

Love Your
Neighbor
as Yourself



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Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

JESUS (YESHUA) SAID the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. He was quoting from the second half of Leviticus 19:18, which says, “*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, **but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD***” (emphasis added).

When Jesus spoke these words, He was speaking to a Jewish man in the first century. His words did not sound revolutionary or new. They were confirmation of already revealed truth. The *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) teaches loving God and loving others—and then gives ways to practice love.

A Jewish children’s encyclopedia, *My Jewish World*, describes Leviticus 19:18 by saying, “This law is the basis for all the other laws which prohibit unfair dealings and the bearing of grudges, and stress concern for the defenseless.”

In the Wikipedia article *Jewish Views on Love* we read, “One of the core commandments of Judaism is ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18), sometimes called the **Great Commandment**. This commandment stands at the center of the central book in the *Torah*.”



*The Torah teaches
loving God and loving others.*

Jewish sages Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Hillel both taught that loving one's neighbor was of primary importance. Hillel was famous for saying, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to another. That is the whole Law. The rest is commentary. Now go and learn."

Jesus' ministry occurred not long after the time of Rabbi Hillel, and Jesus would have been very familiar with his teaching. Jesus probably adapted Hillel's statement when He said, "*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matt. 7:12).

Jesus was part of a faith system based on the *Tanakh* (OT) that encouraged study, debate and practice of one's faith. Jesus never rejected the teachings of the Bible. Rather, He sought to encourage those around Him to understand the truths of God's Word and incorporate them in daily life.

Loving one's neighbor can be a challenging prospect. Some are blessed with good neighbors and others...not so much. To truly fulfill this commandment, we need to love the unlovable, angry and difficult people around us, not just those we like.

Who is My Neighbor?

Who is my neighbor? This is a question that has been of great interest to the Jewish world. Many discussions and theories have been advanced. Some take the view that all Jewish people are the neighbors. Others, however, take the view that all humans are our neighbor, although some exclude idolaters.

During the first century, it was obviously a topic of interest. In Luke 10, Jesus (Yeshua) had an encounter with a lawyer, and as part of the conversation, the lawyer quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, the very passages we are discussing. The lawyer asked Jesus: "*And who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, ending with the words, "*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?*" (v. 36). The lawyer answered, "*He who showed mercy on him*" (v. 37). The story concluded with the words, "*Go and do likewise*" (v. 37).

It is clear from this story that Jesus expects us to treat others as a neighbor, not just those who live next door or in our part of the city, share our culture or attend the same congregation. We are to show love, mercy and care to all our neighbors, even those we view as enemies. We live in a world of diversity. Does God want us to share our love only with those who are like us? Certainly not. The Samaritans were viewed as the “others” in Jesus’ time. They were certainly not the expected recipients of neighborly love. In fact, it was rare for the Jewish people to even mix with the Samaritans. By using this shocking (to the original hearers) example of a “neighbor,” I believe Jesus was showing us that all other human beings are our neighbors, especially those who are different from us and who may even be viewed as our enemies.

In another reference to Leviticus 19:18, Jesus says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?... Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”* (Matt. 5:43–48).

Although the phrase “hate your enemy” does not appear in the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), apparently it was an accepted teaching of the time. Jesus came against this explanation or commentary of the Scripture and clearly tells us that we are to love our enemies—certainly a shocking and challenging injunction.

Love and the Apostolic Writings

Probably the most well-known passage on love is found in 1 Corinthians 13. This passage is often used in wedding ceremonies, but was never intended to just be nice words to use on special occasions. Rather, these are words to live by, practical and lofty. They are a recipe for successful relationships. Furthermore, the apostle Paul tells us they are of supreme importance saying, *“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love”* (1 Cor. 13:13).

*Jesus expects us
to treat others
as a neighbor.*



The Bible says of faith, *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb. 11:6). It says of hope, *“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth...”* (Ps. 146:5–6). Yet, as important as faith and hope are, love surpasses them all.

The love described in 1 Corinthians 13 is love in action. It is not selfish. It is not about self-satisfaction. This love for others is 100% giving. The word in Greek is *agape*. In the *Nelson Study Bible*, it says, *“This word, agape, describes a love that is based on the deliberate choice of the one who loves rather than the worthiness of the one who is loved. This kind of love goes against natural*

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human inclination. It is a giving, selfless, expect-nothing-in-return kind of love.”

John also talked about love, bluntly saying that if we do not love people, then we do not love God. *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also”* (1 John 4:20–21).

How is This Love Possible?

As we explore the idea of love, it may seem to be a lofty goal that is virtually impossible. How can anyone love their enemies? How can we even love our families with unselfish love? How can we truly love God? Is there any hope of fulfilling the greatest commandments? Yes, there is, but it is a lifelong endeavor. It is not a quick trip through the spiritual drive-through window. It begins with knowing God, acknowledging His Lordship and entering into communion with Him. He then begins to work in our hearts and lives.

John says, *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him”* (1 John 2:3–5). He goes on to warn, *“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him”* (1 John 2:9–10).

It involves thousands of daily and hourly choices. We must make the choice to love. When my husband was a youth pastor, I remember him teaching the teens about love. He said, “Love is not an emotion, love is a decision.” We need to make love a priority in our lives, choosing repeatedly to act in love toward those around us—our families, church family, those who live around us, strangers we encounter and even those who treat us hatefully.

Jesus (Yeshua) said, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34–35).

Sadly, many Christians have failed the love test. Historically, the Jewish people have not experienced much love from Christians. Today, God is calling true followers of Jesus to love the Jewish people. At Bridges for Peace, we aim to show God's love to the people of Israel through our practical expressions of love.

I encourage you to show love in practice to your neighbors. *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16).

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah, Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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