
Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

On Valentine's Day we celebrate the love we have for our lovers, friends, families, and classmates. Valentine's Day is a blessed day where receiving and giving love is more natural than on other days but it also exposes a weakness, namely that we realize we are not great at loving others, particularly those who do not love us back, those who are not like us, or those we have nothing in common with. The truth is that because Jesus Christ has loved us freely we are free from living self focused lives and free towards other centered loving. God's love frees us to love others freely, no matter what the return on investment is.

People who have been saved by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ have been freed from keeping score before God and other people so the need for self promotion, self righteousness, self image management, self justification, and the like is dissolved. Rather, we are free to live as we are designed to live- with the Lord at the center of our lives and with others as the recipients of His love through us.

Read Galatians 5:13-14

We must be honest with ourselves: we have misunderstood the love and work of Christ for his people so we have misunderstood the implications for our lives and, thus, we have misrepresented his love to the world- our love is more directed at ourselves, or at least what is comfortable, easy, and familiar to us! But because the work of Christ has set us free we must be a people who love others freely.

1. Christ's work brings freedom from Self-Centered Living (5:13a)

Paul builds on a theme he began in 5:1 (and really in 1:10) by reminding the believer that the work of Christ has set us free and this freedom is living free from a life of keeping score. Paul says, "... do not use your freedom as an opportunity for your flesh..." The word opportunity is a Greek word used in military offenses speaking specifically about where initiatives are launched out. So, literally, our freedom in Christ is a freedom from a life where our living offenses are launched from our selves, for ourselves, and because of ourselves. It is not about us keeping score, being better than others or looking good for everyone around us but rather living true humanity, life as God designed it for His people, with God at the center and not ourselves and others as the recipients of His love through us.

2. Christ's work brings freedom towards other's centered loving (13b-14)

The fact is that true freedom is service, not selfishness. As Paul unpacks how we are to live in the freedom we have from Christ's work he calls us to be other centered in our loving in two distinct categories: loving the People of God and Loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. These opportunities to be other centered in our loving are ongoing, ethical obligations for Christians. (On loving the People of God see Rocky's last sermon) Paul states this explicitly in 14: For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'you should love your neighbor as yourself.' Paul mentions this here in Galatians and again in Romans 13:9 showing the importance of this ethical obligation for those who have found freedom in Christ.

Why is it important to Paul? It is important to him because it was important to Jesus. You see this theme throughout the teaching and life of Jesus but most famously is the parable

of the Good Samaritan we read in Luke 10. Why is loving our neighbor as ourselves important to Paul & Jesus? Because God has always designed his people to love freely towards their neighbors. We first encounter this command explicitly in Leviticus 19:18 but it is implicit in God's word as far back as Genesis 12.

The point? The call to love our neighbors as ourselves is an ancient obligation for the people of God but it has frequently been an ethical standard we fail to meet. Why? Because in our humanity we are instinctively focused on loving ourselves. We enjoy loving those that love us back, or loving others when there is something in it for us, so we don't love our neighbor well. We see the grace of God on display in this passage as God holds out, yet again, the opportunity to find freedom and fullness through living his design for life.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How does a life of "keeping score" push your focus on yourself and weary your spirit? How does the work of Jesus Christ free us from the weight of a self-focused life?
- 2) How has the call for God's people to love their neighbors as themselves been an ancient call? Why should this matter?
- 3) What are the motives for loving God's people and for loving our neighbors as ourselves? How does understanding the work of Christ act as a foundation for us?

Helpful Resources

BOOKS

[Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just](#)

by Timothy Keller

Digging Deeper

When you reach the end of your life, what will your regrets be? Will you regret more loving others as yourself or being too self-focused in your loving?