

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

Love Of Neighbour

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Leviticus 19:9-18

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Leviticus chapter 19. If you were not here for the message that we did two weeks ago on the sacrificial system I would encourage you to download that from the website as we provided some extensive introduction to Leviticus in general in that message and for the sake of time we will not be repeating that information this morning. I want to read to the section of the Old Testament that contains a verse that is among the most frequently quoted in the New. We are likely all familiar with the words: “Love your neighbour as yourself” – words quoted in the New Testament three times by Jesus, twice by the Apostle Paul and once by James, the brother of Jesus in James 2:8. But what do these words mean? What do they intend to command? Those words obviously meant something to Jesus and to Paul and to James because they had read and studied the passage we will be reading this morning. Let me read the text to you beginning at verse 9 and carrying through to verse 18 and then we will divide it by God’s grace and ask some probing questions of it. This is God’s Word:

⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.

¹⁰And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for

the poor and the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.

¹¹You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.

¹²And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the LORD.

¹³You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob *him*. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.

¹⁴You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I *am* the LORD.

¹⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.

¹⁶You shall not go about *as* a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I *am* the LORD.

¹⁷You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.

¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD. (Leviticus 19:9-18. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

General Introduction:

Let me provide a little bit of introduction to this chapter before we begin looking at the five rather obvious ways this text calls upon us to show love to our neighbour. Scholars generally agree that Leviticus 19 offers an expansion upon the 10 Commandments as a whole. If you read the chapter carefully you will notice each commandment reappears with a little bit of expansion and extrapolation. In the passage we are looking at scholars generally agree that you have a clustering of laws and reflections upon what it means to love your neighbour. It is often said that the ten commandments are gathered and organised around two great imperatives: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. That idea comes from this chapter. This chapter seems to be teaching us that love and keeping commandments are intimately connected realities. We love God by avoiding idolatry, keeping a separate day for worship, respecting the centrality of worship and church gatherings, honouring our parents and listening to their instruction and keeping the Lord's name holy and respected. We love our neighbour by keeping the commandments expanded upon in verses 9-18.

Most of us in 21st century North America do not intuitively make the connection between love and obedience and so this chapter is actually a little bit surprising and even confrontational. We tend to define love in very sentimental and subjective kind of ways. We think in terms of feelings and affections and chemistry. The Bible thinks in terms of obedience and self denial and service. If we want to follow Jesus, however, we need to get on board with this way of thinking because it was HIS way of thinking. He says in John 14:15:

¹⁵If you love me, you will keep^a my commandments. (John 14:15. NRSV)

Jesus understood love as working itself out in acts of obedience to the commandments of God. That's a new thought for most of us but as you will see, it is a useful and even transformative way of thinking. Let me show you how the Bible says we should love our neighbour. There are five concrete acts of obedience that express this love.

Loving Our Neighbours With Five Acts Of Obedience:

1. We are commanded to be loving with our wealth

We see that in verses 9-10:

⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.

¹⁰And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather *every* grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God. (NKJV)

Notice how this passage ends: "I am the Lord your God". The reason that I am suggesting that there are 5 acts of loving obedience and not 3 or 7 is because scholars agree that each new teaching is set off from the next by this phrase "I am the Lord". It shows up five times in this passage after each new aspect of loving the neighbour. This is intended to communicate that our actions toward the neighbour are rooted in our understanding of God's own character. We do this because of who God is. We'll come back to that at the end of the message.

Here we are told that we are not to reap the corners of our land. Wonderful, you say, because as you do not actually farm any land, this clearly does not apply to you. Wrong. The principle is expressed in agricultural terms because God's people at this time were agricultural people; the principle however is transparently obvious: God's people should live well within their financial means so that they have plenty of money to share with those in need. The NT authors frequently cite this principle in their own inspired writings. The Apostle Paul for example says:

²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28. ESV)

God has given to you a capacity to make money and he has not done this simply so that you can have good things, rather he gave you this capacity ultimately so that you would have the ability to be as he is: a generous, cheerful giver of good things to those who are in need. When you spend all your money on yourself you are failing to worship God who is the giver of all things.

We need to hear that my friends. Canadians carry an enormous amount of household debt, meaning that we are spending, on average about 105% of what we make on ourselves. The average Canadian gives less than 1% of his income to anything remotely charitable. A friend of mine was telling me how happy he was that several people in his church were being aggressively audited by CRA because of their ridiculous charitable donations. They all give well over 10% to their church and then many of them give on top of that to local charities. The CRA found this so remarkable that they thought some sort of localized scam was happening so they sent investigators to their homes! I myself was partially audited a few years ago because it is rare for pastors to tithe nowadays and they wanted to see receipts to prove that this was really happening. My friends, we should all be giving CRA fits because Christians are supposed to be the most generous people in the world! I would love for the Christians of Orillia to so arouse the suspicions of the CRA that we incite a massive across the board investigation. Let's make that our goal. God's people love their neighbours by living well within their means and sharing generously from their wealth.

2. We are commanded to be loving with our words

We see this in verses 11-12:

¹¹You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.

¹²And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the LORD. (NKJV)

The type of stealing being referred to here is the type we would think of today as fraud. It is saying that something is made of gold when it isn't or it is saying that something is worth more than it really is. There is a little more commentary on this principle offered in verses 35-36 of this chapter. Moses records:

³⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume.

³⁶You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19:35-36. NKJV)

We are to be loving to our neighbours by telling them the truth, particularly in the realm of business and finance. No lying scales, no false promises, no renegeing on our words or contracts. If we are dishonest we will undercut the very institutions that protect property and promote prosperity. The financial crisis of 2008/9 was almost entirely the product of dishonesty. The financial sector has become so complicated that only a few people understand it and these people were able to perpetrate an enormous fraud that resulted in untold loss and damage to men and women. To love your neighbour is to tell the truth.

3. We are commanded to be loving with our actions

Look at verses 13-14:

¹³You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob *him*. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.

¹⁴You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I *am* the LORD. (Leviticus 19:13-14. NKJV)

In those days many working class men literally lived hand to mouth. They were day labourers and they would show up at the town square in the morning and wait to be hired by the estate managers. At the end of the day they were paid the standard days wage and that pay usually bought the man's family their evening meal. To hire a man to work on your estate and then tell him at quitting time that you couldn't pay him was a callous and mean spirited abuse of the poor. You sent that man home to his family with no money and no food and filled only with shame and a sense of his own helplessness and it made God angry. Likewise evil, mean spirited people have always found sport in abusing the handicapped. This is especially heinous in the eyes of God.

My children are fascinated with the stories of discipline from the 70's and 80's when I grew up. They are amazed that Uncle Marc got the belt and Auntie Lianne got her mouth washed out with soap and that DADDY regularly received instruction at the business end of grandma's wooden spoon. They can't believe that such things were legal back in the stone age and yet they love the stories and regularly ask for a retelling. At the end of each belt or spoon story Mikayla will often ask: "That's illegal today though right?" And I assure her that it is, though I also tell her that I quite profited from the whole experience. But when I taught my children Leviticus 19 I told them that if I ever caught them taking advantage of a handicapped person or making jokes at the

expense of a handicapped person I would immediately investigate exactly what the law does permit in terms of discipline and I would personally apply that punishment to their person with maximum relish and enthusiasm. There is nothing worse; there is nothing less loving than the abuse of the handicapped and the most vulnerable. Christians do not do such things. Christians have compassion and treat the needs of the vulnerable as if they were their own.

4. We are commanded to be loving with our judgements

We see this taught in verses 15-16:

¹⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.

¹⁶You shall not go about *as* a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I *am* the LORD. (Leviticus 19:15-16. NKJV)

The best gift we can give to our neighbours is often fair treatment under the law. Justice should be blind. The goal of law is not to make everyone equal – it is not to rob from the rich and give to the poor, it is to treat people fairly with respect to the truth. We do as much harm by favouring the poor as we do by favouring the rich. For a society to function TRUTH not EGALITARIANISM has to be the standard and objective in our decision making.

This is a necessary corrective in our present cultural climate. The Bible is not Marxist. It is not anti-rich or pro-poor. It is pro-justice and pro-truth. It is the truth that will set you free, it is justice that provides you with a context for advancement it is not affirmative action or wealth redistribution. We love people best by insisting on truth and fairness with respect to the law.

5. We are commanded to be loving in our attitude and in our affections

We see this principle in verses 17-18:

¹⁷You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.

¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD. (Leviticus 19:17-18. NKJV)

You see, it is possible, even quite common in Canada, to love one's neighbour in the previous four ways we have mentioned and yet still hate him in your heart. You can tithe and give money to the cancer society, you can be honest and fair and yet still hate and hold enmity in your heart. But this will not do. God commands you to do what you need to do to have peace with all people. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. This will involve attempting to work out the reasons and causes for your hard feelings towards your neighbour.

When someone wrongs you, or you feel that they have wronged you, you have three options:

- i. Seek revenge.
- ii. Let it go.
- iii. Work it out.

The Bible teaches into each of those options. First of all, it clearly rules out option one:

¹⁹**Never take your own revenge**, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19. NASB)

Never take your own revenge. A Christian is not permitted to deal with offence by seeking to get even. The Bible also addresses #2:

Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer^f and another, ⁶but a believer^f goes to court against a believer^f—and before unbelievers at that?

⁷In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. **Why not rather be wronged?** Why not rather be defrauded? (1 Corinthians 6:5-7. NRSV)

In the church at Corinth believers were having disputes and arguments with each other that often spilled over into the court system and Paul says: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not just let it go? Better to be wronged and defrauded than to shame the name of Jesus". Sometimes letting it go is the wisest course of action. But not always. There is a time to confront the person so that you can work it out and return to friendship. The Bible says that too:

¹⁵Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

¹⁶But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*[£]

¹⁷And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17. NKJV)

If someone has done you wrong go and talk to that person, just you and him ALONE. How much peace would be restored to the church and the world if we followed this principle? We rarely do this, usually we talk about people behind their backs, attempt to recruit support and generate some strength in numbers. This should not be. Go and talk to the person one on one. Sometimes that will do it. If it doesn't seek a third party perspective, often that will do the trick. I am convinced that most marriage counselling is just third party perspective. She sees it her way, he sees it his way and they just need another set of eyes to get passed the blockage! If that doesn't work, involve the church. Let the leadership have a look at it. If that doesn't work, then Jesus says, one of you is not saved and needs to be kicked out of fellowship and re-evangelised. It shouldn't be this hard for believers to see eye to eye. If you can't one of you is spiritually blind and dead and needs to come to Jesus.

Listen to me my Canadian friends, too many of us fear confrontation and so we never take the step to go and talk to the brother who has wronged us we just hate them in our hearts while smiling pleasantly to their faces. That is not loving. Tell them what they've done, rebuke them if necessary and get it right. God does not want our love to be merely legal, and merely truthful and merely helpful. He wants it to be ultimately heartfelt. Real love is not only affective and emotional, but it cannot be void of affection and emotion. God wants both.

Who is my neighbour?

Before we move on there is an obvious question that this text begs us to ask and it is this: who is my neighbour? If I am going to put this teaching into practice I need to know the target audience. Who is my neighbour? Look again at verses 17-18:

¹⁷You shall not hate **your brother** in your heart....¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against **the children of your people**, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD. (Leviticus 19:17-18. NKJV)

There is absolutely no doubt that in the original giving of this teaching the target audience for this type of love was other members of the covenant community. It is also true that this ethic was extended beyond mere ethnic boundaries to people who were not actually Jewish but who were living among the covenant community and participating in its intended culture and ethos. So we

see in Leviticus 19:33 a reference to the stranger (non-Jew) who is living inside the land. He has chosen to identify with the people and should be treated with the same standard of love as the ethnic Jew. The original meaning then of “neighbour” would be those living within the covenant community, whether they were actually “of Israel” or not.

That is the first thing we should say, but it cannot be the last thing that we say. We recall that Jesus had a regular habit of saying things like:

²⁷“You have heard that it was said [£]to those of old, ‘*You shall not commit adultery.*’[£]

²⁸But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28. NKJV)

What was Jesus doing here? Was he abolishing the Old Testament moral law? No, certainly not, he was taking people deeper into its very heart. According to the Old Testament law adultery meant having sex with another man’s wife. Jesus here is not saying: “Its ok to have sex with another man’s wife as long as you are wearing a blind fold.” He is not saying that. He is saying that while you certainly should not have sex with another man’s wife, you also should not even look at a woman who is not your wife with lust in your heart.” He is validating the external boundary of the law and then walking people deeper into the very heart of the law.

Why am I telling you this? Because Jesus told a story once to answer the question: “Who is my neighbour?” To answer that question he told the story of the Good Samaritan. You know the story, a man is walking from Jerusalem down to Jericho and he gets beaten up by robbers and is left for dead on the road. A priest and a Levi walk by and they do nothing to help and then a Samaritan walks by and he has mercy on him, he puts him on his donkey, takes him to a local inn, feeds him, tends to his wounds and leaves money with the inn keeper to see to his recovery. This man was neighbour to the fellow in need. Now people often take that teaching and they say: “See! Jesus is saying that the correct object of our love is not the covenant community, it is the needy person from another culture!” And thus digging a well in Africa is good but visiting the seniors in your own church is selfish. That is not Biblical and that is not what Jesus does with respect to the law. Jesus always respects the outer marker and then he walks us deeper. The Bible uniformly affirms that we are to FIRST love the members of the covenant community but then ALSO we are to show love to whomever God puts in our path who is in need. That is why the Apostle Paul said:

¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, **especially to those who are of the household of faith.** (Galatians 6:10. NKJV)

Let me be very clear then: who is my neighbour? To whom do I owe this standard of obedient love? The Bible tells us of three categories of people who are owed this love:

i. The covenant community

The climax of the sheep and the goats story when Jesus separates people on judgement day, some to everlasting glory and some to everlasting punishment involves him saying to the sheep people: “I know you are sheep people because I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, naked and you gave me clothes, sick and you visited me”. The sheep people say: “We don’t remember ever feeding you or giving you a drink or visiting you. When did we do this?” And Jesus famously replies:

‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of **the least of these My brethren**, you did *it* to Me.’ (Matthew 25:40. NKJV)

According to the Bible, love for the brotherhood of believers is taken by Jesus as proof of saving faith. That is huge. Charity and love BEGIN inside the local body of gathered believers. When you visit one of our seniors in the hospital you are providing Jesus with compelling evidence of your legitimate faith. When you fix the broken toilet or leaky pipes for one of our single moms you give Jesus compelling evidence that God’s grace has touched your heart. Love begins in the covenant community, Old Testament and New. Within that covenant community there is a sub-section that receives special mention in the Bible:

ii. One’s own biological family

The Bible says:

⁸But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8. NKJV)

It is the job of parents to work to support their children and it is the job of children to support their aged parents when they can no longer work for themselves. Failure to do so is proof that you are not a believer and in fact are worse than an unbeliever because even without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they often do these things themselves. The last person, the one we might have missed without the inspired story of Jesus is this:

iii. The needy person God puts in front of us

The story of the Good Samaritan is not Jesus saying: “Don’t love the covenant community and don’t love your kids or parents” it is Jesus saying: “Don’t forget to love the needy person, whoever they may be, that God has put in your path. Love that person too.” Care for their immediate needs. Bind their wounds. Do unto them as you would have them do unto you.

Conclusion:

This teaching is very necessary today because there is a great deal of fuzzy thinking in the modern day church. We are made to feel that we must do many things that in reality we are not well positioned to do and we are subtly encouraged to neglect many things that we really must do and are in fact IDEALLY positioned to do. A parachurch ministry comes to your church and shows a video about hungry children in Africa and they tell you that you must do something because we are, after all, commanded to love our neighbours. Now, it is true that we are to love those God puts in our path and it is true that the church is called to GO INTO ALL THE WORLD so it is almost true to say that I must do something about that hungry child in Africa. What must I do? I must be a part of the church that goes where that child is and I must support the churches that are loving their neighbours in places such as those. That is why many missions boards, including our own have made it a priority to work through local churches in places where there is need because the love of God is best communicated when local believers love those hurting children that God has put in their path. You see ultimately, we do these loving things because of who God is; remember how each section ended? “I am the Lord your God”. Our acts of love must be grounded in the character of God; our acts of love are intended to communicate to lost people WHO GOD IS.

The point is not just to feed hungry people; hungry people who don't know the love of God in Jesus Christ go to hell whether we feed them or not. The goal is for these acts of love to point to the author of love. The goal is for them to see that God has loved us in just these many ways. He has loved us by giving us generously from his wealth. In Jesus Christ God has made the overflow of his own righteousness available to all of us poor sinners who stand in need. God has loved us generously with his words. He has spoken all of creation into being and indeed we are saved by his Word, the Word of God in the flesh. God has also loved us with his actions. God demonstrated his love for us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God has also loved us with his judgments. Because of the work of Jesus Christ God is now JUST and the JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in Jesus. And he has loved us with affection. His is no cold and merely external love. His is the love of a father who has joined us into his family with adopting love. He is the Lord our God and THEREFORE do we love our neighbour. May God be glorified in us as we reflect his love to one another and to all our neighbours along the way. And all God's people said, amen. Levi, will you come and lead us?