

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (10)

Quality relationships

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, "Quality of being", the tenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Quality of our being will be seen in the quality of relationships that we develop with God and with other people. What are the areas that we need to pay attention to in order to develop quality in relationships?

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

In the last message, we considered the two great commandments that the Lord Jesus highlighted as He summarized God's teachings in the Old Testament. One commandment centred on our relationship with God and the other, our relationship with our neighbour.

We have sought to appreciate that there is a difference in the emphasis in the two commandments, although both of them refer to an attitude of love.

There are two aspects of the meaning of love, the first in terms of appreciating the value of what is loved and that may be morally good or bad in values. The second is seeking the benefit of the one who is loved; that may also be morally good or not good. We then went on to appreciate what it is when it is morally positive and good.

Today, I want to concentrate on the positive kind of love and relationship. The positive kind of love and relationship brings across the meaning of quality in character and relationship which are central in God's purposes for mankind. God wants us to develop the highest quality in our character and the best meaning in relationships.

These two aspects we can see are present in the two commandments that God has given to us.

Relationship with God, basically, the emphasis is to appreciate Him, be devoted to Him and to be spiritually close to Him. This concentrates on the character of love, with the emphasis on good values and meaningful direction in life and from there, we seek to do what is pleasing to God.

So love for God is relationship, love in our character is a quality in our character.

Relationship with others concentrates on appreciating the potential for goodness in their lives, even if not yet a reality, and thus being concerned for their well-being, just as we are concerned for our own well-being.

Here, the love in character has the emphasis on kindness, concern, compassion and responsibility. So love for our neighbour brings out the issue of our relationship with others.

If we ponder over our relationship with God as the Lord Jesus brought it out in the first commandment, we may realise that if we truly nurture a good quality relationship with God, we will in reality also relate with others in the right way.

If we understand how to develop quality in our relationship with God, we can say that we will in effect fulfil the second commandment. From that angle, we may say that the second commandment is not necessary, if we truly understand the first commandment and how to fulfil it.

The Lord Jesus referred to our relationship with God as: this is the great and foremost commandment. This is the great and foremost commandment, and if we look at the Scriptures, we ponder about life, we think about who God is and our relationship with Him, we will realize that all other commandments bear a relationship with this. And if we know how to properly abide by this commandment, we will know how to properly keep the other commandments.

God wants us to understand what is the correct priority, emphasis, in our lives. And if we know that, if we understand how to work at it in that way, we will find that the others, other issues, will be not difficult for us to appreciate and to work out.

This in terms of its meaning is rather similar to the incident in which Martha and Mary related with the Lord Jesus: The Lord Jesus – God become Man dwelling amongst us manifesting the glory of God. What did the Lord Jesus say to Martha?

Luke 10: 41-42

- 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things;
- 42 but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

There are so many things that we may be concerned about every day in our lives; there are many things that seem so very important. There are many things we pursue, concentrate upon, we are interested in, and they seem so very necessary.

But the Lord Jesus in His perfect wisdom said to Martha: "*only* one thing is necessary". Martha was worried and bothered about so many things – so characteristic of so many Christians today and throughout the ages. We are bothered and worried about so many things.

For Christians who love God, many of these things we are bothered about and worried about are not bad things. They are good things. We care about our health, we care about our security, we care about our family, we care about our loved ones; we care about being responsible in work. These are not wrong. They are right things. But in our seeking to care for these things, we are worried and bothered about so many things.

The Lord says, "*only* one thing is necessary". If we know how to concentrate on that one thing, we will realize that we will be in the right state to care for the many, many things in life.

We will know how to respond to these many cares in this world and to conduct ourselves in a way that will bring joy to God, bring help to other people, and bring deep satisfaction to our own lives.

From what we can see in the Scriptures, the primary issue the Lord Jesus was referring to where He said “one thing is necessary” has to do with the quality of our devotion to God, the depth of our devotion to God, our love for Him.

To what extent can we really nurture a heart that is undistracted in our devotion to God? That I see was primarily what Mary was seeking to do.

We cannot say that Mary had attained it to a very, very high level. We do not know. But what we can say is that what she was seeking to do in that situation was to nurture such a spirit. She was absorbed in what the Lord Jesus was saying, she was paying close attention to what He was saying and she loved Him and she wanted to obey Him, walk in His ways. There was that love and devotion to Him. And this Mary also poured the alabaster vial on the Lord Jesus in her love and devotion.

It is that kind of spirit of love for the Lord that God is looking for. And if we know how to love Him in the right way, then we will also know how to love our neighbour. Why is that so?

It is not difficult for us to appreciate that because if we truly love God, our attitude will be one in which we value what is truly good. God is morally perfect; His ways are perfect and good. If we truly love Him, we will value what is good and values such as kindness and compassion and justice will be so important to us; we will develop our character in that direction: We will become like God because He is our treasure.

When God is our treasure and we give our lives in that direction, then our heart will be there. Our heart will become like our treasure.

And so we will become like God and we will learn to relate with other people just as God would relate with us. For God so loved the world that He gave – because of His love.

So too we will also love others and we will also give because we care, because we are kind to them – we are compassionate, we want to seek their well-being.

So much of human relationships is centred on self-centredness, on what we want, what we like, what we can gain. And very often, we do not care what happens to the other party: What is important is what we can get out of it.

But if we truly love God, we will care for others, we will be concerned for them; we will be considerate towards them. We will want them to develop well, to benefit, to become people who are good, who will find meaning in life.

So if we learn to love God in the right way, we will know how to love our neighbour as ourselves.

So then, why is it necessary for God to tell us: “Love your neighbour as yourself”?

In reality, in life situations, we are not so properly devoted to the Lord. We do not love Him in the right way but we may think that we love Him when we do not. And this can lead to wrong relationships with others without a proper sense of responsibility.

If we just say that all you need to do is just to love God with all your heart and everything will be alright, in principle, in meaning, it is correct.

But in practice, there are many problems because: Do we really know what it means to love God with all our heart? Do we understand the implications of that?

It is very easy to say, "I love God with all my heart. I am prepared to do anything for Him" but when the Lord calls upon us to love our neighbour, we say, "No, not this one; someone else" – straightaway, we react.

We say we love God, we will keep His commandments but there are so many things that when God tells us to do, we do not like to do, we do not want to do, and we are not prepared to do.

So is that truly loving God? It is not so. But we may claim to love God. So the Lord needs to give us other instructions, other commandments to help us recognize: Do we truly love Him? Are we keeping His commandments?

The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." That is the test, that is the manifestation of whether we love Him or not. We can say we love Him but the Lord says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord' and do not do the things that I say?" They do not correspond.

So it is easy for us to say we love God but in reality, we do not. So we need to examine and see in life situations whether we love God or not. And one of the ways to know whether we love God or not is the way we relate with our neighbours. How do we treat other people, with what kind of attitude?

This will help us to understand whether we truly love God and what is truly good.

Matthew 15: 1-9

- 1 Then some Pharisees and scribes *came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,
- 2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."
- 3 And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"
- 4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.'
- 5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to *his* father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given *to God*,"
- 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And *by this* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.
- 7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:
- 8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.
- 9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"

The Pharisees claimed that they loved God. The Pharisees were supposed to be teaching the law of God. They were supposed to be examples of the way to live life pleasing to God.

But in reality, their lives were opposed to what God intended. They taught the people in the wrong direction because their hearts were wrong. So they claimed to love God and they were teaching from the Scriptures and yet in reality, they were disobeying God.

God says, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER" but they say, 'Whoever says to *his* father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given *to God*," he is not to honor his father or his mother'. Basically, what the Pharisees were saying was, "Just love God. If you love God, you are free from all other responsibilities: 'Whatever I have that could have benefited you, my parents, I have given to God. So I do not need to honour you, I do not need to take care of you, I do not need to look after you. I have given all this to God. It is between me and God. I love God with all my heart.'"

It sounds right but obviously, wrong because if you love God, then God says, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER", but you are disobeying God. How can you then say that you love God? So that is why the Lord Jesus said, "You hypocrites... 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.' They say what seems to be right, they say they honour Me, they love Me, but their heart is actually far way from Me; their values are wrong, their pursuit is wrong. 'IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" These were their own ideas; these were not from God.

So we see while God tells us to love Him with all our heart, He also commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves and our neighbour includes our parents, includes society, people in general, includes our children. We are to keep God's commandments to love our neighbour. And loving our neighbour requires that our attitude be right, that they are correct values in our hearts.

So the second commandment helps us to recognize the responsibility of love. Loving your neighbour has very much to do with responsibility. We care for their well-being, we want to help make sure that they will benefit, grow well and become what they ought to be. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself": If the Pharisees had learnt to love their neighbours as themselves, they would not have taken the stand not to honour the parents with the excuse of loving God.

If they understood and they abided by this commandment, then they would have loved the people as they loved themselves, to care for their well-being, to be concerned for them, and that would not have led to the wrong teaching. But they did not truly love God and so they did not keep the second commandment.

So when God tells us to love Him with all our heart, He wants us to know that loving Him does not mean that we have no responsibility towards other people – we just care about our walk with God, we just love Him and we just love Him, and we need not care about others. That is not so.

Caring for others is an expression of our love for God because it is love for what is good and it leads to development of good character.

However, the second great commandment is placed as second because it must be subject to the first. It comes from the first and it must not contradict the first. And that is very important for us to understand.

Many of us may misinterpret the second great commandment and in so doing, we violate the first great commandment, the first and foremost commandment. How?

We may place a wrong emphasis with the wrong understanding on our love for others: Love for our neighbour, love for our parents, love for our children, our wives, our husbands, in such a way that we become unhealthily and unduly attached to them, such that our devotion to God is negatively affected – we are no longer devoted to God in the way that we ought to be; we are distracted in our devotion to Him; we compromise in our loyalty to God because of our love for others.

This is a danger that we must recognize.

While God wants us to honour our parents, to love them, to care for their well-being and so too to care for the well-being of others, it is possible for us to love them in the wrong way.

So the Lord Jesus made this very clear in **Matthew 10: 32-39**.

Matthew 10: 32-39

- 32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.
33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.
34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
35 "For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW;
36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.
37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.
38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.
39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

So we need to understand the total picture. What is it that God requires of us?

He wants us to honour our parents, He wants us to love our neighbour and yet He says, "I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD."

Is he saying that in every family, there will be enmity – such relationships will always result in the people involved becoming enemies?

Of course, that cannot be what He is saying. It is very clear the Lord Jesus is saying that ultimately, if we learn to love Him in the right way, and our loyalty to Him is such as it ought to be, then that loyalty will be supreme and if anyone is opposed to that, then we cannot be close to them.

Whether it is in the same family, whether it is in society, wherever it may be, that principle will always apply.

“...everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven”: There is a sword that is based on what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, what is morally righteous and unrighteous.

So when we are determined to be loyal to the Lord, we can expect that those who are not loyal to the Lord can very readily be hostile, be opposed and become enemies. We must be prepared for that.

But we also need to recognize that the Lord did say, “Love your enemies”. That means even though they become our enemies, even if they are against us, we can still love them in accordance with the second great commandment: Love your neighbour for their well-being.

Even if your parents are opposed to you, they are angry with you, they do all kinds of nasty things towards you, you can still love them, care for their well-being, pray for them, seek to do what is helpful for their lives. You are still fulfilling that love for them because this aspect of love, this emphasis on love has to do with responsibility, kindness, compassion, concern for their well-being.

But it does not mean that we will be close to them. If their hearts are not right, if their values are wrong, we cannot be close to them in terms of the moral and spiritual direction of our lives.

The first commandment centres on our relationship with the morally perfect God. In that context, we can and we should be close to God. We should long to be close to Him, to be very, very close to Him because He is very, very good. It is on that basis that we nurture that kind of closeness of fellowship, of relationship of love in this kind of direction.

But love for others can be expressed in situations where we are not close to them in spirit, in heart, in direction, but we love them for their well-being, we care for them.

In this context, the word that is translated as “love” – He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me – that word “love” is from the Greek word “*phileo*” which has to do with that of a friend – friendship, to be a friend of, to be fond of, or to have affection for – which denotes personal attachment as a matter of sentiment or feeling, that is, it has that element where you are emotionally attached to, you are close to, in affection.

So the Amplified Bible translates **Matthew 10: 37** in this way. It says:

Matthew 10: 37 (AMP)

He who loves [*and takes more pleasure in*] father or mother more than [*in*] Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves [*and takes more pleasure in*] son or daughter more than [*in*] Me is not worthy of Me;

So here, the Lord Jesus is telling us, “If you delight in your parents more than you delight in Me, you would rather be close to them – more affectionately close to them – then you are not worthy of Me: because it means ultimately, your values are wrong. You value something that is imperfect and you are prepared on that basis to distance yourself from that which is perfect, and so you are not worthy of Me. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

But this is not applicable just to father, mother, son or daughter. It also is applicable to our own lives. “He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me”: We must also distance ourselves from ourselves that are not good.

That means we no longer want to pursue our old ways, we no longer love our old self, old person, that has been self-centred. We distance ourselves from that.

And so He says, "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it". We must be prepared to give up ourselves: What is not good, give it up, put it to death, so that we can truly love the Lord with a pure heart. Then we can be renewed to become the new self or the new man, the new person that we ought to be, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

So whether it be ourselves, our parents, daughters, whatever it is, the principle is the same. You love your neighbour as yourself.

So therefore, if you value your parents, you will not want to encourage them in the wrong direction, you will not want to be close to them when the path is wrong. You love them means you want to help them in the right direction. Yes, you can be gentle with them, you can be caring, concerned, but you do not condone what is wrong, you do not go along with them where things are not right and you take a stand where necessary.

This can lead to conflict, this can lead to situations where they can be angry with you, but you continue with the right spirit, in the right direction.

And this applies to our own lives in the same way. Whatever we see that is wrong in our lives, we should hate it, we should despise it, we should reject it and we should nurture what is good in our lives. That is what God wants us to be. When we love ourselves, it would mean that we reject what is negative in ourselves in order to nurture what is good.

So we must see that ultimately, quality of relationship with deep fellowship and closeness must be based on quality of moral meaning and moral values and this is found in the quality of our being.

So in order to love our neighbour properly, we must learn to properly and deeply love God and learn from Him how to love others in the right way.

So, many of us may quite readily say, "I love God with all my heart." But God wants us to pause and consider: Do you really love Him with all your heart? And so the Lord Jesus said in **Matthew 5: 8**:

Matthew 5: 8

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

It is not because you say you love God that you are close to God. You can only be close to God if you are pure in heart. If you want to be close to God, you want to see God, you want to have a deep fellowship with God, you have to be pure in heart, you have to be transformed – you have to develop quality in your being.

Without quality of being, there will not be quality in relationships, whether with God or with others.

So, relationship with God that is deep and personal centres on purity of heart, that is, right values and commitment for what is good and pure. And this will then lead to deep relationship of love and friendship. If we do not have purity of heart, we will not see God; we will not know Him deeply, personally and in a deep love relationship.

So our relationship with God emphasizes fellowship and closeness in a spirit of love and devotion, while our relationship with our neighbour emphasizes responsibility and kindness that may not mean fellowship and closeness.

This distinction is important.

When we love God according to the first and foremost commandment, we develop fellowship and closeness in a spirit of love and devotion.

But when we learn to love our neighbour as ourselves, this emphasizes responsibility and kindness toward them, but it may not mean fellowship and closeness.

However – and this “however” is important – however, when there develops quality of being in our neighbour, then the aspect of fellowship and closeness becomes meaningful.

So, when we love someone who is negative in character – who is hostile, whose attitudes and values are not good – our relationship with them is based primarily on kindness and compassion to do them good.

But when they develop quality in their being, then we can have fellowship with them: There can develop closeness that can be meaningful. So the greater the quality of being that is developed in our neighbour, the greater the potential for fellowship and friendship of the highest level.

It will move in the direction of the kind of relationship that we have with God because He is morally perfect: So, that kind of relationship can come about only when the values are right, when our hearts are pure, where our attitudes are correct.

So, relationship with others that centre on spiritual closeness has to be based on moral meaning and not circumstances or emotions.

We see this clearly expressed in **Mark 3: 31-35**:

Mark 3: 31-35

- 31 Then His mother and His brothers *arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him.
- 32 A crowd was sitting around Him, and they *said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."
- 33 Answering them, He *said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?"
- 34 Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He *said, "Behold My mother and My brothers!
- 35 "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

The Lord Jesus wanted to make it very clear that closeness in spiritual relationship is based on doing the will of God, that is: identify with God, loving God, loving what is good. It has to do with moral goodness and perfection. "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" – whoever that may be.

In the spiritual realm, a close kind of relationship exists when there is moral quality in heart.

But if our mother, our brother and sister do not do the will of God, does it mean that we have no more responsibility towards them? No, we still love them; we care for them, but in accordance with the aspect of kindness and compassion and seeking to do them good, but not in the sense of that closeness of fellowship.

So, the distinction between these two is very important as we relate with people, as we live in this world.

So I want now to spend a short while to consider our relationship with others with regard to concern and responsibility based on specific situations and earthly relationships.

While it is critical that we understand the meaning of our devotion to God and our absolute loyalty to Him, we also need to recognize that we do have responsibility in this world towards people because of specific situations and earthly relationships.

Ephesians 6: 1-4

- 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise),
- 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.
- 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Here, the apostle Paul was writing to the Ephesian Christians and he taught them love and responsibility towards parents and children. Children are to honour their parents. Parents are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

This centres on responsibility and kindness, concern for their well-being.

So if we love God deeply, we are devoted Christians, we are dedicated to God, we must not forget that God expects us: Children, honour your parents. Parents, love your children, care for their well-being, take care of them; do not provoke them, do not make them exasperated, do not take advantage of them, do not neglect them. These are responsibilities of love.

Many years ago, I heard someone say, "These children are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use." Well, we should not be like that.

If we are truly heavenly minded, we will be of great earthly use – because that is a wrong interpretation of being heavenly minded.

One who is heavenly minded means one who is absorbed in God and His values; and one who is absorbed in God and His values will care deeply about the people in this world and their well-being.

But that is because people have a wrong idea of being heavenly minded and so they become of no earthly use: All they want to do is to read the Bible, sing hymns, attend meetings, go for trips, apparently to serve God but they are not concerned about their responsibilities at home, what their parents are going through. Perhaps they are not Christians and so they think, "Why should I spend so much time with these people who are not Christians?" So they do not bother. And so they do not contribute to their well-being.

And this is also one reason why many non Christians turn away from God. If Christians who are supposed to have good character are irresponsible, are unconcerned for their fellow men, then what kind of faith is this?

So we need to understand: When we truly love God, we will love our neighbour, we will care for their well-being, we will be considerate towards them, we will seek to understand them in their needs, but we will not compromise. We will not just do the things that they want us to do. We can be distant from them, we can even take a stand and have conflict, but we still care for their well-being. So that is very difficult.

Love for our neighbour in general: the Lord Jesus made this very clear in **Luke 6: 31-35**:

Luke 6: 31-35

- 31 "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.
- 32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them.
- 33 "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same.
- 34 "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same *amount*.
- 35 "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.

The Lord Jesus taught the people how we should love others and here, He is talking about loving our enemies and doing good and lend, expecting nothing in return. So much of the things that we do in helping other people have, what people call, "a string attached": I give you but you put something there, I will pull it back. I give you something but you must return something good to me.

So the love that we have for people is very often tainted. God wants us to learn to love with a pure love. We care, we give, without seeking for anything in return. That is the kind of love that we must nurture and develop, if we want to fulfil God's commandment.

So we can care for their well-being even though we may not be close to them or value them in their present moral state. And it is this kind of love that has drawn various non Christians to want to become Christians. When they see the quality of love, when they understand that there is such a meaningful value in life, then they are touched and they are more responsive to hear what you have to say about the Lord Jesus and His death on the cross. It becomes relevant to them. It is appropriate, it is meaningful.

Then the Scriptures also teach us about our responsibility in general in the place that we live in and towards all men.

Romans 13: 7-10

- 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.
- 8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.
- 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."
- 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

This is the attitude that we should have to all men. Render to all what is due them – to those who are in positions of responsibility, we show the respect that is due to them. However, we must always continue to remember that in all these situations, it must never contradict and violate the first and foremost commandment. If we render what we think is due to others when it conflicts with our loyalty to God, then we are not in effect doing it as God intends it to be.

There are many people who demand of us what is contrary to God's ways, who want us to go in the wrong direction, who want to encourage us to be dishonest, to misappropriate, to lie and steal, to take advantage of others, to be inconsiderate, so that we can gain what the world offers. In such situations, we cannot move together with them.

Here it is a reference to our attitude towards others. “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”: Here we talk about the issue of being kind, being just, being merciful, being helpful. “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another”: Why do we owe love to others? We do not owe them because they have given to us because many of these people may be very negative, have done nothing for us. We owe them not because of what they have done for us. We owe them because we want to be good and we ought to be good. If we want to be good, then we have a debt of love to others because that is an aspect of being good.

So you cannot say: “I am pursuing the path of goodness and I do not care about others; I mind my own business.” If you want to be good, you will care for others, but you must care according to God's ways because you are undistracted in your devotion to Him. So that would always be primary, that must override all other things, but bear in mind, it is to be expressed in a spirit of love.

So, relationship with God is supreme in the area of love in terms of values, meaning and closeness and attachment because He is absolutely perfect in moral quality. So our love for God must be supreme in this aspect of our being close to Him – our affection for Him, our attachment to Him. He is our treasure and we love Him.

This may explain why the Lord Jesus said in **Revelation 2: 4**:

Revelation 2: 4

'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

The Lord Jesus, in speaking to the church in Ephesus, said this: "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. You still do many things that are good and right, but you have left your first love: Your devotion to Me, your closeness to Me is no longer fresh and alive. You are doing many things as a duty, a responsibility, a habit. Do you have that freshness, an aliveness in your love for Me?"

Here, the meaning of the word "love" can include this aspect of affection, where we are close to the Lord, we love Him not just in the sense that we value Him, we treasure Him, but also that we delight in being close to Him. We want to be close to Him, we want to have fellowship with Him, we want to talk to Him, we want to hear what He has to say and we want to obey Him and walk in His ways.

So if we love God in the right way, we will not only value Him, but our love for Him will always be fresh and alive and there will be deep fellowship and we will always want to be very close to Him.

So if we find that our relationship with God is becoming more and more distant, we are doing things because it is expected of us as Christians, we are involved in the various things because it is our responsibility to fulfil, then we need to evaluate.

Have we neglected our first love? Have we properly appreciated how wonderful it is to know God, how marvellously privileged we are that God welcomes us as His friends? He wants to share with us what is in His heart, but very often, He finds we are not listening, we are not very interested: We would rather watch that TV programme, we would rather read the newspapers, we would rather go for a trip, we would rather do many other things that seem so profitable and important.

Would we want to spend time just to talk to Him, to consider what is in His heart, what is important to Him? Do we enjoy that fellowship with God? If we truly enjoy that fellowship with God, then praying without ceasing will not seem so difficult after all: We will want to talk to Him all the time, we will be listening to Him in every situation, we will be consulting Him in every decision that we make, we will be seeking His enabling in everything that we do.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to relate and love in the right way, to develop quality in relationships with right values and the right attitude of heart. We must first give ourselves to walk with God meaningfully, with true love and undistracted devotion. And we must depend on Him fully for His guidance, His enabling and also in learning how to love others as we should.

Quality of being has a very direct effect on the quality of our relationships. That is why the Scriptures emphasize so strongly the importance of development of quality in our being. Many of us want quality in relationships but without quality of being. We want to be close to God but we cling on to many things in this world. We want to have good friendships but we are preoccupied with our own desires and we are not so concerned about the effect of our lives on others. How can we develop meaningful friendships?

So then, let us, as we come before the Lord, ask Him to help us understand how we can properly nurture quality relationships arising from quality of being, how we can properly fulfil the first and foremost commandment and in so doing, fulfil all other commandments.

Let us also learn to evaluate our lives with regard to how much we love God by observing the way we treat other people, how we relate with others. If there is arrogance, if there is pride, if there is self-centredness, if there is inconsiderateness, it shows that our love for God is not deep enough.

It is much easier to love our neighbour than to love God. Loving our neighbour can just mean being kind to them, showing some goodwill to them. Loving God requires the giving of our whole lives, our whole being, to Him. It is much, much more difficult. If we truly learn to love God, we will not find it difficult to love others.

So then, let us ask God to help us evaluate our lives, so that if there are aspects that are not what they ought to be, He will help us to recognize and to correct them and to live our lives the right way. This is so central in our lives and in God's calling for us.

Let us recognize that all this has become possible because the Lord Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. While we were enemies of God, the Lord Jesus died for us. We were not close to Him. He died for us because of love, of kindness, of compassion, of grace, of mercy. But when we respond to Him, when we appreciate His love for us, we become good, then He can love us with an appreciation of our being. He wants us to be close to Him when our hearts are transformed to be what we ought to be.