

# The Law of Love

Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:34-40

If you were to go out to Walmart and ask random people to define love, what would you guess would be the responses? Would it be loving a spouse, or a boyfriend or girlfriend? Or “love is blind,” or “love is a many-splendored thing,” or that “love is all we need”? Or “love is heartbreaking,” if it's coming from a spurned lover?

But do you know that the Ten Commandments (Exo 20:1-17) is about love? When asked by the Pharisees what is the greatest commandment, Jesus answered that there were two: love God, and love neighbor (Matt 22:37-40). So love is the fulfillment of the law of God.

What is it to love God? The first commandment, *“You shall have no other gods before me,”* is a summary of the next three commandments:

1. *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything... You shall not bow down to them or serve them...”* This is a prohibition against idolatry, which is worshiping any other god other than the God of heaven, the God who created heaven and earth. Self (narcissism) and pleasures (hedonism) are the most common human idols.
2. *“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”* This is dishonoring the holiness, greatness, righteousness, love, mercy and other perfect attributes of God.
3. *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”* Not keeping the Sabbath day, the Lord's Day every first day of the week, is dishonoring what God intended for mankind: one day physical rest every seven days, and commemorating God's provision of spiritual rest for his people. We dishonor God when we love our work and pleasures more than God.

Therefore, to love God with all our *“heart, soul, strength and mind”* (Deu 6:5; Mat 22:37) is to make the highest purpose and enjoyment of our life *“to glorify God and enjoy him forever”* (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A1).

So Jesus teaches us that this should be our life's purpose, *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”* (Matt 6:33). Paul says, *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth”* (Col 3:1-2). *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (Col 3:17).

And what is it to “love our neighbor as ourself”? (Lev 19:18; Mat 22:39) The Tenth Commandment, *“you shall not covet... anything that is your neighbor's,”* (Exo 20:17) is the summary of the Fifth through the Ninth Commandments. These are actions that we are prohibited from doing to our neighbors. The well-known 1 Corinthians 13, the Bible's “love chapter,” gives us the attributes of pure, true love, the positive aspects of loving our neighbor: “patient, kind, does not envy or boast, not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its

own way, not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrongdoing, rejoices with the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

So we are to love our neighbor with a love that includes all these characteristics of love. What a tall order! It would be impossible for sinful human beings to have this kind of love. Only God can love in this way, but this should be our goal. Therefore, no one can love his neighbor with this godly love if he doesn't love God first.

Jesus said we must love our neighbor as ourself. He doesn't want us to hate ourself. Only that we are to acknowledge that our own selves are sinful and that Jesus has forgiven us of all our sins. We are so precious to God, so loved by God, that he gave his only-begotten Son to us so that we may not perish into eternal wrath, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

So Paul urges us, *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 2:3-5a).

And who is our neighbor? The example Jesus gave us in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luk 10:25-37) points us to who our neighbor is. The neighbor is actually us, helpless and hopeless in our sinful, fallen condition. We have been beaten and overcome by temptations and sins.

And who comes along our way to rescue us from our helplessness? It is Jesus himself, the Good Samaritan, who looks after us, his neighbors. He binds our wounds. He pays for our temporary lodging in this world, while we await his return to take us to our final, eternal home in heaven. What wondrous love! (Psa 31:21)

Are you a neighbor to your fallen family and friends? Are you willing to sacrifice your own time, effort, and even money to save them from their fallenness? Like Christ, who paid for us fallen sinners with his broken body and shed blood on the cross, are you willing to sacrifice for them?

Jesus gave us love commandments: *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13). *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”* And when your family and friends see our love for one another in our church, *“all people will know that you are my disciples”* (John 13:34-35).