

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

By Donald G. Leavell

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:34-40).

In these scriptures, God gives His people, His born-again ones, the command to love Him and their neighbor. Let us consider what this command means.

God is distinct from His creatures in so many ways but let us not attempt to explore all of His distinctions today. In this article, I would like to examine one of His distinctions: love! God is love! I am human. God is love! I have love, yet not of myself and not without God! In order to function properly in His universe, one must have His love, the love of God! Without His love (agape), one can never function properly in this world. Therefore, the Lord commands love, but only His sheep who hear His voice are capable of this level of obedient love. Since this is the case, it is incumbent upon us to do the will of God in this present age or it does not get done. I am sure there are those who would disagree with this statement, but I ask, how is the will of God done without His Body, the Church? Is it done through angels? Or is it done through the ungodly? Or is it done through God Himself without us? I give an astounding no! God's will has been made known to us, therefore, we must carry it out in love by the power of the indwelling Christ!

Loving one's neighbor is the Gospel! Love is what motivates us to obey, to do the will of God, and to fulfill His purposes on the earth! Without the love of God, we are incapable of loving God or our neighbor. If we do not love our neighbor, it is proof that we do not love God either because we have disobeyed His command! Who is our neighbor? When we are born into this world, we did not get to choose our neighbor. Our neighbor is our fellow man. It does not matter where they live or what they look like. The Samaritan was not considered a neighbor by the Jewish people. He was an outcast, an untouchable, yet Jesus says he is a neighbor. The Lord is requiring us to love with specificity those whom He puts in our path and in a general sense all others. This means, what I specifically do for one person, I would do for all. Since Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, we conclude that love for one's self and his neighbor flows out of loving God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength! We know from the scriptures that we have been born of love, the love of God shown through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are able to love our neighbor, thus, all humanity without qualification just as God commands!

We can only change the world through this kind of love. It is called the God-kind of love! It is non-negotiable. If you love God, you must love your brother also!

Pastor Don