

“A Way to Love Your Neighbor”

Scripture does not separate love for God from our love for the neighbor. Yes, the two commands are distinct. Love for God is the greatest commandment, Jesus says. As the greatest commandment, it shapes our love for the neighbor. Nevertheless, a Christian cannot follow the greatest commandment without following the second. “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Joh 4:20).

Who is our neighbor? Neighbors can be understood both broadly and narrowly. Broadly, our neighbors are those with whom we live in proximity. In the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), a neighbor is anyone with whom you come in contact, including an enemy. So, think about those people who live near you, such as the members of your family or your neighbors. Your neighbor is also the stranger you might pass on the street.

Narrowly, our neighbors are brothers and sisters in Christ, or members of the church family. While we have the obligation to do good to everyone, we must consider the importance of the church family. “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

What does it mean to love our neighbor? Simply, to love your neighbor means to advance their good. But this requires parameters. A person’s good is not defined by personal preference. Biblically, love is ordered to God and His ways. God is the highest love and joy. Thus, love and truth are also inseparable. Love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing; it rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6).

How do Christians love their neighbor? One way is to promote and strengthen the created institutions of family and marriage. “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:4-7). The command to seek the good, of the community includes strengthening marriages and family. These are good because marriage and family is built into the moral fabric of the world. Plus, there is the principle of reciprocity. By seeking the good of the city, Christians will also benefit.

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