

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

19: 11-18

Love your neighbor as yourself DIG: Which mitzvah detailed here was quoted by Jesus, Paul, and James? In this context, who is one's "brother" and "neighbor?" How do you guard against slandering or gossiping against another person? How does keeping this commandment constitute holiness? Under what circumstances is it permissible to speak badly of another?

REFLECT: In your own life, how has God delivered you from some sin mentioned here? How does deliverance help you live better with your God? With your family? Your neighbors? The disadvantaged? How can you avoid carrying the sins of your neighbor? Is 19:18 a mitzvah to forgive? According to the apostle Paul, which commandment is a summary of the Torah?

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself.



The Torah is not a superficial guide to life, it is our blue-print for living. This section of mitzvot deals further with how people are to treat other members of the covenant

community and corresponds to the second half of **the Ten Words** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy**, **to see link click Bk - The Ten Words**). Here the demands for **holiness** are directed to one's **neighbor**, implied throughout **19:11-18**: associate, **brother**, citizen, countryman, friend, **neighbor**, and person. The pattern builds in the section so that all relationships within the covenant community are drawn into the focus of the mitzvot. This idea of the neighbor/friend stresses community responsibilities. The mitzvot may have specific reference to those close at hand in society, those with whom one lives and works, but ultimately, they apply to anyone with whom one comes into contact or with whom one has dealings. It was always considered righteous to be a good neighbor, not merely to have good neighbors. **We follow these commandments not to gain our salvation, but as our blueprint for living.**

Integrity (19:11-12): Do not steal from, defraud or lie to each other. If people are going to get along with each other in the redeemed community in a **God-honoring** way, they need to live honestly with each other. Moreover, they need to be able to trust each other. **Stealing** is a crime where the breach of trust is most evident. **Ha'Shem** has chosen you from among the nations to be the representative of **His Name**. You must, therefore, set the example of a people who are held to a higher standard by **God**. One of justice, truth, and loyalty. If you tarnish yourselves through dishonesty and lies, you are profaning the name that you bear, and you are undermining the **love** of **ADONAI** for whom you must be the messenger.³²⁶ This can be seen in **the eighth commandment: Do not steal** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bs - Do Not Steal**). **God's** reputation is at stake in our dealings.

Do not swear by my name falsely. This is an idiomatic Hebrew phrase meaning that no one should take or vow a legal oath. Such an oath was often made in a business agreement, as in, "In **God's** name, I vow that I will do such-and-such." If the oath taker broke his promise, it would reflect back badly on the reputation of **God**. **Which would be profaning the name of your God.** This can be seen in **the third commandment: Do not steal** (see **Deuteronomy Bn - Do Not Misuse God's Name**). Thus, this practice was forbidden in **the Torah**.³²⁷ The motivation for avoiding these sins is expressed by: **I am ADONAI**. This reminds us that our duty is to be like **God**. And what is **God** like? **He** is the **God** of truth - so we need to deal honestly and faithfully with others.³²⁸

Fraud (19:13): While **verses 11** and **12** deal with unjust acts between those who are more or less equals, **verses 13** and **14** deal with unjust acts committed by the powerful against those unable to defend themselves. The mitzvot of **holiness** (see **Cy - The Holiness Code**) contains this prohibition: **Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Defrauding** refers to

withholding that which belongs to another (**Hosea 12:7**), while **robbing** refers to taking someone's property by force (**Job 20:19**). **Specifically, you are not to keep back the wages of a hired worker all night until morning.** This commandment is reiterated and expanded upon in the Fifth Book of Moshe (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy 16:11 - Protection for Hired Workers**). Again, **the Torah's** standards of integrity are revelations of **God's** nature and person. **He** is truth. **He** is honesty. When we violate those standards, we damage **His** reputation because **His Name** is upon us. But when we keep these standards, we protect **His** reputation and we are set apart from the world by **His** commandments.³²⁹

Concern for the less able (19:14): **God's** grace is always toward the helpless. Long before legislation regarding accessibility for the disabled and physically challenged, there was **Torah!** It is a matter of **holiness** to treat every person with dignity and respect. **The Torah** gives us two examples of human cruelty. **Do not speak a curse against a deaf person or place an obstacle in the way of a blind person.** These mitzvot should be taken as general principles; it is fairly obvious that such commandments are not exhaustive. **The deaf** and **the blind** are merely selected examples of everyone whose weaknesses demand that they be respected rather than despised.³³⁰

Cursing a **deaf** man may be amusing for a wicked person because he can laugh that the **deaf** man does not hear **the curse**. To such an evil person, placing a stumbling block before a **blind** person would be similarly amusing. The issue is taking advantage of another's weakness. Going out of one's way to accommodate the needs of the handicapped is part of **holiness**. From **God's** perspective, we are all handicapped in one way or another, yet **He** delights in assisting us and removing obstacles from before us. Once again, the motivation for obeying these mitzvot is stated: **Fear your God; I am ADONAI, for the fear of ADONAI is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of holy ones is understanding (Proverbs 9:10).**

Justice (19:15): Verses 15 and 16 prohibit unjust legal acts. **Do not be unjust in judging - show neither partiality to the poor nor deference to the mighty, but with justice judge your neighbor.** The demand for justice and fair jurisprudence is an ever-present concern in **the Torah**. Fair and equitable courts are an essential component of **the Torah**. It is part of being a **holy** people. The mitzvot of fair and equitable trials actually extend to every human relationship. In a very real sense, we are constantly like judges on a jury, having to weigh motives, decide between opinions, settle disputes and determine fairness. Whether at home or at work, in marriage or in child rearing, in the congregation or out of it, with friends, neighbors, family, employers, employees - regardless of the situation

- we find ourselves having to make decisions and **judgments**. A **holy** person will take this responsibility very seriously. A **wise** person will know when to make **judgment** and when to withhold it.

Gossip and Slander (19:16a): Do not go around gossiping or **spreading slander among your people**. These sins are most difficult to eliminate. **James** says that **the tongue is unstable and an evil thing, full of death-dealing poison (James 3:5-8)**. A person who refuses to speak disparagingly of others is certainly unusual. Such a one is set apart indeed. Even if the negative information is true, it is not permissible to speak ill of another person except under certain circumstances, such as protecting another from harm. This can be seen in **the ninth commandment** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bt - Do Not Give False Testimony**).

Peter adds **his** voice to the warning of reigning in our **tongues**. **To sum up, all of you, be one in mind and feeling; love as brothers; and be compassionate and humble-minded, not repaying evil with evil or insult with insult, but, on the contrary, with blessing. For it is to this that you have been called, so that you may receive a blessing. For "Whoever wants to love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit" (First Peter 3:8-10 quoting Psalm 34:12)**. **Yeshua** sternly warns us: **Moreover, I tell you this: on the Day of Judgment people will have to give an account for every careless word they have spoken; for by your own words, you will be acquitted, and by your own words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:36-37)**. We are obligated to protect one another from such harm by using our **tongue** for godly ends. Because of the seriousness of this sin, we are reminded when we pray the Amidah: **My God, guard my tongue from evil, and my lips from speaking falsehood**.

Rescue (19:16b): But also, don't stand idly by when your neighbor's life is at stake. The Hebrew of **verse 16** literally says, "Don't stand upon the blood of your neighbor." **Some rabbis take the Hebrew to mean "to conspire against, or act against."** Thus, **Targum Onkelos reads, "Do not rise up against the life of your comrade." This is similar to the interpretation of rabbis Ibn Ezra, "One ought not to join forces with murderers.** This can be seen in **the sixth commandment** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bq - Do Not Murder**). When someone's life is in danger, and it is possible that you may be able to rescue him or her, you are required to make the attempt. One is reminded of the devout believers who sheltered Jews in Nazi Germany, placing themselves and their families at great risk. One is also reminded of the vast majority of European Christendom who silently consented to the mass extermination of the Jewish people. This

commandment is paired with the prohibition on spreading slander to teach us that just as it is forbidden to speak evil against another, so too it is forbidden to listen to evil being spoken. To listen to slander or gossip about another person is to “stand upon the blood of your neighbor.” To refuse to listen to gossip is to rescue your neighbor. All of the mitzvot are revelations of the character of **ADONAI**. The mitzvah of rescuing one’s **neighbor** is a revelation of the heart of **YHVH**. **He** is the **God** who redeems and rescues, saying: **I am ADONAI**.³³¹

Hatred (19:17a): Verses 17 and 18 constitute a unit and teach **Israelites** how to respond when wronged by a fellow believer and/or a fellow **Israelite**. The context suggests the interpretation that an individual should not allow ill feelings to fester; rather, he should confront his kinsman and admonish him directly, in this way avoiding grudges and vengeance that breed **hatred**. **Do not hate your brother in your heart**. Moreover, a proper attitude promotes **love** for one’s neighbor. The opening statement in **verse 17** about **hate**, contrasts with the conclusion in **verse 18** regarding **love**. This is a matter of **holiness**. A people that does not nurture **hatred** is a people set apart.

Rebuke one’s neighbor (19:17b): **But rebuke your neighbor frankly, so that you won’t carry sin because of him. As the sages put it, “Woe unto the wicked person, and woe unto his neighbor.”** One may eventually suffer by being closely involved with wrongdoers, and it becomes necessary to protect oneself when people go astray. There is also the suggestion that, beyond self-interest, civic responsibility requires a person to rebuke others out of concern for others and for the community as a whole.³³² **The Master** teaches us the proper method of bringing **rebuke** when necessary (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gi - If Brother or Sister Sins, Go and Point Out Their Fault**).

Revenge, forgiveness and love (19:18): It is forbidden to **avenge** oneself, and it is forbidden to **carry a grudge**. **Don’t take vengeance on or carry a grudge against any of your people**; and for good measure, declared once again: **I am ADONAI**. On the contrary we are to **love** one another. **Rather, love your neighbor as yourself**. These are among the most difficult of commandments, weighty matters in **the Torah**, because they are contrary to human nature. And to clarify the mitzvah, **Yeshua** told the story of the good **Samaritan** to make **His** point (see **The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**). Additionally, the **Master** took this prohibition and expanded it to include one’s enemies (see **The Life of Christ Dm - You Have Heard it said: Love Your Neighbor**). Finally, Paul said: **For the whole Torah is summed up in this one sentence, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14).**

Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great **love**! How wise it is of **You** to watch how people care for others to see if they really care for **You**. **And He said to him, "You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The entire Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mt 22:37-40).**

Heaven will be so wonderful to live with **You**, praising and glorifying **You** forever! Mere mental knowledge about **You** is not enough to get one into heaven. **You** open heaven's door to the person who's relationship with **You** is one of trust and following **You** as their **Lord** and **Savior**. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation (Romans 10:9-10).** Confessing **You** as **Lord** means to follow what **You** command: to **love our neighbor as ourselves**.