

THE ME GENERATION

Grant Phillips

Jesus says in Matthew 22:39, "...Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." My understanding of the Greek word used for "neighbor" means anyone you come near to or in contact with. To the Jews of that day, the meaning of your "neighbor" was confined to the Jewish race, but to Jesus the meaning of "neighbor" included all people, period.

Surprisingly, some in our day use the term in a much more limited sense, to mean the one you live next door to, or only those where you attend church, or maybe only your family members, or others you may be close to in relationships.

Based on Jesus' statement and its intent, our neighbor should not be confined to the microscope, but instead looked at through the telescope. Simply meaning, that the field should not be so narrowed that we cannot include anyone and everyone we come in contact with in our lives.

So, how many of us truly practice this verse? Shamefully, as I look back over my life, I have failed many times. Perhaps that is true of you too?

I have been privileged to know many people who are kind and considerate to others. They have inspired me, and without realizing it, have strengthened my resolve to be more diligent in practicing this command that Jesus gave us. (That's right. It is a command. Read the verse carefully. Jesus definitely commanded that we love our neighbor as ourselves. It is not a request.) Generally speaking though, these dear people are definitely in the minority. Most of the world around us, whether Christian or non-Christian, are only interested in themselves. I can understand non-Christians having this frame of mind, but we Christians have no excuse, because we have Jesus as our example.

You may have noticed that this verse is Jesus' response to a lawyer who asked Him, "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

This is such an overwhelming topic I hardly know where to begin. Jesus is clearly saying for us to put the interests and welfare of others before our own. Without a doubt, we live in a generation where most people are interested only in themselves. Any direction will take us to our introductory verse. No doubt, many commentators could address this issue, and not say the same thing. I will address just a few examples of our failure to love our neighbor, but as already expressed, this cannot be an inclusive listing.

Perhaps in every instance divorce is caused by selfishness from one or both parties. More often than not, one party seeks their own pleasures over the other. So the innocent party suffers (not to mention the children, if there are any, and other family members).

Many churches split because someone just has to have their way. I'm not referring to major, justified, doctrinal issues. I am referring to petty issues that don't mean squat. So the world looks on and says something like, "There they go again. I told you those Christians are just hypocrites. They must be fighting over the color of the carpet again." Now isn't that a great witness!?

Have you ever experienced sleepless nights (or days if you work nights) from your neighbor's barking dog(s)? They love their gratification of owning a dog(s) over and above your need for sleep. They don't give a whipstitch in other words.

Maybe you arise one beautiful sunny morning to find someone's restaurant scraps in your front yard. Do you think they care that you have to pick it all up?

Someone slings their car door open and dents yours. Others ride your bumper on the way to work. Car horns blare behind you because you stop for a pedestrian crossing the street. You must lock your doors at night (and day) due to thieves. A person is murdered by a fiend who has no respect for life.

Another writer mentioned in his article that many churches have thousands and even millions of dollars that they hoard, instead of helping others around the world and even next door who need the basics of life just to live. This has always been one of my pet peeves. Our churches build bigger and bigger "barns", but is that what Jesus expects of us ... as Christians, the Church?

It's all about ME. ME. ME. ME. I could go on and on and on, and you too could supply countless examples, but I think we get the point. Our society is a dried up well when it comes to putting others first. As I have already said, you expect this to some extent from non-Christians, but what explanation do we Christians have for being so selfishly minded?

We Christians eagerly wait to see our Lord face to face, whether it be via the Rapture or our death. If this gift that God has given us through His Son Jesus is so great, and it is, do we share it? Do we love our neighbor as our self? We want to "make it" to Heaven. What about our neighbor? Do we want them to "make it". Secondly, is our God important enough to us to tell others about Him? Usually one would be telling everyone they saw about something in their life that is really, really exciting and important.

I have often thought about these few verses mentioned above. If just we Christians would allow these verses to permeate our lives, what a difference it would make. Maybe we would be fulfilling our Lord's commands to us individually, instead of propping our feet up in front of the television for hours on end. And that is just one example. I certainly am not berating anyone. I am as guilty as the next person. There isn't a one of us who can't improve in this area. That, you surely would admit.

Jesus said to the Laodiceans, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Notice that it is "I am rich" and "I am increased with goods" and "I have need of nothing." It is all about "I" (ME). This church is certainly focused inwardly upon itself. It is easy to see that "love your neighbor as yourself" does not exist among this group of so-called Christians.

We (this church era), are the Laodiceans. So according to Jesus, we need to:

- buy from Him gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich

- I think Jesus is saying that our works will burn up, but if we will come to Him, we can be a child of God, rich in Him, and His works through us will last.
- buy from Him white raiment, that we may be clothed, and that the shame of our nakedness not appear, and
 - I think Jesus is saying here that our righteousness is as filthy rags, but if we come to Him, we can be clothed in true righteousness.
- anoint our eyes with eyesalve, that we may see.
 - I think Jesus is saying here that we think we see, but in actuality we are blind. If we come to Him, He will open our eyes that we may see clearly.

How do we treat others in our every day lives? Do we stop and think, “How would this effect the other person?” Or do we just plow right on, caring only that our voice be heard, or that we have our way? Is life all about ME, or are others as important to us as they are to our Savior?

Are we the Laodicean type ... spoiled, self-centered, egotistical, spiritually blind?

Strangely enough, even if we, as Christians, never tell anyone about Jesus, we are still witnessing to a lost world by our actions. Someone once said, “Your actions speak so loud, I can’t hear what you say.” If our life is all about “ME”, those without Christ in their lives will take notice. Even though the world around us is rude, crude and selfish, we should not be so. We should never get so caught up in ourselves that we ignore the feelings of others.

We need not expect much from a world that doesn’t know Jesus Christ, but we Christians really could start here in improving the lives of all those around us by simply putting others first in our thoughts and actions.

Grant Phillips
grantphillips@windstream.net