THE ROYAL LAW: WHAT IT MEANT AND WHAT IT MEANS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Permit this work to speak generally when it suggests the word theology implies an end in the minds of many 21st century Western parishioners. It is both an honor and duty to see theology resurrected and redirected in the coming generations, as theology is both means and end. To study theology (the knowledge of God) is to delve into the waters not only of the mind, but the entire self according to Deuteronomy 6:4 – soul, spirit, heart, and will. To know God is not exclusively cognitive, but entails relational intimacy at the core. Therefore, this knowledge requires action of becoming like Him and not merely cognitive agreement. The mind alone can never override the entire self, and when it does, it is certain then that an unbelieving culture will find theological inquiries unbelievable because they remain in the realm of mere theory and rhetoric, never revealing more of the nature of God in the world He created.

The aim of this work is to understand the royal law intellectually and much more. It affirms the confession of Hebrews 4:12 that the Scriptures are “living and active” when the reader approaches them humbly, seeking renewal, inspiration, and transformation. The English Standard Version and Greek New Testament 4th ed. will be the translations used unless specified otherwise. May the Spirit of God move the church not only hear the words of the royal law, but to act in response within an unbelieving world. Further, may the church

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1 Sh’ma – The central Hebrew Text.
2 John 17:3
once again embark on a theology yielding mission. Before moving into the proposition statement, which will launch the contents of this work, it may be prudent to get two presuppositions out of the way to ensure both the author and the reader launch from similar perspectives.

1) This work assumes to love God is central for all serious followers of the royal law. Given that the royal law is the second greatest commandment according to Jesus, it presupposes that those who seek to fulfill neighborly love do so as an expression of the love they already have for God.

2) The neighborly love required from the commandment is birthed from a fullness of the Holy Spirit and is not a prerequisite for earning God’s redemptive approval. God’s grace, which He has initiated to humanity, is what enables one to love most properly in the first place. A follower of the royal law loves not that God may accept him (though love certainly brings God pleasure and verifies that follower as this work will detail), but as a response to the love and acceptance God says is freely given to humanity. Thus, the neighborly love given the world is given in response to grace rather than from a soteriological motivation.

This work does not claim to be exhaustive, but intends to open a portal. The hope of this portal is to begin an endeavor of reclaiming the mission behind the text. A brief exegesis of James’ Epistle, chapter 2:8 will serve as a launching pad. When one begins to dig underneath this passage, what is discovered is that James’ writings were not penned in a vacuum. Rather, his understanding was dependent on earlier voices, namely, Jesus and Moses. Transitioning from the ancients, four modern theologians are then examined to preview how the royal law has been applied throughout recent history. Once one

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3 Deuteronomy 6:4
4 James 2:8 is the only place in Scripture where one can find the term “royal law.” This work will detail why James refers to it as such.
5 Romans 3:20, Romans 3:24, Romans 3:28
6 See also Romans 2:13
7 It is not only the Christian who may love, for love to some degree is imprinted into all humanity as all bear God’s image. But only those who have the Spirit living within them can engage love without end is the position of this work.
understands what the text then meant, the reader may then move toward what the law now means. A brief journey through economic, political and technological change will aid one’s perspective of this text’s flexibility. Last, a benchmark is outlined to help the church better respond appropriately to her call and mission.

**Proposition Statement**

Recently much effort has gone into how the church must reconstruct her strategies to meet the needs of a drastically changing world. However, few voices seem to be focused on distilling her mission to the most urgent task of all – love. The Western church, in general, assumes more effort and resources allocated toward developing and redeveloping programs is the evolution needed, rather than resourcing her members to be the church in their respective communities. Despite the missional complexities in an ever-changing world, it is the aim of this work to understand the royal law, exegeting what James 2:8 meant, and developing what it now means in the 21st century as an essential task in the life of the church.
CHAPTER 2

EXEGETING 2:8

James’ Epistle was debatably the 1st letter written in the Canonized New Testament.¹ Whether this is certain or not is of no consequence to this work. What is of serious consequence, however, is that this Epistle was not written in a vacuum. Affirming that the author was James, the half brother of Jesus² and Jewish-Christian Bishop of Jerusalem, he relied heavily on the Torah and the Hebrew scriptures to shape the Church we find in the New Testament. It is clear throughout the New Testament that the writers were greatly indebted to the earlier Old Testament writers, as they built their theological frameworks on the foundation of their fathers. That being said, we must agree that the New Testament relies on the Old Testament, creating an organic whole, and fulfills the revelation given to the Ancients. As we will see, James relied on an essential Old Testament text and teachings of Jesus (most likely oral) to validate his position for the purpose of shaping the direction of the Church for generations that would come.

Context

Around 50-60 A.D. Christianity had taken root within Roman Empire. In “taking root” it is not being proposed that Christianity was blossoming and expanding in rapid numbers. Rather, it could be found deep within the Empire for someone who was looking for

¹ Stern, 730
it. Jesus had risen from the grave according to the Apostle’s and numerous eyewitness accounts;\(^3\) the Holy Spirit had descended creating the miraculous as relatively commonplace;\(^4\) the church was meeting in homes daily in addition to the Synagogue. But like every family, it was only a matter of time before issues developed, complexities manifested, and problems arose. In Antioch, a dispute raged over the place of circumcision within the Jewish-Christian community. Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to resolve the problem with the Apostle’s.\(^5\) Simultaneously, in Palestine the dispersed Jewish believers were living in the midst of Imperial darkness, suffering the pangs of persecution. Further, the Kingdom of the world was polluting these believers into favoritism, dissention, and discrimination.\(^6\) These believers had also apparently heard a perverted gospel and concluded it was a license to sin.\(^7\) It was within this framework that James wrote his letter, urging believers to reconstruct their lives in the Biblical pattern of the will of God.

**Text**

James 2:8 –

εἰ μέντοι νόμον τελείτε βασιλικὸν κατὰ τὴν γραφήν, ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε

If you actually complete the royal law according to the Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself”, you do well.

In an effort to make this text more approachable, it will be divided into four parts and dealt with respectively. Obviously, one can never say everything about anything, but divided

\(^3\) 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NIV).
\(^4\) Acts 2
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid.
up, it is my aim that *something* can be said about *something*. It is also a conviction that the “*something said about something*” in this work will lead to more than just “*something*.” The hope is that exegeting this passage will lead to greater awareness of the heart of God and will supernaturally manifest in the lives of people as it is lived out.

Before delving head first into this particular text it is paramount the reader understands not only what preceded this verse, but also what follows. Succinctly put, preceding this passage James writes an overview (what we now have come to know as Chapter 1). In this overview he introduces himself as a servant (doulos) of God and Jesus, comforts those in persecution, reveals new realities in prayer, shows the equality of man, teaches where sin comes from, and explains what true religion is all about. As any good Torah teacher would do he then encapsulates his teaching in a summary statement. It is the position of this work that 2:8 is the culmination of all that had been previously stated. Furthermore, I’m persuaded that every verse following 2:8 is James’ way of explaining how to live this text within the original reader’s context. What must be reiterated from the beginning is James’ reliance on we is referred to as the Old Testament text. This verse is taken straight from the LXX, rooted in the Leviticus 19:18b. In full, Leviticus 19:18 reads, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

This passage climaxes a long list, urging the Hebrew community to live as participators in the image of God. Like James, the author of Leviticus reveals contextual examples of how this passage is to be lived and is then followed with more examples. One may conclude that James appears to borrow this model from Moses, the proposed author of
Leviticus. More concerning the ancient Hebrew’s text will be revealed later, but suffice it to say, James’ instruction was built on the foundation of those before him.

James 2:8a –
εἰ μόνοι νόμον τελείτε βασιλικὸν
If you actually complete the royal/Kingdom law

The first part of Chapter 2 verse 8 introduces a fascinating word to its reader, which supports the purpose of this paper. The clause introduced by *εἰ* (if) can be translated “since” or “because.” What this means for the reader is that it is assumed the royal law is a desirable vision. Secondly, it ties in not only the content before this clause, but the entirety of James 1-2:7. John McArthur. *James. The McArthur New Testament Commentary.* (Moody Press, 1998), 111.

James leads his readers to believe that for those who claim to follow the Scriptures, and particularly the way according to Jesus, the royal law becomes the aim and the community must open herself to accountability and rebuke when deliberately missing the mark.

Furthermore, *εἰ* is what is known in the Greek as a 1st class conditional clause. This type of clause assumes “the condition stated in the protasis is a reality.” Brooks, James A. and Carlton Winbery. *Syntax of New Testament Greek.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979), 182.

In other words, completing the royal law is actually exceeding strong probability into the realm of inevitability. This leaves little room for speculation as to whether or not the command is optional, but puts great emphasis toward how severe one should consider pursuing the completion of this law in one’s life.

The verb *teleite* is interesting in that it can be rendered “to perform completely or

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wholly.” Coupling that with the adverb, *mentoi* (really, actually), it seemingly creates a paradigm of sarcasm. That is not to say that James’ doubted the possibility of completing/fulfilling the royal law as was previously negated, but that it is a daunting task for anyone to undertake. Given this reality, it is not intended to deter the reader from undertaking such a task. Rather, to challenge and motivate the reader to seek to uphold this law as the greatest aim of one’s life. One would do well to devote his/her entire life to this principle, for it validates the declaration of the faith one confesses.  

Another important insight into the adverb *teleite* is its possibility of being interpreted “to bring to its goal.” What is essential in this translation of the word is that the law has a goal. In other words, the law was not given for its own sake, or for arbitrary purposes, but is the mode by which humanity participates in the story of God. The law is a covenant commitment creating the relational dance between God and His creation. It must be understood that a covenant brings its parties into a relationship as primary motivation as oppose to duty. Contrary to popular belief in Western culture, the law a) is not an end in and of itself but a means, and b) is relational, as it brings us into relational union with God. This perspective, to many, is revitalizing when referring to the law. This is true particularly because many in Western society who do not seek to uphold his law have a negative view of the merciful God.  

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11 James 2:14.
14 Ibid.
The word *basilikon* is one that also may be understood in several ways. It may refer to that which is “kingly” in character or excellence\(^ {15} \). In this paradigm, one may understand this law carries utmost importance. This is not a law to obey when one feels ready, but is eminent. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians 5:14, “The entire law is summed up in a single command: "'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Paul’s understanding of the royal law here is similar to this understanding. Better put, by following the royal command to love your neighbor as most excellent, most kingly, most eminent, one simultaneously fulfills the law completely.

Another possible interpretation for the word *basilikon* would be “that which belongs to the King” (e.g. roads, officers, clothing, commandments).\(^ {16} \) This perspective is valuable because it reminds the reader that all things belong to the King. So, when we love our neighbors as ourselves, we are valuing what rightfully belongs to the King since he created all things and all things find their origin in Him.

*Basilikon* may also mean “royal custom” simply because it is of the King in his practice.\(^ {17} \) This translation is useful in that it establishes an understanding that to be diligent in upholding the royal law is to represent and imitate the King himself, namely, Jesus. I find this translation most helpful in the purpose of this paper because it demonstrates that the law is an instruction that comes from within the nature of God (the King) that He is already performing. Therefore, the invitation to follow the law is an invitation of imitation rather than a mere arbitrary requirement. Although God would be just in mandating the law it is a covenantal law foremost based in relationship.

\(^ {15} \) Johnson, *The Letter*, 231.
\(^ {16} \) Ibid.
\(^ {17} \) Ibid.
Thus far this work has suggested that James 2:8 serves as a crescendo. It ties in the previous chapter while perpetuating the passages thereafter. There is little doubt that James was inviting his readers to recall Leviticus 19:18 (a central Jewish text along with the Shema - Deuteronomy 6:4) and apply it in community. His aim is for his reader to fulfill the royal law as a lifelong pursuit while understanding that to perform this law is not simply an act of obedience to the King’s command, but is an imitation of the King Himself.

James 2:8b
κατὰ τὴν γραφήν,
according to the Scripture,

The second division of James 2:8 is critical for purposes beyond the scope of this work. However, it is worth mentioning that this portion of verse 8 eradicates any notion of antinomianism – that belief claiming a person is free from upholding any moral law obligations.18 What James does in this part of his Epistle is provide a Biblical framework to justify his case, namely, that these particular scattered, Jewish-Christians need to be reigned in and confronted again with the truth of Scripture. He also understood his suggestion alone failed to carry the weight of adherence unless he built his case on something much stronger.

We must bear in mind as we read James’ Epistle today that he is not referring to the Bible as many Christians have come to know of the canonized version agreed upon in the 4th century. James relied heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures. It is possible that he had access to a Gospel account at his time of writing or the work(s) of Paul, but many scholars affirm James’ work to be one of, if not, the first letter penned in the New Testament.19 This is an important feature to reiterate in the wake of many Christians viewing Judaism in a negative light rather

18 Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus, s.v. “Antinomian.”
19 Stern, 730.
than the tree they were grafted into through faith in Jesus.\textsuperscript{20} It is also my experience that many Christians today, primarily Gentile, have, by and large, viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as inferior, primitive, and sometimes irrelevant. According to James in verse 8, we can conclude that James depended on the legitimacy of the Torah after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We can therefore affirm, even after the movement of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that the work of the Old Testament is still relevant today as it was in lives of the ancients.

James thinks of the commandments as a whole rather than parts. He uses the royal law (Lev. 19:18b) to sum up the entire ethic of one human toward another. Thus, to paraphrase verse 10, if one is guilty of breaking any of the law, then it is the same as the entire law has being broken. For example, if the transmission of the car has broken down (which is only one of many major components that makes up any given automobile) then it is generally regarded that the car is inoperable. When we say that the car is inoperable we generally mean one major component of the car not in service. We may think of those terms when approaching the law. One may even argue that the entire Epistle is encapsulated in the royal law. For example, observe how the following verses of James’ Epistle not only correspond to Moses’ writings in Leviticus, but all draw from the central command to love your neighbor as yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(OT) VERSE</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>(NT) VERSE</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leviticus 19:12</td>
<td>Swearing falsely</td>
<td>James 5:12</td>
<td>Swearing falsely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leviticus 19:13</td>
<td>Pay wages fairly</td>
<td>James 5:4</td>
<td>Pay wages fairly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{20} Romans 11:24 (NIV)
Leviticus 19:15  No favoritism  James 2:1, 2:9  No favoritism
Leviticus 19:16  Do not slander  James 4:11  Do not slander
Leviticus 19:17b Correct neighbor  James 5:20  Correct neighbor
Leviticus 19:18c  Love neighbor as self  James 2:8  Love neighbor as self

In addition to these obvious parallels that James borrows from Leviticus, Johnson suggests that James uses Leviticus 19:11 and 19:14 to support what is now known as chapter 2:14-16 and 3:13-4:10. As suggested before, that which comes prior to James 2:8 is as an overview leading up to the crescendo of the royal law. Therefore, as suggested in the chart above, everything that follows is commentary as to how the royal law plays out contextually. It appears from these texts that James was writing a new composed, contextualized Leviticus for the Jewish-Christians of the 1st century, and that the believers of the present are intricately tied to the believers of times past. We will more deeply into this in a later section devoted to James’ use of Leviticus.

James 2:8c – ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν (You shall love your neighbor as yourself)

The previous division of James 2:8 clearly demonstrated James’ heavy reliance on the Torah when writing his Epistle. We begin this section where we previously left off. Johnson points out in his commentary that James uses the exact translation of the LXX. As previously stated, James does not write in a vacuum, but uses resources available to him when constructing his ardent plea for the Jewish-Christians to conform their lives to the text.

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21 Ibid.
To *love your neighbor as yourself* is the substance of the royal law. It is the greatest commandment in Scriptures (next to / along with the Sh’má) as we will prove in the lines to come. Johnson states, “The commandment is above all, ‘royal’ because it is identified with Jesus, who is identified as ‘King,’ as his distinctive summation of Torah.” A Rabbinical Commentator said of this law in the Torah that it is the culmination of the entire chapter of Leviticus 19. Rabbi Akiva suggested that it was *the great principle of the Torah.* Rabbi Hillel used the inverse of this passage to make his point in saying *what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.* Many have argued from Hillel’s point of view that interpreting a negative perspective of this passage is much more meaningful and applicable within human nature. Whether we treat people how we desire or avoid treating people ways we’d rather avoid, both perspectives can help one arrive at the goal of loving others well. However, one must note that Hillel, as well as other religious leaders such as the Bhudda, in teaching the negative aspect to the royal law can and often does lead to inactivity. This is one of the primary distinctions of Jesus’ teachings from other religious leaders throughout history. Jesus inspired active love rather than passive avoidance.

Believing James’ Epistle as the first work of the New Testament, it is critical that we understand the 1st century was a highly oral communicative context. If James was the first to pen part of what we now know as the New Testament Canon, he would not only have drawn from the written Old Testament Scriptures, particularly the Torah, but also the oral teachings of Jesus spread by the Apostles. James was not considered one of the twelve disciples of

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23 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 204 (Sifra).
27 Ibid., 205.
Jesus, so he most likely was not privy to the conversations that were occurring the three years of Jesus’ life we read from the four Gospels. However, through oral tradition (and possibly Jesus’ interactions with James in the home) James had access to Jesus’ teachings. One must also note that Jesus did not come to say anything new, but to fulfill, detail, and affirm what was old.  

The passages below indicate where Jesus, Himself, drew from the Old Testament text and revealed its worth in the 1st century context –

Matthew 19 - 19
love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22 - 36
"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"
37Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Mark 12 - 31
The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Luke 10 - 27
He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Matthew, Mark and Luke all recall Jesus’ emphasis of the Leviticus 19 passage. However, this law did not begin with Moses and conclude with Jesus. This law carried on through the work of Paul and of James. Paul records in his letters to the Roman Christians and the Galatian Christians –

Romans 13 - 9
The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," "and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5 - 14
The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

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28 Matthew 5:17 (NIV).
As seen from the writings of Paul, the entire law was encapsulated through the vision of loving one’s neighbor as oneself. This command may be seen as a piece of oversized luggage that all the other commands fit into. To think of another’s good as one’s own fulfills the rest of the law. It is also the aim of a person’s life amidst a corrupt generation bent around self-gratification, selfishness, and self-centered autonomy.

James 2:8d  
καλῶς ποιεῖτε (you do well)

According to McArthur, James’ use of the word kalos (well) means more than satisfactorily. Rather, it carries the weight of living excellently because to actually live in this way in the fallen world is not the norm. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is an atypical vision amidst a corrupt generation. It, therefore, serves as a compelling vision, grand enough to devote ones entire life toward “completing” or “fulfilling” as the first division of this passage indicates.

Adding fuel to the fire, the suggestion here is that the standard of gauging spirituality is often different than most standards the world employs. Contrary to popular opinion, this standard is not, nor ever has been based on church/synagogue attendance, a correct denomination, or any given number of credentials or degrees. Firstly, God exclusively determines authentic spirituality, as only He truly knows the hearts of people. Secondly, spirituality is only as authentic as experienced by the people surrounding each person. If one professes to be spiritual then that spirituality should be made manifest in the lives of those near. Additionally, it also creates new relationships with those one did not know prior to conversion as spirituality reveals how man may shape environments he was not aware of.

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29 McArthur, 113.
30 Romans 2:16, 1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV).
before profession. For example, a wealthy man before conversion rarely has a need to spend time with the poor simply because he worked his way to escape the conditions that shackle the poor. However, many a rich man after coming to Jesus have since befriended and actively sought the poor as a way of expressing their faith to the less fortunate. That is not to say that all who practice generosity have the Holy Spirit, for all have the imprint of God stamped inside them. However, for those indwelt by the Spirit of God, it may be assumed that the Spirit is prompting the royal law within them to actively pursue acts of love toward others.

Exegetical Conclusion

According to Bamberger, the golden rule is an instrument of criticism in that it “enables us to judge a proposed course of action, but leaves the means of that action up to the imagination.\textsuperscript{31} The most fascinating aspect of this passage is its ambiguous definition, which I believe reveals the vastness of its implications. Nowhere does the text speak of the royal law and follow with a definition of how exactly one is to apply in every scenario. If that were the case it is quite possible James would still be writing. He does, however, provide vivid examples as to how the Jewish-Christians, scattered abroad were to love in their context (e.g. caring for the poor, widows, orphans). That does not, of course, provide loving examples for every scenario as surely James was not implying that his readers ignore the rich simply because they had wealth. These examples then, as the ones in Leviticus surrounding 19:18, are not exhaustive, but supply readers with immediate paradigm shifts of applying love to one’s neighbor(s).

\textsuperscript{31} Bamberger, 205.
I am persuaded that James’ mission was to shape the church in ways he heard they were currently missing the mark (or sinning). It may be argued that missing the mark of love is a sin of omission and not only commission. This should raise the severity of the command in the minds of its listeners. Therefore, the question every Christian community, in every context, in every generation needs to ask is 2 fold –

Who is not receiving the love of Christ through the church?
How can we show the love of Christ to those people?

When studying this text in proper context, one must bear in mind the breadth of resources readers have today. Only recently does the church have an opportunity to realistically love on a global scale, and see the results. In ancient times, people had little to no awareness whatsoever of communities beyond a few days walking journey.32 Today we are connected in multiple ways with conflicts such as events in the Middle East, the water crisis in Africa, or the genocidal reality in the Darfur region by a simple click of a computer mouse. The implications the royal law has on the church at this time at staggering. Given that adherers are not only to love their immediate neighbors daily, but are now possibly called to be a part of a global community, showing the love of Christ to world.

Loving one’s neighbor is an exemplary life vision for a follower of the law as it bears both communal and personal implications. It is communal in that neighborly love works toward putting to right what is corrupt in the world’s empires such as inequalities, discrimination, self-indulgence, etc. It personal as it appears reasonable that loving one’s neighbor is simultaneously good for one’s own soul. For it is the exercise of love that releases the temptation of self-preservation, self-interest, and disregard toward the cries of those oppressed and overlooked. Although both of those motivations (communal and

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32 Bamberger, 205.
personal) are compelling in and of themselves, there is a third vision I find most satisfying to this entire conversation. That is, that the aim to love ones neighbor as oneself is most eminent because it is an invitation to imitation. This is what God has been up to since the beginning according to Genesis.\textsuperscript{33} This law of love led God to create a world for man to enjoy in the first place. It was also demonstrated by God as He fastened a helper for Adam, and provided a sacrifice for Abraham, eventually climaxing with His Son, Jesus, on a cross.

This law was no arbitrary requirement. Rather, it was/is an invitation to be like the one who issued it. Fulfiling this law is about being more like our Creator and returning to how we were created to exist in the Garden. The royal law enables ordinary people, who are in covenant with God, to renew the world through His power. To seek the fulfillment of this law is a worthy vision that compels people every day. It is no easy task to think outside of oneself in order to become more like the Creator, but if Christians around the globe surrendered their lives to Christ in order to love their neighbors more sacrificially, rather than merely desiring to go to heaven after death, the possibilities could be limitless. However, this complicates the equation if we truly seek to get to the bottom of the mission. For generations a question has been asked again and again. Nowhere is it clearer than in Jesus’ dialogue with the lawyer who inquired this answer from the Son of Man/God. It is to that end that the direction of this work diverts its mission toward – \textit{who is my neighbor}?

\textsuperscript{33} McArthur, 112.
CHAPTER III
WHAT THE ROYAL LAW MEANT

1st Century Context

One of the greatest errors in the Western Church today is, to use a colloquialism, “putting the cart before the horse.” Western culture is obsessed with application to the point of missing how it arrived at a conclusion in the first place. It is imperative, particularly as far as this work is concerned, to understand what the royal law meant in its original context, and what it meant in the context James wrote his Epistle in the 1st century. Only after peering into original context can one begin to satisfactorily apply to his current context.

Dependence on Leviticus 19

“Ἀγαπήσει τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν” (LXX)

James does not write his Epistle in a vacuum. His writings, along with every New Testament writer, were greatly influenced by devotion to what is now referred to as the Old Testament. In addition to the Epistle of James, one may also note other non-canonical works shaped by this section of the Torah as well, particularly The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides.¹ Within that framework the Christian Church must recognize her roots and dependence upon the Jewish tradition and reject an antinomian outlook. The first place one can find the Biblical author’s dependence on the royal law is explicitly seen in Leviticus

chapter 19. The text of James 2:8 is taken literally, word for word, from Lev. 19:18b in the LXX. Holiness is the foremost theme of Moses’ work as his task was not only to lead the people from Egyptian captivity, but also to introduce them to an entire new way of being. This way of being was heavily constructed upon renewing their perspectives on reality and reorienting their choices to God’s explicit instructions. It is within this framework that the royal law emerges.

Although debate exists over whether or not Leviticus was finalized as a book under the Persian Empire by Priests, it is the view of this work that Leviticus was crafted by Moses post exodus from Egypt. Before moving forward with the perspective that this book was not written in the Prophetic era, it is fascinating to understand why some would perceive this time to be the period of its final revision. Kaminsky, an Associate Professor of Religion from Smith College writes:

When informed that this expression (Lev. 19:18b) first occurs in the (Hebrew Bible), many contemporary readers assume it must come from the prophetic material. How could those narrow-minded priests so concerned with cultic details have authored this notion let alone enshrined it in the center of their corpus?

The Israelites were ready for the sacrificial system to be implemented and needed further instruction as to how to live in harmony with God and each other. The construction of Leviticus is worth noting (and will be further noted below) as it can be divided into two

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2 Ibid., 123.
sections. The first section has been referred to as the Priestly Code. This code extends from Exodus 25-Leviticus 16 and is intended for Priestly adherence. The Holiness Code, within which the royal law is contained, includes the remainder of the book, save the final chapter (Leviticus 17-26). We will look more deeply into this below.

The reader must bear in mind this book is a technical document and its aim was to govern the spheres of life amongst the Israelites. This code was not written exclusively for Priestly adherence. Rather, it was written for the masses and was intended to shape the standards and norms of the Hebrew’s society. In addition to this law, the holiness code details instructions concerning annual feasts, miscellaneous laws, and covenant curses.

The command to “love your neighbor as yourself” emerges in chapter 19 of 27, and is placed in nearly the exact center of the work. It is as if the royal law is the cliff notes version of the entire holiness code. To fulfill this law, outlined by the contents of what was written before and after Leviticus 19:18, was to fulfill to entire code. It was the way of holiness, and thus, the key to God-likeness who dwells within the holy of holies as the Holy One. Chapter 19 can be subdivided into two parts within the two chapter divisions of Leviticus - the first section being verses 1-18. In this section the author dealt with laws that stem from the thesis “You shall be holy, for I Jehovah your God am holy (v. 2).” In this we see an imperative that likeness to God is a goal of being human. The command to “love your neighbor as yourself (v. 18)” has been said to close the first section and according to Makujina, (it) “serves as a summary statement encapsulating the specific commands concerning fellow Israelites.”

Moreover, the summary statement of neighborly love refers to previous commands to leave

\[ \text{Makujina, 213.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
\[ \text{Ibid.} \]
gleanings for the poor (vs. 9-10), to pay employees fairly (v. 13b), malicious gossip (v. 16), theft (v. 11), and so on. As we can see, this began the Israelites on the journey toward what it meant to love their neighbors, but certainly was not comprehensive, as we will see below.¹⁰

The Hebrew term used for love in this commandment was the word *ahab*, meaning, love or affection. It is used 208 times in the Old Testament and can carry a broad spectrum of meanings.¹¹ Abraham Malamat asserts that the English use of the word “love” is an inadequate rendering of the word *ahab* in Leviticus 19:18. Through exegesis he contends the word *ahab* is closer to the phrase “to benefit.” Therefore, the sense of love from vs. 18 and 34 is pragmatic and elicits practical benefit from one person extended to another (50).¹² Makujina suggests, “one must resort to the surrounding of Leviticus 19:18 to determine the secondary sense of “ahab” in that verse, a meaning that relates to the primary meaning.”¹³ By this he asserts that this passage is nowhere near exhaustive, but illustrative. It illustrates “do not’s” such as stealing, lying, oppression, extortion, cursing and stumbling. It also illustrates do’s such as honoring parents and generosity. What is paramount from this text is the reality that love was intended to move both tangibly and intangibly. The tangible love includes the physical, material well being of another (e.g. leaving gleanings for the poor). The intangible includes the emotional, spiritual, and psychological well being of others (e.g. avoiding cursing, lying).

Neighborly love begins in the aesthetic world but does not end there. The people of God have a responsibility to care for the entirety of one another. It is a holistic approach to

¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹³ Makujina, 214.
neighborly love. Just as the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4) commands man to love God with his entire being, so must we also apply this to man. The whole of man is to be loved, not simply the exterior, or simply the interior, but both the exterior and interior. For example, all too often, for the sake of expedience we offer the man on the street the dollar he seeks, but give so we may then move on to the next item on our daily list of activities. We often do this in order to justify ourselves and to move past him as if he is an obstacle to our daily purposes. This is a case of caring for one’s physical well-being, but ignoring his emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions. The inverse is true as well. James exhorts his readers to be sure that they do not simply care for the inward being while ignoring the outward, physical needs of your neighbor (James 2:16). Speaking a word of encouragement for the hungry without providing physical nourishment is not love according to the Epistle’s author.

Throughout the Bible we find significant dependence upon this passage and the Leviticus text as a whole. One of the more prominent examples of how the royal law was applied holistically was implied through the relationship between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18ff). According to Makujina, this text records two ways Jonathan’s love toward David was ahab love, neighborly love.

1. The text states Jonathan loved David as his own soul (vs. 1, 3). This is the kind of love that gives toward another based on empathy and action.

2. The text states Jonathan loved David when he sacrificially stripped himself of his rights (vs. 3-4). This is the kind of love that gives in the midst of limited resources – sacrificially.

In the latter of these two examples of love, Jonathan stripped himself of his robe and gave it to David. In addition to his robe Jonathan gave David his armor – sword, bow and belt. This act demonstrated Jonathan’s willingness to lay down his birth rite to the crown and surrender
it as a gift of devotion to David. To love oneself typically implies to provide oneself with position, status, success, honor, etc. All of these things Jonathan willingly surrendered to David, thus loving him as he would love himself. Yet, this love was more than providing his friend what he desired. This love was sacrificial. Makujina states, “Jonathan’s love toward David was only possible at his own expense.”\textsuperscript{14} Jonathan’s love, in fact, cost him the price of the crown.\textsuperscript{15}

A question that emerges within this conversation is whether or not \textit{ahab} love requires giving sacrificially. After all, the command urges its listener to “love your neighbor \textit{as yourself},” not \textit{instead} of yourself. One need not always give sacrificially in order to love another. Resources are not always limited as they were in the case of Jonathan and David – only one could be on the throne. However, when one does love sacrificially, love is taken to an entirely new level and demonstrates great character and likeness to God. This is demonstrated most dynamically in Jesus as he lay his life down for his friends.\textsuperscript{16} Below we will view some theologians of recent history to gain perspective on their views of this type of neighborly love.

In addition to James’ dependence and Old Testament dependence upon Leviticus 19, the New Testament writers were also devoted to the Biblical text of Leviticus 19. Makujina writes that in every instance of \textit{ahab} the Greek records it as \textit{agapao}.\textsuperscript{17} Leviticus 19:18 were referred to 10 times in 8 New Testament passages.\textsuperscript{18} Makujina further notes,

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{15} 1 Samuel 18:4.
\textsuperscript{16} John 15:13.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{18} Mt. 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31,33; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Eph 5:28; Jas 2:8 (Mt. 5:43 is not used here because it lacks reference to self-love).
Agape (defined as selfless, unconditional love) should not cloud agapao here. The historical source of the concept of self and neighborly love in all the NT texts is ultimately Lev. 19:18 … which makes them … dependent on the meaning of ahab … therefore … one should expect no difference in meaning if the NT writers had used the Hebrew text in citing Lev. 19:18.  

As seen here, according to Makujina, that the transition from the Ancient Hebrew way of love retained the same meaning in the Greco-Roman culture, even though time and context had shifted. Although the application may vary, the meaning of love retained its value as an objective reality from the time of Moses to the time of the 1st century. One may then ask, “if love is an objective reality but subjective in application, what exactly is objective and how does it lead into subjective reality?” This question will be handled later and bears immense gravity in the present context.

Another facet that begs attention when handling the Leviticus 19 text is its application (or lack thereof) regarding those outside of the Jewish community. This is a loaded question implied years later in the case of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. Therefore, we can assume that how this text applied to strangers was greatly debated and perhaps divided the Jewish community. Even today this passage is widely contested. For example, a 2001 article by Allan Brownfield from *The Washington Report* published the case regarding the tragic death of Israel Shahak, the Polish born Professor of Chemistry at Hebrew University, stating, “The famous verse "Thou shalt love thy fellow as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18) is understood by classical (and present-day Orthodox) Judaism "as an injunction to love one's fellow Jew, not any fellow human."  

19 Makujina, 217.  
In stark contrast, Makujina suggests that the command in Leviticus 19 extends to the stranger beyond the Jewish community. This is argued when one goes beyond verse 18 and to verse 34 of chapter 19. Therefore the command to love those outside the Jewish community was not inaugurated for the first time in the person of Jesus, but was intended from the beginning. In Jewish culture, even Gentile slaves were to be treated as image bearers of God, which they were. Although Gentiles were not released after seven years of service, they were not to be treated inhumanely. The purpose of releasing Jewish slaves had nothing to do with favoritism. Rather, it was to remind the Jewish people of the covenant God had made to release them from slavery and reveal to the world how God graciously deals with the people He has covenanted with. What love meant in that context has been debated, but this work assumes that the original text meant love demanded crossing social boundaries and even national barriers. One can see here a glimpse at the heart of God for the all the nations that He would later explicitly open His Kingdom to through the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the New Testament.

Before concluding this matter and moving to the next section of this work, the mentioning of a major opponent is helpful at this point. World-renowned psychologist, Sigmund Freud offered his opinion about this text that adds contest to the conversation. It will be detailed in the Good Samaritan section below, but is worth mentioning here in brief. In an article written by Samuel K. Roberts, he interprets Freud believing neighborly love as self to be virtually impossible to perfect, stating –


21 Ibid., 214.
22 See Leviticus 25 for the treatment of slaves in Hebrew context.
23 This position was revealed to my by Dr. Sam Larsen, Professor of Missions at RTS.
Powerful inhibitors to a general altruism lay deep within the psyche of modern humans. In Civilization and Its Discontents, he (Freud) articulated qualified disdain for Leviticus 19:18. Sensing a conflict between the realities of natural aggression within the human psyche and the inability of humans to fulfill an ideal command such as loving the neighbor as self.²⁴

Freud, a Jewish man by birth, rejects this passage as plausible. Although he does not speak for the majority of the Jewish population, his opinion typifies the reality that this commandment has not historically been black and white. Rather, rigorously debated, it deserves full attention from every human who desires to learn what it means to follow God.

In conclusion to this section of James’ dependence upon the Leviticus text of 19:18, the aim has been to “open a can of worms.” Makujina suggests the following as it pertains to this text, “The Holiness Code … these (are) considered to be corrective measures for specific instances of religious failure, (but) it does not constitute a complete and systematic set of instructions relating to the Israelite religious system.”²⁵ What this means as far as this paper is concerned is that there is room for re-interpretation in every context of every age. The case is not closed when it comes to loving our neighbors as ourselves and it would serve a God-follower well to seek the Holy Spirit’s guide as to how one can fulfill this command in his own time. When Jesus comes along and reinterprets the concept of neighbor, it is not against the law that He does this, but rather, he accelerates the implication of the question further and opens it wider than his audience ever imagined.

The Good Samaritan

²⁵ Makujina, 213.
Thus far in this third chapter it is clearly evidenced that James was dependant upon his ancestors, particularly the author of Leviticus, when shaping the 1st century Jewish-Christian Church. It is also clear that the context of the first century differed significantly from that of the period in which Moses penned the Torah. Later, the progression from the 1st century to the 21st century context will be revealed. Before moving toward the application of the royal law today, it is vital to detour through another passage, which may prove most beneficial to the contemporary follower of God. The detour being referred to is none other than the famous account of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most widely known, if not the most widely known parable of the Common Era. The parable can be found in the 10th chapter of Luke’s Gospel. A parable is simply a literary device using a fictitious scenario to communicate 1 central truth. A parable is different from an allegory as not every element in the story is intended to carry its own meaning. For example, Augustine’s interpretation of the Good Samaritan is considered erroneous as he approached the text allegorically, rather than parabolically. Therefore, the man on the side of the road was Adam, the robbers were devils, the Samaritan was Jesus, the innkeeper was the Apostle Paul, etc. Further, a parable is intended to bring clarity and a heightened sense of crisis that leads the listeners to the brink of decision. Consider the passage below from Psalms.

Psalm 78:1-2 –
Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in parables, I will reveal hidden things, things from of old.

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27 Ibid.,147.
Understanding the Good Samaritan parable is key to unlocking further mysteries in regards to loving our neighbor as God has commanded. Again, as stated in the Leviticus section above, when the royal law was first given to the Ancient Israelites, in no way did it outline a comprehensive vision to neighborly love. Thus, room for interpretation, and re-interpretation has always been imminent. Borrowing from the Gospel writer, John, we might say in regards to this matter, “were everyone of them (examples of love) to be written … the world could not contain the books that would be written.”  

It is helpful to regard much of Jesus’ teachings in this way as a continuation of God’s word from the Torah, rather than something completely innovative. Jesus Himself declared, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”  Though not exclusively, Jesus’ teachings often gave clarity and a wider lens perspective into the things the Father had already revealed in past generations. Therefore, when a reader stumbles upon Luke 10, he is then further enlightened as to how love in the world continues to be developed.

Luke 10:25-37 begins and ends with a lawyer (Greek – *nomikos*). In this Jewish context it meant a specialist in Jewish law, both oral and written. This lawyer addresses Jesus as a “Teacher”, thus acknowledging him as someone who can provide further insight into what had already been made known to him, thus, a Rabbi with authority. He proceeds to inquire about eternal life to which Jesus responds with a question about his adherence to the law. It is vital at this point for a reader to pause and acknowledge Jesus as the author of Scripture rather than a rebel calling the Jews away from the system they had previously been

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29 Matthew 5:17.  
30 Stern, 122.  
31 Kistemaker, 141.
given. The lawyer answered Jesus’ question with the response to love God (as Sh’mā instructed) and to love others (the subject that demands the attention of this work). What is most fascinating is a question Jesus asked the lawyer in addition to asking him about the law: “How do you read it?” An obvious question is, “what do you read?” The fact that Jesus asked a “how” question begs the reader to engage the mysteries of life’s most urgent questions. The “what” is to love as God commanded. The “how” is the way in which we are to live. This “how” is not static, but rather, is malleable, demanding inspiration, creativity, passion, desire and so forth. It is this end that is most urgent for the present time.

The lawyer is told by Jesus to follow this love command and life will be attained, thus answering his question. However, the lawyer seeks further clarity and shrewdly asks a Jewish mystery – “And who is my neighbor?” Whether or not the lawyer asked this question from a posture of sincerity or sarcasm reaches beyond the scope of this work. What is concerning, however, is that the question asked demanded and still demands further exploration. It is possible that accessing new discoveries of this mystery might restore the church to an even healthier state than that in which she currently operates.

As a result of the lawyer’s question inquiring who exactly should be defined as “neighbor”, Jesus speaks a creative parable. Being mindful that the lawyer’s nationality was most likely Jewish, Jesus invents a scenario regarding a man who is destined to die on the side of the road unless immediate medical attention is received. 3 specific men pass by this man and all are aware of his need. Each has an opportunity to help; a choice to make concerning the injured. The first is a Jewish Priest who passes him by without assisting. The second is a Levite who does the same. The third is a Samaritan who exhibits compassion by

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33 Luke 10:29
biding his wounds, applying oil and wine, transporting him to an inn, and providing financially for any need he may have from the innkeeper. Jesus concludes by asking the lawyer which man was the neighbor. The lawyer replied that the Samaritan was the neighbor. The scene concludes as Jesus tells him to become like the Samaritan.

Jesus’ Jewish audience would have, most assuredly, been aware of the historical Jewish customs. It would not have been a surprise to think of a Priest and Levite walking by the injured man. The Priests and Levites, after all, were Sadducees and some scholars suggest Sadducees interpreted the law from a literal standpoint (although scholars debate the veracity of this viewpoint). According to some, the law would have prohibited these men from touching a dead corpse. And even though the man had not died in Jesus’ story, according to Kistemaker he was considered dead due to his dire condition.

One must consider the possibility that the lawyer was asking Jesus to answer his neighborly inquiry simply to see how he interpreted the law. Upon hearing of the two Sadducees (a priest and Levite) walking by following their law, it is quite possible the audience, no less the lawyer would have perceived that Jesus would now have a Pharisee walk by. As previously stated, by law the Sadducees could not touch a defiled body, but the Pharisees viewed the law orally. That is, they regarded human life above the law. By their standards the neighborly thing to do would be to help the Jewish victim on the street. However, this was not the next character onto the scene. Rather, it was a Samaritan and Samaritans were not even regarded as being made in the image of God by many Jewish standards. These were the men and women who had abandoned Jerusalem as the home of

35 Kistemaker, 143.
God’s Temple and set up their own in Samaria. In other words, Jesus was not simply adding to the current paradigm, but blowing it wide open. He opened the door so wide that the listeners now had to regard the nation they hated most in some cases to be included as the neighbor. Jesus seemed to be concluding for this lawyer that love has no limits as the hero of the story demonstrated; the one who practiced love perfectly was the lawyer’s probable worst enemy.

One of the mysteries of this text, specifically the question the lawyer asked, should be handled before moving forward. Although this question begs exegetical attention, for now it will be given only a quick view. It seems, at a glance, contradictory that the lawyer’s first question to Jesus pertained to self-interest while the last pertained to external interest. He approached Jesus about his personal future regarding eternal life. He concluded by asking Jesus to define his neighbor so that he may know him and perhaps love him, thus fulfilling the commandments. It seems ironic that the way of eternal life personally involves loving of others. Is it possible to love others if we have self-interest as our primary motivation (e.g. eternal life)? Is it possible to truly love others if we are thinking of ourselves as the reason we do it? Is that what it means to love others as we love ourselves? The conclusion of this work will deal with these questions in greater detail, but are acknowledged here as we have dealt with the Good Samaritan Parable.

Proximity

Understanding the cultural context of the past is vital to access the full scope of how this passage applies with the 21st century context. When engaging the Leviticus text, one

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 146.
must bear in mind the socio-political climate of Israel coming out of Egypt and commencing self-rule. No longer was she under oppressive Egyptian dictatorship. Such profound freedom under Yahweh demanded equally profound responsibility. Israel was fatigued from past oppression and present journeying. God desired to assure her that to preserve the society He intended, Israel would need to be careful how she engaged with foreigners, lest idolatry set in and the anointing of God be removed. In the 1st century context where one encounters the parable of the Good Samaritan, the culture was greatly intertwined with the Greco-Roman world. Although Israel still had a national identity and the presence of a restored Temple, her distinctive was shown to be less vivid by this century. In the Levitical context xenophobia often seemed like the proper method of action. Roberts suggests, “… outside the bonds of kith, kin, or commonly held tradition, the term “neighbor” often had no meaning whatsoever.” He also affirms that through much of human history, the Jewish identity of the neighbor seldom went beyond blood, exact traditions, and tight geographical proximity. It is this reality that makes the parable of the Good Samaritan so compelling. The people of Israel had come a long way, and their culture had shifted in scope, population and geography. Many of the Jews at this time lived outside Jerusalem and even beyond Palestine. Another consideration to keep in mind is not only the dispersion of Jews out of Jerusalem, but the influx of aliens within. Therefore, conditions had changed that needed further consideration. The people of Israel were in need of new teaching from one who had authority to provide new direction due to cultural shift between Moses and the 1st century.

Simon Kistemaker affirms Samuel Robert’s statements above explaining the typical construct of the neighbor within the Jewish culture. Utilizing both Roberts and Kistemaker’s

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38 Roberts, 147.
39 Kistemaker, 141.
insights, a picture of how love might be disseminated might best be illustrated by the concentric circle graph below.\(^{40}\)

![Concentric Circle Graph]

One can see from this visual why the Good Samaritan parable could have been a shift for the Jewish listeners of Jesus as the neighbor is nowhere to be found on their current paradigm as evidenced through the graph.

In summary of this section, it is evident Jesus expands the boundaries of the neighbor reality according to Luke 10. Makujina adds the following:

… Christ enhanced the largely “prohibitive” notion of love in Leviticus 19:18 with the idea of extending kindness to those who are wounded. In other words,

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
where Lev. 19:13 enjoins, “You shall not oppress your neighbor,” Christ adds, “You shall help those who are already oppressed.”

He further presses into the aspect of forfeiture, believing the sacrificial element on the wounded man’s behalf is what made the Samaritan’s love extravagant. Through this sacrificial lens he attempts to string together the Old Testament example of neighborly love by Jonathan to David as part of the understanding of the neighborly love continuum. In it, sacrifice is the crux that sets apart ordinary love from extraordinary love – agapao, if you will. In the final section of this work, the sacrificial element will be explored attempting to understand whether or not sacrifice be present when discerning true love for others.

Recent Contributors

Understanding what the royal law meant is not discovered by exclusive exegesis of Biblical culture alone, but also in every generation thereafter. Four contributors to the recent conversation are discussed in the following pages. Much can be said of every generation since Christ’s ascension, but for the sake of simplicity, clarity, and comparison this work will focus on the lives of Leo Tolstoy, Soren Kierkagaard, Karl Barth and Francis Schaefer. The comparisons will be brief but will provide some perspective as to the nuances of love through the different thinkers within modernity. Upon understanding each man’s interpretation of applying neighborly love, we may then move toward applying it in the 21st century context.

A brief word before moving forward with this section – only by understanding the people of the past can we most meaningfully pave the road to the future. This reality is especially true when it comes to the royal law, as there are countless insights, perspectives and lessons we

\[41\] Makujina, 219.
\[42\] Ibid.
may and must learn from our predecessors.

Leo Tolstoy

Tolstoy was a Russian author, essayist and philosopher in the 19th century. His contribution from works such as War and Peace and The Kingdom of God Is Within You are two among many of his works that were insightful within a communist framework. He converted to Christianity in his later years, but never permitted himself to be a passive “pew sitter” in the church. Tolstoy was dynamic and vocal about his disagreements with the church, and practiced his religion with rigorous devotion. For example, upon conversion he thought it prudent to give up tobacco, alcohol, eating meat, and to practice chastity.43 One may only imagine how aggressive this was within the context of 19th century Russia. He rejected his vocation and employed rigorous reassertion of individual responsibility in an attempt to love his neighbor well.44 Tolstoy’s contribution to this section is helpful as we move forward in our understanding of what the royal law meant, particularly in the areas of sacrifice, personality, and politics.

As detailed in the previous section concerning the sacrificial love between David and Jonathan, Tolstoy also alludes to the element of sacrifice as indispensable when applying the royal law. In his classic work, On Life, Tolstoy wrote,

How is one to act, and on behalf of which love and how? For which love should a man sacrifice another love? Whom should he love most and to whom do most good? To his wife or to his children – and to his own wife and children or to others? How can he serve his beloved country without infringing his love of wife, children and friends? How is he finally to decide

to what extent he should sacrifice his own personality, which is needed for the service of others? To what extent may he care for himself in order to be able to serve others whom he loves?\textsuperscript{45}

What initially seems obvious is the complexity of the royal laws application. Any serious follower of the command, as was the case with the lawyer who questioned Jesus, will quickly realize the complexity of deriving an answer. The royal law is not a command of ideological philosophy. Rather, it is a pragmatic imperative that demands understanding. As one can clearly see in the interaction between Jesus and the lawyer that love demands specific direction (e.g. \textit{who is my neighbor?}), it also demands that even after assessing neighborly qualification the adherer must also take action. However, when taking action one runs the risk of possibly missing out on other neighborly love opportunities. This due, in large, to limited resources such as time, expertise, finances, etc. So, from the beginning one should note the application of the royal law is quite convoluted. A good example of this complexity is discovered when passages such as Matthew 10:37 and 1 Timothy 5:8 are cross-referenced. Although the texts retain their integrity and harmony, it can be seemingly contradictory for a passive reader. From the text in Matthew Jesus teaches the idea to love one’s father or mother more than him is not worthy of him. The text in 1 Timothy communicates one must love his father and mother provisionally so as not to be rejected by God. These texts may seem to conflict, but do not. God is to be loved supremely above all things (Deuteronomy 6:4), and family is to be loved as an extension of one’s primary love for God. After all, God is Father to all families and to treat one’s family with honor is to honor God, the creator as long as that love is pure and not motivated by the denial of God’s purpose for one’s life.

\textsuperscript{45} Tolstoy, \textit{On Life}, 96.
Tolstoy continues in his work, *On Life*, to detail a fictitious scenario where an old, hungry man appears at the doorstep asking for dinner. This dinner is the very one which he has already prepared for his dearly beloved children. It should be noted that food resources are limited, therefore to feed the hungry man at the door is to take needed food from the children. The man wrestles with the question of how he is to weigh the present demand of the stranger for food with the future demand of his beloved children. Tolstoy creates these scenarios as possible life situations that convolute the seemingly simple command requiring a choice be made. Choices are often sacrificial in nature. In the account of Jonathan's sacrifice before David, the reader encounters a simple gesture that seems self-contained as far as the text is concerned. However, what if the sacrifice Jonathan made to David meant that his own wife was sacrificed something without her approval first? Does that change the reality of love in the act? Or imagine the Samaritan who helped the wounded in the parable had neglected an urgent message to return home immediately to be with his dying father. Would that change the way we view love in the parable?

In regards to the element of sacrifice, Tolstoy put forth the following argument -

An essential feature of love is self-renunciation, while its concomitant is benevolence towards all men. To love, then, is to do good by self-sacrifice. Only in this way can a man satisfy himself and others: he is no longer concerned with the welfare of his personal life which is a false good, and has freed in himself a sympathy for all men. A necessary condition of love, therefore, is to desist from hatred, that is, to cease doing harm to others and to cease preferring some people to others for one’s own personal welfare.

Tolstoy's remarks seem to indicate that providing for the fictitious hungry man at the door is necessary even if it disqualified his children from receiving nourishment. In other words, the immediate need must be addressed before needs of the future, while the needs of his children

47 Ibid., 76.
would be met if the man truly operated in faith. For him, only the present opportunities were valid, as future love did not exist. Tolstoy would advocate that this would be the only true way of interpreting the first verse of James, chapter two, which instructs its readers to show no partiality. For Tolstoy, the element of self-sacrifice was non-negotiable, and taking God seriously in His command would be applying it with equal seriousness.

Another dynamic in Tolstoy's understanding and application of the royal law was taking the personality into account. He believed in the dissection of human personality. Tolstoy suggested humanity to be divided into two parts: the "animal personality" and the "human personality." The animal personality represents the physical self and is untamed in regard to ethics and morality. Coexisting with the animal personality is the human personality, which contains the spiritual life and is able to emerge and make choices based on more than instinct. Unlike what we will see in Kierkegaard, Hucker suggests, “Tolstoy believed that Christian equality was achieved by removing earthly distinctions. Kierkegaard accepted earthly class distinctions and existing social roles because he interpreted equality as a matter of eternity, not a matter of what is bound by time.” Thus, approaching humanity equally, regardless of how one presents himself/herself before the neighbor, is essential in following the royal law command. Simultaneously, it is within this framework one actually achieves the status of the human personality. To express the coexistence of these distinctions within every individual Tolstoy created the short story "The Death of Ivan Illich". In it, he

carried on conversations between two selves of the same person.\textsuperscript{50} Hucker contributes much to the conversation regarding these three contributors in his Princeton Theological dissertation. Concerning Tolstoy’s belief in the two personalities he notes, “Tolstoy wishes to distinguish sharply between preference and love. (Man’s animal personality) cannot be called love because they lack its chief sign: an activity which has welfare for its aim and end.”\textsuperscript{51}

The third and final element integral to Tolstoy’s approach to the royal law has to do with the political landscape. He advocated for the prohibition of force. For, to use force in any situation was to nullify love. He believed this commitment to non-violence according to his understanding of Jesus’ teachings. This was a central ideology in Tolstoy’s writings. Many, however, find his ideology utterly dissatisfying when facing various scenarios such as children being abused, a spouse held at gunpoint, global genocides, etc. According to Hucker, Tolstoy believed “an individual must accept responsibility for his actions by refusing to participate in the fabric of violence: a person should not deny his fundamental obligation as a human being in the name of habit, custom or an erroneous view of vocation.”\textsuperscript{52}

Tolstoy’s ideology is what makes his reputation forgettable in the minds of many. However, these were ideologies he practiced as realities and thought it best for all humanity to follow his lead. Nevertheless, for Tolstoy, his commitment to non-violence was a pre-imminent value in upholding the royal law.

\textsuperscript{51} Hucker, 74.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 113.
In conclusion to this brief section on Tolstoy’s perspective on the royal law, the following from *On Life* provides a summation on the topic.

> Whoever you may be who read these lines, consider you position and your duties … not your imaginary duties as a landowner to your estate, as a merchant to your capital, as an emperor, minister or official to the State – but those real duties which follow from your real position as a being called to live and endowed with reason and love.  

It appears evident that Tolstoy understood the most significant identity in life is discovered when all earthly titles are stripped, and one lay bare before the Creator. It is in that posture when humanity may best achieve maximum purpose on earth – *to love one another.*

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Soren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard was a Danish Theologian whose devotion spanned philosophy, theology, psychology, literary criticism, devotional literature and fiction genres. Despite never meeting, Kierkegaard and Tolstoy have remarkably similar views in approaching the royal law. The works of Kant and Schopenhauer influenced both while both also shared a disdain for Hegel’s ideas. Kierkegaard, like Tolstoy who had two classifications for humanity, thought of existence in three distinct, linear spheres: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. Additionally, both men employed a highly individualistic orientation in regard to the royal law. These men are often placed into extremist categories among Christian authorities by the way in which they engaged their faith.

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55 Hucker, 110.
56 Ibid., 111.
57 Ibid., 112.
Although Kierkegaard and Tolstoy shared many views in common, there were also distinctions dividing them. One particular distinction pertaining to the topic at hand, namely, the royal law, was their view of society. For Tolstoy earthly distinctions were intolerable, and Christians should seek to engage love in all spheres of life such as politics, economics, etc. Tolstoy was an anarchist, pacifist and some believed, a communist. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, wrote in *Works of Love*, “Christianity lets all the distinctions of earthly existence stand but in the command of love, in loving one’s neighbor, this equality of lifting oneself above the distinctions of earthly existence is explicit.”  

Whereas Tolstoy sought the eradication of anything preferential in any and every domain of life, Kierkegaard made concessions that earthly distinctions are valid, except for the command to love. Further, that “equality before God is something that absolutely every man has, and has absolutely, independently of temporal distinctions.”

Many agree the way in which Kierkegaard defended love as the only route removing earthly distinctions was quite brilliant. From *Works of Love* he stated,

> No, if one stands at the top, even if one is King, he shall lift himself above the distinction of his high position, and the beggar shall lift himself above the distinction of poverty. Christianity lets the distinctions of the earthly existence stand, but in the command of love, in love one’s neighbor, this equality of lifting oneself above the distinctions of earthly existence is implicit.

Kierkegaard’s strategy was to help his reader see that even the King is not in the highest position attainable. The highest status in life is the status of loving another, and both the King and the beggar may rise up and achieve that place only through the giving of oneself to another. For to help our neighbor with indiscriminate eyes, we must first see them as God  

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59 Ibid., 139.  
60 Ibid., 89.
Kierkegaard viewed earthly distinctions not as classifications that necessarily controlled and confined people. Rather, he saw them in the light of embracing one’s place in life and rising above that in love. In his view, life was not about defining oneself merely by birth, rank, circumstances, education, etc. Life for Kierkegaard was about moving beyond these distinctions and rejecting identity formation by such shallow categories. A King should embrace his position for good, but move beyond his status to serve. A peasant should work hard with his hands embracing his lot while moving beyond his low status through works of love. In contrast to Tolstoy, life is not about subverting the classification system, but moving within it to achieve love.

Kierkegaard believed every man to be the neighbor. Through dialectic this becomes possible between the particular and the universal. From this viewpoint, to love a person is to love all persons simultaneously. The reader can see this reality from Works of Love as Kierkegaard wrote, “The next human being – he is one’s neighbor – this the next human being in the sense that the next human being is every other human being.” Therefore, the neighbor is the one close at hand and represents everyman. To love the first one you encounter is to love everyman just the same. It is here that one may closely tie Kierkegaard to the minds of Augustine and Tolstoy. Another facet of Kierkegaard’s neighborly concept can be seen directly in the word neighbor itself. The English word developed from the Old English word nigh-dweller (neahgebur). According to Kierkegaard, “if there are two

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61 Hucker. 140.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 70.
65 Hucker. 124.
people in the room, the other person is the neighbor; if there are millions, everyone of these is the neighbor.

Kierkegaard also believed that it did not really matter the relation of the neighbor as anyone qualifies for this position. Therefore, whether it was an enemy, friend, relative, or spouse, being human was the only qualification one must hold to be a neighborly. He justified this position by arguing the neighbor is classified within the spiritual realm, therefore, all earthly distinctions die between men. What mattered most to him was to remove all earthly distinctions (not abolish) because only within that posture can one act not basis of preference, but on equality. A caveat to mention however, was that one must never cease to love his beloved as a result of this removal of distinctions. For example, a wife is one’s neighbor and friend. A friend is one’s neighbor, but not necessarily one’s wife. A neighbor is not necessarily one’s wife or friend. Nonetheless, equal consideration for both stranger and wife are to be considered under the application of neighborly love, and a wife is not to feel abandoned when a religious seeker attempts to love his neighbor as himself. Finally, it is only within this holistic approach to love (loving your neighbor without discarding your wife) that one may approach God-likeness as we find Hucker’s evaluation:

> Kierkegaard’s conception of Christian love is influenced by an understanding of God’s love, which serves as a pattern and gives content to the believer’s task. Because there is no partiality in God and there are no distinctions before him, the person who loves his beloved or his friend cannot be said to resemble God. Only when (one) loves his neighbor is there a likeness present.

It is possible that Kierkegaard drew this conclusion from Jesus’ response to his earthly family waiting for him outside as he was teaching and healing. Jesus indicated the existence of a

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67 Hucker. 122.
68 Hucker. 129.
greater realm of family. In no way did Jesus ever abolish blood relatives and dismiss them as his true earthly family (as Tolstoy purported). We know this because Jesus provided for his earthly mother to be cared for even while on the cross. However, when engaging the world according to Kierkegaard, one must always do so in a manner of love without preference and in that way alone one may conform to the image of God.

In this final section regarding Kierkegaard it is expedient to talk about his foundation in applying the moral. The sections above revealed Kierkegaard’s commitment to equality and the dialectic between the universal and particular – that to love one is to love all. The foundation to his application of the royal law includes not only the duty of love but also the motives by which acts are done. Many agree when reading his works he advocated “social expressions and activities of love, not with dispositions, inclinations and feelings.” Alexander Dru, an editor of Kierkegaard’s works wrote in response to Kierkegaard’s, The Journals,

To say that love is a feeling or anything of the kind is really an unchristian conception of love. That is the aesthetic definition and therefore fits the erotic and everything of that nature. But to the Christian love is the works of love. Christ’s love was not an inner feeling, a full heart and what not, it was the work of love which was his life.

Departing from Kierkegaard’s stance that feeling, emotion, volition, etc. must be absent in a work of love one must bear in mind that action is the affect of volition. Without volition action is usually absent. That is not to say one should romanticize the action, but one need not deny inspiration altogether. Some of Kierkegaard’s most dutiful translators interpreted

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69 Matthew 12:46-48
70 John 19:26-27
71 Hucker. 116.
his work as supremely pragmatic. Simultaneously, he was deeply analytical in his application to the royal law. His approach was not sloppy and careless, but meticulous and spontaneous. Hucker notes that he gave much emphasis on how the deed was done rather than what was achieved.\(^{73}\) That is not to say he cared little for the achievement of love, but that the proper motive was a vital ingredient in application to the royal law. Indeed, any personal satisfaction from deeds of love nullified the work itself. Pertaining to encouragement given in love he wrote, “How the word is said and, above all, how it is meant … is the decisive factor in determining and recognizing love by its fruits.”\(^{74}\) The telos of love drives one much further than the simple act alone, but rather what the act may produce. Often the motive of the act factors into the end result and can affect it for good or for bad. Illustrating this through the Good Samaritan parable one may propose an alternative story: Imagine the Good Samaritan had nothing to bind up the wounds with and no money upon reaching the inn. Suppose he then tried his best to stop the bleeding and held the former “enemy” in his arms as he died. Would that then not be a miraculous deed as well?

One may argue that mercifulness is closely linked to the manner in which the deed is done and not necessarily linked to the deed itself. The case in Luke’s Gospel of the widow at the Temple giving all she had fits the criterion of the category.\(^{75}\) In *Works of Love* he asked, “Does mercifulness consist in giving hundreds of thousands to the poor? No. Mercifulness is how it is given.”\(^{76}\) Merciful acts of love are not only achieved through the motive behind the act, but are justified as authentic when a response is not demanded.\(^{77}\) This, again, is what

\(^{73}\) Hucker, 116.
\(^{75}\) Luke 21:2-3
\(^{76}\) Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 302f.
\(^{77}\) Hucker, 133.
make the Samaritan’s deed compelling as he not only carries the injured inconveniently supplying resources for his care, but feels no compulsion to be congratulated when the man awakes. Nor does he seek for the man to be there when he returns. This kind of love is not a choice, but a duty for the Christian according to Kierkegaard. Here one can pick up traces of Kant’s categorical imperative in his thinking. Hucker interprets this dutiful love as ethical, not shared within the boundaries of erotic and friendship love as there is no obligation in neighbor love for the one being acted upon to reciprocate relationally. It is entirely a one-way kind of love; the kind of love God has for his people – agape. Seeing neighborly love as divine and as a categorical imperative on one hand is a sobering reality inspiring many to part from interpreting this command as an option command. However, as we conclude this section and will see in the following pages, it also takes a judicial personality, and although Kierkegaard thinks this an essential way to view love as a response to God, it has been and often is interpreted as stifling to the natural choice of a believer to respond to God freely.

Karl Barth

In Karl Barth, the mid 19th century Swiss-German Professor and Pastor, one finds a turn of perspective entirely from the two previous thinkers. Whereas Tolstoy and Kierkegaard address the scope of the love commandment from the particular to universal, Barth reverses the direction from the universal to particular. He rejected neighbor love quite simply as the love of all men. Another striking contrast between Barth and the previous two was his lack of attention toward the sacrificial element emphasized in Tolstoy, and to a

78 Ibid., 135.
79 Ibid., 136.
80 Ibid.
81 Hucker, 157.
lesser extent, Kierkegaard.\textsuperscript{82} An additional stark contrast seen in Barth is his approach to the concept of neighbor. Unlike the previous, Barth does not believe every man is to be considered a neighbor. In his work, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, Barth wrote,

\begin{quote}
My neighbor is my fellow-man acting toward me as a benefactor. Every fellow-man can act towards me in this way … but not every fellow-man does in fact act towards me in this way. Therefore, not every man is my neighbor.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

Barth’s understanding of the neighbor in this way will be discussed further in the next section. Suffice it to say for now that Barth’s commitment to neighborly love was reactive (much like the Samaritan parable) rather than proactive. Before handling Barth independently, a final contrast is noted from Hucker’s work, stating, “Tolstoy understood the enemy not as a personal foe, but as a national or public enemy. Barth construes the term in relation to particular historical communities which are defined theologically.”\textsuperscript{84} For Barth, both the Good Samaritan parable and the Scriptures were not addressed for the purpose of bringing them into the political arena. They were instructions for personal application, not national ideology.

Barth placed a great deal of emphasis on the responsibility of love given close proximity. Regarding the lawyer’s question to Jesus, \textit{Who is my neighbor?}, Hucker states, “the command of God was addressed to this man, in this place, at this time and not to man as such. Thus it was related to specific situations and demanded concrete responses.”\textsuperscript{85} He believed man had a heightened commitment to those around him and that neighborly love was subjective in nature. Barth rejected Tolstoy and Kierkegaard’s hypothesis that to love

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 164.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}. I, 2. Translated by G.T. Thompson and Harold Knight, (Edinburgh, 1956), 420.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Hucker, 177.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 158.
\end{itemize}
the next neighbor one encounters is to love every neighbor the same. In this framework one might say Barth’s view was *terminus a quo* rather than *terminus ad quem*. Hucker also reports, “Love takes place in the proximity of a historical relationship in which the one who loves and the one who is loved both stand.”

This is a rejection of Tolstoy and Kierkegaard’s theory that to love one is to love all – the danger in the formers’ application is the opportunity for too much self-satisfaction. An increase of self-satisfaction often breeds laziness. For if one believes he has loved the whole world today for feeding the homeless man before his eyes, then what motivation does he have to persist in love until tomorrow? Barth’s departure gives the follower of the royal law a heightened ethic to do more than feed a man and feel as if he has fed everyman. By contrast, Barth’s way of love demands continuous innovation, commitment, and devotion. He insisted one start with the man closest, but merely as a starting point rather than as a conclusion.

One of Barth’s greatest distinctions from his contemporaries was his perspective of this commandment to whole of man. Tolstoy and Kierkegaard can be interpreted as dualist in their approach. They both made sharp distinctions between the animal personality (Kierkegaard – aesthetic) and the consciousness that man’s real life could be discovered (Kierkegaard – religious). In this, they often downplayed the significance of human need in light of the eternal. Dualism often leads man into settling for relief in the afterlife rather than pursuing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth today. The following text, lifted from Kierkegaard’s, *Works of Love*, reveals his devotion to this particular dualism: “‘Get us money, get us hospitals, these are the most important!’ ‘No, says the eternal; the most

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86 Ibid., 172.
87 Matthew 6:10
important is mercifulness.’ That a man dies is, eternally understood, no misfortune, but that mercifulness has not been practiced is.”

In contrast to Kierkegaard, Barth concerned himself greatly not only with man’s unity but his wholeness. Barth believed the creation of a hospital was God revealing his eternal mercy through people. Further, in regard to Barth’s rejection of the dualistic perspective, Hucker adds,

This denial led Barth to affirm more readily than Tolstoy or Kierkegaard the importance of the body, man’s social relationships and his existence in history. Because the command was addressed to the whole man, his life in its totality was the subject of divine sanctification. It is the emphasis on the unity and wholeness that makes Barth’s approach such an attractive alternative.

Barth’s influence is widely popular among the 21st century, emerging Western Church. Social justice, the belief that justice should be achieved in every aspect of society, is becoming the way, truth and life for many God-followers today as will be detailed further in the section to come.

Another unique component to Barth’s work was his view on the duty of love, or lack thereof duty. Kierkegaard seemed to promote the royal law as a duty, whereas Barth sought to avoid any temptation toward God’s commands yielding legalism. In Church Dogmatics, he wrote,

Yet it is more important to assert positively that when the love of God establishes fellowship between God and man it makes man free to imitate His divine action in the sphere and within the limits of human action, and thus to love in human

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90 Hucker, 159.
91 This is evidenced through Emergent Church voices such as Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Dan Kimball, etc.
fashion as God does in divine. The one who is loved by God acquires and has this freedom. It is not that he should love— but that he may and will.  

No one who takes the Scriptures seriously can deny the obligation to love one’s neighbor. However, Barth feared that obligation would confine man to view God as a dictator rather than the one who placed the capacity to desire love out of one’s own volition. Barth advocated our starting place as motivation to be in view of God freely reconciling His people to Himself, and the reconciled would then be free to become more like him. A reconciled follower was then to love primarily out of a freedom to imitate God and devotion to His creation. Therefore, the task to love others is not undertaken simply as a response to the commandment, but rather as first a passion to imitate the God of love. To this end Barth said, “In general terms Christian love is the active human recognition … of the love of God. It recognizes it by following it, imitating it, modeling itself upon it” Further, “We are not to apply the law in such a way that stifles the spirit, but rather in order that we may seek from it the Spirit who is the freely commanding Spirit of the Lord.” According to Barth, there are ways of following the law that confines man rather than frees him. It was this fear that led Barth to rearrange his theology in such a way that protected man from legalism when approaching God’s commandments. Of all things, neighborly love is to be a divine response to the God who grants grace and the Spirit to conform man into His image. This love is not birthed from the disposition of obligation, but of inspiration.

Barth’s contribution to the royal law is essential as one seeks to engage this commandment today. His works inspires readers to begin from a proper framework when

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92 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. IV, 2, Translated by G.W. Bromley, Edinburgh, 1958, 782.
loving our neighbors. As previously stated, his contribution to the conversation about love regarding proximity, holism and freedom is necessary as the church moves forward in the 21st century, Western context.

Francis Schaefer

The final contributor briefly noted is Francis Schaefer, the American Evangelical Christian theologian, philosopher and Presbyterian pastor. Creating the L’Abri Fellowship in Switzerland evidenced Schaefer’s devotion to Christianity. It was through L’Abri that he hoped to instill the value of living in community with hopes of impacting society. Schaefer provides a fantastic understanding of the application of the royal law in his short work, The Mark of a Christian.

Schaefer placed great emphasis on the mark of love being the definitive distinctive of the church. He wrote, “Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts.” To Schaefer, the primacy of love was not revealed through the various symbols listed above. Rather, it was to be evidenced by one’s life of service, sacrifice, and compassion. As an apologist, Schaefer voiced a discontent with the status of the church in the world, and believed it was the direct result of her lack of love. He emphasizes the following texts:

- John 13:33-35 – By this (love) all men will know you are my disciples
- Galatians 6:10 - …do good to all men, especially (the church)
- James 2:1 – My brothers, show no partiality
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – And the Lord make you increase … in love

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97 Ibid., 15.
1 John 3:11 - … the message … heard from the beginning, that we should love

Emphasizing these texts, Schaefer criticized many Western Christians for de-emphasizing them. This, he argued, was evident from the lack of Christian love. Further, he suggested that “Christians” are not really Christians in most instances. He adamantly stated,

> From the scriptural viewpoint, not all who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that is especially true in our generation. The meaning of the word Christian has been reduced to practically nothing. Surely, there is no word that has been so devalued unless it is the word of God itself. Central to semantics is the idea that a word as a symbol has no meaning until content is put into it. This is quite correct. Because the word Christian as a symbol has been made to mean so little, it has come to mean everything and nothing.

Therefore, the distinctive a Christian is supposed to be known for most (love) has been lost in a sea of multiple meanings that may or may not have anything to do with the way Jesus prescribed his followers to live. For anyone who takes the teachings of Jesus seriously, they must admit, this is a significant problem. It may perhaps explain why disbelief in West appears to a growing trend.

The last thing distinguished from Schaefer is his inclusion of all men as neighbors. He wrote the following from *The Mark of a Christian*,

> We are to love our fellowmen, to love all men, in fact, as neighbors… All men bear the image of God. They have value, not because they are redeemed, but because they are God's creation in God's image. Modern man, who has rejected this, has no clue as to who he is, and because of this he can find no real value for himself or for other men. Hence, he downgrades the value of other men and produces the horrible thing we face.  

Schaefer agrees with Jesus and James that the neighbor bears no distinction, for it is every man. What therefore qualifies a man as a neighbor is simply that he is a man. Schaefer made his point more specific when adding, “Very often the true Bible-believing Christian, in

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98 Ibid., 8.
99 Ibid., 9.
his emphasis on two humanities — one lost, one saved — one still standing in rebellion against God, the other having returned to God through Christ — has given a picture of exclusiveness which is ugly.”\textsuperscript{100} Not to say that there is something inherently wrong with categorical thinking altogether, but when it is funneled through the lens of love, everyone qualifies and none are too unlovable because God loves all. Basing ones love for another based on whether or not one professes to be a Christian is what Schaefer deemed “ugly.” This notion agrees with the instruction given by James’ epistle in chapter 2, verse 1. To love the things that God loves, which are all men, is to become like God.

The value of Schaefer to this conversation is the primacy of love. He interprets the repetition of the command to love one another in John’s Gospel chapter 13 and then again in John’s first letter chapter 3 to mean John is also contending for the primacy of love. He believed it was as if John was saying, “Don’t forget this. Don’t forget this.”\textsuperscript{101} Schaefer takes the call of love for the believer much more seriously than many theologians, philosophers, and apologists today. This work agrees that since humanity is prone to emphasize something, love is a proper and necessary emphasis. This work will now turn its attention toward that direction, as claims to the current context are ready to be made.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 10-11.
CHAPTER IV
UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE ROYAL LAW MEANS

Shifts

Libraries have been filled regarding the certainty of change within the economic, political and technological arenas. Many scholars have devoted their careers to documenting and understanding global shifts, which affect the way humanity lives. This work does not pretend to scratch the surface of the aforementioned arenas. However, it is intent on taking the complexity of changes that have evolved over time and offer a few simplified conclusions as to how they have impacted the application of the royal law in the 21st century. Therefore, this chapter will be brief, while its effects have been and are significantly felt.

Economics

Many from the twentieth century (and some centuries before) boasted of opportunities to align global economies. Never before has the world been as intricately connected through the force of trade, commerce and currency as it presently is. Mau’s work, *Massive Change*, reports, “The initiative that emerges in the open market – the notion of the intermodal, the idea of seamlessly integrating one system with another – became the central ambition of the design in the last half of the twentieth century.”¹ There have been rumors of a global currency for decades as some desire economics of the world to go beyond

interconnectivity into synchronization of one global standard. Though the world still operates with various currencies, suffice it to say the world’s economies are intertwined.\(^2\)

Although this fact has tremendous benefits in the expansion of the selection of goods and competitive capitalism, it is obvious that with great opportunities come great costs as well. For example, trading with China does create economies in previously impoverished areas of the Asian region, but capitalistic nations like America also create severe negative environmental and social impact on those regions. Without uniform labor laws across the globe, what kinds of conditions are factory workers laboring in? With economies tightly intertwined and boarder being economically erased, does the royal law now extend to these regions where we previously had little connection and commonality? As one can clearly see, every opportunity also bears a cost.

The economic landscape has been expanded under the capitalist regime as the Western nations, particularly the United States, imports a majority of its goods from other countries. American economies depend on others, often creating vile environments for workers from China, Thailand, etc. who do not work under labor laws that are as strictly enforced as those in the US.\(^3\) This is an example of how United States citizens may be violating the royal law from a national, economic perspective simply by personal consumer choices. The political section of this chapter will delve a bit deeper into the national viewpoint, but recall that this work is primarily an individual perspective of the application


\(^3\) Ibid.
of the royal law and not a national perspective. Through an individual economic perspective it appears axiomatic that purchasing some goods may lead to the exploitation of others across the globe while leaving environmental impact for generations to come. This reality requires a consumer to search how his simple choices can affect people unseen if he is to uphold the royal law. The application of the royal law compels a serious observer of the command. In contrast to the Good Samaritan, sometimes the people one is called to love are not directly before one’s line of sight.

Despite the simplicity and brevity of this section, the suggestion is that the royal law is bigger than face-to-face contact. This is due in part to the emergence of activities such as global economic inter-connectivity. The global impact of trade and commerce, through the exchange of goods and services, does not merely impact both parties positively, but negative impact is felt as well. It is this negative impact that the observer of the command must discern whether it is loving or not to proceed in everyday consumptive choices because of the negative impact today’s decisions may have on the present and future social and environmental landscapes.

Politics

Much like the previous section, the following regarding political change will be brief. However, the impact is significant. The political conversation often takes the application of the royal law off of the individual and places it onto the government. Although this work is primarily directed to individuals within the Western context, some national insights should be mentioned. History has seen its share of national alliances, but none previously so dynamic as the creation of the United Nations. Although many believe this league to be
unproductive due to its bureaucracy, much has been established inter-governmentally through this alliance. The United Nations (referred to as “UN” from this point on) was created in large part as a reaction to its predecessor, the League of Nations. It hoped to prevent the Second World War. Broadly put, The UN’s aim was/is to create and preserve international peace through collective security.4 Much can be said about historical political alliances, but suffice it to say that the UN serves as a typology for a flattened political landscape, which have created opportunities for the royal law to reach further and for peace to extend through governmental collaboration.

In addition to the formation of such alliances as the UN, it is appears self-evident that the spread of political democracy is a global value for leading nations such as the United States and Great Britain. The powers of a few governments claim to be seeking positive impact all for what they believe to be the greater good for the world. In times past, history conveys the message that nations in power were seldom satisfied with political ideologies being implemented within their current nation. Rather, many of these power nations desired global conquest under their own name and control. Examples of this strategy include the majority of mega-empires such as the Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, and most recently, Nazi Germany. By contrast to many mega-empires today, the previous examples reveal the expansion of power of authority rather than a releasing of it. Governments today are operating in the release and empowerment of authority rather than the control of it, thus tying the diverse political landscape much more tightly. Within that paradigm one question whether or not political alliances bind one people group to another.

For example, does the catastrophe in the Darfur region illicit global responsibility, or is that an exclusive Sudanese issue? Should the United States have sent troops to fight Nazi Germany before they were a threat to national security or only as they began to pose a threat to US soil and American interests? What does the Torah have to say regarding Israel’s involvement, and are its messages interpreted as conflicting? Finally, should individuals within countries define their identities first and foremost locally, nationally, or globally? Moreover, for those who claim to follow the will of God, should they not first and foremost define their identities as members of God’s Kingdom rather than by the state?

The questions above are all relevant to the current time period. Understanding the royal law within the complexity of the global landscape is difficult. I am not advocating that the application of this law has been simplistic in the past, but do propose that it has certainly never been more complex as it is today. Thus, the discernment an individual must have within one’s context is paramount if he/she is to follow the royal law as an utmost priority.

Technology

In the political section it was concluded that the application of the royal law has never been simplistic, but neither has it ever been as complex. This section demonstrates a different reality. I am persuaded that technology is at a precipice of exponential advancement to the extent that human history has never before experienced. Technology has always existed in varying degrees, but never in a way that has impacted more people simultaneously as it does in the 21st century. For example, methods of transportation have always existed and been improved upon, but have advanced today to the degree that permits humanity to span the globe in the course of one day. Although the horse, the car, the boat
and our shoes gives us traction to move from point “a” to point “b”, the airplane provides a point “c” that would have been unimaginable in days past. Not only does this impact the technological sector, but advances others as well, such as economies, since goods can be ordered and received in the course of several hours. One can only imagine the impact this has had on the selling of perishable goods worldwide.

Mesthene, author of *Technological Change* states, “New technologies have been bringing about social change since the beginning of time.”\(^5\) Some other recent examples of this reality can be seen in the eighteenth-century’s Industrial Revolution such as the invention of the wheel, development of printing methods, and improvements that emerged in agriculture and firearms.\(^6\) However, the question at hand is not whether technology is advancing, but rather, do these advancements impact the most primal of commands – “to love one’s neighbor as oneself”?

Technology, particularly the rise of the Internet, has connected the world in ways unimaginable. In the mid-90’s there were fewer than 20 million Internet users according to Mau’s research.\(^7\) Mau then records that over 400 million users were “surfing the web” by the conclusion of the year 2000. It was estimated before the end of the year 2000 that by 2005, more than one billion people would have access to the Internet.\(^8\)

Just as the radio and television were advancements in the mid-twentieth century, so the Internet is the portal connecting people visibly everyday. Does awareness of another’s need through technological advancements such as the Internet, and also advanced aero

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Mau, 222.

\(^8\) Ibid., 222.
technologies such as the airplane increase the social responsibility to love a neighbor who is being physical proximity?

I am persuaded that the awareness of global opportunities to love not only expand humanities paradigm of who is one’s neighbor, but also increases the social responsibility to act in love according to how one would like to be treated. Furthermore, aero advancements permit humanity to access nearly any location on the globe, thus increasing one’s responsibility to love a neighbor globally. This persuasion does not stem from intuition alone, but the Scriptures as well. Scripturally, it can be defended from two points of view. First, taking the Good Samaritan account, one finds all three characters of the parable undergo heightened awareness. Each of the three characters was caught by surprise by the plight of the wounded man and each had to respond spontaneously. From the outcome one may deduce that Jesus was teaching that knowledge of the wounded creates responsibility for those aware.

Second, looking back to an earlier account from John’s Gospel, chapter 4, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman while en route from Judea to Galilee. The text reads as follows:

9The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

From this text one may clearly conclude that Jesus’ priority in fulfilling the royal law had nothing to do with social distinctions, or any other distinctions for that matter (e.g. religious, political, gender). Jesus demonstrated to his disciples, and to all future followers, that love pays no attention to preference. James makes this clear in his Epistle in the first verse of his second chapter, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show
favoritism.” This does not necessarily mean one’s acquaintance is equal in priority to one’s kin, but simply that no one is to be overlooked in the endeavor of neighborly love. The graph below will explore this reality further. With the aforementioned truths in mind regarding loving one’s neighbor this work may now transition into revealing a new type of devotion to the royal law.

Economically, the global environment of trade heightens one’s responsibility to care for those from whom we derive some kind of benefit. Politically, the unification of national alliances connect us more deeply with the triumphs and struggles of various countries, thus enlarging our responsibility to play a role in global development of those oppressed and under-resourced. Technologically, increased access to global needs raises awareness, and with a greater sense of awareness comes a greater responsibility as was evidenced in the Good Samaritan parable and Jesus encounter with the Samaritan women. Though oversimplified, these three arenas provide a follower of the royal law with more traction by which one can act practically in daily life. These shifts lead into a facet of the royal law that will propel the reader forward into another innovation of applying the royal law to one’s life.

**Proactive Love vs. Reactive Love**

Thus far the royal law has been bent in several directions, revealing both its versatility and malleability. In Leviticus one may argue it not only applies to how Israelites must love other fellow kinsmen, but foreigners as well. In Jesus’ teachings it extends to one’s enemies. To Tolstoy, it bends politically in the direction of non-violence. It also applies, in that it stretches, in regard to economic, political, and technological evolution.

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9 See Galatians 6:1, 1 Timothy 5:8 for examples of prioritizing love.
These examples all share in common a reactive element. The Israelites should love the foreigner reactively when he sojourns with them. In Jesus’ teaching, the Samaritan loved because he reacted to the wounded man on the road. Tolstoy’s non-violent love is founded in reaction to oppressive systems of government. Economic and technological innovations help cultures raise awareness so situations may be met with the response of love. To provide an example for the latter, much of the awareness globally of recent events in the Darfur region does not come as a result of proactive search, but by “surfing” the World Wide Web and stumbling upon it. All of these examples demonstrate the profundity of reactive love. However, is reactive love a complete (τελεία) fulfillment of the command of God?

Taking the previous question seriously, we must ask whether God only loves reactively? At a first glance, perhaps one might be inclined to answer “yes.” After all, the most highly regarded Jewish festival (Passover) is celebrated to remember the reactive love of God rescuing His people from the oppressive Egyptians. The prophet’s messages of old came as a reaction to God’s wrath in order to lead them to repentance. Jesus was crucified in reaction to the sins of people. Much of the contents of Scripture account for the reactive love of God where his mercy is bountifully revealed. But is reactionary love God’s exclusive way of love? This is a crucial question to answer because to worship God is to seek His likeness, His image, and to do imitate Him as He is. But before one concludes that fulfillment of the royal law lies primarily, perhaps exclusively, in responding to a neighbor reactively, one must consider the first passage of the Scripture. That God created is the first act of love revealed in Scripture. His creation is His first loving act toward the world.

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10 See Romans 11
11 Leviticus 19:2
12 Genesis 1:1
God did not need to create for Himself, for He has always been. God created not only for the glorification of Himself, but with a passion to love what He had created, especially those who bear His image. Here we may conclude that God demonstrates a proactive love as well. Therefore, to imitate God fully in love is to not merely love reactively to one’s need, but proactively as well.

To illustrate the proactive love of God from the New Testament, consider Jesus’ teaching recorded by Mark in chapter 6 vs. 7, “And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.” The disciples found themselves in situations unlike the Samaritan from the parable. Jesus does not tell us the reason the Good Samaritan character was on journey prior to encountering the wounded man. The reader has no idea whether the Samaritan was on business, leisure, or perhaps was looking for opportunities to love. It is clear that the Samaritan was on a journey of some sort. The extent of the journey is unknown. More insight is provided for our conjecture toward the end of the parable as the Samaritan informs the innkeeper that he will repay whatever costs are incurred on his return trip. It is evident the Samaritan seems to be on his way to somewhere rather than his way back. To conclude, the Samaritan was on the forefront of a task that had a future goal in mind. Therefore, encountering the wounded man was not part of his itinerary as he did not remain with him. I am persuaded the Samaritan was not embarking on similar tasks that the disciples were entering into in Mark 6. For, Jesus had sent out the disciples on a journey of proactive love to cast out demons and anoint with oil when the situation presented itself.

13 John 3:16
The function of proactive love is growing increasingly difficult for one to achieve. Western culture particularly is a privatized culture, embedded as seen in some areas in the form of neighborhood security gates, personal automobiles, private houses, etc. However, dreaming of how Genesis 1 and Mark 6 can be lived out in the 21st century context is most likely closer than one might suspect. Consider the following article:

The identity of the neighbor is not only interesting ethically it is also logically prior to any proposed normative actions toward the neighbor. How can we assess the adequacy of actions toward the neighbor apart from some knowledge of the identity of the neighbor, the neighbor’s needs, her conditions, or his overall life circumstances? On what basis can we gauge the moral worth of such actions, unless we have a clear and compelling understanding of the one toward whom the actions are taken? Until we attend carefully to the identity of the neighbor, questions about what we should do to and for the neighbor are apt to end either in vacuous abstractions or inconsequential reflections.  

For the follower of Jesus waiting for his Good Samaritan scenario to come to him, he may have to wait disappointingly long. Jesus intended His followers to pursue love in all the margins of life. And by that pursuit it is not being advocated that one should quit all obligations, such as his/her job, journey off without any food, clothes, and money (though for some that may be a personal calling from God). Rather, whatever environment one finds him/herself, the royal law must be prepared to be at work at all times in all situations. This law must be given allegiance, ready to both respond to issues of need and generate awareness that certain needs exist in every context one encounters. Only through proactive movement can need awareness be most realized.

Creating awareness, referred to here as “proactive love,” concerns this work in regards to the church in the world. The Western church, generally speaking, is primarily reactive. Better put, it moves predominately in a corporate manner leaving little ingenuity

14 Roberts, 141.
for individual initiation. This work is suggesting that corporate missional endeavors are good and appropriate. However, if the corporate aspect is the only aspect a follower of the royal law is adhering to, it is probably that that individual is missing ample opportunities to exercise neighborly love. As an example, many churches in the West are now engaging corporate “mission trips” to various global locations where some sort of evangelical (and perhaps social) activity is the goal. Often these trips are targeted toward people groups who are often deemed “unreached” or perhaps already subscribe to religions other than Christianity.

The corporate missional endeavor often runs as follows: A church body, often initiated by church staff, discovers a need (e.g. an unbelieving people group, a territory in famine, etc.) and responds by mobilizing dozens, sometimes more to travel and provide benefit. These activities are often rooted in compassion and can be excellent examples of reactive love. A need is identified and relief is then offered. However, reactive love is often resigned to corporate invitation and often extends beyond one’s local context. When an individual views this kind of reactive love exclusively as their personal fulfillment of the royal law it can creates a dualism – in that being mission-oriented is an event that occurs for a specified time period each year, within the context of a corporate community, outside of one’s the immediate local context. One can only speculate what these activities implicitly communicate to one’s unfamiliar local neighbor, who perhaps is contemplating suicide due to unemployment in an economic recession? How is it that American Christians can believe they are fulfilling the royal law, if the names of their surrounding neighbors are unknown? I am convinced that the majority of Western Christians do not know the names of even half of
the people who live on their street, complex or village. Only by proactively creating opportunities for awareness of another can love then by applied reactively to each scenario.

The content of this work is not directed toward the abolishment of global mission. Nor is it designed to attack the church mission model. Inversely, it affirms this kind of reactive love because it promotes awareness among parishioners of the global landscape, and mobilizes them to take action in the world God has created and invited His church to participate in. What the content of this work, particularly this section, does intend to accomplish is to reveal simple ways for the church to be the church comprehensively. One would be wise to recall that the term church is both corporate, referring to the church body, and also distinguishes individual members. This work is not satisfied to resign mission work to a week of the year when a member may embark overseas to fulfill neighborly love for the year. Nor is it content to wait until a need finds its way to the church for the church to act.

In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth made the following assertion,

> My neighbor is my fellow-man acting toward me as a benefactor. Every fellow-man can act towards me in this way … but not every fellow-man does in fact act towards me in this way. Therefore, not every man is my neighbor. \(^{15}\)

Barth’s assertion stands in opposition to the task at hand. For Barth, neighborly love is entirely reactive. Not every man is a neighbor to him because not every man has engaged Barth. One might wonder what Barth would do with Jesus sending out the 12 to heal. Moreover, the very nature of apostleship (Gr. απόστολος) is one who is sent, not to receive. One must also never forget a central text to Christianity where Jesus commissioned His followers to “go into all the world.” \(^{16}\) This does not create the image of a passive Christian

\(^{15}\) Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I 2, 420.

\(^{16}\) Matthew 28:19
who awaits an opportunity to approach him. Rather, it reveals an active believer, both personally and corporately, who not only responds to the world’s need, but also seeks to discover need to meet it with God’s power.

In chapter 3 under the proximity section, a graph was given to illustrate a probable graph to illustrate the priority of many Jewish followers. The followers would have held the previous graph in hopes of fulfilling the law God gave through Moses to love one’s neighbor as himself. In order to activate the church further, the following graph may be used as a benchmark to measure how one is to take up the call of fulfilling the royal law –

1. Self
2. Immediate Relatives
3. Kinsmen
4. Church
5. Associates
6. Local Context
7. Global Context
The concentric circles illustrate priority and serve as a Scriptural benchmark for those desiring to take the royal law seriously. The graph above is merely a suggestion as it extends in priority to the outer circles. However, the first four circles may be defended scripturally.

Beginning with “circle 1,” one discovers scripturally that loving oneself is both axiomatic and presupposed.\textsuperscript{17} When the command is issued to engage in neighborly love, it assumes one understands how to love the self. Beyond the command alone, one can find Scriptural basis in Paul’s instruction to care for one’s own body (the whole, not just the flesh), referred to as the Temple.\textsuperscript{18} Unlike Kierkegaard’s viewpoint of self-denial to the point of asceticism, self-love is rooted in the Scriptures but is never intended to be the exclusive focus of anyone’s life.\textsuperscript{19} Circle 2 and 3 in the graph above also agrees with the previous graph in chapter II as the circles suggests immediate relatives are to be loved. This communicates the fallacy for one to journey the world in the name of love when life is not ordered properly at home with those whom one knows best. The scriptural basis for this is discovered in 1 Timothy 5:8 as Paul suggested that one who does not provide for a relative (circle 3), particularly household members (circle 2) has denied faith. To disregard familial love is serious crime in Paul’s theology, and is a breach from Moses’ and Jesus’ instructions to honor one’s father and mother.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, immediate relatives and kinsmen are second and third in the command respectively. Again, similar to the previous chart, it is confirmed that converts should take precedence when one seeks to obey the royal law as evidenced in the previous graph.\textsuperscript{21} One of the most attractive evangelical elements of the New Testament

\textsuperscript{17} Also recall the introduction, which states that love for God is presupposed.
\textsuperscript{18} See 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19.
\textsuperscript{19} Hucker. 126.
\textsuperscript{20} Exodus 12:20, Deuteronomy 5:16, Matthew 15:4.
\textsuperscript{21} Leviticus 19:34, Galatians 6:10.
church was the church’s commitment to love one another. Such elements are scattered all over the book of Acts. Providing for each other’s needs was not a government-sanctioned socialism. Rather, it was founded on the pursuit of loving the church as one loves oneself. This kind of love is not found in the world, but is birthed by inward disposition to care for the bride of Christ.22

Circle five of the graph above is a departure from the previous graph in chapter II as it illustrates the priority of loving associates. Associates, for the purposes of this work, may be defined as those one shares space with consistently. This may mean a co-worker, boss, schoolmate, etc. It is imperative that one carries a vision and creates relational opportunities for associates who are consistently within one’s content. Only in that pursuit will a neighbor’s need be properly identified and met. Embracing a missional disposition in all areas of life seems to be a central tenet to becoming more like Jesus.

Sixth, it is being suggested that the church, both personally and corporately, become involved with those living in close proximity. It is astounding in suburban America how few neighbors act neighborly toward each other. Most households seem to function as private residences that rarely intermingle with fellow neighbors. This reality must change, and it must begin with creativity from those who distinguish themselves as the church. Throwing housewarmings, neighborhood barbecues, parties, involvement with a local school, and volunteering at local functions are easy ways to begin relating to people in any given context. Moreover, one should not wait until an opportunity arises through a church bulletin, but should take initiative as a follower of God to create opportunities to relate, thus becoming

22 Roberts, 155.
like God in any and every context. A proactive believer who is passionate about God's Kingdom seeks to imitate the God of creation and the Messiah who sent the 12 Apostles.

Seventh, as suggested before, global issues are paramount concerns and must be attended to. Millions are starving worldwide, diseases are spreading, and oppression is rampant. Responding to these epidemics is a primary call of the church, especially with the advancements in economics, politics and technology. However, it must never eclipse the people we walk by everyday. People matter, both at home and abroad. Although this concentric circle graph has limitations to be sure, it may provide a needed benchmark for Christians who have lost their way in the sea of self-preservation and apathy. In the conclusion of this work, the graph above will be further detailed.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Much has been said about the commandment that stretches beyond the span of the globe. The aim of this final section is to bring all the contents of this work together.

Beginning with James’ instruction to the Jewish-Christians scattered in the Diaspora to love each other as they love themselves, it became evident that James did not write his Epistle in a vacuum, but was dependent on his predecessors, namely, Jesus’ and Moses’ teachings. One of the greatest motivations to follow this royal command is that when followed, one imitates the Royal One who commanded love in the first place. Better put, it is termed the “royal law” because it is the way of the true Royal King. To perform this law fully is not only beneficial in that it is what the King has commanded, but supremely beneficial because of its invitation into the imitation of him. To fulfill this law is to become like the King Himself.

Departing from Kierkegaard and Tolstoy, this work suggests a higher motivation than obedience from the position of duty. Rather, it foremost suggests adherence for the purpose of God-likeness. Recent Contributors Tolstoy, Kierkegaard, and Barth, have most certainly offered perspectives to engage new ways of seeing this command as well as innovative ways to apply it. Finally, it was critical to approach this command not merely for what it meant, but to engage what it now means. As culture shifts, so do humanity’s opportunities to express love uniquely within culture. To follow James’ admonition, the 21st century Western Christian must be creative in exploring how love should be applied in an ever-increasing
privatized culture where individualism reigns supreme. A second graph of concentric circles was also suggested as a benchmark to aid Christians in seeing the responsibility of love toward all types of neighbors, beginning with self.

A few things to mention in this section will be helpful in conclusion. Moving beyond the individual understanding of neighborly love to the collective, how does an entire church embody this passage in James as a whole? This is a question worth asking to which the contemporary church would be wise to heed. As individuals should take their task seriously to move out in concentric circles in this world, so too should the church. The church should do this simply because in the Western context, the church has a visible presence (e.g. the building) in the heart of many cities, towns, and communities. The church in the West, by-and-large, is not forced into hiding and should leverage that reality for all it is worth. For the community church that sits on “Main Street”, it is imperative that the surrounding neighborhood feel the tangible presence of that church. All too often churches treat their buildings as just that – buildings. These buildings become exclusively locations for people to drive to from nearby and adjacent cities once a week to worship God. To those who do not subscribe to God and His church in that surrounding context, the building personifies their conclusions regarding God and His people. When the people within that building do little to connect with the local context, it implicitly sends a message that the church is not a living organism providing a microcosm of the people of God. Rather, they are depicted as an exclusive club that sings songs to God, partake in the Eucharist and perhaps, have a good children’s program on Sundays. Those neighbors may conclude then that to follow God means to attend church meetings once a week and engage the activities listed above. They may never experience the power of God, the compassion of God, and the love of God if His
followers resign to allow the buildings to be simply a that for weekly use. Every church must first question why it worships in a particular context and how they are to be on a love mission within that context first and foremost. It is no coincidence that Jesus started with Jerusalem when instructing his apostle’s to go into all the earth. Nor does Jesus mean to disregard Jerusalem once Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth are reached.¹

**Light and Heavy**

A problem one may encounter when analyzing the Good Samaritan parable as the basis for love is that this parable reveals a specific scenario. Therefore, some may argue it only speaks to that one type of scenario. Jewish literature employs many devices. The parable of the Good Samaritan, I am suggesting, employs a device known as a “kal v’chomer.” This device was employed by Rabbis at this time and signified “light and heavy.” It corresponds to what philosophers have called *a fortiori* reasoning: If “A” is true, “B” must be true.² For example, if an athlete can dunk a basketball on a 10-foot goal, he surely can dunk a basketball on a 9-foot goal. According to Stern, this literary device is used twenty-one times in the New Testament. It is also used in various parts of the Gospels, particularly in what is known as the *Sermon on the Mount*.³

The Good Samaritan parable is one of extreme circumstances. The *kal v’chomer* is a way of Jesus telling a dramatic story that takes his listener to the peak of a mountain, so to speak, which must certainly include all the land below. To the inquisitor and the listeners of this parable, it was an invitation to reconsider the borders many had created to define who

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¹ Acts 1:8
² Stern, 32.
³ Ibid.
was and who was not within the neighborly scope. For if the lawyer and his (primarily) Jewish constituents were to love even a lowly Samaritan who was a bitter enemy turned hero in this parable, then surely they were to love everyone as well who fell somewhere in between. Succinctly put, if one asserts from Jesus’ teaching he is to love the enemy as himself, then surely it would also be true that he is to love acquaintances, intimates, and everyone between himself and his enemy. The issue with this parable then is what it creates in 21st century Western reader. When this parable is taught in churches in the West, the application is often to love an enemy (whoever that may be) and to offer aid if one ever encounters another in need (reactionary love). What is missing is all that lies in between.

Christians leave services, armed for emergency action alone while foregoing opportunities to love ordinary people in the ordinary situations of life. Jesus did not tell parable direct love to one’s enemies or emergency situations alone. Rather, it was designed to reveal that we are, in fact, to love our enemies and much more. Followers of God are even to love the people encountered passively every day. Jesus’ parable reveals a wide range of love that spans the globe, not merely the extremes.

One of the mysteries of the Good Samaritan text lies in the lawyer’s question, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Although this question begs exegetical attention, it will be given only a quick view to magnify a point. It seems, at a glance, contradictory that the lawyer’s first question to Jesus pertained to self-interest while the last question (“Who is my neighbor?”) pertained to external interest. He first approached Jesus regarding eternal life for his own benefit. He concluded by asking Jesus to define his neighbor so that he may know him and perhaps love him, thus fulfilling the commandments.

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5 Luke 10:25
It seems ironic that the way of attaining eternal life for this individual (and perhaps all) involves the external love of others. The question that begs attention is whether or not it is possible to love others if we have self-interest as our primary motivation (e.g. eternal life). Is it possible to truly love others if we are thinking of ourselves as the reason for doing so? Furthermore, is it wrong to love others with self-interested motivations? To answer this question the cross provides revelation. It is possible that the cross was historically the greatest event of self-interest the world ever witnessed. Self-interest typically carries a negative connotation, but one should suspend judgment for the time being. Jesus went to the cross to save souls to be sure. However, his main priority was to please the Father (and in the end, himself given Trinitarian theology) as evidenced in the prayer of Jesus in Garden of Gethsemane. What is being suggested is that loving one’s neighbor is a selfless act in many respects, but need not be wholly selfless in order to qualify as true love. In this case the lawyer was instructed to love his enemy, for that was what is required for eternal life.

The Goal

As previously stated in chapter 2, James’ instruction to the believers begins with a first condition clause by use of the word, ei, suggesting that what followed was an inevitable possibility. The first class conditional clause raises the level of importance this law has on anyone desiring to sincerely follow God. Hucker grasped this notion as he wrote, “the one who loved shall give himself up entirely and devote his existence to the love that is within his reach and which he sees before him.” Not only is this a statement affirming love within a

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6 Mark 14:36
7 Brooks, James A. and Carlton Winbery, 182.
8 Hucker, 233.
local proximity, but also the urgency of the command. One would be wise to heed this command with utmost attention. If the goal of the command is to love your neighbor as you love yourself, the shift one must make is the realization that to love your neighbor is to love yourself. For loving your neighbor is loving yourself because applying the royal law imitates the Royal God, and God-likeness is the goal of life.

In conclusion, recall Matthew 28:19 where it is recorded that Jesus commanded his disciples to make more disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus also called his apostles to fulfill this task first in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and finally to ends of the earth. By no stretch of imagination would anyone suspect Jesus was advocating forgetting Jerusalem upon expansion into Judea, or forgetting Judea upon expansion into Samaria, and so forth. Most would support the position of retaining Jerusalem as God’s Kingdom as one expands into Judea and so forth. Using this passage, we may apply it to the graph above. In actually fulfilling the royal law, one should seek to love oneself as he moves toward loving his immediate relatives, and to continue loving immediate relatives as one expands to love kin, the church, etc. One’s goal of love therefore, should seek to expand one’s loving capacity while retaining love with each circle within. To love well is to expand to larger circles while loving those within. This is the call of the King. This is the goal of life. This is the fulfillment of the royal law.

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9 Acts 1:8
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