CIRCLE OF LOVE HE DREW AROUND US AND OTHERS AND RESPOND WITH ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICIAL LOVE.

THEN JESUS COMMANDED US TO FOLLOW UP BY DEMONSTRATING LOVE FOR OTHERS, BEGINNING WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS AND EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OUTWARD.

OSWALD CHAMBERS WROTE ABOUT THIS IN “MY UPMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST”, EXPLAINING GOD WILL BRING TO US PEOPLE WE CANNOT RESPECT.

HE FURTHER SAID THAT THE LORD CALLS US TO EXHIBIT LOVE TO THEM, EVEN IF THEY ARE DISAGREEABLE TOWARDS US.

HE WROTE THAT THE LOVE WE ARE COMMANDED TO DEMONSTRATE IS NOT PATRONIZING LOVE FOR THE UNLOVABLE, BUT THE LOVE JESUS SHOWS US FOR US.

CHAMBERS ALSO CONFESSED OUR ABILITY TO DO THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT, IT WILL TAKE TIME, EFFORT, AND GOD’S HELP.

HOWEVER, LEARNING TO LOVE OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS AND EXPANDING THAT LOVE TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE FAITH IS WORTH THE EFFORT.

AND OUR WORK OF LOVE BEGINS BY RECOGNIZING AND OWNING OUR FAILURE AS CHRISTIANS.

THIS IS THE FIRST STEP TO OBEYING JESUS MORE FULLY AND WITNESSING TO HIS LOVE MORE SINCERELY.

THE NEXT STEP IS REMEMBERING THAT LOVING AS JESUS COMMANDS IS NOT SOMETHING WE CAN DO BY OUR OWN MERITS ALONE.

WE NEED THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AS WELL AS LOOKING AT JESUS TO DISCOVER HOW WE CAN DO THIS.

FOR EXAMPLE: THE SAVIOR WAS HONEST WITH OTHERS. HE POINTED OUT SIN AND ERROR NOT TO SHOW HIMSELF TO BE SUPERIOR OR OTHERWISE HUMILIATE, BUT TO TRANSFORM THEM.

JESUS LOVED THROUGH PRACTICAL SERVICE: TEACHING, FEEDING, HEALING, AS WELL AS REALLY LISTENING TO OTHERS.

HE ACCEPTED PEOPLE AS THEY WERE, BEFORE POINTING THEM TOWARD WHO AND WHAT GOD CAN HELP THEM BECOME.

THE SAVIOR WAS ALSO PATIENT WITH OTHERS, INCLUDING HIS CLOSEST FOLLOWERS WHEN THEY DID NOT LISTEN OR COULD NOT UNDERSTAND.

HE WAS WILLING TO SACRIFICE TIME AND ENERGY FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.

IN THIS WAY HIS LOVE WAS SACRIFICIAL EVEN BEFORE HE WENT TO THE CROSS.

JESUS ALSO DID NOT KNOCK PEOPLE WHEN THEY WERE DOWN, OR AWARE OF THEIR SIN, BUT INSTEAD LOVED THEM AND LIFTED THEM UP.

REMEMBER STORIES LIKE: THE TAX COLLECTORS LEVI AND ZACCHAEUS, THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY, AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN.

EACH ONE OF THESE IS AN EXAMPLE OF JESUS LOVING THOSE WHO WERE REJECTED BY THEIR OWN PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN.

TOGETHER THEY REPRESENT ALL OF US WHO ARE SINNERS, WHETHER WE HAVE BEEN REJECTED BY OTHER PEOPLE OR NOT.

CHRIST'S CIRCLE OF LOVE EMBRACES US ALL AND DRAWS US INTO THE KINGDOM AND FAMILY OF GOD, IF WE LET HIM.

MANY OF THE THINGS THAT JESUS DID FOR OTHERS ARE WHAT WE CAN DO FOR ONE ANOTHER.

AND, REMEMBERING IT IS THE POWERFUL AND GRACIOUS LOVE OF GOD OUR SAVIOR THAT WELCOMES US, CAN HELP US LOVE OTHERS.

LET US ALSO NOTE THAT LOVE, IS NOT ALWAYS SHOWN THROUGH GREAT DEEDS OR WORDS, NOR DOES IT NEED TO BE PLANNED OUT.

OFTEN THE BEST DEMONSTRATIONS OF LOVE ARE FOUND IN SMALL AND SPONTANEOUS ACTS.

THERE IS A STORY FROM THE WORLD OF SPORTS THAT OFFERS AN EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF EVEN A SIMPLE ACT OF LOVE TO CHANGE THE BEHAVIOR OF OTHERS.

IT IS A STORY THAT IS TOLD ABOUT BABE RUTH, WHO HIT 714 HOME RUNS, AND WAS ADMIRER AND LOVED BY MANY FANS.

BUT THEN, HE GREW OLDER. DURING ONE OF HIS LAST GAMES, HE DID NOT PLAY WELL.

HE FUMBLER THE BALL TWICE, MADE A COUPLE OF BAD THROWS, LET IN FIVE RUNS FOR OPPOSING TEAM, AND HIS TEAM LOST.

AFTER THE GAME ENDED, HE WALKED HEAD DOWN, TOWARD THE DUGOUT, AS FANS WHO ONCE CHEERED WERE BOOING.

THEN A LITTLE BOY JUMPED OVER THE RAIL ONTO THE PLAYING FIELD.

HE THREW HIS ARMS AROUND THE KNEES OF HIS HERO IN DEMONSTRATION OF AFFECTION FOR THE OLD MAN.

BABE RUTH PICKED HIM FOR A MOMENT, AND THEN SET HIM DOWN, TOSLING HIS HEAD. THE TWO WALKED OFF THE FIELD HAND-IN-HAND.

THE CROWD HAD BECOME SILENT AS THEY WITNESSED THE GIVING AND RECEIVING OF A SMALL ACT OF LOVE. CONVICTED, WE MIGHT SAY OF THEIR OWN FAILURE TO LOVE.

MAY WE BE WILLING TO TAKE OUR OWN SMALL STEPS TO LOVING IN PRACTICAL WAYS SO THAT OTHERS MAY BE INSPIRED TO WELCOME THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN THEIR LIVES.

LET US PRAY: O GOD OF LOVE, YOUR WORD MADE FLESH IN JESUS CHRIST IS TRUSTWORTHY AND TRUE. BY THE POWER OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, MAY IT RISE UP IN US THIS DAY LIKE A GIFT FROM THE SPRING OF THE WATER OF LIFE TO REFRESH OUR THIRSTY SOULS WITH THE POWER OF CHRIST'S LOVE.

LONG AGO YOUR SON CALLED HIS CHURCH TO A LOVE BEYOND ALL SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, AND GAVE THEM THE GIFT OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT TO OPEN THEIR HEARTS TO ENACT SUCH LOVE.

GIVE US, WE PRAY, THAT SAME SPIRIT OF OPENNESS, THAT WE TOO MIGHT DISCERN NEW DIRECTIONS IN OUR DAY FOR YOUR DREAM TO RECONCILE AND HEAL ALL CREATION. IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY. AMEN.

SERMON SUMMARY: JOHN 13:31-35 “WHY LOVE”

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