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Loving Your Neighbor
Part 2

This morning, we are going to continue to see what the scriptures teach regarding loving our neighbor as ourselves. I am grateful to be able to share what the Lord has been teaching and convicting me of regarding this, and I hope this continues to be an encouragement to you as we stir up one another toward love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). I know it was only a week ago when we went through part 1, but that was a very full weekend and so we will do a brief review. Our key verse, as you may remember, was from Matthew 22.

Matthew 22:36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is the first and great commandment. 39 "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

We established that the scriptures teach us that our love for the Lord and our faithful obedience to His Word, is demonstrated and expressed in the way that we love our neighbor. This love that we are to have for our neighbor is shown in how we think or talk about him, how we judge him, how we forgive him, and lastly how we serve him. We cannot love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind **when** we are not *also* loving our neighbor as ourselves. These verses connect the two commandments so closely that it is impossible to separate them.

This commandment in Matthew 22 was given by the Lord, the one in the place of authority. It is now up to the ones hearing it to decide whether they will obey it. This decision is always a matter of walking by the Spirit or by the flesh. It is a matter of hearing what the Word of God says and then, by faith, becoming a doer of the Word.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But 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.

We then answered two very important questions from our Matthew 22 verses; **Who is my neighbor**, and **how am I to love him?** As we answered the first question regarding “who is my neighbor”, we saw in the evidence from scripture that our neighbor was not the broad category of “everyone” or “all of mankind.” We need to understand this narrowly due to context and the Bible in general rather than the world’s definition. In Matthew 22, “neighbor” is defined as being a fellow Jew.

We also saw that the purpose of the law was to give specific direction on how the Jewish people were to interact and relate to God as well as their fellow Jews. This was for the purpose of being found faithful, and thus entering the Promised Land.

Sadly, Israel’s disobedience over the centuries ultimately led not only to the rejection of their King but also the offer of the Kingdom of the Heavens being taken away from them. *Matthew 21:43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*

The “nation bearing the fruits of it,” as we know, is the New Man in Christ, who is now heir according to the promise given to Abraham’s seed. *Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

As a result of our relational standing “in Christ,” we saw that this same commandment of *loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and body and loving our neighbor as ourselves*, was given to the New Man in Christ. Our neighbor then is our fellow believer who is seeking first His Kingdom by doing the will of the Father (Matthew 12:28-50).

The second question we started to answer was “**How am I to love my neighbor?**”. We only scratched the surface of this last time, and I hope this morning that we can dive deeper into what the Lord is commanding us to do. This is for our benefit as we will continue to see.

We saw that biblically loving or hating another has an age-lasting outcome for those who are new creations in Christ, one that will either be positive or negative at the judgment seat of Christ. This is why James calls this the “Royal Law,” as the King of Kings gave it, and those who live in obedience to it will receive the salvation of their soul on that Day.

James 2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

And finally, we saw that our faith in what the scriptures teach must work together with our works. We cannot separate faith from works (James 2:14-26). We saw this specifically working itself out in our 1 Corinthians 13 passage. *1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity,*

but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails...

We will continue to see how our love is a deliberate decision of action that we must continually make because of what the scriptures say. A decision not based on our emotions or feelings at the moment but one that is made by faith in the One who is commanding us to love. This can only be accomplished through our spirit man.

Are we ready to address the difficult topic of judging another? This is a topic I struggle with and after conversations last weekend at our conference, I don't believe I am alone in this. How often do we struggle with judging one another? Unfortunately, I struggle with this more often than I would like to admit standing before you this morning. However, we must remember that maturing in The Faith is a process that we must all go through, no matter how unpleasant it is. The antidote to judging is love. This will require us to be compassionate and self-controlled, oftentimes requiring us to forgive. We will soon see how forgiveness is the greatest expression of love we can show one another.

Judging another is like jet fuel for our flesh; it seems to give our flesh the energy and vivacity that it craves. Our flesh feeds off it and grows stronger as we entertain negative thoughts about others. If our flesh can justify something it wants, it will gladly offer judgment as the means to get it. "I want to feel better about myself, so I will condemn," ...or "I want something that someone else has, so I think poorly of them to justify my feelings of discontentment or jealousy," and as a result, I feel better about myself. I want to justify my sin, as it isn't nearly as bad as his sin... "I can't believe what he is doing, I would never do something that dumb" ... "If he were seeking first the Kingdom, he would never have said or done that" ...and so on...

Judging our brother or sister is extremely destructive to our relationship with that person and our relationship with the Lord. The Lord takes this seriously, and so should we.

Luke 6:37 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Do you find this as terrifying as I do? The fact that we are told with what judgment we judge, we will be judged with the same measure back to us. That alone should cause us never to judge someone again! Do we think He means it? Our flesh loves to ask, "But did God indeed say"?

One of the many reasons we should not judge each other (besides the fact that the Lord tells us that we shouldn't) is because we all have a sin nature! We all struggle with the same thing, our flesh! Instead of judgment, we need love, compassion, self-control, and forgiveness. You might struggle with a different sin than I do, and so my flesh wants to classify my sin so that I can justify it as not being as bad as yours. However, in the end, it really doesn't matter because, from God's perspective, sin is sin, period.

Let's keep reading *Matthew 7:3 "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

When we are tempted to judge, we must realize that we are just as guilty a sinner as our brother or sister. Thus, because we are peers in transgressing the law, we must offer compassion instead.

Judging is a cancer within the body of Christ that **MUST** be removed. Judging is always done according to our flesh, to condemn someone and exalt ourselves above the other person. Judging does not allow us to reach the unity of our faith, it destroys it. It causes factions, divisions, and dysfunction within the body. When we judge, we are placing ourselves as God in that person's life, which is a scary place to put ourselves!

James 4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

We must remember that the Lord is taking our brother or sister on a journey, and we must trust the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them as we **all** study and strive toward the Kingdom together.

One might try and justify, "I don't tell other people what I am thinking, I just run them down and judge them in my mind, or I only tell my spouse what I think about what they are doing." Unfortunately for our flesh, that doesn't get a pass.

*Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the **thoughts and intents of the heart.** 13 **And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.***

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates (detests) his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

The Lord knows our thoughts, "as all things are naked and open to his eyes". Our thoughts will eventually turn into actions if we continue to entertain them, and that could be a good thing or a bad thing. So, what do we do if we have developed a pattern or habit of judging others? Or do these thoughts of judgment appear even when we don't want them to? Maybe we are very critical of ourselves and thus others as well and we can't seem to get our thoughts under control. This may seem like a very natural way of thinking for us, and that would make sense as it's a result of our sinful flesh.

We need to remember that temptation is not sin, it is our response to temptation that determines whether we sin or not. Remember, Christ was tempted in all things and was yet without sin.

*Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was **in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.** 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

When we are tempted to judge someone, we need to pause and consider the decision that we are about to make. Do I follow my flesh and judge, or do I follow my spirit man and forgive, offer compassion, biblical encouragement, and pray for them? We will need to come boldly to the throne of grace and take every temptation and thought captive to the obedience of the scriptures.

2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and

every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We must put off the old man and his destructive ways of casting judgment and put on the new man created according to God in righteousness and holiness. Remember, if we criticize our neighbor in judgment, we are criticizing members of our own body.

*Ephesians 4:17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ... 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 **if** indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you **put off**, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be **renewed in the spirit of your mind**, 24 and that you **put on** the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

This battle is won in our minds by submitting to the Word of Truth. It is up to us to do the hard work with the scriptures and the Holy Spirit to grow in this area. If we struggle with this, remember that we all do, but what are we going to do about it? We must renew our minds through the Word of Truth and change today.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

There will be times, however, when someone's sin affects us greatly, and we will need to address it with them. We should do this with the intent of

restoring the relationship, not airing our grievances. The first is approached with humility and love with the end view of the salvation of the soul, the other is out of arrogance, fleshliness, and hate with the end view of the here and now.

*Matthew 18:15 "Moreover 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.** 16 "But 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.' 17 "And 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.*

We know the dangers of judging one another and how this sin is like a disease that will have a disastrous outcome for us at the judgment seat. So, the question we had asked earlier was, "What is the antidote to judgment?" As we have seen it is us loving our neighbor as ourselves. We want others to show us compassion, don't we? We want others to have self-control in their thinking about us. We also want people to forgive us when we sin against them.

Forgiveness is the highest form of love that we can show to our brother or sister! Why is that? Why is forgiveness so important within our body of believers? It is important because it is exactly what Christ did for us!

*John 15:11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is **My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.***

We see here that the word for "commandment" is the same Greek word "entole" (en-tol-ay) that we saw in Matthew 22. If we remember, this word means *an order or charge given by reason of one's office*. He is ordering us to love one another as He has loved us. This begs the question; How has Christ loved us? What example has He given us to show us how we are to love one another? Let's keep reading....

John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

We see here that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. This is the example Christ has given us and the one we need to follow. He laid down His physical life so that we could fulfill our created purpose all the way back in Genesis—rulership within a marriage relationship.

Laying down our life for our friends is for the same purpose – rulership within a marriage relationship. This type of love is the greatest expression of love that we could have toward one another. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that we are laying down our physical life as Christ did, but we should see this in us laying down and putting to death the man of flesh, for our friends, our neighbor – our fellow believers. When someone sins against us, and we are tempted to judge them, we need to put down the man of the flesh and biblically love our brother through forgiveness.

If our love is relational, which, as we have seen...it is, then our sin must also be seen as being relational as well. Sin will affect our relationship with the Lord and our relationships with each other. As a result, we must see our forgiveness as being relational also. Forgiveness is a **spiritual obligation** that we have before the Lord toward one another, and if we haven't been challenged enough already...Let's continue to see what the Lord says about this.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

These verses in Galatians start with "Brethren," indicating that we are contextually talking about a fellow believer who is overtaken by any trespass. We see that "those who are spiritual" are encouraged to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. The word "gentleness" is also

translated as meekness or humility, as we can relate and understand because we struggle with the same man of the flesh.

This restoration of those who are in sin can only be accomplished through the Spirit, seen by “those who are spiritual.” It will never happen apart from the Spirit, as the flesh profits nothing. As we have seen before, our flesh will judge and condemn, exalting ourselves above our brethren, thus resulting not in restoration but dissension and separation.

“... *considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*” We are further encouraged to consider ourselves lest we are also tempted into sin. Now we could see this as tempted with the sin that our brother is overtaken with, but that would be too narrow of a view here. We would need to consider ourselves unless we are tempted into **any** sin and therefore need to be restored ourselves. This is where we can see the meekness and humility coming into play. We are approaching our brother, who is overtaken by sin, with meekness and humility, being careful that we are acting through the spirit man, not the man of the flesh, so that we don’t also fall into sin ourselves. The flesh will want to see varying degrees of “small sins” and “big sins”; sin is sin, and anything contrary to the Scriptures should be viewed in this manner.

Remember our verse earlier, *James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

We are then told to “...*2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ,*” which refers to the Royal Law we saw in James 2 and the first and greatest commandment we saw in Matthew 22.

James 2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

What does it mean to bear one another's burdens practically, and why is it important not to show any partiality? We cannot pick and choose whose burdens we will bear within our body; we do not have that luxury. We must look at each of our brothers the same. The word "burdens" that we see here refers to a weight or load that we are to bear (lift) for our brother.

This burdensome weight is the weight of sin that overtakes us. So, we will see here the picture that we are to lift the weight of each other's sin, and in doing this, we will be fulfilling the Law of Christ: loving our neighbor as ourselves.

As we have said before, our love is relational between the Lord and our neighbor, so also our sin will be relational. It may sometimes affect us in some incredibly deep and major ways, as our James 2 passage addressed adultery and murder. However, as we have seen, there is no big sin or little sin, there is only sin. If we are judging each other, talking poorly about one another, condemning, taking, or giving offense, from God's perspective these sins are viewed as the same as adultery and murder.

All sin has relational consequences. When we look at our sin in the way Christ sees it and have a repentant heart as a result, we will feel the enormous weight of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and/or discouragement. This weight can be incredibly heavy and burdensome, and the only way it can be lifted is through forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We may not "feel" forgiven by the Lord, but feelings do not matter in the arena of faith. This is done by faith in what the Word of God has said, and then we act upon it. If we confess our sins, He has forgiven and cleansed us from all unrighteousness...**period**. Believe it – it's true! We need to pick up our heads and get on with our journey toward the Heavenly Kingdom. Now this is not to say our sin will not have real-world consequences that we may live with and need to deal with potentially for a very long time. However, the grace of God is sufficient, and the love of our brethren helps us lift the heavy burdens.

As we have just seen, our love is relational, our sin is relational, and our forgiveness must also be relational.

*Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, **and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.***

*Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.***

*Mark 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, **forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.** 26 "But **if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.**"*

We might not want to forgive the sin against us, but if we seek first His Kingdom, then we are not given this choice. We **must** forgive as we have been forgiven. EVEN if the other person never seeks forgiveness or may never even realize they have hurt us. That sounds like something needs to die (our flesh), doesn't it?

If we want 1 John 1:9 to be our reality, which we all desperately do, then we must also make Mark 11:25 our reality as well. The Lord is very clear, "**forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses**". And if that verse was a little too vague and our flesh is trying to find wiggle room, the Lord nails it home extremely clearly in the next verse. *Mark 11:26 "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

That doesn't really give us much of a choice, does it? If we want to be forgiven by our Father in heaven, then we must also forgive our brethren. Will we believe what God has indeed said?

Wonder if we "think" we have forgiven them, but we don't feel like it and thus keep forgiving them over and over and over again for the same sin?

Or if they keep sinning against me, how many times am I to forgive them?
These are great questions, but we will have to wait until next time if the
Lord is willing.

Let's Pray...