

Love Some or All?

Jesus condenses the Law into two statements: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:34–40).

Do we love God? Do we love our neighbor? We love God, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). We are incapable of loving God with our own strength. Our only possibility to please and love God is through grace in Christ. We are also incapable of truly loving our brother because of the corrupt forces that arise in our flesh and blood. Has resentment, anger, and hate sometimes been close to us? “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20). John reminds, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). Oh, how we also need God’s help to show love to our fellowman!

Loving Those Who Love Us

Those people around us who have extended love to us are easier to love. Often we love because we see a benefit to ourselves or expect love in return. We may think, maybe we’ll receive recognition, love, money, acts of service, etc. We are selfish human beings. Jesus says, “For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have?” And He adds that even the dishonest tax collectors do that much (Matt. 5:46).

While it is easier to love those who love us, we too often take our closest ones for granted and fall short in serving with love. Have you dear father of a family worked to lighten the load of your wife with an encouraging word, a hug, or by doing the dishes or other household chores? Children and young people, have you loved your parents by thanking them for all they have done or by helping with the younger siblings, house cleaning, or yard work?

Loving the Undesirable

Is it easy to love those who may be a burden to us, those who have wronged us, those who bear the consequences for their foolish decisions and seek our help to get out of a bind? What about those who have less, those who are poor, have lesser abilities, and so on? Have we found it hard to remember that such a person also is our neighbor?

In His Parable (paradigm) of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus answers the lawyer’s questions of how one is saved and who is our neighbor. Because their hearts were not cleansed with Christ’s gospel that gives power to love, we see how the priest and the Levite couldn’t be bothered to help the man that lay robbed, beaten, and half dead on the way to Jericho. But the despised Good Samaritan saw this man as his neighbor whom he was to love as himself. This love arose from a merciful heart. Jesus even takes it a step further in teaching us, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Have we fared well with this instruction of Him who loved all perfectly?

God’s children who will once be called to everlasting life will not feel like they have merited salvation and will wonder how they have served the Lord Jesus. “The righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” Jesus will then assure them, “Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:37–40).

How Can We Serve and Love?

Often our intentions are good, but our good intentions have not assisted a tired mother in need of help, fed the poor, encouraged the mentally ill, helped a struggling addict into treatment, etc. The needs for services of love are many. May

God give us eyes to see the many needs around us and do what we can within reason. The possibilities are many: A group of youth may visit and sing songs with an elder in a care facility or go to babysit and clean at a young family's home so the parents can get a break. Sometimes lifelong friends in faith, confessor fathers or mothers, are found through these acts of service. A local congregation could conduct a food drive for a local food shelf. A family could invite someone for the holidays who doesn't have close ones to celebrate with.

I remember as a child feeling disappointment when my father or siblings invited someone outside of the family to celebrate a holiday with us; it felt like our family celebration wouldn't be the same. As the years have passed, I have seen the blessings of this teaching in my childhood home. Many of these "strangers" have become lifelong friends and escorts in faith. The example of the Good Samaritan was taught in practice at home.

"Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (Heb. 13:1-3).

Our Refuge

We have fared poorly. Yet, God is a forgiving God and has loved us so much that He sent His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to save us from sin. That is love! May the Giver of that love prompt us undeserving recipients of His miraculous grace to serve Him and our fellowman with all we have been given!

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Discussion Points:

1. Discuss Galatians 6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."
2. Are there believers who are struggling, without help? How can we reach out?
3. Do we help those who are not believing as we are?
4. How can we help those with an addiction of one sort or another?
5. How can we utilize societal resources around us to help?