

Loving Our Neighbor as Ourselves

“For this, **Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet;** and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**” (Rom 13:9).

“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall **keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.** For he that said, **Do not commit adultery**, said also, **Do not kill**. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” (Jas 2:8-11).

Paul and James made the same point about the one law of love but approached it from different angles. Paul said keeping one law keeps all the laws, while James said breaking one of the laws breaks all the laws. It’s the same conclusion reached two different ways. Since all the laws are one, then one broken is the one broken. James wasn’t saying that righteousness under the law meant keeping it perfectly without ever sinning. That line of teaching discourages righteous living so we’ll quit, “Well, we can’t do it anyway, so why even try?”

When James stated “**For he that said, Do not commit adultery**, said also, **Do not kill**” (Jas 2:11), it wasn’t what Moses said in the law but what Christ said about the law: “Ye have heard that it **was said by them** of old time, **Thou shalt not kill**; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: **But I say unto you**” (Mat 5:21-22), “Ye have heard that it **was said by them** of old time, **Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you**” (5:27-28). What “was said by them” is what the scribes and Pharisees said about the law, “That except your righteousness shall exceed **the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees**” (5:20). They lowered its righteous standard thereby destroying it. But what Christ said fulfills it, “Think not that I am come **to destroy the law, or the prophets**: I am not come **to destroy, but to fulfil**” (5:17), “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: **for this is the law and the prophets**” (7:12).

Christ warned us to not just hear what He said about the law but to also do it, “Therefore whosoever **heareth** these sayings of mine, and **doeth them** ... And every one that **heareth** these sayings of mine, and **doeth them not**” (7:24, 26). And James restated His warning, “But be ye **doers of the word, and not hearers only**, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, **he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass**: For he beholdeth himself, and **goeth his way**, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” (Jas 1:22-24). Christ’s law of love is to first look at ourselves, then treat others accordingly, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Mat 7:12). Thus, James’ illustration of looking into a mirror—we see ourselves when we see our neighbor that has the same essential needs.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus was answering the question “And who is my neighbour?” (Luk 10:29). “And by chance there came down **a certain priest** that way: and **when he saw him, he passed by** on the other side. And likewise **a Levite**, when he was at the place, came and **looked on him, and passed by** on the other side” (vs. 31-32). This is what James repeated, “he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way” (Jas 1:24). A man that is a hearer but not a doer sees himself when seeing his neighbor in need but goes his way without helping.

Paul used the same illustration of a mirror for Christ’s law of love: “**Charity** suffereth long, *and* is kind; **charity** envieth not; **charity** vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1Co 13:4-7), “For now we **see through a glass**, darkly; but then **face to face**” (v. 12). Though now we’re looking into a mirror hearing, but when face-to-face with our neighbor we’re to be doing—suffering long, being kind, envying not, etc.

Loving our neighbor as ourselves means consciously and purposely compelling ourselves to mentally switch places with them. When encountering others in all types of situations, we must see ourselves in them and treat them accordingly. This doesn’t mean, obviously, getting our priorities out of order in neglecting our own family to care for others. God gives His Breath in our hearts to lead us in wisdom.