

DOES LOVE GOD TOTALLY FIT LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR?

The two commandments, total love of God and love of neighbour, seem to contradict one another. You are told to love God alone and then to love your neighbour which seems to mean in addition to God. But reading the commandments in context erases the contradiction. God alone is to be valued but others are to be loved in the sense that they are to be treated as God wants them to be and because God wants them to be.

LIST OF PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE CONTRADICTION

THE TWO COMMANDMENTS ARE REALLY THE SAME ONE - TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR IS TO LOVE GOD

This one is a blatant malicious lie. How can you say you love God just because you love your neighbour when you hate God! Why would the Bible talk about loving God and putting him first if it could settle for just saying you must love your neighbour?

You can hate Ann and love her husband. So why can't you love God and hate a human being? Is it because God says so? Is it because he commands it? So the implication is that he chooses to define it as unloving to him to hate somebody when he commands you to love them. That is just passive aggressive emotional blackmail.

If they are the same then why do we get nothing about caring for ourselves or others if we focus on the command to love God with all our powers? And Jesus made it clear that they were two commandments not one.

Love is sacrifice according to most religion and according to Christianity. So loving your neighbour as yourself means you encourage your neighbour to sacrifice for God as much as you do, not that you seek pleasure and happiness for your neighbour as yourself. That is why Jesus said the great commandment to love God alone was like the one to love the neighbour as oneself and John said that both loves go together and you cannot have one without the other. It is a terrible sacrifice to transfer all your natural feelings to God so that you can love him and to put him before yourself and be willing to suffer horribly if it is his will so loving your neighbour cannot be pleasant either. The two are alike in their horrific demands. They agree in the demand for self-giving. The commandments being like one another does not mean they are the same.

That loving people means nothing more than trying to make them please God explains why Jesus said that the first greatest commandment was to love God with everything that is in you and that the second, to love your neighbour as yourself, was like it. How could it be like it if it were not intended to be done for God and nothing else? It would be another commandment altogether while scripture claims that they are the same (1 John 4:7). John told us to love others for God has loved us (1 John 4:11). It is a testament to human hypocrisy that nobody is reminded to love God alone before they do anything for us.

The Bible may say that the love of God and the love of neighbour go together. It does not say that loving your neighbour is necessarily loving God. Indeed, Jesus said the total love of God was the main commandment while the next most important one was love of neighbour! True love of God means you agree that if hypothetically you had to choose between loving God and another person then choose God. You would have to live and train yourself in such a way that if you could do that.

LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR - MEANING OF WORD LOVE IS NOT THE SAME. LOVE OF GOD MEANS COMPLETE SELF-GIVING TO GOD ALONE. LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR MEANS BENEFITING THEM ONLY. IN YOUR HEART YOU DO NOT LOVE THEM. YOU LOVE THEM ONLY IN THE SENSE THAT YOU TREAT THEM GOOD.

This one is correct as we have seen already.

Jesus gave the commandment to treat others the way you wish to be treated the same status as love your neighbour as yourself. It is another way of saying love your neighbour as yourself. The commandment then is about behaviour towards others and not how you feel about them. Feelings of love are reserved for God only.

Luke 17:7-10 (ESV) - 7 Jesus said, "Will any one of you who has a servant ploughing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? 8 Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are

unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”

That says it all! It proves that if Jesus said love your neighbour as yourself he meant do good actions and it is not about feeling good or loving. In fact he commanded that you must feel you are no good.

Karen Armstrong notes in her book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* page 169 that love your neighbour as yourself is to be found in the book of Leviticus and is therefore a legal rule. It is not about feelings. "Leviticus is a legal text and any talk of emotion would be as out of place as it would be in a Supreme Court ruling. In the ancient Middle East, 'love' was a legal term used in international treaties: when two kings promised to 'love' each other, they pledged to be loyal and to give each other practical help and support - even if this went against their short-term interest". I would add that the importance given to the impersonal commandment implies that feelings of love are unimportant.

Jesus said we must love our enemies - he did not ask us to feel adoration for them. By love, he meant doing what is good for them. The theologians who say that Jesus' commandment that we always treat others the way we like them to treat us is another way of saying love your neighbour as yourself are right. If so, the love is about how you treat people. You value God not them for God deserves all your love.

Jesus embraced little children saying, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (Mark 9:37). He is showing that he means welcoming a person in the loose sense. Strictly speaking it is only God that is to be welcomed. That is how the seeming contradiction between loving God alone and loving neighbour is reconciled. He is clear that he does not mean, "Whoever receives a child does not just receive the child but receives me too". "Receiveth not me", makes that plain.

Only God is loved directly and we honour him indirectly by doing good for others. That is the perfect paraphrase of the commandments. We love only God and others benefit and get treated well as a side-effect of our undivided love for God.

Another way to understand Jesus is that love your neighbour is just popular language. Just like we say we love chocolate when we don't really love chocolate - we only like it. Its only persons you can love. If you loved chocolate you wouldn't destroy it by eating it.

Some of the Christians say that Jesus in commanding such love of neighbour did not mean that we must be crazy about everybody but only that we must treat them as we wish to be treated. Some critics think they lie for he said love not respect. Respect our neighbour as ourselves means we can treat a person properly despite having bad feelings for them. Suppose we are to have feelings for our neighbour. Then we must must adore our neighbour as much as ourselves. Do you really think Jesus would have commanded that rather than command the most important thing - for us to respect our neighbour?

Jesus commanded that we are to love (agapao in the Greek the gospels were originally written in) God with all our hearts and strength and to love (agapao) our neighbour as ourselves. Agapao refers to self-sacrificing and unconditional love. A good translation would be altruistic love. In other words, it is a love that is independent of feeling or affection. For Jesus, if you agapao yourself that does not mean you have great self-esteem at all. It means you treat yourself in accordance with what God calls good. You love yourself if you die for God for God commands that you die for him rather than break God's law. There is nothing consoling about this kind of love of self. Agapao was sometimes used to describe non-altruistic forms of love in ancient times but the way Jesus says God must be loved more than yourself certainly proves that he meant altruistic love. The context tells us what he meant by love. Anyway the other meanings of the word were loose and careless and rare so Jesus should be taken to mean altruistic love. The gospels were using the word properly.

Jesus declared that this agapao for God and neighbour was the greatest commandment. So it is more important to have agapao for your wife than eros, erotic love or sexual affection. It is more important to have it than to have the warm liking love (non-sexual affection) that is called philia for your friend or parent or brother or whatever. These other forms of love must be rooted out if they endanger agapao or if they are not based on it and taking their impetus from it.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT URGES US TO PUT GOD FIRST AND THE SECOND URGES US TO TREAT OURSELVES AND NEIGHBOUR AS EQUALS. PUTTING GOD FIRST MEANS WE SHOULD LOVE OTHERS IN ADDITION TO HIM.

Then it would read, "You shall put God first in all things. You shall love your neighbour as yourself." But instead it reads that we must love God with all that we have and love him completely. Putting God first is not loving him completely. There will be part of you kept for loving other than God.

Jesus is saying we must love God not with some of our energy, most of our energy but ALL our energy. In other words, everything we do must be solely motivated by what pleases God. Its all about pleasing him. When you help the sick, it is not done to help the sick but to honour God. It is done for God.

By implication, we surrender our right to be autonomous moral agents. We must ignore our natural feelings that make us want to care for the sick even if it is against God's will. We must let God make the decisions about what we should or shouldn't do. That is why the commandment calls God Lord, meaning boss.

Jesus said you are to love God as Lord with all your heart and this was the biggest commandment. The second tells who to love less - our neighbour. It is said that to love your neighbour more than God means you will hurt the neighbour. That is nonsense. If you really love your neighbour you will not hurt him or her. The commandments are telling us that God is to be valued with all our powers. Our neighbour is to be treated as ourselves but because he says so and because we value him.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF IS LOVING GOD BECAUSE YOU ONLY LOVE WHAT GOD DOES THROUGH THE NEIGHBOUR

This understanding arises from the Christian doctrine of grace. When a person turns to God in faith and repentance that person is washed from sin in the blood of Jesus Christ. Because of that the apostle Paul claimed that Paul was alive no more but Jesus was alive in Paul. He was saying that any good in him is Jesus' good not his. So to love another person is to love God. But this means that you are loving the God in the other person not the other person. It is essentially the same as the view that the love of God means valuing God and love of neighbour means benefiting the neighbour.

Conclusion: Love of God and love of neighbour. The love in either case is not meant in the same sense. Loving God means valuing God. Loving your neighbour means obeying God in relation to what he says concerning how he or she should be treated. In other words, you are using your neighbour to serve God. Loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbour as yourself would mean that you love your neighbour not in addition to God but because of God and for God.

A God who does not want us to help others because we have feelings of affection for them is totally unworthy of worship. Jesus' teaching about the extreme importance of loving God implies that we must believe, "If God does not exist all is permitted and nothing matters." Anybody who thinks like that is a fake no matter how many good works they do. They are saying that works of compassion and charity are nothing if there is no God! They insult the good atheists of this world. They say that there is no morality if there is no God which means that those weak in faith will be morally dubious or morally feeble. They insult the good people who just barely believe in God.

Love of neighbour, in the view of Jesus, means making a person good in the eyes of God but not being warm towards or valuing that person. So, if selflessness is love then love means making others selfless, making them sacrifice and die daily for God. So love of neighbour is not feeding the hungry or clothing the naked who are dying of cold or anything like that - they are only a means of luring people into the trap. It is converting them to slavery to God. We can't say that we have to look after their needs so that they might be more open to the need for serving God without interest in anything other than his will for that is like helping people to sin in order to put them off sin. The solution would be to help them but to keep reminding them of your motive which is to bring them to consecrate themselves to God. The focus has to be kept on God.

Christ said that you must love your neighbour as yourself. This does not actually say we must love ourselves. It only assumes we do love ourselves. It does not indicate approval for loving yourself. Loving yourself is so natural that it cannot be commanded. It is as absurd and impossible as commanding your dog to breathe. Even those who have bad feelings towards themselves love themselves - they just have warped self-love. If God commands you to love yourself then that is like bullying. Only a control freak would want to give you permission to breathe! Only a control freak would order you to love yourself.

If you are only using your neighbour to please God then you can't be said to love your neighbour in the heart sense. You love only in the sense that love is working for the wellbeing of others whether you care about them or not.

The New Testament Jesus and the apostles frequently spewed hatred and venom towards those who disagreed with them in religious matters. If you submit yourself to God and love him first and above all people, that means that hurting people is better than hurting God if there is a choice. That being so, to love God like that implies disdain for people. Jesus said that we must put God's ways first so he has to tell us how we are supposed to love other people. It is loving them to treat them as God wants them treated be it stoning them to death as God commanded in the Old Testament. Or approving of them going to Hell forever or of Jesus giving them abuse as in the New Testament. God believes you have to be cruel to be kind. It is Christian doctrine that you are better to catch a physical disease that torments you for all eternity than to commit a sin such as adultery! Sin to them is the greatest evil. Christians who do not practice cruel love are not true Christians. Do you see the point? Do you see how Christian love does not forbid cruelty and verbal and physical abuse? It is possible to be harsh and stern and intend to be loving. And indeed if we are as depraved as the Bible says we should be.

If you love your neighbour as yourself you will feel as traumatised by their traumas as they are. You won't live long with all

that stress. Jesus certainly wanted to put that burden on us for he didn't say, "Always respect your neighbour". That would require us to look after people and cheerfully help them when we can but would not be urging us to treat them as if they were us. It would not be urging us to have the same agony as them when they suffer the trials of life.

People do not like to be loved for their money - even if a bit of the love one has for you is about your money you will find your trust diminishing in the person. Nobody wants others to interpret love neighbour as yourself as meaning, "Love others but try to get something back for it." And Jesus excluded that meaning for he made it clear we are to love God for his own sake totally. Loving him to get happiness or to get something back for yourself would be against that.

If you expect people to love you as much as they love themselves your life will be full of disappointment and anger. If you expect you to love others as yourself then frustration and loss of self-esteem will be your reward.

You might be told, "For your own peace of mind, do not worry about it for you cannot change them." But if you give off the message that you don't expect love from others you will get what you expect. And you would be likely to expect that those who love you will stop doing it.

St Francis knew that what Jesus meant by love your neighbour as yourself was not that you are to love yourself but to love rather than be loved. Such love cannot be given to yourself but only to another. A Catechism reads, "Q. But why is there no commandment of love to ourselves? A. Because normally we love ourselves naturally, and without any commandment. No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it. Ephes. 5:29".