



## Love God, Love Neighbour – Overview

## Matthew 22 v 34 to 40

We would assume that loving God and loving our neighbour are Christian basics. But the very fact we are looking at the issue suggests it is not always true. We might say some people are hard to love. How do we express our love to God who we can neither 'see' or 'hear' in the way we apply it to our human interactions. We may also say we don't always feel very loving if we're living through pain or stress. To be consistently loving is beyond us because the sin in our lives causes us be anything but loving.

**As a starter. talk about how you deal with people you find hard to love.  
What do you find hard about loving God?**

This chapter has Jesus dealing with first century controversies that his teaching has highlighted. In verses 23 to 33 he has dealt with the issue of resurrection. The Sadducees, who raised the issue, were firmly rebuked for their wrong belief that there was no resurrection. The Pharisees present would have been pleased with Jesus' response as they believed there was a resurrection.

Having heard the rebuke, the Pharisees were anxious to test Jesus about his view of the law (v34). His response to this 'tester' was straight out of the Jewish teaching in Deuteronomy 6:5. This was part of the 'shema' the belief system of the Jewish faith. 'Love your neighbour' was also rooted in OT teaching (Lev. 19:18).

It's not certain whether Jesus was the first to specifically link these two commandments as the basic core of God's requirements. But no teacher of the law who was present that day could have faulted him for his orthodoxy. The pairing is powerful because it connects your faith and your actions. In 1<sup>st</sup> century culture what you believed rarely affected how you treated people. The coming of Christian teaching made that link very clear and disturbing. You could no longer live as you pleased – you were accountable to God for your actions.

This couplet of commands also raises the issue of grace. Nobody has ever loved God with his whole being. Nobody has ever loved her neighbour as herself. So, if we are less than perfect how can God accept us? We only have a place in God's Kingdom because of the unmerited grace of a loving saviour who knew we could never earn our way to salvation. We are imperfect but we are wonderfully saved by grace so we should strive to keep the commands God has given us.

## FROM THE PASSAGE

1. People often want to know God's will for their lives. Augustine's response was 'love God and do as you will'. This is what the Pharisees legal experts were after. They were looking for an overarching way to obey God's will. If we love God with all of our being (v47) it is inconceivable we would want to do anything contrary to his will for us.

**Was Augustine right?**

**Is it true that if we focus on loving God our lives will be marked by obedience and love?**

2. The 'love' word here is 'agapeo', the 'commitment of devotion that is directed by the will and which is our duty as believers' (NIV Study Bible).

Does this mean that love is not about how 'we feel'?  
Is it more about the need to give sacrificially to those we know?  
Do you think 'loving our neighbour' is a duty for a Christian?

3. We are told to love God with 'all your heart, ..... mind, ..... and strength'. (v37)

How do we love God with our heart?  
How do we love God with our mind?  
How do we love God with (all our) strength?  
How will each of these qualities be seen in our love for God?

4. We are also told to 'love our neighbour as yourself'. There is no room here for saying things like 'I don't do anybody any harm'. This is a positive commandment which should result in purposeful initiatives on our part.

What does Jesus mean when he says we should 'love ourselves'?  
Once we've learned that lesson, how does this change the way we love others?

5. In human terms we deepen our love for another person by getting to know them, getting alongside them or working with them.

What positive steps could we take to deepen our love for God?  
It may be helpful for each of the group to share ways they have achieved this.

6. Loving the unlovable is an ongoing battle for many of us. We are attracted to some people more than we are to others. If our love for God grows and our desire to do his will grows then maybe the love God has for us will spill over into our love for the unlovable. Mutual love grows a relationship.

Pray that our love for God will grow and this will impact on all our relationships.

## **THINGS TO DO**

- Make a list of people you really love and thank God for all of them
- Make a list of the people you find hard to love and ask God for an opportunity to demonstrate how much you love them.
- Read a few Psalms – list the characteristics of God you find in those Psalms
- Ask God to help you deepen your relationship of love for him.

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Is it easier to love someone than to dislike them?  
Which takes more energy?  
Which does you more harm?

Have you ever asked yourself what it is that makes you dislike another person?  
Could it be the right time to deal with that issue?

**'You are more loved than you could ever know'.  
(Rico Tice – All Souls Langham Place)**