

# *“A Neighbourly Command”*

*Leviticus 19:18 & Romans 13:8-10*

Being a  
**GOOD**  
**NEIGHBOUR**



Random Acts of Loving My Neighbour. Matthew 22:39

Neighborhood Day, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of September

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Sept. 11, 2022

Leviticus 19:18 [ESV]

18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

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Rodney Stark died in July of this year. Born in Jamestown ND. He was a research professor of Sociology and Comparative Religions at Washington University until 2004 when joined the staff of Baylor University. In 2007 he converted from what he described as a cultural Christian agnostic to Christianity. His book “The Rise of Christianity” 1996 has had a profound impact.

Rodney Stark [1934-2022] was a world renowned Sociologist and Historian studying Religion

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In his book he gives a persuasive explanation of the rapid rise of the Christian faith from an obscure Jewish sect in Palestine to an Empire dominating religion in less than 300 years. One of the central arguments he pointed to in his book in the central ethic of Christianity. It was revolutionary: Love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself.

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## **Romans 13:8-10 [ESV]**

8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.



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In his book Stark identified 2 catastrophic events in the pagan Roman Empire that allowed Christianity to gain supremacy in the culture. The 1<sup>st</sup> began in the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Aureus. They were the 1<sup>st</sup> co-emperors in Roman history. The catastrophe was the Antonian Plague [their adopted father was Emperor Antonius – they were called the Antonian emperors]. It is believed that this plague was the 1<sup>st</sup> appearance of Small Pox.

Marcus Aurelius [AD 161-180] was co-Emperor

Lucius Aureus [AD 161-169]

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*Romans 13:8-10*

**Marcus Aurelius' gold**

**Aureus from AD 166**

In the year AD 166 the Roman Army returned from war with the Parthians, victorious. With them they brought this plague. It's mortality rate was near 25%. At its height in 169, 2000 people a day died in Rome alone. It would ravish the Roman Empire periodically from 166 to 189. The death toll reduced the Roman population likely by 10 to 20%. This caused a severe backlash to Christians who the pagan community blamed for the punishment from the gods.



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## Luke 10:26-37 [ESV]

26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

27 And he answered, "You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself."

28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."



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The Cyprian Plague [named for the bishop of Carthage who described it] is believed to be the 1<sup>st</sup> appearance of measles. It too was a devastating plague. During one outbreak 5000 people a day died in the city of Rome. By the end of these 2 plagues in less than 100 years the Roman population is believed to have been reduced by over 1/3. This caused acute labor shortages and large tracts of uncultivated land.

St. Cyprian [d. AD 258] witnessed and described the next plague called the Cyprian Plague of AD 249-262.

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## 2 Kings 7:8-9 [ESV]

8 And when these lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent and ate and drank, and they carried off silver and gold and clothing and went and hid them. Then they came back and entered another tent and carried off things from it and went and hid them.

9 Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household."



## *“A Neighbourly Command”*

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Following both plague outbreaks the Roman elite struck out at what they described as the impiety of the Christians that had by their disbelief offended the Roman gods. The Imperium for the 1<sup>st</sup> time nationalized persecution of Christians. Cyprian himself was executed as a result of these orders. But Christians surprised Roman culture by being neighborly during the plagues. When most other fled friends and family they stayed and cared for people.

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## Matthew 22:36-40 [ESV]

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

38 This is the great and first commandment.

39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."



This is a Roman curse tablet found in London. It is lead and reads: *“I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts and memory; thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed, nor be able”*.

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Roman pagan culture was vicious, self-indulgent and pleasure seeking. You took advantage of others before they could take advantage of you. Over 1600 Roman curse tablets have been found which asked gods, demons or the dead to deal out horrible plagues on former friends, family or neighbors. The great Roman Physician Galen who lived through the Antonian plague abandoned his family and slaves to save himself.

Sept. 11, 2022





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Christianity entered this pagan world with a completely different ethic. It was noticed in the culture. They did not abandon friends, family or even neighbors. They even considered their enemies their neighbors. As a result several interesting things happened: They cared for the ill and they recovered at a higher rate spreading immunity through the Christian community. Their care for those outside won them public respect.

Sept. 11, 2022

Galatians 5:14 & 6:2 [ESV]

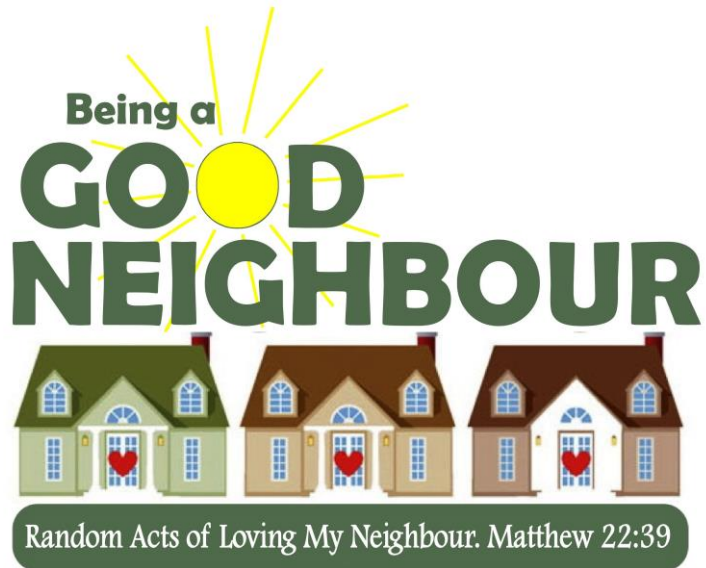
5:14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

...

6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

## Principles from Leviticus 19:9-18 & Galatians 5:13-6:2

1. Provision for the needy is a Christian ethic. Lev. 19:9-10
2. Christians chose to be neighborly. Gal. 5:13-15
3. Theft, deception, perjury, oppression or cruelty are inconsistent with Christianity. Lev. 19:11-14
4. Christians do not gratify their carnal nature. Gal. 5:16-21
5. Christians attempt to be impartial and act with integrity in relationships. Lev. 19:15-16.
6. Christian character guides our interactions with others. Gal. 5:22-26 & Lev. 19:17-18
7. A good neighbor is concerned with rebuilding and supporting others. Gal. 6:1-2



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**As Christians we are called to be neighborly.**

As our culture moves away from Christian ethics, we also move away from the concept of neighborliness or “civility”. As Christians we need to reestablish these central “Royal Laws” in our everyday life. The community around us will not likely perceive or care that we keep the 1<sup>st</sup> but they will certainly recognize the difference we make in the world when we keep the 2<sup>nd</sup>.