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SIX LESSONS TO UNLOCKING THE TRUTH  
TO GOD'S HOLY LAND



International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews® 

# LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

How wonderful and fitting it is that the sixth and final sermon in our series about the modern nation of Israel should focus on the phrase, “Love Your Neighbour.” Over these six weeks we’ve used the acrostic I.S.R.A.E.L for the six areas of discovery that every believer should know about the modern state of Israel, which celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year on April 19<sup>th</sup>. Our six topics have included Israel is *I*mportant; Israel is a *S*tate, Israel teaches us about *R*ighteous giving, Israel teaches us about *A*liyah (which means, “return”); our great need is to be *E*ducated about Israel; and finally, today, Israel teaches us about the importance of *L*oving our neighbour. These are the lessons that God wants to teach the world through the nation of Israel and the revelation of God’s word.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, was Jewish. He was raised in a Jewish family and attended a Jewish synagogue. He certainly would have studied the Torah. So it’s no surprise that He was so eloquent when it came to talking about the Law.

In Matthew 22:37-40, when He was asked about the greatest commandments, Jesus quoted the Torah and replied:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus knew that the Law was more than just a list of rules—God’s Law teaches us how we are to live harmoniously in community with others. Treating others with empathy and respect is at the very core of the Torah and the message of the Gospel. Scripture repeatedly talks about how we are to treat our neighbour. Luke’s Gospel tells us that when Jesus repeated these great words from the Law, a lawyer, wishing to justify himself, asked, “Who is my neighbour” (Luke 10:29)?

Our Lord’s response was instructive. He replied with an imaginative story (a parable) that was based on the meaning and the heart of the Law of Moses. Keep in mind that the Old Testament is still, to this day, the Word of God to us. Perhaps even more surprisingly, the Old Testament is the only Bible that Jesus read. This is so important! The example of the New Testament Gospels is that Jesus relies on the Old Testament as his guidance from God the Father. The Old Testament is the Bible that shaped the life of Jesus. Another way to say this is that Jesus is our guide to understanding the Old Testament. And the life of Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the heart of the Old Testament.

So, when Jesus sets out to answer the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbour?” his parable is the story that illustrates the heart of the Mosaic Law. Jesus told the story because the story revealed the correct understanding of the Torah. Perhaps you know it. We call it the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the cultural setting of Jesus’s day, Samaritans were misunderstood, hated, and rejected by society. In our day, we can easily miss the shock and the power behind the idea of a “good Samaritan,” because the idea would have seemed like an oxymoron to those who were listening to the Lord as he told his story. In Jesus’s day, no Samaritan would ever be considered “good” by the Jewish community. You can read the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke, chapter 10, but in just a few short sentences, Jesus illustrates the difference between religiously minded people who care more for orthodoxy than they do for other people—especially people who are not like them. At the end of Jesus’s parable, we discover that our neighbour is the one to whom we show mercy in practical ways. Further, Jesus says that we should *all* imitate the actions of the good Samaritan. The good Samaritan’s behaviour is what the love of God looks like in action from one person to another, even though the world might have considered these men enemies.

The Lord's teaching is exactly in keeping with the law of Moses. So many people who are not familiar with the Old Testament think of it as only a book of rules and regulations. But the Old Testament is inspired by the Holy Spirit to communicate God's mind and God's heart. The heart of the Mosaic law can be found in the Book of Leviticus 19:34, which tells us,

*"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."*

Do you see the word *love* in this passage? It's at the heart of the Mosaic law. It's important to understand that the Mosaic Law is a love-gift from the Creator. Because God loves us, He has given His Commandments. His Commandments will Guide us into loving Him and loving one another.

Likewise, John's Gospel tells us that the love of God was expressed in the life of Jesus, our Lord. John 3:16-17 says,

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."*

It was the love of God the Father that sent Jesus the Son into the world. Jesus did not come into the world to condemn us, but rather to save us from the condemnation we were already living under.

Finally, there are the three-fold mentions of love in the letter written by the Apostle John to the churches. First in 1 John 3:16-18, he says,

*"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."*

Then, in 1 John 4:11 the beloved disciple of Jesus reminds us,

*"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*

John goes on to say that the proof of our love for one another is to love God and to carry out His Commandments.

*"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:1-4).*

Do you see the connection between the Mosaic Law and John's description of the love of God? If we think the Old Testament law is difficult for us to obey, we have missed John's words that "His commands are not burdensome." The correct understanding of the Old Testament is that it provides the guidelines for how we can love one another in practical ways.

Jesus demonstrates the proper way to live out the Commandments of the Old Testament. Some may consider it a very tall order, but the message is clear—we are to treat others with the same love God has shown to us. Our neighbour is anyone we meet who is in need—whether they live next door, in another town, or across the globe. Whenever we help another person in need, we are being that person's neighbour and fulfilling one of God's two greatest commandments. In fact, in a world where we can hop on a jet plane and be anywhere the very next day, it's not too far of a stretch to say that the *whole world* is, in fact, our neighbour. God has commanded us to provide for the needy and to use what He has given us for the less fortunate. In that way, we show our regard for God as Creator of all people, share His goodness with others, and draw others closer to Him.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder and president of the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews of Canada* reflects on our calling to love others. “Judaism refers to this as *tikkun olam*, or ‘fixing the world’. It is our purpose and calling as Jews to restore the world to rightness with God”. Christians are also concerned with this same kind of restoration. The Apostle Paul reminds us that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). In both cases the emphasis is on reconciliation between all mankind and between mankind and God, our Maker.

So, during our six-week series on the nation of Israel, we have seen what a tremendous debt we have to the people of Israel and how closely aligned to the Scriptures from both the Old and New Testament are. If anyone at all is our neighbour in this modern world, it should certainly be true that the modern state of Israel is a close neighbour to every follower of Jesus. As we discussed in last week’s message regarding educating ourselves about our responsibility to Israel, every Christian should take time to consider how he or she can show support—and love—for Israel in practical ways.

As the modern state of Israel has opened its doors to immigrants from around the world, it has taken on this calling to godly love. This means that the state of Israel is constantly welcoming people that are frequently rejected in other parts of the world. Jewish immigrants arrive each year in Israel with no possessions except the hope provided by their ancient custom of *Aliyah*, or “returning” (this was the focus of the fourth message in our series). As a result, the state of Israel is in constant need of Christian partners who can show the love of God in practical ways to their neighbours—their *close* neighbours—the people of Israel.

If we take time to educate ourselves about the needs of Israel (this was the focus of the fifth message in our series), we will discover the depth of their needs and the responsibilities of Christians to help supply those needs. Indeed, the earliest Christians actively looked for ways to help Israel. The Book of Acts tells of the great offering orchestrated by the Apostle Paul (another Jewish Rabbi and great follower of Jesus!) specifically to help the people in Jerusalem.

Paul talks at length about his ministry to help the poor in Jerusalem. We find references to this ongoing work in at least three of his letters (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15; and Romans 15:14-32). These are not short, passing references, they are sustained teaching passages about the importance of showing God’s love to Jerusalem in practical (financial) ways! He saw “remembering the poor” as one means of Christian (Gentile) churches showing their indebtedness to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem who had first established the faith of Christianity. Listen to how he uses the language of “indebtedness” in this passage from Romans 15:25-27:

*“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”*

Not once, but twice, Paul says “they owe it.” Notice, too, how wide-reaching this effort is to send assistance to Jerusalem. Paul mentions the regions of Macedonia (Northern Greece), Achaia (Southern Greece), and in Rome (Italy). In all of these regions, the Christians of the first-century church were busily engaged in showing their financial support for Jerusalem.

We also know from Acts 11:27-30 that Paul had previously delivered aid from the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem, which was suffering famine. Much later in his ministry, Paul went out of his way to re-visit the church leaders in Ephesus (Turkey) to receive their offering for Jerusalem. This means that the record of the New Testament records at least three times that the Apostle Paul was engaged in supporting Jerusalem. More likely, it was a regular part of his ministry wherever he went.

The early church, especially under Paul's leadership, was eager to financially support to Jerusalem, the place from which the Gospel had originated. In another context, Paul referred to love offerings as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18) and, in an echo of God's promise to bless those who blessed Abraham, Paul assures the church in Philippi that: "God will meet all your needs per the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

If the earliest Christians understood their debt to Israel and Jerusalem, and if this matter of financial support was recorded for us in the letters of the New Testament, we ought also to consider such practical, financial support for Israel a Christian duty, both as individuals and as congregations.

Both the Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan and the apostolic letters of Paul provide ample connection between the New Testament's teaching on loving our neighbours and the practical use of offerings to show that love. The conclusion for this church, and every church, should be clear, from the Old Testament to the New—we demonstrate our love for God by loving one another. This love should take Israel into account, and that that love must be practical.

Finally, let's close with the words of James, the Lord's brother:

*"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:15-17).*

But we are not part of a dead faith, are we? How will we demonstrate that our faith is alive, loving, and well?