

Sunday School Lesson October 18, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for October 18, 2020, "Loving Your Neighbor"

Background Scripture from Leviticus 19:18 and Luke 10:25-37.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:31 This is one of the most quoted statements in the Bible. It can be found in numerous places throughout scripture, and we reference it frequently. Do we really stop to think about what it actually means to love our neighbors as ourselves? Could it be, that we actually love some of our neighbors differently than we love ourselves?

Loving your neighbor as yourself is found eight times in the Bible. Loving your neighbor as yourself is so important to God that He not only repeats Himself. He makes it a command. And not just once in a list of many commands. Jesus coupled the command to love your neighbor as yourself with loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. James calls it the royal law. But loving your neighbor as yourself, we all know is not easy. That's why God made it a command. He knew we would struggle. We have to do it on purpose, be intentional about it. Sometimes even out of our need. Here are some statements of what it means to love our neighbor as yourself (you can probably add others):

- Loving your neighbor means receiving God's love.
- Loving your neighbor means loving ourselves as well.
- Loving your neighbor means showing grace.
- Loving your neighbor means acting with compassion.
- Loving your neighbor means looking out for their wellbeing.
- Loving your neighbor means serving them.
- Loving your neighbor means speaking kindly.
- Loving your neighbor means making allowances for other people's humanity.
- Loving your neighbor means sharing in their joys and sorrows

- Loving your neighbor means forgiving.

Forgiveness is a big deal to God. The Bible says He planned it for us from the foundation of the world. Jesus frequently spoke forgiveness over others that resulted in the healing of their bodies.

From the text section, The Parable of the Good Samaritan – the central teaching of the parable of the Good Samaritan is found in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-31 also underscore this emphasis, though they do not include the parable. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”. Leviticus 19:18 says, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord”.

We sometimes find it easy to love the elderly man with tattered jeans, ruffled hair, and a hand-scratched sign begging for help. Other times we find it easy to love the orphan who isn't even old enough to beg. Other people's hearts are broken for the women who are forced by life's circumstances into the grips of prostitution. Sometimes we find it difficult to love the neighbor who is sitting in the pew right next to us. Other times we find it difficult to love the neighbor who is sitting in a different pew, in a different Church that doesn't hold to the same biblical viewpoints. Some we find it difficult to love the foreigners among us. Examples could go on and on. I'm certain that all of us identify with a group of people from a particular life circumstance or background and are filled with compassion and love for them. We find it easy to love those neighbors as we love ourselves.

I'm also certain that all of us struggle or have struggled truly loving our neighbor, because our neighbor takes on many forms. Our neighbor might be the woman we call a gossip who worships right beside us, the young teen who paints graffiti on buildings, and the man who attends a church that's not in our denomination.

The issue isn't who our neighbor is and who we're supposed to love. The issue is our hearts. Who are we and, are we willing to show love, mercy, and compassion? Will we get caught up in who we should help and love, how often are we supposed to, and how much; or will we simply allow the Holy Spirit to work through us? We are all different and at different places in our walk with the Lord. He is working on each of us. We can be united in love and still stand firm in our beliefs and challenge one another to rise above.

From the text section being a neighbor. The more we grow in our love of God, the more we realize how deeply we are loved by God. Loving God is not

a one-time thing. Loving God calls us to offer every aspect of our lives to God. But the harder we try, the more difficult it becomes. Were it not for God's immeasurable love for us, we could not make even the smallest progress in this effort. Surprisingly, God helps us most when we try to follow God by loving others. True love of self is made possible because we accept God's love for us, warts and all. To love one another is to do for the other what God is continually doing for us. God recognizes our needs and seeks to meet them; this is how we are to treat others.

Points that provide additional information regarding today's scripture.

The lawyer's question asked Jesus to define who was to be considered a neighbor. The lawyer was looking for a legal definition to limit his liability. Jesus rendered his question moot when he told a story about what it means to be a neighbor. His teachings amplifies the Torah teaching about caring for widows, children and non-citizens or resident aliens. The lawyer was not truly seeking Jesus, he wanted to trick Him. Like the lawyer, we often know what is right; we just need to be doing it.

The command to love one's neighbor was seen as a key moral command of the law (Leviticus 19:18). It is cited often in the New Testament as the summation of the whole Law of Moses (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, 33, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14 and James 2:8). We often know what the Bible means, but we keep on asking questions hoping to justify our contrary views.

The priest and the Levite might have thought that the injured person was dead, so they passed on the other side to avoid being ritually unclean by touching a dead body. However, the Talmud concludes that the law requiring a person encountering a dead body to stop and bury it took precedence and should have compelled them to attend to the person regardless. In this teaching, Jesus was highlighting the absurdity of the legalism religious leaders prioritized over the law of love. The law is summed up as loving God and loving our neighbor. If we could obey the law completely we could live eternally. Jesus did not identify the wounded man, therefore he represents all people regardless of rank, religion, or nationality. The root problem with the priest and the Levite was their failure to love God. Showing love to someone results in self-sacrificing actions toward that person; it may cost you time and money.

For Jesus, to love your neighbor as you love yourself was to practice justice towards your fellow human beings:

- Live generously towards the poor and alien.
- Do not steal from anyone.

- Do not be deceptive in dealings with people.
- Do not swear in God's name.
- Do not oppress, rob, or exploit the poor by paying unfair wages.
- Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind.
- Do not be partial to the poor or show favor to the great, but judge honestly.
- Do not commit financial fraud.
- Do not hate your brother.
- Do not seek revenge or hold a grudge but extend forgiveness.

For Jesus, speaking to Jews shaped by the Torah, this is what loving your neighbor looked like. We have to ask our self, how does this affect how we love our neighbor?

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson October 25, 2020, "Love Divine" Background Scripture 1 Corinthians 12:27-14:1.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Dr. Craig Rikard, lesson on Loving Your Neighbor, from South Georgia Advocate, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.