

Resolving to Love Our Neighbors

Just as it is the case every January, the new year brings many resolutions. Another year has passed and because of the new opportunity set before us, it is time to make some changes. More than likely we have all been there before. As January 1st approaches, we resolve in our minds that there are gym memberships to buy, there are diets to apply, and there are hobbies we want to try. There is something about the new year that brings a desire to improve ourselves, set new goals, and gain greater achievements when the ball drops. Certainly, there is nothing wrong in seeking to improve our health or read more throughout the year. However, often it is the case we place more emphasis on our physical resolutions, than we do the spiritual. Without a doubt, there are a plethora of spiritual resolutions that could be made as we ring in the new year, but one we all need to think about is the love we have for our neighbor.

When asked by a certain lawyer what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). As we examine these verses, it becomes quite obvious God wants mankind to love Him whole-heartedly and above all else (Matt. 6:33), but Jesus also makes the point we are to love our neighbor. To further emphasize the importance of these commands Jesus said, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” In essence Jesus is proclaiming all the commands found within the Old Law can only be fulfilled and practiced by loving God and loving our neighbor. In a similar manner, Paul commands the Christian to do the same when he said, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10). Without a doubt, we would all agree it is both important and essential to love our neighbor. So, with that in mind, let us consider three things to remember as we resolve to do such through 2025.

First, if we want to love our neighbor, we need to remember this is something that requires action. It would be fair to say sometimes we might propose that we love our neighbors, but there is very little action which suggests we do. James made a point similar to this when he said, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:15, 16). The truth of the matter is, if we really love our neighbor, our love will be expressed and acted upon. Did not John say, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). You see, it is not

enough to think that we love our neighbors, and it is enough to just say we love our neighbors. True love for a neighbor is much more than that, it requires action.

Second, to properly love our neighbor, we need remember this is something that requires dedication. On one occasion when an individual asked who his neighbor was, Jesus replied with the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). There is certainly much to be learned from this specific teaching of Christ, but one truth we take away is true love for a neighbor requires dedication. The Samaritan bandaged and dressed the wounds, the Samaritan put the injured man on his own animal, the Samaritan took this man to an inn, and the Samaritan told the innkeeper, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you" (Luke 10:35). Without a doubt, the Samaritan was dedicated in the love he had for his neighbor. Could the same be said for you and me?

Finally, if we want to love our neighbor, we need to remember this is something that requires imitation. In John 15:12 Jesus said, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Certainly, we recognize Jesus is speaking to His disciples in the final moments before the cross. However, the command applies both to the apostles of old, and the saints of today. If we want to love our neighbors in the best way that we can, we will follow in the footsteps of Christ. No man past, present, or future has ever or will ever love their neighbor more than Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8). Therefore, if we desire to do the same, we should look no further than Jesus of Nazareth, and strive to imitate Him.

Having closed the doors on 2024 and directed our eyes toward 2025 there are certainly many resolutions on the horizon, but as we set our goals and aspirations for this new year, let's be sure we do not neglect what is most important. Going forward may we all resolve to love our neighbor.