

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

by Carter Conlon

Matthew 22:35-40: *Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

In this second commandment of Jesus, he said you need to love your neighbor as yourself, but that is not as easy as it sounds. I would like to share with you a revelation the Holy Spirit gave to me concerning this powerful truth.

■ A CERTAIN LAWYER

The lawyer Jesus was speaking to actually was an interpreter of the Old Testament law. As an expositor, he would take the law and make it clear to the people. He was trained to explain the law and show where it was leading. He was probably a very arrogant man with an attitude of, "Let's see if you're as smart as people seem to think you are." So he asked Jesus a question in order to test him, "Master, what is the greatest commandment in the law?" In other words, "Of all the things that are written in the law and in the prophets, if you were to sum them up, what one truth stands out above and beyond all the other things that are contained in the book? In your estimation, what is the single great commandment?"

■ THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT

Jesus said to him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Jesus clearly said, "Everything that you're supposed to be teaching the people is summed up in these two commandments. If what you are communicating does not lead the people to these two things, then you need to go back to the drawing board, because you are completely missing the mark."

Since this also applies to us today, it is to this same end that I set the direction of my will, my soul, my mind, and the outflow of all my inner abilities. In other words, the totality of my life is directed to loving, knowing, understanding, and allowing him to work within me. When you put all of this together, it moves into the second commandment, which he says is like the first: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* The ultimate expression of how deeply I love God is reflected in how I interact with other people—how I allow the strength he implants in my life to begin to flow out to all of humanity around me. That's why in 1 John 4:20, John said, in essence, that if any man says he loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar and the truth is not in him. The word *hate* in this verse also has the connotation of indifference. The Word is saying, If a man claims to love God, but is indifferent to his fellow man,

indifferent to their pain and difficulty in living without God, then the truth is not in him. If he says, "God is in me and I'm in God," yet there is no outflow of passion to fallen humanity, the truth is not in him.

In other words, the ultimate expression of how deeply I love God is reflected in how I interact with other people.

■ WHAT IF I DO NOT LIKE MYSELF

The scripture says I am to love my neighbor as myself. But this is where it gets a bit tricky. What if I don't like myself? Didn't Paul say that he was convinced that within him dwelt no good thing? Now I'm told that the measure of how I love my neighbor is determined proportionately with how I love myself. Some people may feel justified in hating their neighbor because they hate themselves. This is true of so many today who look in the mirror and don't like what they see; they don't like the way God made them. If this is true of you, then you will have a controversy with God because you have a wrong definition of what beauty really is. You've been watching too much media, reading too many magazines, and acquiring a Hollywood concept of beauty.

You may even continue the argument, "Well, what if all I see is failure? What if I look into my life and regardless of all the

magnificent promises God has for me, I don't seem to be achieving any of them? Sure, there are a few little victories here and there, but the overall picture is one of failure. I don't see myself becoming what God intended me to be." There are many who receive the lie that they are not complete in Christ; they believe God made some kind of tragic mistake in the way they were created. Or somehow they have taken this life that God gave them and have made such a mess of it, that it's no longer recoverable.

■ HOW CAN I LOVE OTHERS IF I DON'T LOVE MYSELF

So, how do I love people, especially if I don't love myself? How do I fulfill the law of God if I see myself in a negative light? Jesus said that you can take all the teachings of the law and the prophets, and hang them on these two great commands. "But I'm afraid to reach out to people and I don't know how to change," you may say. "I'm afraid of people. I love God and I can open the Bible and read it. I can even come into the prayer closet to pray, but when it comes to people, I have a hard time relating. I have been deeply wounded by people, and, therefore, I have difficulty loving them."

■ NO FEAR IN LOVE

Your problem may be in not understanding the scriptures. 1 John 4:18 says, *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment, and he that fears is not made perfect in love.* In a real sense God is saying, "You are afraid of people because you are not perfected in love." Again you may say, "I know that; that's fairly obvious. If God's love is in me then I should not be afraid of people. I should not be afraid of stepping out of my comfort zone, into places where they live in order to see God touch their need through me."

You see, here's the fear that many men and women carry, a deep fear that God sees us the way we see ourselves.

■ WHAT IS AT THE ROOT OF MY FEAR?

But my question remains; "What is the root of this fear in me that keeps me from loving who I am. And, therefore, from loving others? What is this fear? Why don't I love who I am?" Have you ever pondered this question? You understand that in the Bible there is a great commission to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. You acknowledge all of this but there is a fear in you that keeps you from loving who you are. If you don't love who you are, you can't possibly love your neighbor. "How can I love other people when I hate myself? I don't think it can happen." You see, here's the fear that many men and women carry, a deep fear that God sees us the way we see ourselves. It's the fear that God sees us with all our frailties and failings just as we see ourselves. This deep-seated fear keeps people out of the prayer closet; they lift up their hands, and this whole scenario of failures appears before them. All they see is how far they have fallen short of the glory of God; how much they have failed God; how little they do in the name of God; how seemingly insignificant their victories have been. Although they are told in the scriptures they should be mighty and that God should be doing exploits through them, they can't reach out to others. They can't even speak to the grocery clerk in the local store and tell him that God loves him. They are so afraid of speaking to people that when they see a person weeping on a park bench they can't stop and reach out. And the root of it is this inward loathing of self, an unholy loathing

that God does not want you and me to have. We are not to live there; we are not to focus on those things.

■ HIS EYE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON ME

In Ezekiel 16:5-7, *None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee, but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.*

And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee [when thou wast] in thy blood, Live...

I have caused thee multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great...

In verse 5, God says, *No eye pitied thee*, speaking of Israel, his own people, who are a type of you and me. In other words, "You were in a terrible condition, and everybody passed you by; no one had compassion on you. You were out on the open field, to be loathed on the day you were born, but God says he saw you. He was the only one who saw the potential in your life, saw what you were going to be, not what you are. To the casual passerby, who didn't know God's heart, there was no pity, no compassion. You were seemingly dropped off in an open field with no hope and no helper the day you were born. In that condition, without Christ, nobody would have any hope for you for the future. Our songs would be empty songs; our hope for eternity would be in vain. But God had his eye upon us from the very beginning. In verse 6, he says, *And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood...* Another translation says, *And when I saw you trodden underfoot...*

God was saying, "When I saw that you had no hope, I said unto you

‘Live.’” This word live in the original text means to enjoy life, to live again, to recover and be quickened. “I passed by you,” God said. “I saw you in your condition, in your helplessness. I saw you as hopeless. But I am not like other people. I stopped and began to speak to you, and I said ‘Live.’ I said, ‘Enjoy life, live again. Do not live being trodden underfoot, or in your failure, but simply, live again. Recover from your condition and be quickened.’” And in verse 7, God said, “I have called you to multiply. Not only did I speak the word ‘live’ to you, but I gave you the strength to become someone other than who you once were.” *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* When you trusted in him for your salvation, he spoke into your heart and gave you the power to become new in Christ.

God loved you when no one else did, and God cleansed you when no one else would. John says in Revelation 1:5: *Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood...* He came down and gave his life on a cross and washed away all the filth and iniquity that you and I were born in—because we were born in sin and with a sin nature. And then God took the penalty of that sin upon him, and washed us clean in his own blood. This is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us!

■ NOTHING LEFT UNCLEAN — NO RECORD OF WRONG

Now let’s look at Acts 10:10-16, *...he fell into a trance. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending to him as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth. Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.”*

I want to show you this principle as a reality. This is a story of Peter, who was visiting at the house of Simon, the tanner. Just before lunchtime, Peter went up on the roof to pray and while he was praying, a vision unfolded before him. Again, this is a type of many believers who come to Christ because as a believer, you are on a journey with Christ. You know that God loves you; you know that God has a commission for you and you have received that. You are going out with this commission deep in your heart, but you feel so powerless to go where God is calling you to go. You go into the prayer closet and in a moment you are accused by the devil. You see this sheet of unclean things come down as a type of memories of the past, the awareness of your shortcomings. You understand what the scripture called you to be and how far short you fall of the glory of God. You look at this and you can’t get beyond it. As the Lord told Peter, there was something in this that he wanted him to see concerning the Gentiles. So, too, there is a truth you need to see concerning failures in your life.

Peter was so entrenched in his own scriptural view of himself and of other people that he could not see beyond it at that moment. So God had to repeat it to him three times (see Acts 10, 14-16) and even then after the third time, he was not sure that he understood what it was that God was trying to get through to him.

Peter saw all of this uncleanness, and the Lord told him, “Peter, it’s now yours for the taking.” And Peter replied, “No, I can’t do this! These are unclean things, I can’t accept this. You are presenting something to me that I am not willing to accept. God, are you trying to

tell me that these things I once considered unclean are now cleansed?” In the same way this applies to the Christian who is in prayer, “God, are you trying to tell me that there is no record of my failure? Are you telling me that there is no record of past wrongs? That heaven hasn’t recorded my past or present struggles? That all these things have changed? That they are not the way they used to be?” The Lord was trying to get this message across to Peter, but he couldn’t hear it and so many of God’s people have this same difficulty. You might be struggling today, but if you are a true believer, there is no record of your struggle in heaven. You are received of God.

It is this new nature that you are to love: “I love the new nature of Christ within me. I love what God is doing; I am not happy about some of the struggles, but I do love the man that God is making me into.”

If nothing else makes you shout, this should! It should make you shout in the presence of God. It should bring joy! “Lord God Almighty, you are trying to tell me that in Christ, the work is complete, that all my struggles, all my failures, all my trials, all my horrible self-image, and the way I feel about myself have been dealt with in Christ. I am not to call any of it common and unclean any longer.”

This is what the Lord is saying to his church in this hour. You must not call yourself common or unclean anymore. Don’t look to your failings, look to the one

who has cleansed you. Don't look at yourself, but look to the one who has covered you. Don't look to where you have fallen short of the glory—look to the glory that now sits at the right hand of God and is resident within you in the power of the Holy Ghost. Look to the promises of God—look to the faithfulness of God. Look to the fact that God is well able to make you into everything he has promised.

■ LOVING WHAT GOD IS DOING IN ME

Now we get back to our original point. You may say, "I thought self was to be crucified, to be denied." Yes, it is, but it is the old self, your old nature, that is to be crucified. The old nature is the one Paul was talking about when he said that in him (that is, in his old nature) dwelt no good thing. But you have a new nature recreated in Christ Jesus. The moment you came to Christ and were born again, you received a brand-new nature. You received the Spirit of God and he began to recreate you into the image of his Son. It is this new nature that you are to love. I love the new nature of Christ within me; I love what God is doing in me right now. It is true, I am not happy about some of the struggles, but I do love the man that God is making me into. Therefore, I am not outside the scripture in saying that I am to love my neighbor as I love myself. It is not the old self I am to love, but the new life that God has placed in me in Christ.

If I love God, I have to love his new creation within me. I love the fact that he has taken a man

who didn't even care about people and given me a heart of compassion for all people, as far as I know. I love the fact that he has taught me how to be a husband, and he is teaching me how to be a father, and now a grandfather. I love the fact that things that were not in me are now there by the grace and glory of Almighty God. And now I love this and you should love it.

Love the work of God within you. It's great to love the church, to come in and love the sanctuary. It's awesome to come in and love the praises of God. But all of that is just leading to something greater; it is leading to the work that God himself is doing within you. Ironically, as we do this, we find ourselves walking closer to God than any number of Bible studies or tapes you listen to can produce in your life. We end up loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We begin our day by saying, "God, I love you so much, and in spite of what I see in the mirror, that's not what you see when you look at me." We look in the mirror and we begin to realize, "God, you don't see this person anymore; there is a brand-new creation going on inside of me and that is the person you are looking at. Your Son Jesus Christ is now living his life in me, changing me every day from image to image and glory to glory."

Carter Conlon
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REV. CARTER CONLON

Carter Conlon is senior pastor at Times Square Church, where he has been on the pastoral staff since 1994.

TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

Founding Pastor

Rev. David Wilkerson

Senior Pastor

Rev. Carter Conlon

Tel:

212-541-6300

Fax:

212-541-6415

Church Location:

237 West 51st Street,
Between Broadway & Eighth Avenue

Mailing Address:

1657 Broadway, 4th Fl.
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:

info@timesquarechurch.org

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Intercessory Prayer	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

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