

How Wide is Your Circle?

July 25, 2021

INTRODUCTION

There is nothing quite as ugly as religion without good deeds. And without good deeds, we may not silence the foolish talk of unbelievers. Peter in his counsel to the early church, put it this way:

¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.... ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

1 Peter 2:12, 15

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

In the Hebrew, there is a unique Hebrew phrase that is only used three times in the Old Testament and two of those times is in these two commands:

The first command is found in Deuteronomy 6:5:

⁵ Love the LORD (ve'ahavta) your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

And the second commandment is found in Leviticus 19:18:

¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor (ve'ahavta) as yourself. I am the LORD.

The ancient rabbis had a practice that when they saw an exact phrase like this, and especially when it was a rarely used phrase, to connect those thoughts. The practice of connecting verses that share a unique word or phrase or is called *gezerah sheva*.

And so the thinking of many was this. There's something about these two verses that are linked by this unique phrase *ve'ahavta*. What is it? And the thinking was this: *the greatest commandment is the Bible was to love God and the way you best demonstrate that love for God is to love your neighbor as yourself.*

Now, this phrase, “love your neighbor as yourself” is best understood as “love your neighbor who is like yourself”. Meaning, “love people around you because before God they are just like you. And you are just like them!” They too are made in the image of God, just like you. Made with such eternal weight of glory and beauty.

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³⁰ 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. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

What Might It Look Like THIS WEEK to Love:

- Those Close to You
- The Stranger
- Your Enemy

