



2019 Q3 The Least of These - Lesson 2: Blueprint for a Better World

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INTRODUCTION

This quarter's theme is obviously based on Christ's words recorded in Matt 25:31-45.

Memory Text: "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against anyone among your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" {Leviticus 19:18, NKJV}.

Just fair warning...we're going to park here for a bit and really unpack this "love your neighbor as yourself" concept further.

Does our memory text passage remind you of or make you think of any other texts?

- Instructions to the rich young ruler in Matt 19:17-19 If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"
- Matt 22: 37-39 One of the Pharisees, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." This story is repeated in Mark and Luke
- Mark 12:33 "To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."
- Romans 13:9 "The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- Galatians 5:14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right."



Wow... Why would this same concept be so consistently repeated throughout the whole of scripture? Do you get the feeling this message is somehow important and deserves our attention?

Mrs. White says in several places, “The **divine law requires** that you love your neighbor as yourself...Without the exercise of this love, the highest profession of faith is mere hypocrisy...That is, we are to deal with our neighbors in everything just as we would wish them to deal with us. If we wish them to act fairly and justly toward us, then we should act fairly and justly toward them. We are simply to do as we would be done by.” {RH, March 11, 1884 par. 10}/{A New Life NL 32.1} Why does the divine law require this?

What is the “divine law”? The Law of Love requires that we love our neighbor for the same reason that the Law of Respiration requires that we breathe...but also the Law of Worship—by beholding we become changed. Love your neighbor, means don’t steal, murder, betray, bear false witness or covet – why? What happens to the one who breaks that law? They are damaged, they sear their consciences, warp their characters, harden their hearts, and thus are deviant from design protocol for life - life is absolutely created to operate upon this principal.

And who are we talking about here...the people who live next door? Just the folks who live on my street or in my neighborhood? Who is my neighbor?

I have some quotes from one of the founders of our church that might help us figure it out.

"God's law requires that justice and right be exercised between man and his fellow man; it requires that we shall not injure our neighbor in his property, his feelings, his health, or his good name. It requires compassion for the afflicted, *even if he be our enemy*, that in all our associations with our fellow beings we shall show the same love and care that we would wish to have exercised toward ourselves." {ST, January 7, 1897 par. 3}

"Jesus related the parable of the Good Samaritan, and clearly showed that he is our neighbor who most needs our charity and help. We are to practice the commandments of God, and stand true to the relation which God has designed shall exist between man and his fellow man. It was never God's purpose that society should be separated into classes, that there should be an alienation between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned. But the practice of separating society into distinct circles is becoming more and more decided. God designed that those to whom He entrusted talents of means, ability, and gifts of grace, should be good stewards of His beneficence, and not seek to reap all the advantages for themselves. God does not estimate man by the amount of wealth, talent, or education that he



may have. He values man in proportion as he becomes a good steward of His mercy and love." {SW 37.1}

“In His teaching He ever presented the law as a divine unity, showing that it is impossible to keep one precept and break another; for the same principle runs through all. Man’s destiny will be determined by his obedience to the whole law. It is not possible for the heart in which Christ abides to be destitute of love. If we love God because He first loved us, we shall love all for whom Christ died. We cannot come in touch with divinity without coming in touch with humanity; for in Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, divinity and humanity are combined. Connected with Christ, we are connected with our fellow men by the golden links of the chain of love. Then the pity and compassion of Christ will be manifest in our life. We shall not wait to have the needy and unfortunate brought to us. We shall not need to be entreated to feel for the woes of others. It will be as natural for us to minister to the needy and suffering as it was for Christ to go about doing good...Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of God’s Holy Spirit. In the depths of heathenism, men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never even heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. Their acts show the working of a divine power. The Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education. The “Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), is shining in his soul; and this light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God.” – {COL 385.1}

So in this parable of the Good Samaritan, in answer to the question who is my neighbor, perhaps we could say, who is a Christian?

Imagine that a ship was sailing from the US to England and hit an iceberg. The ship is sinking and people are frantic for seats on the lifeboats. The last lifeboat is about to be lowered over the side, completely full, when a child is discovered still on the sinking ship. A priest refuses to give up his seat, a pastor and a theology professor also refuse, but a homosexual man, who lived an active homosexual life, gets off the lifeboat and gives his seat to the boy. Who, in the parable is the Christian—who is like Christ?

- By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Jn 13:35
- Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Jn 15:13
- This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 1Jn 3:16



Do you feel like you have a better idea and a clearer picture of who your neighbor is now? OK, so what does it look like to “love your neighbor as yourself”? And doesn’t that smack of selfishness?

I thought we were supposed to be transformed to selflessness! Well, can people who don’t love themselves actually love others—why or why not?

If a person doesn’t have a healthy self-love, valuing themselves for who they are as a child of God - at peace with themselves and God, then they are not whole on the inside; they are insecure, fearful of rejection, and don’t possess healthy love to give to others. Instead, such people generally seek to *get* from others to fill what is missing in them.

They seek to get: love, reassurance, acceptance, validation, praise, security...those who don’t have healthy love seek to get from others rather than seek to give to others, thus we are unable to love others well until we are first healed in heart and mind by the indwelling Holy Spirit—we must come to peace with ourselves and love ourselves as children of God - does that make sense?

So what does it mean to “love your neighbor as yourself”?

Is love only an emotion or a feeling or does love cause action?

And what type of action? Beneficent, other-centered, outward-moving, unselfish actions.

Can you love others in this way if you are incapacitated? No!

In order to love others well, you have to maintain self-care, your own wellness and health...and thus, before one can love others you must first possess something worth sharing or giving to others. For example,:

- You cannot teach people to read if you yourself cannot read
- You cannot teach people the truth about God if you don’t know God
- You cannot genuinely love others if you don’t have love in your heart
- So, we must first be converted in our hearts to a genuine love/trust relationship with Jesus

Christ - and really *know* him before we can be most effective in God’s cause (notice I said *most* effective - God in His infinite wisdom can use many things to advance His cause, including speaking through a donkey)...and we must be in a state of health in order to be capable of providing to others.

So let’s get more specific and more practical...in this class, we have learned that love always does what’s in the best interest of the other person - but what does this look like in reality, and what are the obstacles to loving others in this way?

Do you ever wrestle with how to love others like this?



Remember what we just read in the quote from COL, “It will be as natural for us to minister to the needy and suffering as it was for Christ to go about doing good” Have mercy, I’m not there yet...sometimes loving others like this is a real struggle for me! Why? Well, there are several types of obstacles in the way that prevent or impede us from fully loving our neighbors:

- Obstacles in our *OWN* hearts and minds:
 - Fear
 - Selfishness
 - Distrust
 - Prejudice
 - Fatigue
 - Apathy
 - Ignorance (being unaware of the need)
 - Lies - Beliefs that the other person deserves something other than love
 - Lies - Beliefs/suspicion that you are being duped or swindled
- Obstacles in *other person’s* heart and mind:
 - Fear
 - Selfishness
 - Distrust - Sees acts of love as manipulation
 - Prejudice
 - Lies - Love looks like being abused / love is having sex / love is being liked or popular
 - False Beliefs - I don’t deserve your love / I’m too sinful to ever be loved / I’m too dirty, too ugly, too worthless
- Situational Obstacles:
 - Proximity - separated by time and space
 - Inability to help...whether it be lack of knowledge - helping a child with their calculus homework or repairing a car...or physical ability - unable to help move furniture because of a bad back or unable to provide financial help because you have no money.
 - Being obstructed by some other force - whether physically restrained, or by illness, or by other obligations.
 - But keep in mind that we can still provide our understanding, encouragement, and love for them despite these challenging situations.

Can you see how between our own obstacles, the other person’s obstacles, and maybe some tough situations (and we didn’t even mention social media comments and political differences)...why connecting with and really loving our neighbors as ourselves can be so difficult?! Lord help us!



OK, we want to truly love our neighbors - we want to help and always do what's in their best interest...so what does it mean to help someone - does that mean giving them what they want? What are some reasons *not* to help someone in need?

Were there people in need who Jesus did not help? But they were in need, why didn't Jesus help them? (Mark 6:1-6, Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.)

Are there people in need that we are unable to help?

Should we force our help onto such people?

So whom should we seek to help...simply those in need, or those in need, who recognize their need and who will permit us to help them?

Let's go through a few "should I help" scenarios and see what you think:

- If you were here last week or have listened to last week's lesson (and if you weren't or haven't...trust me, you really should), but you will remember we talked about the apparent homeless person on the exit ramp with the "will work for food sign", and wondering should I help? Do you remember what we came up with?
 - That our "help" may actually do more harm than good
 - That since we may not really know if the need is genuine, it may make more sense to focus on helping folks who we *know* are really in need - our own family/friends, church members, Samaritan Center, etc. Ask the Holy Spirit to send people who are in need across your path and He will arrange those divine appointments.
 - That we can't make a cookie-cutter rule that I will always help or I will never help, or what that help looks like...we have to use our wisdom, judgment, and be open to the influence of the Holy Spirit.
- If you are in a restaurant and see a couple arguing, should you offer to help - but they clearly need help, should you offer?
- If you see a parent in the grocery store having problems with their child who wants candy and is throwing a fit in the candy aisle...should you step up and offer to help?
- What about a family member with sickness or injury who needs help - what then? How do you define "help" and where do you draw the line in helping? When dealing with someone recovering from injury, what is more helpful: to do as much as you can for them, or as little? Why? In this situation, the goal is to help the person recover as much of their autonomy and independence and strength as possible. Therefore, you give as little help as possible...or to put it another way, you require the person to do as much for themselves as they are reasonably able to do, lest you delay their recovery and even worse, foster their decline! This scenario brings to



mind the Helen Keller story - how many have seen the movie or read the book *The Miracle Worker*? Do you remember what state Helen Keller was in when Annie Sullivan showed up? How did Ms. Sullivan treat Helen? Was she helping? Also remember that Ms. Sullivan insisted on Helen being removed from her family in order to prevent them from “helping” her.

- Helping does not mean doing what the other wants, but what is *actually* helpful, within the boundaries or lines of authority and our mutual responsibility to each other. [Optional/Related: last week’s discussion on the importance of having constructive work/industry/purpose, and how damaging/destructive/demoralizing it is to take that away from people who are capable.]

Maybe the most important thing to remember from this discussion of loving our neighbors as ourselves...is that this “command” or the even the parable of the Good Samaritan do not say anything about *what we can do* works or efforts-wise to be saved...the emphasis is rather on how a converted person on the path to healing (or a “saved” person) *ought* to live. There is an inextricable link between these two most important commandments – “Love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself.” We cannot love God and treat other people (our neighbors) poorly.

So that does it for the introduction...now let’s take a look at Saturday’s Lesson. The lesson’s intro lists some Old Testament folks who maintained very close, special relationships with God - specifically Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - and in these relationships, we see God’s yearning to heal our brokenness and put us back in harmony with his design...but not just for the benefit of these few individuals and their families. Of course, this is and always has been part of his larger plan to heal mankind - but knowing that if each of these individuals trusted Him, were “at-oned” with Him, and were thereby transformed to be like Him...they would share that blessing and spread the message to others. God said to Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” {Gen 12:2-3} Have you ever been a blessing...have other peoples on the earth ever been blessed through you? How was that...how did that feel?

So Abraham’s descendants - the nation of Israel - were to be the avenue through which all the peoples of the earth would be blessed...ultimately, obviously, by being the avenue through which the Messiah would come, but in many other maybe not-so-obvious ways. They were called and instructed to be unique in their society - in the world, even - in almost every way possible. We have discussed extensively in this class - we even have a whole DVD seminar on the subject - that these folks were an acting troupe, they were on a giant world-stage, acting out a script (that we call scripture), with some awesome costumes, and a whole bunch of cool props...but for what purpose?

Acting out the plan of salvation using the object lessons and symbols of the sanctuary services, rituals, and sacrifices - showing the destructive and deadly effects of sin as well as God’s plan to heal,



transform, and restore us back to “at-one-ness” with Him - with every single detail and symbol and metaphor always, always pointing forward to the reality of the coming Savior...this was their ultimate purpose - to fully understand, assimilate, and internalize these truths into their hearts and minds, and then share this picture of a loving God with the surrounding nations - in direct contrast to their pagan, angry, appeasement-hungry Ba’al gods and idols.

What other purposes or assignments were the Israelites tasked with?

- They were living examples of God’s many names and qualities - deliverer, provider, protector, shelter (pillar of cloud by day), defender, light of the world (pillar of fire by night), bread of heaven (manna), living water (from the rock), etc.
- They were to be unique...in almost every way - the way they dress, the way they grow food/treat the soil, the way they prepare food, what they eat, their hygiene practices, how they treat each other, how they treat their slaves / animals / enemies / baby boys, how they governed and resolved differences, the way they worship, and most importantly the kind of God they worship. And all these unique elements, all these differentiating characteristics were for their good and for their growth - all designed to move them forward out of their darkened minds and slave mentality - always maturing them toward restoration back to His original design, and enabling them to be a powerful example and witness and blessing to the surrounding nations.

Ellen White, in Chapter 21 of Christ Object Lessons, describes the rich man in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man this way:

“There are today close beside us many who are hungry, naked, and homeless. A neglect to impart of our means to these needy, suffering ones places upon us a burden of guilt which we shall one day fear to meet. All covetousness is condemned as idolatry. All selfish indulgence is an offense in God’s sight. God had made the rich man a steward of His means, and it was his duty to attend to just such cases as that of the beggar. The command had been given, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5); and “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18). The rich man was a Jew, and he was acquainted with the command of God. But he forgot that he was accountable for the use of his entrusted means and capabilities. The Lord’s blessings rested upon him abundantly, but he employed them selfishly, to honor himself, not his Maker. In proportion to his abundance was his obligation to use his gifts for the uplifting of humanity. This was the Lord’s command, but the rich man had no thought of his obligation to God. He lent money, and took interest for what he loaned; but he returned no interest for what God had lent him. He had knowledge and talents, but did not improve them. Forgetful of his accountability to God, he devoted all his powers to pleasure. Everything with which he was surrounded, his round of amusements, the praise and flattery of his friends, ministered to his selfish enjoyment. So engrossed was he in the society of his friends that he lost all sense of his responsibility to co-operate with God in His ministry of mercy. He had



opportunity to understand the word of God, and to practice its teachings; but the pleasure-loving society he chose so occupied his time that he forgot the God of eternity...”

The rich man was favored with every temporal and spiritual blessing, but he refused to cooperate with God in the use of these blessings. Thus it was with the Jewish nation. The Lord had made the Jews the depositaries of sacred truth. He had appointed them stewards of His grace. He had given them every spiritual and temporal advantage, and He called upon them to impart these blessings.

Special instruction had been given them in regard to their treatment of their brethren who had fallen into decay, of the stranger within their gates, and of the poor among them. They were not to seek to gain everything for their own advantage, but were to remember those in need and share with them. And God promised to bless them in accordance with their deeds of love and mercy. But like the rich man, they put forth no helping hand to relieve the temporal or spiritual necessities of suffering humanity. Filled with pride, they regarded themselves as the chosen and favored people of God; yet they did not serve or worship God. If he had appreciated his exalted privileges and had allowed God’s Spirit to mold his mind and heart, he would have had an altogether different position.

So with the nation he represented. If they had responded to the divine call, their future would have been wholly different. They would have shown true spiritual discernment. They had means which God would have increased, making it sufficient to bless and enlighten the whole world. But they had so far separated from the Lord’s arrangement that their whole life was perverted. They failed to use their gifts as God’s stewards in accordance with truth and righteousness. Eternity was not brought into their reckoning, and the result of their unfaithfulness was ruin to the whole nation...



SUNDAY

The God Who Hears

400+ years of slavery - that's a really long time to wait for deliverance or pray for a promise to be fulfilled. Through multiple generations they waited...and waited. Finally, God shows up - at the burning bush - and commissions a reluctant Moses to deliver His people out of Egypt and out of the bondage of slavery. Is there any symbolism or a perhaps a greater object lesson from God allowing His people to suffer and languish in slavery, only to be delivered and set free and led into the promised land?

- Romans 6:6 "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin"
- Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Not only that, he promised not to lead them out of Egypt empty-handed - that they would get a hearty send-off from the Egyptians and basically clean them out.

End of lesson notes