**“Love Your Neighbor As Yourself”**

Moses delivered this injunction to the Israelite people after he led them out of Egyptian slavery (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus taught that the totality of what God wants from us can be summarized as loving Him with all our hearts, souls, strength and mind and loving our neighbors as ourselves. But He then proceeded to turn our concept of ‘neighbor’ on its ear.

On one occasion, the question, “who is my neighbor” prompted Jesus to tell a parable about a Jewish man beaten, robbed and left for dead on a deserted road. While other travelers ignored his plight, a Samaritan had compassion on him and expended great time, effort and expense to get the man to safety and to nurse him back to health (Luke 10:30-37).

Not only did the Jews of the first century hate Samaritans, the feeling was mutual. The ancestors of the Samaritans had been transplanted to the region of Samaria by the Assyrians around 700BC and their religion was a mix of acknowledgement of Jehovah and pagan idolatry. They built a temple in mount Gerizim in the 5th century BC and in the 2nd century before Christ, Jewish forces destroyed it. It is obvious from the comments of the Samaritan woman at the well that the conflict between the two religions was a constant source of controversy even then (John 4:20).

As Jesus and His disciples journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem, they passed through Samaria and requested lodging in one of the Samaritan villages. When the people of the city learned that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, they withheld their hospitality. Normally a Samaritan who may have encountered a Jew in the ditch would have considered him an enemy, but the Samaritan in Jesus’ story behaved as a neighbor despite the nationality of the man who needed his help. And the conclusion of Jesus’ parable was, “Go and do the same.”

When Jesus says, “Love your neighbor as yourself”, He is including our enemies! Discipleship means striving to develop the character of our Master, and that is an ambitious standard! He was willing to die for us when we were still rebellious sinners (Romans 5:8). We must learn to hate unrighteousness as much as He does, yet empathize with those whose lives are being destroyed by it. Christians are called to love everyone we encounter and have the humility to act in their best interest even when they don’t feel the same way.

The characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians13:4-7 applies as much to foes as to friends. I must strive to be kind, patient, humble and thick-skinned in all my relationships. To the extent that I succeed will be the degree to which I will glorify my Father who is in heaven.

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