

Loving Others and Faith

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Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers - Pg# 96-97 Dr. Bob, noting that there were no Twelve Steps at the time (1935) and that "our stories didn't amount to anything to speak of," later said they were convinced that the answer to their problems was in the Good Book. "To some of us older ones, the parts that we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the 13th chapter of First Corinthians, and the Book of James," he said.

"We already had the basic ideas, though not in terse and tangible form. We got them ... as a result of our study of the Good Book.

Chapter Two of the Book of James may have made two direct and major contributions to the language of the Big Book and also to A.A.'s philosophy. Those two contributions were "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (James 2:8) and "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). The Bible that Dr. Bob and Anne read and read to Bill Wilson was the King James Version of the Bible. In addition, the Bible that Rev. Samuel Shoemaker (Bill Wilson's spiritual mentor and whom Bill W. said was a Co-founder of AA) preached from was the King James.

James 2:8 (KJV) says,

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.

James 2:26 (KJV) says,

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

First, let's look at what the Bible says about loving our neighbors.

This commandment to "Love thy neighbor" is used nine (9) times in the Bible [Lev 19:18; Mt 5:43; Mt 19:19; Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Ro 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8]. So, there is no assurance that the quote is from James rather than from another Bible verse. The Big Book says:

You are going to meet these new friends in your own community. Near you, alcoholics are dying helplessly like people in a sinking ship. If you live in a large place, there are hundreds. High and low, rich and poor, these are future fellows of Alcoholics Anonymous. Among them you will make lifelong friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of "Love thy neighbor as thyself." (pg# 152-153)

Last week we began examining passages that taught us to "love your neighbor as yourself." We examined Leviticus 19:9-18 and Matthew 5:43-48.

Tonight we will examine two other passages.

In Matthew 22:34-40, we read,

(22:34) Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. (35) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: (36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

- a) What is the greatest commandment? (vs37)
- b) What do you think it means to love God with all your heart, soul and mind? (vs37)
- c) What is the second greatest commandment? (vs39)
- d) What does it mean to "love your neighbor as yourself"? (vs38)

Christ says that love includes and embraces all the commandments. In fact, the term "the law and the prophets" is a term often used to refer to all Scripture. What Christ really says is that all Scripture hangs on love for God and love for one's neighbor. Christ actually paints a picture by using the word "hang." He says that love for God is a *hanger* and love for neighbor is a *hanger*. Upon these two hangers hang all that God has ever said, whether commandments or revelation of truth, or practice of ceremony and ritual. The sum and substance of all that God has said and done is love. And the sum and substance of all that God wants of man is love: love of God and love of neighbor. Rather than worrying about all we should *not* do, we should concentrate on all we *can* do to show our love for God and others. (Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible Commentary)

Examine Romans 13:8-10. It says,

(13:8) Let no debt remain outstanding, [pay your debts as they come due] except the continuing debt to love one another [practice loving others; you can never finish paying the debt of love that you owe each other], for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law [done what God's law requires]. (9) The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet [want what belongs to others]," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to its neighbor [hurts nobody; does no wrong to others]. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law [God's law].

- a) How do we practice loving others? (vs8)
- b) Why is it so important to God for us to love others? (vs8)
- c) Why does God's law require us to love others? (vs8)
- d) How does loving your neighbor sum up all the other commandments? (vs9)
- e) How does love always act toward others? (vs10)
- f) Why do we experience conflict and hurt in our relationship with others? (vs9)

FAITH WITH WORKS

A second contribution that the Book of James made in the language of the Big Book is “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

James 2:26 (KJV) says,

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

“Faith without works is dead” was practically the father of the ideas that bounced around early A.A. from James. The verse itself is quoted or paraphrased several times in the Big Book. The verse was allegedly the favorite Bible verse of Anne Smith, Dr. Bob’s wife. The verse was allegedly Bill Wilson’s favorite, along with the Book of James. And expressions said to have come from this verse were and are common in A.A. Thus Wilson named his Big Book promotion corporation “Works Publishing Company.” The shortest sentence in A.A.’s Big Book is “It works.” And most every A.A. meeting concludes with a circle in which the members join hands, join in prayer, and conclude by shaking their chain up and down, crying, “Keep coming back. It Works.” See also Kurtz, *Not-God, supra*, pp. 68-69; Raphael, *Bill W. and Mr. Wilson, supra*, pp. 116-117.

This sentence, or variations of it, “faith without works is dead”, appears several times in Chapter Two of the Book of James.

James 2:17 (NIV)

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:20 (NIV)

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless [dead]?

BIG BOOK USE

“Faith without works” as a phrase, and as an A.A. “action” concept, is quoted or referred to many times in the Big Book (4th ed., pp. 14-15, 76, 88, 93, 97).

Big Book pg# 14-15 ... (Bill W. telling about Ebby’s talk with him) My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that.

Big Book pg# 87-88 ... As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done" (*Matthew 6:10 Gene's emphasis*). We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves. It works - it really does. We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined. But this is not all. There is action and more action. "Faith without works is dead."

FAITH IN JESUS

A.A.'s original Oxford Group connection also put emphasis on these James verses concerning the importance of witnessing. And sometimes, I believe, A.A. today has put lots of emphasis on "works" and forgotten the "faith part." The "faith" of pioneer A.A. is the faith of Jesus Christ.

Examine Galatians 2:16. It says,

(2:16) We know that a man is not justified [made right with God; receive God's approval] by observing the law [doing what the law commands; living according to a set of standards by their own efforts], but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified [made right with God] by faith in Christ and not by observing [obeying] the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified [made right with God].

- a) What does it mean to be made right with God?
- b) How can you be made right with God?
- c) What does it mean to have faith in Christ Jesus?
- d) Why can't we be made right with God by our works (our deeds; the things we do)?

The Bible says, "He saved us [gave us new life in Jesus] because of his mercy, and not because of any good things [deeds] that we have done" **Titus 3:5 (CEV)**.

Here are several other verses that tell us we are saved by God's grace

Acts 15:11 (NLT)

We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."

Ephesians 2:5 (NLT)

It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!

2 Timothy 1:9 (NLT)

For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.

FAITH AND WORKS GO TOGETHER

Faith and works go together. We are not saved by our works, what we do, we are saved by faith and we work because we are saved. We don't work to be saved, we work because we are saved.

Examine Ephesians 2:8-10. It says,

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)

(2:8) For it is by grace [the undeserved favor of God] you have been saved [delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation], through faith [when you believed] --and this not from yourselves [of your own doing, it came not through the good things you did], it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works [you could not earn it by the good things you done], so that no one can boast [brag about it; take credit for it]. (10) For we are God's workmanship [his masterpiece; his handiwork], created [given new lives] in Christ Jesus to do good works [to live lives filled with doing good things], which God prepared in advance [planned] for us to do.

- a) How are we saved? (vs8)
- b) What does “saved” mean? (vs8)
- c) Why can’t the good things we have done save us? (vs8-9)
- d) Why is salvation a gift of God? (vs8)
- e) What do you think it means to be God’s workmanship, masterpiece or handiwork? (vs19)
- f) What did God create us to do? (vs10)

Examine the following verses. What do they tell you about serving God (works)?

Matthew 5:14-15 (TLB)

^(5:14) You are the world's light--a city on a hill, glowing in the night for all to see. ⁽¹⁵⁾ Don't hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds glow for all to see, so that they will praise your heavenly Father.

Colossians 1:10 (TLB)

We pray that the way you live will always please the Lord and honor him, so that you will always be doing good, kind things for others, while all the time you are learning to know God better and better.

Titus 2:14 (NLT)

Jesus gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.