

Love by Imitating God

Matthew 22:39 (NASB) - ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’¹

Although some of the content of the quote below is theological, Skip Moen explains that love is an action word from the Hebrew perspective – from Jesus’ and Paul’s perspective.

“Perhaps God’s directive about loving your neighbor isn’t an ethical principle at all. Perhaps it isn’t even a moral rule. Perhaps loving your neighbor is a window for viewing God. Let me explain. Rabbi Sacks comments:

“The truths of religion are exalted, but its duties are close at hand. We know God less by contemplation than by emulation. The choice is not between ‘faith’ and ‘deeds’, for it is by our deeds that we express our faith and make it real in the life of others and the world.”²

Sacks writes that we are called to “imitate God”³, not merely to contemplate Him. What this means is that if we are going to see God in our lives and in the lives of others, we must act as He would act. God remains hidden precisely in order that we might discover Him in our decisions and actions. We can see His glory, contrary to the warning to Moses—in reflection through our behavior. This is exactly what Jesus⁴ meant when He commented, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father”. While we may feel a moral obligation to love our neighbor, fulfilling that obligation carries an amazing benefit. God is revealed in the act.

But this means that seeing God is a matter of personal responsibility. God is not visible when I choose compassion by proxy, when I let someone else do the deed, some agency or system or government perform the act. Until my hands reach out with the cup of water, God stays hidden from me. To see God’s glory is to touch, smell, hear, taste and see the tears of another.

All of this is counter-cultural. We are taught antiseptic disengagement. “Let the government take care of them,” we say. “We’ve paid our taxes.” “Let the church do it. We paid our tithes.” Once I heard a story about a famous Christian missionary who asked a very wealthy man for help. The man responded, “Just tell me how much to write on the check, but don’t ask me to get involved. Money is not a problem. I just don’t have the time.” Of course not. Time is the great equalizer. We all have exactly the same amount in which to see God’s glory. But when life is finished, few of us will have any glimpses of Him. We were too busy keeping clean.”⁵

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1 – Also Leviticus 19:18

2 – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, p. 5

3 – 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; Hebrews 6:12

4 – Replaced ‘Yeshua’ [LDS]

5 – <http://skipmoen.com/2014/09/10/seeing-god/>

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