

Doctrinal Summary of Love: The Second Greatest Commandment

In Mark 12:31 Jesus identifies the second greatest commandment is to love one's neighbor.

“The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.””

The word “love” is translated from the Koine Greek word ἀγαπήσεις (“ah-ga-pae-seis”) which more literally means, “you really will perform the continuous type of action in a point in time in the future to self-sacrificially pursue that which is best for another regardless of the response received because of your own integrity and volition.” It refers to love that pursues what is best for another without any concern for personal interests. Thus, it is self-sacrificial and selfless in its entirety. It does not place any expectations or strings attached onto the one being loved but unconditionally seeks to relate to and provide what is best for that individual.

The word “neighbor” is translated from the Koine Greek word πλησίον (“plae-si-on”) which more literally means, “one who is nearby or in close proximity to another.” It refers to any individual who is nearby. The description is based on proximity and not based on residency or citizenship. It should be understood as referring to anyone nearby one's presence regardless of location. Jesus identifies that man is to love those who are nearby him no matter where he is at or what relationship he has with them.

The word “as” is translated from the Koine Greek word ὡς (“hohs”) which more literally means, “in like manner as to.” It introduces a comparison which describes the action of one statement as being in like manner or the same manner by which an action in another statement to which it connects is carried out. It is used by Jesus here to identify that man is to love those nearby him in the same manner as he loves himself. Thus, man is to self-sacrificially and unconditionally love those around him in the same manner by which he self-sacrificially and unconditionally loves himself.

Jesus' statement is a quote from Leviticus 19:18 where Moses is relaying God's instruction to Israel regarding how Israelites are to treat fellow Israelites. But the concept of loving one's neighbor is extended by Jesus to include anyone that is nearby one's presence in Luke 10:30-37 through the story of the Good Samaritan. It was neither the priest nor the Levite who walked by the man who had been beaten and robbed that proved to be his neighbor, but the Samaritan who helped him. In Luke 10:37 Jesus asked the lawyer with whom He was speaking who proved to be the neighbor of the man that was mugged. The lawyer correctly identified the Samaritan who had shown mercy as the mugged man's neighbor in Luke 10:37.

“And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy toward him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same.’”

Showing mercy is the action of providing for another's needs at one's own expense. Providing for another's needs at one's own expense is the byproduct of grace (a mentality of favor towards others that takes responsibility for their needs instead of ignoring them). Grace is a byproduct of having self-sacrificial and unconditional love towards others that pursues what is best for them regardless of their response. Thus, unconditional love is the source of grace which is the source of mercy. As believers walk around this world they encounter those who need the mercy and grace that come from unconditional love. Those they encounter are their neighbors whom they are to love unconditionally as the second greatest commandment.