

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES

Providing factual information about the Bibles, beliefs, values, movements, institutions, events and people of historical Christianity & Judaism.

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What Does God Value the Most?

By Jim Myers

A lawyer, who was a Pharisee, asked Jesus this question -- "*Which commandment is the greatest commandment?*"¹ Below is Jesus's answer:

*You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Torah and the Prophets.*²

The lawyer asked for one commandment, but Jesus combined parts of two commandments. Jesus not only answered the question, he revealed something much more important ó *God's highest value and a foundational principle of His kingdom*. To understand these we must view the two commandments Jesus quoted in their original context. Here is the first commandment:

*Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God is One. And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart. And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*³

God requires that humans love Him with all of their *heart, soul and strength*. They are to do the following:

*Keep God's words in their heart.
Teach God's words to their children.
Talk of God's words when they sit in their houses.
Talk of God's words when they are traveling on the roads.
Talk of God's words when they lie down.
Talk of God's words when they rise up.
Bind God's words for a sign on their hands.
Place God's words as frontlets between their eyes.*

In order for them to have God's words in their hearts they had to have been taught the words of the Torah (Jewish Scriptures). Who did God command to be the first teachers? It is parents. This means:

*parenting is a sacred responsibility
parents are the first representatives of God for the next generation*

*every home is a sacred space
parents are to teach their children continually inside and outside the home
parents are to wear visible symbols of God's words*

Why is it so important for children to be taught God's words? We must go back to the moment Noah stepped off the ark and presented the first offering to Yahweh to find that answer:

*And Yahweh smelled a sweet savor; and Yahweh said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; **for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;** neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done.⁴*

Children must be taught from their youth to prevent the above from happening again. Teaching children is a sacred and spiritual responsibility that has far-reaching implications. Now let's turn to the second commandment Jesus quoted in his answer.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall settle a dispute with your neighbor, and not allow sin upon him. You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh.⁵

How does one love his neighbor? The answer is revealed in the parallelism used in the ancient text. *Parallelism sets up relationships of equivalence or opposition between two propositions.*⁶ It is by identifying the terms used in parallel to each other help define their meanings and relationship to each other. The terms used in parallel to each other here are:

hate // love
brother // neighbor
your heart // yourself

The parallelism contains an opening and a closing statement:

opening -- *you shall not hate your brother in your heart*
closing -- *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*

This structure reveals the lesson we are about to learn *ó the way to love your neighbor as yourself is by not hating your brother in your heart.* How does one not hate his brother?

*settle a dispute with him by teaching him God's words that are relevant to the dispute
thereby not allowing sin upon him*

The Hebrew word translated "settle a dispute" above is often translated "rebuke," but it is one of those "old" words that most people do not use in everyday language, especially members of the younger generation. Today, people usually understand it to mean something like "scold." The biblical text, however, provides a more accurate definition in another biblical parallelism:

*reprove not a scorner, lest he hate you
rebuke a wise man, and he will love you*

*give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser
teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.⁷*

How does one "rebuke" a wise man?

*by instructing him
by teach him God's words*

How will a wise man react? He will love you because he knows that you are making him wiser and increasing his learning. This is how one loves his neighbor when there is a dispute. They know God wants them to provide instructions that will settle the dispute and restore the relationship of those involved, so there will be no attempts to avenge or grudges held between the parties involved.

A wise person, who is a brother and neighbor isn't perfect ó all people make mistakes or sin (*miss the mark*). In life every person will find themselves in the position of being the one to help settle disputes in some cases, while in other cases being the one involved in the dispute. The thing that must be remembered is that in either case ó remember to love all of those involved by doing acts of love. Ignoring those who are missing the mark and not instructing them so that disputes may be settled is to hate one's brother and neighbor.

In his unique way of teaching, Jesus reveals the highest value of God and a foundational principle for living life as envisioned by Him.

Human life is God's highest value.

One must have a heart that is large enough to love God and love those made in His image.

In other words, Jesus taught this:

One loves God by having His words in his or her heart and loves his neighbor by acting in accordance with God's words in their human relationships.

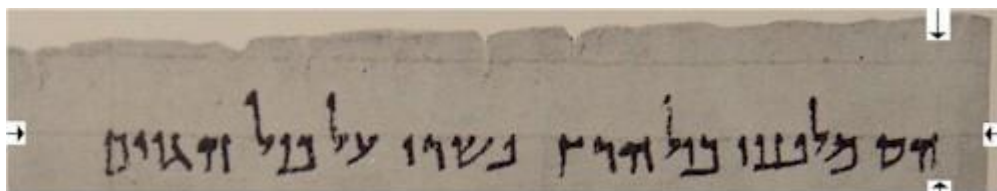
This reveals one of the most important and simple truths of the biblical text:

*People require other people to love God,
because it is only through acts of love done for people that they love God!*

Jesus highlighted this point when he said:

On these two commandments hang all the Torah and the Prophets.

The Torah and the Prophets are the first two parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. They were written on scrolls by scribes. There were no books or Bibles in existence like those we have today. The writing on the ancient scrolls looks like this (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Pesher to Habakkuk* [1QpHab]).



(← ← ← Hebrew is written from right to left ← ← ←.)

Before the scribes wrote on scrolls they first prepared them by drawing faint horizontal lines on the parchment in order to keep the lines of text straight and vertical lines for the margins. In the picture of above, arrows have been added to point out those lines.¹⁹ After the lines were drawn, **the scribes hung the Hebrew letters from the horizontal lines.**



Jesus compared the two commandments together to the lines on the scrolls of the *Torah and the Prophets*. Without the lines all of the letters of the *Torah and the Prophets* would fall. In terms of our cultural understanding, the point Jesus made is that *the foundation upon which our Bible rest is the love of God AND the love of our neighbors*. He was well aware of a related point that many prophets made *ó when religious rituals replace the love of God AND oppressive leaders hate God's people through their extractive acts – the nation will fall.*

What would keep people today from doing the acts of love like Jesus taught? One reason is that they may not understand what *öloveö* meant to Jesus. His Jewish meaning of *öloveö* is very different from what *öloveö* means to American today *ó love is an emotion; a warm fuzzy feeling*. It is an *öindividual emotionalö* thing of concrete acts. I can $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ count the number of times I have heard people that physically abused or murdered others say they *ölovedö* their victims. From Jesus $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ point of view, no they didn $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ *ó they hated them!*

In Hebrew, love requires actions in the highest, most passionate degree.⁸ *öLove presupposes a concrete inner disposition based on experiences and events, but it must also include conscious acts done in behalf of the person who is loved or the thing that is preferred.ö*⁹

Dr. David Flusser provides some very interesting insights about what *öloving your neighbor as yourselfö* means in the ancient Hebrew culture (highlights have been added for emphasis):

Both Jesus and Hillel before him saw the Golden Rule as a summary of the Law of Moses. This becomes intelligible when we consider that the biblical saying, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”*¹⁰, was esteemed by Jesus and by the Jews in general as a chief commandment of the law. An old Aramaic translation of this biblical precept runs like this, *“Love your neighbor, for whatever displeases you, do not to him!”* This periphrastic translation turns the phrase *öas yourselfö* into the negative commandment included in it. ***You are not to treat your neighbor with hatred, because you would not like him to treat you in that way.*** Therefore, by means of Jewish parallels we are able to see how the **Golden Rule**¹¹ and *the commandment to love our neighbor*¹² are related within Jesus $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ teachings.

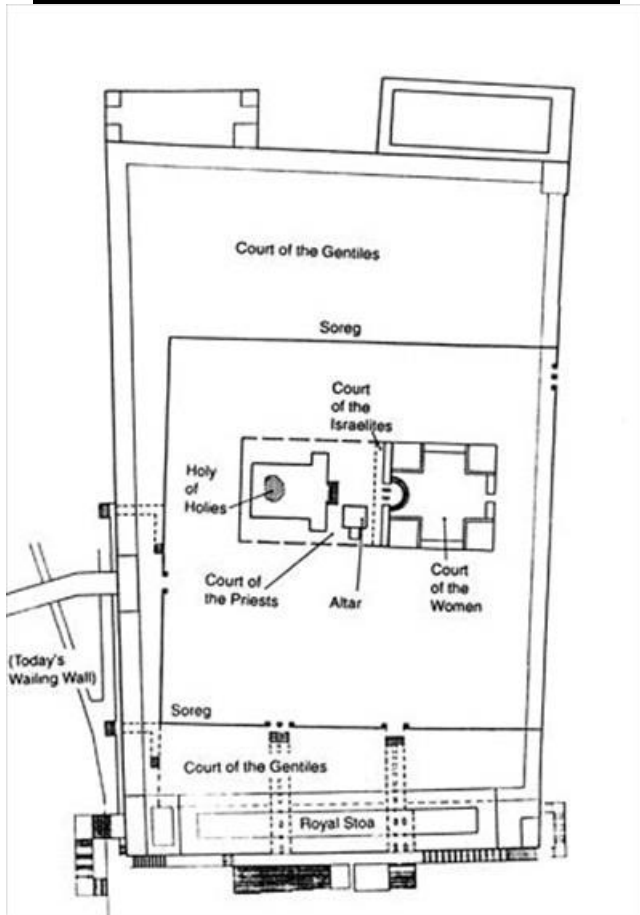
There was yet another explanation of the phrase *öas yourselfö* in the biblical commandment *to love one's neighbor*, so important in those days. In Hebrew the phrase can also mean *öas though he were yourself.ö* The commandment then reads, *öLove your neighbor for he is like yourself.ö* Sirach knew of this interpretation when he demanded that one *forgive one's neighbor his trespasses, for it is a sin to withhold mercy from “a man like himself.ö*¹³

Rabbi Hanina, who lived approximately one generation after Jesus, explicitly taught that this commandment to love one $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ neighbor is *“a saying upon which the whole world hangs, a mighty oath from Sinai. If you hate your neighbor whose deeds are wicked like your own, I,*

the Lord, will punish you as your judge; and if you love your neighbor whose deeds are good like your own, I, the Lord, will be faithful to you and have mercy on you."¹⁴

Another thing that would keep people from doing acts of love for their neighbors is that **they believe that doing religious rituals are more important to God than what they do to people**. Jesus addressed this issue in one of his most important teachings -- *a lesson unknown to most Christians today*.

Jerusalem Temple During the Life of Jesus



Source¹⁵

*Therefore if you bring your QORBAN to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your QORBAN there, before the altar, and first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your QORBAN.*¹⁶

QORBAN is usually translated as "sacrifice" or "offering," but it comes from a root word that means **ōto draw near**. In the layout of the Jerusalem Temple, find the following: *Court of the Gentiles, Court of the Women, Court of the Israelites, the Altar, and the Holy of Holies*. A Gentile could not enter the *Court of the Women*. A Jewish woman could not enter the *Court of the Israelites*. Only a Jewish man could approach the *Altar*, which was as near as a human being who was not a priest could draw to Yahweh's *Holy of Holies*. Think about what it would have been like for a man standing at the *Altar* facing the place where Yahweh's presence was. To enter that sacred space would result in death. Now let's take another look at exactly what Jesus said above:

"Therefore if you bring your QORBAN to the altar. . ."

Every Jewish person listening to Jesus understood exactly what was required for a man to bring a QORBAN to the altar. In order to reach that spot in the Temple, he would have to do the following:

- (1) *Take his QORBAN to a priest at the Double Gates on the south side to be examined.*
- (2) *Then go to the ritual immersion bath complex, also on the south side, and ritually immerse (baptize) himself under the supervision of the priests.*
- (3) *Walk straight from the ritual immersion bath into the Temple complex at the southwest corner.*
- (4) *Walk through the Court of the Gentiles and go through the Beautiful Gate.*
- (5) *Walk through the Court of the Women and enter the Nicanor Gate.*
- (6) *Stand in the Court of Israel and wait until he was called by a priest.*
- (7) *Be taken to his QORBAN and ritually participate in its preparation.*
- (8) *Stand at the Altar as his QORBAN was presented to God.*

Jesus now has a message for his disciples to remember when they stand in that spot by the Altar.

*“ . . . and **THERE** (you) remember that your brother has something against you, **LEAVE** your **QORBAN THERE**, before the altar, and first be reconciled to your brother . . . ”*

A man had drawn as physically near the presence of God as possible. As he stood there he was to take the final step in presenting his gift ó *examine his state of purity.*

*A QORBAN has **no expiating effect** unless the person making the offering sincerely **repents** his or her actions **before** making the offering, and makes **restitution** to any person who he has sinned against.¹⁷*

As the man stood there examining his state of purity and remembered that ðhis brother has something against him,ö meaning that ðhis brother had a legal charge against him in God’s eyes,ö he was to leave and go find his brother and do **TESHUVAH**. Just like ðlove,ö **TESHUVAH** was something that required actions. It is important to understand that the principle that every Jew listening to Jesus knew by heart was ó *God will not pardon a person unconditionally for sins committed against another person.* In other words, the man standing at the Altar could not simply ask God to forgive him for what he had done to his brother, because God would not do that until after the man does the following:

- (1) *cease from doing the sin*
- (2) *experience genuine remorse for the wrong he has committed*
- (3) *convert his penitential energy into concrete acts*
- (4) *do acts of restitution to repair the damage that he had caused*

God’s forgiveness, however extensive, only encompasses those sins which a person commits directly against Him -- *sins against one’s fellow man are not forgiven until the injured party forgives the perpetrator after the sinner ask for forgiveness and does acts to repair the damage he caused.*¹⁸ The principle Jesus taught was this:

TESHUVAH is a prerequisite for divine forgiveness.¹⁹

Now Jesus closes his lesson with this:

*“ . . . and **THEN** come and offer your **QORBAN**. . . ”*

After finding the person he had harmed, doing **TESHUVAH**, being forgiven by that person, if he left the Temple complex, in order to return to the Altar he would have to repeat the steps below:

- (1) *Go to the ritual immersion bath complex and ritually immerse himself again.*
- (2) *Walk straight from the ritual immersion baths into the Temple complex.*
- (3) *Walk through the Court of the Gentiles and go through the Beautiful Gate.*
- (4) *Walk through the Court of the Women and enter the Nicanor Gate.*
- (5) *Stand in the Court of Israel and wait until he was called by a priest.*
- (6) *Be taken back to his QORBAN at the altar and complete the ritual.*

The importance of acts of love done for one’s neighbor is repeated in Jesus’s teaching about **HOW TO ENTER INTO ETERNAL LIFE** ó *Jesus’s salvation message.* According to Jesus, on the **Great Day of**

Judgment when all humans will stand before God and be judged, they will be separated into two groups.²⁰ One group he calls *the sheep* and the other he called *the goats*. What will determine which group people are placed in?

(1) **Those in the group on the right loved their neighbors** *ó they gave food to those who were hungry, drinks to those who were thirsty, invited strangers in, gave clothes to those who were naked, cared for the sick, visited those that were in prison, etc.*²¹

(2) **Those in the group on the left hated their neighbors** *ó they did not give food to those who were hungry, drinks to those who were thirsty, invite strangers in, give clothes to those who were naked, care for the sick, visit those that were in prison, etc.*²²

Now are you ready for Jesus's salvation message?

(1) *Those in the group on the left will go away to eternal punishment.*

(2) *Those in the group on the right will enter into life eternal.*²³

That's it! If you asked the real Jesus, the one who taught the words above, what must I do to be saved, his answer would be *ó love God by loving your neighbors*. Is this the salvation message that the institution which claim to speak for Jesus proclaim today? Why not?

(1) With the involvement of Roman Emperor Constantine in the fourth century CE and the creation of the Roman Catholic Church, the salvation message became *ó one must be a member of the Roman Church in good standing in order to be saved*.

(2) When Martin Luther challenged the pope's authority over a thousand years later the answer became *ó one must believe the correct doctrines in order to be saved*.

(3) Two centuries later, a new answer appeared in "new light" churches -- *salvation requires individuals to have an emotional experience*.

The bottom line is that the Gentile versions of the Jesus Movement progressively cut the line upon which the letters of Jesus's Hebrew Scriptures hung. A new salvation message progressively emerged *ó God doesn't care how one acts towards his neighbor as long as he or she does the prescribed religious ritual*. It has created collectives of people who live lives in which God and their neighbors occupy completely separate spaces their lives.

The world is becoming a meaner and more dangerous place for millions of people because God's highest value *ó human life* *ó* has been subordinated to the acquisition of wealth, religious rituals, etc. This should not have happened in nations in which hundreds of millions of people who profess to be followers of Jesus live. *What would life in those nations be like if those hundreds of millions of people loved their God through acts of love done for their neighbors -- hundreds of millions of people feeding the hungry, giving drinks to the thirsty, inviting strangers in, giving clothes to the naked, caring for the sick, visiting those in prison, providing homes for the homeless, giving comfort to the lonely, providing education, creating and protecting a justice system that dispensed justice equally for all, etc.*

What do you believe God values the most? What do you value the most?

BHC

September Memorials

In Loving Memory

**KAREN
LEYNOR**

**March 31, 1966
September 9, 2004**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

*May the memories of our loved ones
inspire us to seek in our lives
those qualities of mind and heart
which we recall with special gratitude.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment*

*Their highest ideals and noblest
strivings.*

*May the memories of our loved ones
deepen our loyalty*

to that which cannot die --

*Our faith, our love, and
devotion to our heritage.*

*(Yitzhor Reflections – The New Mahzor – The
Prayer Book Press)*

In Loving Memory

**JAMES
EDGAR
MYERS, SR.**

**September 13, 1913
September 19, 1999**

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorial Garden and Memorials which are printed in this newsletter. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org>. Please visit the Memorial Garden the next time you are online and stop by often. If you would like to add a loved one, send their information to us. Share your memory of those who mean so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

¹ Matthew 22:36

² Matthew 22:37-40

³ Deuteronomy 6:1-8

⁴ Genesis 8:21

⁵ Leviticus 19:17-18

⁶ *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* by Adele Berlin, © 1985; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, p. 135

⁷ Proverbs 9:8-9

⁸ Ibid, p. 106

⁹ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* edited by G. Johannes Botterock and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Willis; © 1974 William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Vol. 1 p. 105.

¹⁰ Leviticus 19:18

¹¹ Matthew 7:12

¹² Matthew 22:39

¹³ Sir. 28:3-5

¹⁴ *The Sage From Galilee* by David Flusser; pp. 59-60.

¹⁵ http://www.bible-architecture.info/4.The_2.gif

¹⁶ Matthew 5:23-24

¹⁷ <http://www.jewfaq.org/qorbanot.htm#Purposes>

¹⁸ Encyclopedia Judaica; Vol. 14 Col. 73

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Judaica; Vol. 14 Col. 73

²⁰ Matthew 25:31-46

²¹ Matthew 25:34-40

²² Matthew 25:41-45

²³ Matthew 25:46