



Loving our neighbours

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.'

'Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.'

Mark 12:28–34 (NIV)

Reflection

In response to the pace at which Covid-19 has spread across the world, governments have been working to slow the rate of infection by limiting people's movements and in many cases, requiring them to stay in their homes. This demands a degree of withdrawal from society that on the surface appears contrary to human nature – in the creation story, we read that humankind has been created in the triune God's image, which implies that we are social beings wired for community.

However, the heart and focus of these restrictions is not individualism, but rather community and society. They are not in place primarily for the protection of those of us who are relatively less vulnerable to the dangers of Covid-19; rather, underlying them is the desire to protect those in our

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societies that are extremely vulnerable, and for whom the virus might prove fatal. These measures are therefore grounded in the interconnectedness of humankind and the fact that our actions have a bearing on our wider communities. These restrictions are, in fact, deeply in line with the heart of biblical Christianity. By obeying them, we are treating life with the sanctity that it deserves and showing love towards others.

Theologian Gustavo Gutierrez expresses the difference between individualistic and community-minded thinking in this way:



'In individualism there is a large measure of withdrawal, at the level of thoughts and interests, in order to ensure a life of quiet privacy. Others may come and knock on the door, but if the individualist opens to them, it is as one who does a favor, as one who graciously adds, so to speak, a community aspect to a Christian life that is self-sufficient without it.'

To be human is not to be self-sufficient – we were created to be in community with others, and that means that we are dependent on one another for our survival. The lockdown and physical distancing regulations are not primarily about us; they are for the common good, and thousands of people's lives could be dependent upon whether or not we choose to obey them.

Reflection questions

1. Spend some time reflecting on verse 33. What does it mean to obey these commandments in your context?
2. What action would community-minded thinking lead you to take in your current situation?

Prayer

Loving God, we pray that you would open our eyes to love those in our communities. In this time of restricted movement, help us to prioritize the needs of those around us, particularly those who are vulnerable to the virus. Let us be to our local community a shining light of your kingdom, demonstrating love, hope and peace.

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