

As yourself

I have often pondered what 'as yourself' means. Does it mean 'in the same way as you love yourself, so you are to love your neighbour'? Or does it mean 'instead of thinking of yourself, think of your neighbour as though he were yourself'? There is truth in the saying that we need to love ourselves to be healthy and at peace. However, when we come to the 'new commandment' that Jesus gave us we will see that love is other-person-focused and self-sacrificing. We are to love our neighbour as though he/she *were* ourselves.

Interior hospitality

Have you ever thought how we human beings are spacial within our person. For example, we say of someone, "He is full of himself". By contrast, the person who loves another as themselves is other-person-focused, and has an interior hospitality for the other within themselves, i.e. a welcoming space within their heart for the other person, their stuff and their story. St Paul had an interior hospitality for those he visited in his apostolic ministry. He wrote to the Corinthian Christians,

you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

2 Corinthians 7:2-3

Matching and topping

If we have a genuine interior hospitality within us for another person, their story and their concerns, they will be glad of our love for them. On the other hand, if we are full of ourselves, we will be continually matching their story with our own: "Yes, that happened to me too, bla bla bla..." If we are full of ourselves we will not be content with matching the other person's situation but will need to top it: "You think that's tough! You should have seen what happened to me...! Blab bla bla..." If we do this others will see us coming and say, "Oh no! Not him/her again!"

Jesus and the second great commandment

As we shall see in the next study, Jesus himself so fully and beautifully lives this commandment. Indeed, we would never know the meaning and depth of it apart from him loving us as himself.

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March 2014

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Five Commandments to Love

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Here are five commandments we find in the New Testament. These five commandments to love interrelate and instruct one another, and the believer will delight to meditate upon them and obey them.

1. **Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.** Mark 12:29-30
2. **You shall love your neighbour as yourself.**
3. **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.** John 13:34
4. **But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.** Luke 6:27-28
5. **Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** 1 John 3:18

STUDY TWO

The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:31

This commandment only appears once in the Old Testament.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. Leviticus 19:18

However the second 'great' commandment permeates the ethical thinking of the New Testament.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:8-10

In the ten commandments the first four have to do with loving God, and the last six with loving one's neighbour. Thus Paul is confirming

what Jesus has said, namely that the ten are 'summed up' in the two great commandments to love God with your whole being and your neighbour as yourself. Paul's concern is to move the question of behaviour from the letter of the law to the freedom of the Holy Spirit. What 'counts' is 'faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6), and love is the fruitage of the Holy Spirit present and working in the believer.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Galatians 5:13-14

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:18-24

James calls this commandment 'the royal law'. The King is Jesus. He has exemplified this way of love as we shall see in the next study, and has established it as the law or principle of his kingdom.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing well. James 2:8

Agape

The Greek word *apape* had little secular use, and seems to have been taken up by Christians and given the same currency as the love of God. It conveyed the essence of the commandment to love someone 'as yourself', i.e. an unrelenting goodwill which doesn't depend on the worthiness of the beloved, or the attitude of the beloved to the one loving. It always seeks the highest good for the beloved and cannot be put off. In short it steadfastly loves the beloved for their own sake and benefit. Thus it is other person focused.

The golden rule

The meaning of loving your neighbour as yourself is behind what has been called 'the golden rule' in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12

President Kennedy in 1963 appealed to the golden rule in an anti-segregation speech at the time of the first black enrolment at the University of Alabama. He asked whites to consider what it would be

like to be treated as second-class citizens because of skin colour. Whites were to imagine themselves being black -- and being told that they couldn't vote, or go to the best public schools, or eat at most public restaurants, or sit in the front of the bus. Would whites be content to be treated that way? He was sure that they wouldn't -- and yet this is how they treated others. He said the "heart of the question is ... whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated."

President Kennedy's appeal demonstrates that this second great commandment has to do with a large part of our living, and raises the question of who is my neighbour?

Who is my neighbour?

The context in the OT suggests that an Israelite's neighbour was his fellow Israelite. However, when asked to identify who our neighbour is, Jesus broadened the definition considerably.

But (the Pharisee), desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." Luke 10:29-37

Perhaps we could summarise Jesus' definition by saying that our neighbour, rather than being the one who is 'one of us' is the one who is near to us, but different from us,

For a man, that may be woman, and for woman, man. For adults, children and vice versa. In like manner our neighbours may include Aborigines, prisoners, refugees, Moslems, and people of other races, religions, moral outlooks, political persuasions or sporting allegiances.