

Mark 12:28–34 — What Is The Greatest Commandment?

February 30, 2020

Take your Bibles and turn to Mark 12:28. While you are turning, let me tell you about an interesting website I ran across this week. It is called the “Record Setter” website¹. People are allowed to select a category, then try to break a world record in that category. All they need to do is video themselves breaking the world record and upload the video to the website. If their video shows them breaking the world record, their name and video are moved to the top of the list. They hold the new world record for that event.

This week, since this message is about love and what it means to love, I was searching the web for illustrations on love. Google brought me to the “Love World Records” category on the Record Setter website. I found that youth pastor Kenny Stanteen currently holds the world record for saying, “I love you” to his wife the most times in 30 seconds. On video he told her “I love you” 69 times in only 30 seconds.

While someone can hold the world record to saying “I love you,” it is something completely different to be a record setter when it comes to actually showing love. The importance of striving to be a record setter when it comes to showing love is what we are going to talk about this morning.

Let’s read our text.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all

¹ <https://recordsetter.com/love-world-records>

your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:28–34 (ESV)

The theme of these verses is love. Loving God and loving people are the most important things we can do with our lives. When it comes to loving God and loving people, that is always something we will do imperfectly until heaven, so it is something that even seasoned Christians need to think about how to improve until we see Jesus face to face.

Our study this morning will break into four parts. First is the background on these verses. Second is the question the scribe asked of Jesus. Third is the answer given by Jesus. Fourth is the response the scribe gives to Jesus.

What is the background of these verses?

Remember we are in the last week of Jesus’ life. Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds in the Triumphal Entry at the beginning of the week. He will be crucified on Friday at the end of the week. Right now, we are in the middle of the week. After Jesus forced the animal sellers and money changers out of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple, the Sanhedrin, which is the Jewish ruling council of 70 men plus the high priest, decided to move swiftly to get rid of Jesus. The Sanhedrin couldn’t just outright kill Jesus because he was too popular with the people. They came up with a plan to ruin his popularity, then they could take his life.

The Sanhedrin's plan was to send three delegations to Jesus to try to trap him with trick questions. They hoped he would lose his popularity with the crowds when he gave bad answers to their questions.

The first delegation they sent to Jesus was a group of Pharisees. They tried to trick Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar. Jesus evaded their trick question. We studied the second delegation last week. That was a group of Sadducees. They tried to trap Jesus, and make him look like a fool, with a question about the resurrection. Instead of Jesus looking like a fool, they left with egg on their faces as Jesus showed them they didn't know their Bible and completely underestimated the power of God.

Today, when we come to verse 28 we have a third delegation that comes to Jesus to trap him. It is a lone scribe. As we read about him in the Gospel of Mark, it doesn't sound like he was a third delegation from the Sanhedrin trying to trap Jesus with a trick question. He sounds like an innocent bystander with a simple but honest question. His approach to Jesus was particularly stealthy.

When we go to the parallel account in the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew gave us a little more information that Mark didn't include. He told us what was happening behind the scenes. This scribe was sent from the Sanhedrin to trick and trap Jesus. Look how Matthew told us about this.

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. Matthew 22:34–35 (ESV)

After Jesus silenced the Sadducees, which is the passage we studied last week, the Sanhedrin met again to decide what to do. They decided to send a

lawyer to ask Jesus one more question. The lawyer came to test him. It was not an innocent question.

One point of discrepancy we immediately notice is Mark calls this person a scribe. Matthew calls this person a lawyer. Are these separate events or different people? No, they are not. Earlier in the Gospel of Mark we learned scribes are described as the theological lawyers. When the Gospel of Mark talks about a scribe and when Matthew talks about a lawyer, that is the same person.

In addition, when we read Matthew carefully, we see this particular lawyer was a Pharisee. This provides some important clarification about the Sanhedrin. Earlier we talked about the Sanhedrin being made up of Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. When you read about this in books, it sounds like the Sanhedrin was made up of a three-party system. I did more research on this topic and learned it would better to say the Sanhedrin was made of up Pharisees and Sadducees, some of whom were scribes also known as lawyers. The scribes, who are sometimes called lawyers, are the particularly learned and well-educated people Pharisees in the Sanhedrin. Scribes were usually Pharisees. They were not usually Sadducees.

The Sanhedrin was similar to Congress in our day. Some members are Republicans, other members are Democrats. There are particularly well-educated Republicans and Democrats in Congress who are lawyers. That is similar to the Sanhedrin, but the two parties were Pharisees and Sadducees, not Republicans and Democrats.

While this man was sent to trap Jesus, I want to give him some credit. He at least appears to approach Jesus from a more objective perspective than the previous two groups. He was open to Jesus' answers unlike the Pharisees and Sadducees in the two previous exchanges. That's the background. Let's look at his question.

The Question To Jesus

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Mark 12:28 (ESV)

This question doesn't sound like a trap. It sounds like an honest question. How could this question trap Jesus?

Last week, we learned the Pharisees believed all of the books we have in our Old Testament were written by God. The Sadducees didn't agree. They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as written by God. While the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed on what books were in the Old Testament, they at least agreed that the first five books of the Old Testament were given by God. The entire Sanhedrin agreed the first five books of the Old Testament, which were God's laws given by Moses, were authoritative and needed to be trusted.

One of the accusations Jesus faced was that he was elevating himself above God's laws in the first five Old Testament books. Some even thought Jesus was opposed to God's laws in the first five Old Testament books. Being opposed to the law was not just a charge leveled against Jesus, but it was a charge leveled against early Christians as well. Look how they accused Paul of

trying to undermine God's laws, which are found in the first five Old Testament books.

...crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place..." Acts 21:28 (ESV)

While Jewish leaders accused Jesus and Paul of being against God's laws from those first five books, that was never true. When this scribe asked Jesus what the most important commandment is, the hope was that he would answer with something not found in the first five Old Testament books. That way they could accuse Jesus of being against the law. This is something the entire Sanhedrin and all of the people would have agreed upon as heretical. Jesus' popularity would have quickly eroded. They would have trapped him.

Before we go any further, this is a good opportunity for a little trivia about God's laws found in the first five Old Testament books. The rabbis in the day of Jesus had decided there were 613 laws to be found in the first five books that needed to be obeyed. The people that study these these tell me not all of these 613 laws are clearly stated in these books. Some of them were rabbinical interpretations and others were oral traditions. The rabbis fluffed up the number of laws found in the first five books a little bit to get to the number 613. The question all of us ask is, "Why did they puff things up a bit to come up with 613 laws?" It turns out that in Hebrew, there are 613 Hebrews letters in the Ten Commandments. They thought there should be one law for every letter of the Ten Commandments. That is pretty silly, but that shows you some of their rabbinical nonsense.

They concluded 248 of those laws were positive commands and 365 were negative commands. Do you know why they insisted on 365 negative commands? That way you could have one negative command for every day of the year. Thank goodness for Leap Day. You have that one off.

Since there were so many laws and people couldn't even remember them, much less obey them, they began talking about some of the laws being heavy and others being light. While all of the laws were important to be obeyed, some were heavier and more important to obey. Others were lighter and less important to obey. Jesus acknowledged this and even spoke about this. Let me show you an example.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Matthew 23:23 (ESV)

The first thing I want us to notice is Jesus used the phrase "weightier matters of the law." Jesus said some things in the law are heavier than others. Some things are more important than others. Jesus recognized that distinction. Now let's look at the rest of the verse.

When we want spices for our food, we pull out jars from McCormick. We purchase our spices dried and prepackaged in glass jars. In that day, they didn't have McCormick. They grew most of their own spices in potted plants. They had what we call a spice garden. If you wanted spices for your dinner, you trimmed a few leaves off your spice plants to add to your food. The scribes and Pharisees were very careful to give 10 percent of the leaves they trimmed off a potted spice plant as part of their offering at the temple. We are talking about minuscule

amounts of spices they fastidiously brought to the temple when they trimmed the leaves off their house plants. You and I might think that is crazy and legalistic. The problem was they were neglecting the really important matters of the law, the heavy matters of the law, like making sure justice was carried out when people were wronged and making sure mercy was shown when people were going through a hard time in their lives.

I want you to notice how this verse ends. Jesus said it was right for them to give 10 percent of everything they received as income, even of the little things they received, like spices from houseplants. However, he said, “Just don’t think being fastidious about giving 10 percent from the little sources of income in your life absolves you from making sure you are attending to the really important matters of the law such as making sure justice and mercy take place.”

What does this mean for us? One of the things it means is that it is right for us to tithe to the Lord 10 percent of small and unexpected sources of income.

Let’s say we help a friend move over the weekend. When we leave, he insists on giving us \$100 for our help. It is right to put \$10 in the offering plate the next week. It is a small and unexpected source of income, but it is right for us to still take a portion of it that we give to God as an act of worship and gratitude. While we do that, don’t neglect the important stuff like love, mercy and justice.

Since there were 613 laws to keep, the rabbis had classified some as heavy and others as light. While all should be obeyed, some were more important to obey. Another way they tried to make God’s Old Testament laws more manageable was by trying to reduce God’s laws to something that were

short and memorable, something that were portable in people's memory that they could keep with them.

How to sum up all 613 laws into something short and memorable was a common scribal riddle that rabbinical lawyers were wrestling with in that day. This is probably why this particular scribe asked Jesus how he would solve this riddle. How can all of God's laws be summed up in a short and memorable way for people to remember? Let's look at Jesus' answer.

The Answer From Jesus

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29–31 (ESV)

The answer of Jesus falls into two part. The best way to sum up all of God's law is simply this. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. According to Jesus, that sums up all the laws in the first five Old Testament books. Let's examine this in greater detail.

We are to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

This command to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength was known as the Shema to the Jews. Shema is Hebrew for "hear." The Shema says, "Hear Oh, Israel... you are to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Orthodox Jews repeated the Shema twice a day, every morning and evening. The words of the Shema originally come from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6. This law did indeed come from the first five Old Testament books.

A little history on the book of Deuteronomy will help us. When Deuteronomy was written, Moses was 120 years old. He was not weak, but he

was at the end of his life. He spent the last 40 years of his life leading the Israelites around the desert. They wandered in circles until everybody died. The 40 years of wandering were now up. A new generation was getting ready to go into the Promised Land. Moses was preparing them for his death. To do that, he held a month-long Bible conference where he gave everyone a refresher course on their history and challenged the new generations of Israelites to stay faithful to God in the Promised Land, unlike what their parents had done. In Deuteronomy 31, we find that all of Moses' Bible conference messages were written down and compiled into a book. It is called the book of Deuteronomy in our Bible.

Deuteronomy literally means the second giving of the law. Let's read the beginning of Deuteronomy 6 so we get a sample of the kind of Bible Conference messages Moses was delivering to the new generations of Israelites.

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.” Deuteronomy 6:1–3 (ESV)

Moses was begging this new generation of Israelites to obey God's laws. The success of their lives and their success as a nation was directly tied to how well they obeyed God's laws. Please obey God's laws so it goes well with you is one of the big themes of the book of Deuteronomy. Walk in God's ways and he will bless you in the Promised Land. God honors those who honor him. God dishonors those who dishonor him.

Moses challenged the new generations to obey God's laws and ways, which is something their parents often didn't do, which is why they met with disaster. The big question is, "How could they be sure to obey God's word and God's ways in the Promised Land?" The answer is love. When you love someone, you desire to do the things they ask you to do. If you don't love someone, when they ask you to do something, your heart will bristle against them and rebel. This is why Moses moved from telling them the importance of obedience to God, to the importance of pursuing love for God. If they loved God, they would obey him. Deuteronomy 6 continues with these words:

**"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."
Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (ESV)**

If the new generation focused on loving God with every fiber of their beings, obedience to God's word would naturally follow. Obedience to God's commands would be a delight and not a burden.

Let me make a few observations from the words in the Shema.

There is only one God. Our love doesn't need to be divided.

The first thing Moses told them is there is only one God out there. They knew him. This is the God who took their parents out of Egypt with supernatural might and power that devastated the nation of Egypt. This is the God who fed them with manna every morning and gave them water out of a rock twice. This is the God who always met every one of their needs. Don't waste your time going after other Gods people were following in the Promised Land. All the cultures around them were not worshipping the same God just in a different way. What were other people in the Promised Land worshipping? Moses told us.

They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently... Deuteronomy 32:17 (ESV)

They never needed to divide this allegiance between their God and other gods. There is only one God in the universe and they knew him. All other gods worshiped by people in the Promised Land were actually demons behind their idols.

We can apply this directly into our lives. Some people worship Allah. Others worship Krishna. Others worship Buddha. They are not worshipping the one true God of the universe in a different way. According to Moses, they are worshipping demons. That is why we never divide our affections for the true God with another god. Every other god is demonically-empowered. That is just as true today as it was in Moses' day.

We are to love God is with every fiber of our beings.

The way to walk faithfully with God is by loving him with every fiber of our beings. We are to love him with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. Some people divide these four descriptions up into different areas. I don't think that is what is intended. In literary terms, this is what is called a hendiadys. That is the expression for using multiple words to describe a single idea. Moses said we must love God with every fiber of our beings.

What does this mean for us today? When I was younger, they used to talk about how our hearts are meant to be Christ's home. The question people often asked was, "What rooms in your heart have you not opened to Jesus? Do you love him just on Sunday, or do you open all the rooms of your life to Jesus for the rest of the week?"

For example, the family room is where you go for entertainment. Have you opened the door of the family room of your heart? If Jesus is in charge of what you watch on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, movies, television, and music? Would Jesus entertain himself with the things we watch on YouTube? Do we say our hearts are Christ's home but we locked the door the the family room of our hearts so Jesus is not in charge of the entertainment we have in our lives?

Another room in our hearts is the living room. The living room is where we have our friends over to the house. Have you kept the living room of your heart locked so Jesus cannot come in? Do we spend time hanging out with friends that we enjoy but we know they are tearing us away from Jesus and into sinful things? Have we given Jesus the key to go into the living room of our lives? Have we let Jesus be in charge of the friends we enjoy? Are the friends we have leading us toward Jesus or leading us away from Jesus? Moses would say we love God by letting Jesus have control of every room in our lives, every part of our hearts. That is what it means to love God with every fiber of our beings, not just part of our beings.

If loving the one true God of the universe with every fiber of our beings is the most important command for us to follow, how can we develop our love for God and grow our love for God? That is the million dollar question, isn't it? If we love God, we will find joy in obeying God. How do we grow in our love for God?

We grow in our love for God by increasing our knowledge of God.

We won't be able to love God until we know God. The more we know what God has done for us and the love he has for us, the more we can't help but

respond with lives of love and gratitude to him. This is what Moses was doing in Deuteronomy. He was telling the new generation of Israelites what God had done for their parents and grandparents in the past so they would love God and not forget how he promised to take care of them in the future. This is why Moses had a month-long Bible conference. Their greater knowledge of God would lead to heart-felt love of God.

For us, this is why we come to church. This is why we sit under the teaching of the Word. This is why we study the Word on our own. Unless we are continually growing in knowledge of what God has done for us, we will not find ourselves wanting to love him with every fiber of our beings. We will find ourselves wandering away.

For us as New Testament Christians, we should love God much more than the ancient Israelites ever did. The ancient Israelites only knew how God had saved their parents from certain death in the land of Egypt and carried them through the wilderness. Today, we know much more about God's love. We know about Jesus. Jesus has saved us in a much greater way. At the cost of his life, he saved us from eternal death and damnation by his death on the cross and his resurrection with the empty tomb. The more time we study learning about that, remind ourselves of that and grow in our knowledge of God's love for us through Jesus, the more we will love Jesus. The more we love Jesus, the more we will want to obey Jesus.

This is why it is important to go to church. This is why it is important to read the Bible almost every day in a translation we can understand. If we don't

spend time getting to know God, we will never love God. There is no way to love God with every fiber of our beings if we don't take the time in Bible reading and prayer to get to know God and fall in love with him.

It is no different than a human relationship. You need to spend regular time with your spouse and date him or her to keep that love alive. It is that time together with your spouse that enables you to love him or her better. The more you love him or her, the more you desire to please him or her.

Our love for the temporary things of this world is what draws us away from loving God the way we should.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15–17 (ESV)

What keeps us from loving God with every fiber of our beings is the competing love for the things of this world. Instead of loving God, we desire the things of the flesh to bring us satisfaction. We go after the desires of the eyes, which means we want stuff to make us happy because it looks good to have our garage full of junk. We go after the pride of life. We try to find our joy in achievements, awards, and trophies. All of those things are nice but they are empty things. If we buy the lie that a garage full of stuff is what is really important in life at the end of life we need to have a huge garage sale to get rid of all the junk. If we buy the lie that earthly achievements and awards are what matter, it will only be a few years until our success is surpassed by someone else and everybody forgets our names. These things can quickly pull us away from what is really important, which is that we have been loved by Jesus. Nothing else in the

universe is more important than enjoying Jesus. A hundred years from now, a garage full of junk and forgotten earthly rewards will not matter. All that will matter is our relationship with Jesus. That is the most important thing to enjoy.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The second great commandment is we must love our neighbors as ourselves. While the first commandment came from Deuteronomy 6:5, this comes from Leviticus 19:18.

Some people misunderstand this. They say we must love ourselves so we can love our neighbors. I don't agree with that. We don't have any problem loving ourselves. We are pretty good at loving ourselves. We love ourselves too much. Who did we buy coffee for this morning before we came to church? Ourselves. Who did we buy groceries for this week? Ourselves. Jesus said we need to love other people like we love ourselves.

The Ten Commandments are about loving God and loving our neighbors.

Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God with every fiber of our beings and to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we look at the Ten Commandments, this is a great way to summarize all of them. The first four are about loving God. The last six are about loving our neighbors.

1. **You shall have no other gods before me.** There is only one God. Worship him alone.
2. **You shall not make for yourself a carved image.** Don't make anything to try and picture or represent God. Anything you use to picture or represent God will be much smaller than him.

3. **You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.** When you speak of God, speak of him with reverence and respect. His reputation is at stake.
4. **You shall remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.** Make sure you make time to worship God. If you don't make time to worship God, you don't love him. You will fall away from him.

The next six are about loving man.

5. **Honor your father and mother.** This tells us we are to have respect for those in authority over us. The first authority figure over us is our parents. While they are the first authority figure over us, they are not the last authority figure over us.
6. **Don't kill people.** We love people by respecting their lives and not taking their lives. That includes when they are very young in the womb and when they are very old in a wheelchair. That includes not putting toxic chemicals in the earth so people around us drink those toxic cocktails and come down with cancer. This includes not traveling back to America if you have the coronavirus. You don't want to inadvertently infect others and kill them.
7. **Don't commit adultery.** This means having respect for moral purity. Until you are married, you are dating someone else's future husband or wife. Moral purity is super important because sexual activity before marriage is taking from someone else's future spouse intimacies that should be reserved for their wedding night. In the same way, once people are married, adultery is breaking a promise of sex exclusivity that people have made to their spouses. Adultery is a great and grievous injury to the emotional world of the spouse

who was sinned against. That is why adultery is a form of not loving your neighbor.

8. **You shall not steal.** This means we must respect others' stuff. We don't take from them what is not rightfully ours. Stealing is not loving your neighbor. We can steal from people in less obvious ways. Sometimes we purchase a product that is cheap and defective. The manufacturer of the product is stealing from us because they didn't put quality into their work. Sometimes manufacturers steal from people by misleading or deceptive advertising. That is a form of stealing. Rather than blessing people with quality things, it is stealing from people giving them junky things. This is not loving your neighbor with your work.
9. **Do not lie.** Lying is not loving your neighbor. It is misleading people. It is putting yourself and your comfort before honesty and integrity in relationships. Lying is valuing saving face and looking good more than honesty and truth, which is a way we love our neighbor. If truth hurts, it is still loving to speak. It is unloving to be dishonest with people. It is not loving your neighbor when a relationship is built on a lie. Imagine if politicians understood this!
10. **Do not covet.** This means we should be content with what we have. When we covet, it leads to jealousy. We should be able to celebrate with people for the successes God gave them, not be jealous because God has not blessed you in a similar way.

So we see loving God and loving our neighbor covers the entire Ten Commandments. Every single commandment relates to one of those two overarching principles.

What I would like to do for the balance of our time is briefly look at what else the Bible teaches us about loving our neighbors.

We cannot love God without loving our neighbors.

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 John 4:20 (ESV)

The Bible tells us loving God and loving our neighbors are closely woven together. They are so closely woven together that we cannot claim to love God if we do not genuinely love our neighbor. We cannot say we love God without loving people. This means the amount of genuine love we have for God is seen in the amount of genuine love we have for other people. When you meet people who are constantly critical of others, not patient with others, and they do not go out of their way to help others, the reason they don't love other people is because there is a problem in their relationship with God.

We love our neighbor by loving other brothers and sisters at the church.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14 (ESV)

The apostle John tells us evidence of Christ changing someone's life is the incredible amounts of love Christians have for one another in the church. Church is to be the friendliest, most welcoming place on earth because the love we have for God will show up in strong and palpable love we have for other Christians in our church. This is why your best friends should be your church

friends. Your best friends should be your church friends because the common bond you have in Christ will produce a deeper friendship than you can find anyplace else. If your best friends do not know Christ, that should cause you to pause and ask why you connect better with non-Christian friends than with Christian friends. Maybe something is not right in your heart.

We love our neighbor by joyfully sacrificing our time and money to help others at church.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:16–18 (ESV)

The genuine love God gives Christians for one another must show up in our willingness to sacrifice our time and our money to help our brothers and sister in need in our church family.

I occasionally forget to mention this but we have a benevolent fund in the church. The benevolent fund is not something we give to in place of our regular offering but it is over, above, and beyond our regular offering. To give to the benevolent fund, simply put a check in the offering plate and note benevolent fund in the memo line. A number of people in the church been continually generous toward that fund. One of the roles the deacons have at CrossWinds is to distribute benevolence toward those in need in our church family. Having been part of the CrossWinds family for more than a decade, I have watched more than \$100,000 be given by the people of this church that has gone to help those in need within CrossWinds Church. What a joy to be part of helping single mothers in their times of need and helping people as they face unexpected medical bills

or can't pay their heating bills because of a job loss. This is what the church does. Genuine love is not just words and deeds but actions. Genuine love reaches into our wallets.

This kind of action-based love in the church is not limited to financial giving. I have seen some of you donate your time to help repair houses for people in need. Others of you have donated your carpentry skills to repair the porch of people without adequate funds. Others of you have helped people move. Others of you have made food for families as they go through a crisis. These are all applications of this verse. True love is love that shows itself in action.

We love our neighbors by serving our neighborhood.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

While the first way we love our neighbors is for Christians to care for their brothers and sisters in Christ, that is not the only way we love our neighbors. This verse reminds us that we reach beyond caring for our church family and meet the needs of others in our neighborhood. We are to do good to all people, not just Christian people.

I saw a great example of that this week. Maybe you saw it in the news. CrossRoads Church in Cincinnati paid off \$46.5 million in medical debt for 45,000 families. It partnered with an organization known as RIP Medical Debt. Every \$100 donation to RIP Medical Debt is leveraged to pay off \$10,000 in medical expenses. The church raised \$465,000 that RIP Medical Debt used to

pay off \$46.5 million in medical debt.² All 45,000 families received a letter that their medical debt was paid off by a church and the generosity of God's people who love them. Imagine the impact that had for Christ in that portion of our country. That is what it means for Christians to love their neighbors.

We love our neighbor by refusing to speak evil against our neighbors.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 5:14–15 (ESV)

Paul said one of the practical ways we love our neighbors is by refusing to speak evil against our neighbors. We refuse to tear them down behind their backs and ruin their reputations in the community. It also means that when we have a disagreement with someone we are to handle it lovingly and with kindness. It is so easy to sin against our neighbors with our mouths. Loving our neighbors means we refuse to sin against our neighbors with our mouths.

We love our neighbor by refusing to show favoritism.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:8–9 (ESV)

Favoritism is when we show preferential treatment to some people that we won't give to all people. That is not loving our neighbors. In the book of James the preferential treatment that was shown was favor to rich people and avoiding poor people. What would favoritism and preferential treatment look like today?

Maybe you are a young man in the church. You hear the men's ministry is meeting for breakfast or having an event but you avoid it. You avoid it because

² <https://www.foxnews.com/us/cincinnati-church-wipes-out-46-5-million-in-medical-debt-largest-amount-for-nonprofit>

there are too many old men. You only want to hang out with people who are like you, the cool young men. That is favoritism. That is sin. It is only wanting to spend time with the Christians that are just like you and avoiding Christians that aren't like you. This is not loving your neighbor.

We love our neighbors by loving our enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?...
Matthew 5:43–48 (ESV)

One of the major ways Jesus redefined what it means to love our neighbors is he said loving our neighbor is loving our enemies. In the Judaism of that day, loving your neighbor meant loving the people you liked and avoiding the people you called your enemy. Jesus thought that was crazy. Anybody can love their friends. Only Christians can love their enemies. As Christians, we started as enemies of God, but God loved us when we were still his enemies. He sent his son to die for us to turn his enemies into his friends.

In the same that God took the initiative and loved us when we were his enemies, we are to take the initiative and love our enemies, even when they don't love us. By the way, this does not mean that instantly all problems will solve themselves. We may need to persist in loving our enemies over a long period of time while our enemies are committed to fighting us.

We continue to love our enemies, knowing it is not our job to take revenge. That is God's job. It is our job to love people like God has loved us.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:19–21 (ESV)

Our job is to feed our enemy when he is hungry. Our job is to give our enemy a drink when he is thirsty. We are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good.

That is what it means for Christians to love their neighbors as themselves.

The Response Of the Scribe

And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:32–34 (ESV)

It is true. Loving God and loving people is more important than all other acts of worship. If we want to take all 613 commandments and to boil them down to something simple that all of us can remember, it is simply this — we are to love God with every fiber of our beings, with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. We are to love our neighbors like we love ourselves. That summarizes everything.



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