

# LOVE PUT TO THE TEST

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"*  
(Matthew 22:39)

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. Once a lawyer came to Jesus and tempted him, asking "Teacher, which is the great
- B. The command to love one's neighbor as self was first given by Moses, "You shall not take
- C. The commandment, given in these words, is found seven times in the NT:  
Matt 19:19; **22:39**; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; James 2:8.
- D. Learning to love our neighbor is inescapably linked to our love for God: **1 John 4:20-21**.  
If someone says, "I love God," and hates 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? And this
- E. This is where love is put to the test.
  - 1. I am challenged to open my heart enough to love people and to get along with others.
  - 2. This is a test for *all* of us.
- F. If anyone says this is an easy command proves one of two things:
  - 1. He has never tried it. OR . . .
  - 2. He has awfully nice neighbors.
- G. Consider this little poem:  
*"To love the whole world  
For me is no chore;  
My only real problem's  
The neighbor next door."*
- H. Let us consider four ways that our love is *put to the test*:

## I. THE TEST OF AGAPE LOVE: "YOU SHALL LOVE."

- A. We need to review what this word "love" means. The Greek word found in this passage is a
  - 1. A working definition of *agape* love is that which *"seeks the best for the one loved."*
  - 2. The command is not to *phileo* everyone or to *phileo* our enemies, but to *agapao* them.
  - 3. We are not told to *like* everyone but to *love* everyone.
- B. Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 13:9 -- "*Love does no harm to a neighbor.*"
  - 1. That is a good description of *agape* love.
  - 2. Remembering that one's enemies are included in the word neighbor, we should do no harm to them.
- C. The key to loving others is learning to be a servant, **Gal 5:13-14**.
  - 1. "Through love serve one another," v.13.
  - 2. You should not love without serving, nor serve without loving.
  - 3. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is the "law of Christ" Paul wrote about in **Gal 6:2**.
- D. Have you ever thought about the fact that *God's* love was put to the test?
  - 1. The real test of God's love was not whether He could love men like Abraham, Joseph and
  - 2. The real test of God's love was whether He could love someone like Saul of Tarsus.
  - 3. It is whether He can love someone like you and me.

F. Thank God that *His* love met the test.

## II. THE TEST OF LOVING ALL MEN: "*YOUR NEIGHBOR.*"

- A. Who is the neighbor mentioned in this command?
- B. Probably the best answer is found in the parable found in **Luke 10:25-37**.
  - 1. A lawyer put Jesus to the test by asking him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal
  - 2. Instead of answering, Jesus asked the lawyer a question, ""What is written in the law?"
  - 3. He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
  - 4. Jesus said, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." v.28.
  - 5. Instead of Jesus being embarrassed, the lawyer had been put on the spot. So he, wanting
  - 6. Jesus then told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, *verses 30-37*.
- C. The Samaritan's love was severally put to the test. In fact, it was a series of tests:
  - 1. There was the prejudice test. The Jews and the Samaritans were enemies. They hated
  - 2. There was the priorities test. No doubt the Samaritan was as busy as the priest and Levite. He had to alter his schedule to stop.
  - 3. There was the pocketbook test. Helping not only cost time; it also cost money. But his
- D. Jesus then asked the question: "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him"
  - 1. The lawyer replied, "He who showed mercy on him." v.37.
  - 2. Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." v.37.
- E. The point is that the "neighbor" in the command can be *anyone* -- specifically anyone with
- F. Since everyone has needs of some kind (physical, spiritual, emotional), the word "anyone"
  - 1. Note that Paul says that love is a debt we owe to all men. Why? Because we are all brothers in the flesh, if not in the spirit. God loved us and we ought to love others.
  - 2. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor," v.10. (cf. The Golden Rule).

## III. THE TEST OF LOVING THE UNLOVABLE: "*YOUR NEIGHBOR*" INCLUDES YOUR *ENEMY*.

- A. ILLUSTRATION: Once in class a teacher said that all of us have enemies. One older man in the class raised his hand and said, "I don't have any enemies." "How did that happen, the teacher asked. "I outlived them all," the old man said.
- B. The greatest challenge of this command is found in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus was contrasting the old law with His new way. **Matthew 5:43-48**.
  - 1. Obviously the Jews of Jesus' day did not understand that a neighbor was anyone
  - 2. The challenge to us is to be like God so that our love encompasses both our friends and
  - 3. Why love our enemies? "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven," v.45.
  - 4. "What do you do more than others?"
    - a. Even publicans and sinners do good and love those who love them, v.46.
    - b. We must go beyond returning kindness only when kindness is received.
  - 5. *Illustration:* In our relationships with others, often what passes for love is little more than a neat business transaction. People are kind to us, so we repay them with equal consideration. When they treat us unjustly, our negative response is really what they asked for. Everything is so balanced, so fair, so logical with this eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth kind of justice. But Christian love never settles for only what's reasonable. It insists on giving mercy as well as justice. It breaks the chain of logical

reactions.

General Robert E. Lee was asked what he thought of a fellow officer in the Confederate Army who had made some derogatory remarks about him. Lee rated him as being very satisfactory. The person who asked the question seemed perplexed.

"General," he said, "I guess you don't know what he's been saying about you."

"I know," answered Lee. "But I was asked my opinion of him, not his opinion of me!"

They are kind to those who are kind to them, and react to those who are unjust to them.

- C. We are to do good to our enemies, but it must be done with love:
1. What good would it do to take someone a bowl of soup and secretly say, "I hope the old so-and-so chokes on it!"
  2. We might do our acts of concern as we would throw a nasty bone to a snarling dog, afraid that the SPCA might get us if we don't.
  3. That is not an expression of *agape* love.
- D. The challenge to love our enemies is one of the greatest marks of Christianity -- and probably the hardest test we will ever have as Christians.

ILLUSTRATION: The German poet Heinrich Heine gave his description of real happiness: "My wishes are a humble dwelling with a thatched roof, a good bed, good food, flowers at my windows, and some fine, tall trees, before my door. And if the good God wants really to make me completely happy He will grant me the joy of seeing six or seven of my enemies hanging from the tall, fine trees."

- E. The positive and negative aspects of loving an enemy, **Romans 12:19-21**.
1. *Negatively*, loving an enemy means you will *not* take revenge.
  2. *Positively*, loving an enemy means you *will* take care of his needs. This should hurt his conscience and "heap coals of fire on his head."
  3. *ILLUSTRATION*: I heard a story about a truck driver who dropped in at an all-night restaurant in Broken Bow, Nebraska. The waitress had just served him when three swaggering, leather-jacketed motorcyclists -- of the Hell's Angels type -- entered and rushed up to him, apparently spoiling for a fight. One grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his French fries; and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it.

The trucker did not respond as one might expect. Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his check, walked to the front of the room, put the check and his money on the cash register, and went out the door. The waitress followed him to put the money in the till and stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night.

When she returned, one of the cyclists said to her, "Well, he's not much of a man, is he?" She replied, "I can't answer as to that, but he's not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles out in the parking lot."

#### IV. THE TEST OF TOTAL CARE: "AS YOURSELF."

- A. How do we love ourselves?
1. Most of us do not look at ourselves in the mirror and say, "I love you, I love you, I love you."
  2. Rather, we show that we love ourselves when we take care of our needs.
  3. After Paul said men are "to love their own wives as their own bodies," he explained what (*Ephesians 5:28-29*).

4. To love others as we love ourselves is to be unselfish enough to supply their needs.
- B. Loving another "*As Yourself*" includes patience and understanding.
  1. Isn't that how you want others to treat you? With patience and understanding?
  2. Don't we tend to be patient and understanding of our own shortcomings?
  3. Don't we give ourselves the *benefit of the doubt*?
- C. Loving another "*As Yourself*" includes observing the Golden Rule.

## CONCLUSION:

- A. What about your love? How deep and wide does it run? Is it like a mighty river, blessing all
- B. When your love is tested, seek to "pass the test" in showing concern, compassion, love and

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