

Words of Truth

Who Is My Neighbor?

By: Brian A. Yeager

The word of God teaches us as Christians to love our neighbors as ourselves. Notice: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

Before we move on, I want to address a common misunderstanding in the Scriptural passages I just quoted above. Many think that “owe no man any thing” means you cannot have any credit debts, etc. The Greek word translated “owe” in Romans 13:8 is “δόφείλω”. It is defined as this: “probably from the base of 3786 (through the idea of accruing); to owe (pecuniarily); figuratively, to be under obligation (ought, must, should); morally, to fail in duty: — be bound, (be) debt(-or), (be) due(-ty), be guilty (indebted), (must) need, ought, owe, should” (Strong’s # 3784). With the definition not being clear, you have to consider further studying the matter. There is Scriptural authority for one to lend money to another (Matthew 5:42). Paul was even willing to be indebted to Philemon on the behalf of Onesimus (Philemon 1:17-19). The same Greek word is translated as “ought” in passages such as (Ephesians 5:28). If you study this out, you cannot possibly conclude that Romans 13:8 forbids financial debts. Rather, and the context fits this conclusion, you have to understand that what we ought or owe to one another is neighborly love. Thus, don’t fail one another in fulfilling that obligation.

With that side study behind us, we should get back to our actual study. Consider this: “And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these... For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:28-31 and Galatians 5:13-14).

When we consider the Scriptures we have read thus far, we can clearly see that we have a responsibility to love our neighbors. Some people think their neighbors are only those whom live within a stones throw of themselves. Some, who live in very rural areas with few people around them will often say they have no neighbors. We have to consider Scripturally whom God defines as our neighbors so that we can properly obey the instruction to love our neighbors.

Jesus Answered This Question

There is no greater answer to the question of "who is my neighbor" than the one you are about to read. Here is what Jesus taught: *"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise"* (Luke 10:25-37).

According to the teaching of Christ your neighbor has nothing to do with one's geographical location or proximity to your home address. According to the teaching of our Savior the neighbor to the Samaritan was a stranger. The way the Samaritan showed love to this stranger was by really helping him in a time of clear and obvious need. There is not much to misunderstand when it comes to what Jesus taught. The conclusion of our Lord's direction was "Go, and do thou likewise".

Since our neighbors are anyone and include everyone we have been taught by God to show loving actions towards all of humanity. Loving actions are like what we read of the "Good Samaritan". We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (James 2:8). Love is a broad subject matter. It includes correcting the erring (Proverbs 27:5-6 and Revelation 3:19). It includes being longsuffering, kind, righteous thinking, endurance, etc. (I Corinthians 13:4-7). Thus, when we are fulfilling the instruction to love our neighbors we need to make sure we are doing what the Scriptures define those actions to be. For example, we cannot allow ourselves to err by doing something like giving food to someone who will not work (II Thessalonians 3:10).

Conclusion

Faithfulness includes much more than initial obedience to the Gospel, worshipping aright, teaching the truth, and other things often emphasized. Sadly, the point of this Scripture is at the top of Jesus' list of faithful actions while residing at the bottom of the priorities of many Christians. Remember, the only instruction greater than love thy neighbor is to love God. Love is action (I John 3:14-18). Let's keep on it or get to it, but do not ignore this instruction!

Milkshakes

The Way Christians View Sin And Sinners

By: Brian A. Yeager

Accurate thinking about Christianity involves thinking about love (I Timothy 1:5 and I John 4:8). Christians certainly love the Lord (I Corinthians 16:22 and I John 5:2-3). Christians love one another (John 13:34-35, I Thessalonians 4:9, and Philemon 1:5). Christians love their fellow man (Matthew 22:36-40). As Christians, we even love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

All of the above is certain and clear in the Scriptures. Where people often err is in understanding how loving Christians have a consistent, non hypocritical love. Consider this particular Scripture: *"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good"* (Romans 12:9). The word translated "dissimulation" in Romans 12:9 means: "undissembled, i.e. sincere: — without dissimulation (hypocrisy), unfeigned" (Strong's # 505). Since the love of a Christian is a love without hypocrisy, we can see how we CANNOT love God and evil at the same time (Psalms 97:10). In fact, the word translated "abhor" in Romans 12:9 means: "to detest utterly" (Strong's # 655).

God's love for humanity brought our Savior into the world (Titus 3:4). Yet, He hates [detests] sinners in a way wherein He sees them as an abomination (Psalms 5:4-6, Psalms 11:5-7, Proverbs 15:9, Proverbs 15:26, Proverbs 15:29, and Hebrews 1:8-9). We are to love as God loves (Ephesians 5:1-2). What does that teach us? It teaches us about love without hypocrisy.

Since our love is to be without hypocrisy and our love is to be patterned off of God's love, we know we have to learn to love saints and sinners, but not alike. Our love for sinners is limited to trying to help them see Christ in us (Matthew 5:14-16) and to see the Scriptures that can save them (Romans 1:14-17). The loving relationship we have with our brethren is not to be like the relationship we have with sinners (Matthew 12:46-50, II Corinthians 6:14-18, and Ephesians 5:6-11). When we find and maintain this balance we perfect how to love without hypocrisy.

Following God's sincere, non-hypocritical pattern of love, we find that we too will have an utter detest of sinners. The Psalmist said: *"I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked"* (Psalms 26:4-5). Words of wisdom teach us this: *"An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked"* (Proverbs 29:27). In the New Testament we read this: *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4).

Christians view sin and sinners alike. You cannot separate the two. A sinner is someone who sins (I John 3:4). Like God, we are to be in the light and not abide in darkness (I John 1:5-7). If we are faithfully living the word of God, we will despise sinners. However, we will love them too. We will try to help them leave the life of sin behind and be converted to become children of God as we are (Acts 26:18-20). Let's view saints and sinners in the way the Bible teaches us to. Let's show people love without hypocrisy. In our next first principle study we are going to discuss how actions speak louder than words.