

Are You Loving? (Part 1) – Lev 19:9-18

Lev 19:9-18; Having finished up our Blessed Assurance series last weekend, focusing on truths to embrace – we’re starting a new series focusing on qualities to live by. A series called Gut Check; B/c every now and then, we need one. In this case, an internal evaluation of our commitment and character; An assessment of our resolve, our fiber, our focus; That’s a gut check (**Intro**)

Which some people say originated in the last 40 years or so, as a boxing phrase. When they would place a punch to the abdomen, the gut, to test the resolve or weakness of their opponent. Others say it comes from the Civil War, where soldiers would do a *literal* gut check in the heat of battle, to see if they were shot and didn’t know it.

Whatever the case, it’s become a metaphor for self-evaluation; And a good thing to do in our walk with Christ; B/c it helps to ensure that our resolve is firm and our life right. That’s our series for the summer – Gut Check.

- And a good place to start, is your love – your love for others; A concept that’s literally all over the Bible. Like in 1 John 2:10 – *Whoever loves his brother abides in the light*. And 2 Peter 1:7 – *Make every effort to supplement your . . . godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love*. And Mt 22:39 – *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. It’s all over the Bible.

The question is, do you do it? *Are* you loving? And how do you know? Is it just a feeling? Or is there something more? Like criteria and standards to gauge ourselves.

- Our middle daughter, Julia, just served as a juror for a drunk-driving case. And b/c the defendant refused a breath test, they were given some *other* criteria to determine his guilt or innocence. Like, was he in control of his body? Was his speech slurred? Were his emotions haywire? IOW their findings of guilt or innocence weren’t dependent on their *feelings*; There was something more.

And so too with love; It’s not based on a feeling, but specific criteria; Found, among other places, in Lev 19; Which, if you’re familiar with the OT, is part of the Law. And it’s important to understand, that while the details and *consequences* of the OT Law are not for us, the principles are – the principles *behind* the law. Principles that come from a never-changing God, and reveal his never-changing heart for his people; Including his desire to see us loving one another.

- So follow along with me as I read the passage, and let’s see if we can’t get an overview. [9] *“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. [10] And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.* [IOW I have the authority here, so disobedience is not an option; Just do it]

[11] *“You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another.*

[12] *You shall not swear by my name falsely [as in make an oath and not keep it], and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.*

[13] *“You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. [14] You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.*

[15] *“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. [16] You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor [oppose them at every turn]: I am the LORD.*

[17] *“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. [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.*

And therein lies the primary thought here – *love your neighbor*; Anyone and everyone with whom you have contact in life; Whether from afar or up close; Love them. And to help you determine whether or not you are, there are 5 criteria here.

The first of which (**You are, if . . .**), is this – You know you’re loving if . . . **You extend grace to people (v9-10)**

Grace; As in favor to those who don’t deserve it; A perfect example of which, is found in v9-10.

[9] *“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. [10] And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner*

Beggars and sojourners don’t *deserve* grain they didn’t plant, and they don’t deserve grapes they didn’t grow.

They didn’t put forth the work, and they didn’t spend the money.

So to *give* them the leftovers, is an act of grace – an act of unmerited *favor*.

- Which means it’s going to cost you something; That’s the *first* thing I want you to see – the first of 4. If you’re going to love people by extending grace to them, it’s going to cost you; Grace always involves a cost. It could be a cost of time, effort, money, attention, possessions – you name it; There’s *always* a price; And if you’re unwilling to bear it, you’ll never show grace . . . And *always* fail to love. That’s the *first* part of the gut check here – Are you willing to bear the *cost* of grace?
- The 2nd is this – Does it show in what you do? Do you extend grace to people in what you *do*? What you do *for* them, and *with* them, and in *spite* of them? Like giving money to someone in need; That’s extending grace in what you do *for* them. Or meeting w/ someone to disciple them; That’s extending grace in what you do *with* them. And blessing someone who has hurt you, is extending grace in *spite* of them.

Do you extend grace to people like that? In the things you do?

If so, you know you're loving; At least to some extent

- But that's *not* where it usually starts; Extending grace *usually* starts in your thoughts – in what you *think* of people; And that's the 3rd thing I want you to see
Do you extend grace to people in what you *think* about them?
And I include this, not b/c we find it here in *this* passage, but b/c we find it *elsewhere* in the Bible; This is just meant to be an example; One of many

But elsewhere, we find it expanded to what we should *think*

Like **1 Cor 13:7** – *Love . . . believes all things* [and] *hopes all things*

IOW loves compels us to think the best of people; And to w/hold judgment about them;

And to refrain from playing armchair quarterback about the decisions they make

Especially the ones we know little or nothing about

That's extending grace to people in what you think

It's giving them the benefit of the doubt; And assuming they're right until proven wrong

Assuming they're good until proven bad; Assuming their decision is best, until proven otherwise

The opposite of which, is thinking you know better, when you *don't******

Especially when you don't have all the information; Or the responsibility for failure

- It's something I used to do all the time; And then I became a business owner – where *I* was responsible; And then a pastor; And realized I was *lame* at this
So I made a change; And started to extend grace to people not just in what I *did*, but in what I *thought*

But it wasn't until I stepped into a position of leadership where *I* was responsible, and where *I* carried the weight, and where the buck stopped w/ *me* – that the light went on
But until that point, I judged everybody; I gave *nobody* the benefit of the doubt
I made flippant comments about the President and the decisions *he* made; I made snap judgments about my *coach* and the actions he took
And I judged my pastor, without thinking there might be some things I didn't know, and without respect for his position

I judged everybody, b/c I knew it all; Or certainly more than they did

And it was the very antithesis of love; The exact *opposite* of extending grace to people in what I thought

How about you? Does the shoe fit? Do you extend grace in what you *think*?

Do a gut check

- And then 4th here – Do you extend grace in what you *say*?
You know you're loving if you're willing to bear the cost of grace, and extend it in what you *do*, what you *think*, and what you *say*; Or write for that matter
IOW are you gracious in your communication? Do you *bless* people with your words, or hurt them? Do you build them *up*, or put them down; B/c **1 Thess 5:11** says . . .
Encourage one another and build one another up
Loving people means extending grace to them in what you say

- The most difficult part of which, is when you're giving someone feedback
That's the hardest part of extending grace in what you say or write

So I want to give you **5 Principles of Gracious Feedback**

Principles *I've* learned over the years, sometimes b/c I've failed to do it myself and had to apologize, and sometimes b/c I've borne the brunt of ungracious feedback

Here's the first

1. Don't do it anonymously

If you're going to critique or criticize someone, or something they're responsible for, don't do it anonymously; It's weak, it's shameful, and it's deceitful

Deceitful, b/c you go around acting as if you *didn't* say anything, when you did; Acting as if you *don't* think something, when you do

The very definition of deceit; And it's wrong

Unfortunately, people still do it; Usually for 1 of 3 reasons:

A. They want to hurt the recipient without taking responsibility

B. They don't want to be challenged in their thinking

C. They're afraid of the repercussions if their perspective is known

None of which are legit

The first, wanting to hurt the recipient, is the exact *opposite* of love

The 2nd, not wanting to be challenged, is either insecure or prideful

And the 3rd, regarding repercussions, is rooted in fear; A fear of man, and a lack of trust in God; That he's got it, and he's got you; No matter what the consequences

Don't go there; Anonymous feedback of a critical nature, is not gracious feedback

It's weak, it's shameful, and *unbecoming* of a follower of Christ

2. Write what's positive, say what's negative

Not all feedback is negative; At least it shouldn't be; Compliments and encouragement should *always* have their place

And when it comes to *giving* such positive feedback, write it down; That way the blessing continues as a *permanent* source of encouragement

Especially if the recipient keeps a file of such notes

But if your feedback is negative, say it; Don't write it, say it; That way, if you're wrong or off, there's no permanent record

And the memory of the conversation can fade all the quicker

Not only that, but you're far more likely to *speak* gently to someone's face, than you are if you write it from afar

Write what's positive, say what's negative; It's a principle that was commended to me as a young adult, and has served me well

3. Don't lob grenades

Grenades, as in inflammatory statements that do nothing but *aggravate*; Or strong accusations that can't be proven . . .

Or judgments about someone's heart that only *God* knows; Like accusing someone they're full of pride, instead of citing things they *did* that seemed prideful

It's a grenade; An inflammatory statement that does nothing but *aggravate* the situation
Like **Proverbs 15:1** says – *a harsh word stirs up anger*

Or how about using the words *never* and *always*?

“You *never* do what I want; You're *always* out with the guys; You *never* do the wash;
You *always* spend too much” Grenades*****

Or how about calling someone names? Or using a *label* that's uncalled for?

“You're pathetic; You're a liar; You're a loser; You're mean; You're a dictator”

All grenades – inflammatory statements, lame accusations, and inappropriate judgments; And the furthest thing from gracious feedback

i. **Stick to the facts**

If you're going to give gracious feedback, stick to the facts; Speak the truth

Like **Eph 4:25** says – *Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor*

Cite things that actually happened; Things you *observed*; Things *you* observed

Not trumped up offenses you borrowed from someone else; Or innuendos you *want* to be true; But *facts*; Stick to the facts*****

Including how you feel; Are you angry? Then say that you're angry

Are you offended? Then say so

Are you hurt? Or upset? Or discouraged? Then express it

They may not be *legitimate* feelings, or *warranted* given the circumstances, but at least they're facts; At least they're true of your heart

Stick to the facts; Without embellishments, or grenades, or innuendos

ii. **Communicate to heal, not hurt**

And this is a tough one, b/c most of the time we give feedback when we're bent out of shape; When we're mad; Or hurt

And hurt people tend to hurt people; Sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally; But that's what they do – hurt people hurt people

So if you give feedback in such a state, make sure you do so to *heal* the hurt, not make it worse; Communicate to heal

B/c if you write or speak just to make somebody *else* hurt, whether consciously or subconsciously – you're not gracious, you're not loving, and you're not wise

Proverbs 12:18 says – *There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts [they hurt], but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Gracious feedback, is feedback that *heals* relationships; Feedback that *heals* wounds, and *heals* brokenness; Feedback that makes people and situations *better*

Feedback that *restores*, not destroys; Communicate to heal, not hurt (**Summary**)

➤ 5 principles of gracious feedback, that I hope will help you extend grace in all that you say and write; Just like you extend grace in all that you think, and all you do

Bearing the cost of loving your neighbor as yourself; It's a gut check

And if it feels like a punch in the gut, you probably need to repent of something

So that you can answer a humble “yes” to the question – Are you loving?

Pray – God, help us to love like you, by extending grace to others; We know it grieves you and shames you when we fail, and we're sorry; Forgive us, Lord; We want so much to magnify and glorify you, love and all

And use our tithes and offerings now, to that end – blessing both the gift and the giver