

Bite Size Bible Study

My Neighbor #170

By Pastor Lee

Deuteronomy 6:5 says:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all **your strength**.* NIV

*and you are to love Adonai your God with all your heart, all your being and all **your resources**.* CJB

The bolded word in Hebrew can mean each of these words, but it can mean **your everything**.

For the Hebrew people this is a part of the *Shema* (a sort of pledge of allegiance) that is said every morning and evening. Understanding what is meant by this sentence is not easy and goes against what we are taught in the Western World. It is saying that everything you have, everything you do, everything you think, everything you are; is to be showing your love for God. That's a tall order!

But when Jesus was asked the question about the greatest commandment, He linked it with Leviticus 19:18.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor (companion) as yourself. I am the Lord. NIV

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. Matthew 22:37-40 NIV

The question arises, why would Jesus put these two scriptures together in His reply? Possibly because we are to love God, whom we cannot see, and our neighbor, whom we can see, remembering that our neighbor was created in the image of God. If we cannot love our neighbor, whom we see, how can we love God whom we don't see?

But now the question arises, who is my neighbor? Whom do I have to love? This was the question from the expert in the Law (Torah). It may come across to us as a silly question but the Jewish people had long believed that only those from the 12 tribes were their neighbors, the rest of the world was pagan and to be shunned. While they could trade with them, they were not to cultivate friendships with them. This was to keep them from following the idolatrous religions of the rest of the world.

With this mindset, they believed that their only neighbor was a Jew. Here is one of many places Jesus gives deeper understanding to the Torah. Jesus responds to the expert in the law with the parable of the Good

Samaritan. Jesus chooses a Samaritan because during this period of time, Samaritans were one of the most hated groups by the Jews – similar to the Germans in the 1940's.

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10 :30-37 NIV

In the parable the Samaritan is the alien and stranger in this land. Jesus shows that this stranger is the neighbor who should be loved just as much as the man loves himself.

In another place Jesus says to love even your enemies. *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.* Matthew 5:43-45 NIV

Two statements by separate Rabbi's bring this into full view. *Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then, when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Should a person nourish anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord? Should a person refuse mercy to a man like himself, yet seek pardon for his own sins?* (28:2-4) (Ben Sira, c. 180 B.C.)

If you hate your neighbor whose deeds are wicked like your own, I, the Lord, will punish you as your judge; and if you love your neighbor whose deeds are good like your own, I, the Lord, will be faithful to you and have mercy on you. (Avot de-Rabbi Natan, Ver. B, chap. 26)

Jesus tells us, "Go and do likewise."