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Loving Your Neighbor

Forgiving and blessing are key to making this possible

Jesus of Nazareth had a knack for making statements that sound simple and direct. But trying to abide by them—to actually follow his teachings—can challenge us to the very core of our souls.

We quickly discover Jesus is not an easy teacher to follow. He tells us to not fight back. He says to forgive our families, our friends, and even our enemies of any hurtful deeds they may commit against us. He wants us to not judge people or events. He tells us to turn away from the material world and instead to help people less fortunate than ourselves.

He tells us to love God and to love our neighbor.

But if we're fortunate enough to be exposed to Christian Spiritualist beliefs as taught here at New Era—using both Biblical and Spirit-aided sources—we can meet the challenge by gaining the ability to go deeper into the words of Jesus and see how they relate to God's Law.

We realize Jesus is teaching us about the spiritual impact of our words and actions on other people and things, and the impact on ourselves. He's describing the law of cause and effect. He's telling us that we will reap what we sow. He's telling us about karma, reminding us that what goes around, comes around.

We may even come to realize that Jesus is telling us how to live joyful lives by controlling the vibration surrounding and inside us. He's teaching us about upliftment. And he's showing us how to attract peace and harmony for ourselves, our neighbors, and the whole world.

Once we understand the teachings at this level, we can appreciate the original meaning of the word "gospel" as "good news."

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A prominent spiritual healer, teacher, and writer in the early 20th century named Joel S. Goldsmith wrote a great deal about the impact our behavior has on other people and on ourselves.

"With a new difficulty of any kind, it is the attitude that you adopt towards it in your own thought that completely determines its effect upon you," Goldsmith writes. "What matters to you, truly, is not people or things or conditions in themselves, but the thoughts and beliefs that you hold concerning them."

"It is not the conduct of others, but it is your own thoughts that make or mar you," he tells us. "You write your own history for tomorrow and for next year by the thoughts that you entertain today. You mold your own life destiny day by day, entirely by the manner in which you react mentally to experience as it comes."

This same idea occurs several times in the Spirit lectures channeled here at New Era for many years through Rev. Anita Rudder, most of them from a high-level Spirit teacher called Doctor Martin.

For example, this Spirit teacher tells us, "You are putting into the vibration what you would like to get back, and that is love and harmony." By forgiving others, he says we experience the benefit of forgiveness for ourselves, adding: "And which one of us doesn't want forgiveness when we realize we've made a mistake?"

Doctor Martin also addresses the concept of reaping what we sow. "It is definitely an impetus for spiritual behavior, even though it may start out as selfish because you only want to put something good into the vibration so it will come back

to you. But eventually—through prayer and God’s will—you can evolve spiritually toward less self-centered concerns and develop greater compassion for others.”

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These concepts bring us close to the words of Jesus as quoted in Mark,12, when Jesus tells his followers: “You shall love your neighbor as thyself.”

In fact, throughout the New Testament, Jesus tells us to love our neighbors and our brothers—two terms of endearment he used interchangeably—noting that in daily life, this kind of love can be challenging.

Most of us live in one type of neighborhood or another—whether our homes are separated by a few feet or hundreds of acres—and all of us have experienced neighbors we liked and neighbors we’d prefer to see move away. Regardless of our relationships with our neighbors or brothers, Jesus was fully aware of the intimate relationship between them and God.

As the Apostle John tells us in his first epistle to the Ephesians:

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar, for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.”

There’s another aspect of this that Joel Goldsmith explained when he wrote: “This love is not something far-off. It is already a part of our being, already established within us. And more than that, it is universal and impersonal. As this universal and impersonal love flows out from us, we begin to love our neighbor, because it is impossible to feel the love for God within us and not love our fellow man.”

In other words, the more we love God, the more we love our neighbor. And the more we love our neighbor, the more we love God.

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How is this back-and-forth flow of love possible?

Jesus teaches us that love is both in accord with God's law and is reflected in the physical universe.

Ask yourself:

- Why is it that if we inflict pain or violence on our neighbor that we undoubtedly fall victim to pain or violence ourselves?
- And why, if we send out love, are we, in turn, blessed with love?

It's because—in the words of both our spiritual teachers and our scientists—“like attracts like.”

Quantum physics teaches us that the entire universe is energy in motion. Even our thoughts and intentions are vibrating at various frequencies. And they attract other thoughts and intentions that are vibrating at the same frequency.

Anger and rage, for example, are very low vibrations because fear is at their root. That's why thoughts of violence, jealousy, anger, abuse, and guilt all form heavy, dark, and slow vibrations and attract one another.

But Jesus shows us how actions based on love—such as forgiveness, giving blessings, and abiding by the Golden Rule—are valuable tools for lifting our vibrations and can attract more of the same.

Think about it. If you steal from your neighbor, you put an act of theft into the vibration. This vibration creates a resonance of thievery that goes out into the universe. This resonance of thievery attracts more thievery as its vibration influences the universe. And your act of thievery against your neighbor, at some point, is reciprocated when you eventually experience the negativity of theft, in one form or another.

If, instead of stealing from your neighbor, you lend him a helping hand, just think of the blessings that will come back to you by means of these same laws of attraction, resonance, and reciprocity.

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When we think even for a moment about our neighbor, our brother, or just other people, judgments can rush fast and furious into our minds.

During his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urged his followers: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”

“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” Jesus continued. “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

Jesus is warning us against hasty or unfair condemning of our neighbor because we will be condemned in turn. He also is describing the hypocrisy of those who blame others for faults for which they themselves could be blamed.

Hypocrisy was especially important to Jesus and gives rise to one of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament when the Pharisees seek to entrap Jesus into defying Jewish law. The Apostle John describes the scene in the Temple:

“The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The Law Moses commands us to stone such women. So what do you say?’”

Of course the Pharisees said this to test Jesus so they might have a charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote in the sand with his finger. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Her accusers slipped out of the temple, one by one, until only Jesus and the woman were left. He told the woman to go and sin no more.

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Instead of clinging to our judgments and opinions, Jesus points us toward a higher spiritual path. Throughout the gospels, we're taught to forgive. The whole matter is pretty straight-forward: If we forgive other people who have acted against us, then God will forgive us in the same manner.

As Matthew puts it:

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

There's an added dimension to forgiveness. Joel Goldsmith explains that as we forgive those who have mistreated us, we can actually change the vibration and, in effect, change the people we are praying for.

“As we forgive, divine love is flowing out from us,” he writes. “As we pray for our enemies, we are loving divinely. The greatest rewards of prayer come when we set aside a specific period every day to pray for those who persecute us, to pray for those who are our enemies—not only personal enemies, because there are some people who have no personal enemies—but religious, racial, or national enemies. When we pray that their eyes be opened to the Truth, many times these enemies become our friends.”

Then Goldsmith elaborates:

“If there are individuals with whom we are not on harmonious terms, we find, as we turn within and pray that brotherly love and harmony be established between us, that instead of enemies, we come into a relationship of spiritual brotherhood with them. Our relationship with everybody then takes on a harmony and a heretofore-unknown joy.

“This is not possible as long as we feel antagonism toward anyone,” he says. “If we are harboring within us personal animosity, or if we are indulging in national or religious hatred, prejudice, or bigotry, our prayers are worthless.”

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With all of this talk about loving our neighbor, we might ask: Who *is* our neighbor?

Jesus saw no boundaries for his own neighborhood. He was known for considering people from all walks of life to be his neighbors—an attitude that further aggravated the Jewish religious leaders.

“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” the Pharisees asked Jesus’s disciples. “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

And when Jesus was asked specifically, “Who is my neighbor?” he delivered the parable of the Good Samaritan, emphasizing the value of viewing everyone as your neighbor, even if you need to overcome bigotry and hatred in the process.

The message of that famous parable is that it’s easy to consider people as your neighbors if you like them and they are of the same social class, race or religion—but a spiritually-sound person sees his or her neighborhood in the much broader sense of having no boundaries.

As Joel Goldsmith explained so well:

“There is no room in spiritual living for persecution, hatred, judgment, or condemnation of any person or group of people. It is not only inconsistent but also hypocritical to talk about the Christ and our great love for God in one breath, and, in the next breath, speak disparagingly of a neighbor who is of a different race, creed, nationality, political affiliation, or economic status.

“One cannot be the child of God as long as he persecutes or hates anyone or anything, but only as he lives in a consciousness of no judgment or condemnation.”

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Throughout history, no other code of behavior has addressed our behavior toward our neighbor as clearly as the Golden Rule.

We know that up until the time of Jesus, the structure of the Golden Rule went something like this:

- That which you hate, do not do to another.
- Avoid doing what you'd blame others for doing.
- Don't do to others that which angers you when they do it to you.
- That which is hateful to you, don't do to your neighbor.

Biblical scholars have called this the “negative formulation” of the Golden Rule, and it's the rule's most common form up until the time of Jesus. In this form, the rule focuses on not doing “bad things” to other people.

During his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus overhauled the concept of the Golden Rule when he told his followers: “Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law of the prophets.”

And more concisely in Luke, chapter 6 verse 31, he says: “Do to others what you would want them to do to you.”

With this instruction, Jesus has lifted it to an entirely new level. This is called the rule's “positive formulation.” He's telling us to avoid doing the sort of bad things to our neighbors that you wouldn't want done to ourselves. But he goes much farther, and explains the Great Commandment of loving God and of loving our neighbor.

He's letting us in on the great spiritual secret that when we treat our neighbor with *love*, that we, in turn, will be loved.

“Jesus was giving us a principle, “ Joel Goldsmith explains. “Unless we do unto others as we would have others do unto us, we injure not the others, but ourselves.

“In this present state of human consciousness, it is true that the evil thoughts, dishonest acts, and thoughtless words we inflict upon others do harm them temporarily,” he continues, “but always in the end it will be found that the injury was not nearly so great to them as it was to ourselves.”

Again, what goes around, comes around.

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It only makes sense on the earth plane that the larger we make our neighborhood, the more possibility exists that we'll encounter negativity.

In the face of negativity, Jesus urges us to release any anger, any disappointment, and any frustrations we feel toward our neighbor. We let go of these things. We apply the Golden Rule. We forgive those who trespass against us.

Despite those teachings, many of us still function willingly in a world of "an eye for an eye."

Another early 20th century spiritual writer and minister, Emmet Fox, urges us to view these negative behaviors from a different angle.

"For those who actually go to the length of persecuting you, you are to pray, definitely and specifically. Jesus says it as plainly and directly as that," Fox explains. "If you return love for love, what is there out of the ordinary in that? Nothing, of course, for anyone would do as much.

"But if you wish to make any real advance, you must do much more," he emphasizes. "You must get rid of all sense of resentment and hostility. You must change your own state of mind until you are conscious only of harmony and peace within yourself, and have a sense of positive good will toward all."

One truly beautiful spiritual tool will help us. The act of blessing our neighbor has a way of improving the vibration, as well as our state of mind toward our neighbor, while also coming back around to benefit ourselves.

As Peter reminds us: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing. Do this so that you may inherit a blessing."

And the Gospel of Luke says: "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

This is an important instruction about the vibration. Blessing the person or the situation dilutes negativity and replaces it with a much higher vibration of love.

Blessing our neighbors was an important topic in a New Era lecture that Anita Rudder channeled several years ago from Doctor Martin.

“Instead of condemning someone, you can ask God to help you deal with the individual by blessing your enemy if this individual has become an enemy, or if it is someone whom you may not know, but you have judged them,” said the Spirit teacher. “For in blessing your enemy or in blessing anyone, you are asking God to heal the individual of negative behavior, and that the soul—the higher self of the individual—be strengthened, and to guide this one’s behavior.”

“For you really do not know the heart of the individual or what has caused him or her to act in this manner,” he adds. “You will then have compassion and right action to deal with the situation.”

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I’d like to conclude with a couple more insights from these profound spiritual writers, Emmet Fox and Joel Goldsmith, regarding our relationship with our neighbors.

Fox adds his voice to others who reveal how God’s Law of love enables our behavior toward a negative neighbor to actually change that neighbor.

“If someone makes himself personally obnoxious to you, do not resist him in thought,” Emmett Fox writes. “Realize the Indwelling Christ in your ‘enemy’ and all will be well. He will cease to trouble you, and will either change his attitude or else fade out of your life altogether, besides being spiritually benefited by your action.”

And just as Jesus taught, Goldsmith again reminds us that one of the most important principles of God’s law is the spiritual benefits that flow back to us.

“It is what goes out from us that returns to bless or to condemn us. We create good, and we create evil. We create our own good and our own evil,” writes Goldsmith. “God does not do either: God is a principle of love. If we are at one with that principle, then we bring good into our experience. But if we are not at one with that principle, we bring evil into our experience.”

So, the choice is ours. We must have faith in God's Law. We must believe that if we love our neighbor as Jesus teaches us, then we will personally benefit from that love. Again: What goes around, comes around.

Amen and bless you.