

**Learning to live together, in the Lord**  
**Exodus 15:1-11, 20-21   Matthew 18:21-35**  
**September 13, 2026**



The Israelites made it across the Red Sea. They narrowly escaped being recaptured by the Egyptians. On the far shore, with a mental picture of what their fate, their doom might have been, had they not escaped, they sang to the Lord, to their rescuer, to their redeemer.

At this stage in their history, the Israelites were a loosely knit clustering of families and tribes. They were a "people" only by virtue of their birth. Now, in the aftermath of the narrow escape, when the celebratory party was over, what were they to do? They turned to Moses and together they recalled the promise of the promised land. And the journey began.

Because we know the story, we know that the journey was a long one - 40 years - the Biblical way of saying "a lifetime." It was a physical journey. It was also a time of growing, of developing, of changing from a clustering of families/tribes into a community/society. Forty years, a lifetime, was scarcely long enough, God knew, for this huge band of nomads to begin to experience life - with all its struggles and uncertainties - in a community.

As we follow the story, we discover that there were countless disputes, more or less constant friction and fighting, endless bickering.

There came a time when God gave Moses a formula that was meant to guide the Israelites as they sought to become a nation, a community that would live and grow together - what we call the 10 commandments. The ordering of the commandments is interesting and intentional. The first four centred around humanity's dealings with God. (There's cartoon from Frank and Ernest i.e. "Oh yes, and add one about taking my name in vain - I'm sick of all those false alarms.") The next one deals specifically with family matters; and finally the remaining five set up the beginnings of a structure for living together as a community. These commandments were meant to draw the Israelites into a society and to give them the working mandate for getting along together as a faithful community.

Well, despite the guidelines, the rules, the Israelites continued to squabble over almost everything in their new life together. And Moses and Aaron were called upon to settle disputes and make rulings on who owed what to whom. Then, as the Israelites became more and more established, the original 10 commandments, grew to be a catalogue, some 600+ rules and regulations for living in the Israelite society and for being considered a member of the faithful.

When Jesus came, he said that he had come to fulfill the law. He taught that people were in trouble with the law, in part because they kept generating more and more rules until the people of God were bound and gagged and unable to live as God had intended them to do. He preached that people were defying the will of God because they were striving to be letter perfect about the law while ignoring the spirit of the law.

Jesus taught that the whole law is encapsulated in love -- of God with all your heart, mind, strength and soul, and of neighbour as one would love oneself.

Now, love is multifaceted. Today I'll focus on two faces of the kind of love Jesus taught.

One face is humility. This is not self-abasement. Rather, Paul in his letter to the Romans teaches that humility is the give and take that is necessary for people to live in community

together. It is seeing the other as holy -- different likely from ourselves, but just as holy and with just as much likelihood of being as right as we are. Paul says that we must see that our purpose is to love God and one another, and that different people will find different ways of living out that command to love. There are different ways, maybe even days on which to worship God, but if the worship glorifies God and shows our adoration for God, then all who call upon the name of the Lord are right.

The other face of love discussed in scripture is forgiveness, and when Jesus talks about forgiveness with the disciples, Peter rushes in with the questions. How often, Lord? And Peter takes a guess -- since the Rabbis taught that one must forgive another 3 times, Peter thought he was well within the reasonable limits when he doubled the old requirement and added 1. Seven times Lord? Surely he and the others who were coming out of the old ways of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" must have been shocked. 70 x 7 -- why that was forgiving without measure, beyond any normal lifetime.

Forgiveness is not an easy thing. We know immediately upon hearing the word that if forgiveness is part and parcel with love then loving is not as easy/straight forward a task as we might have thought. We readily say about many experiences in life: "It's just not fair, someone has to pay." or "I'm going to get even if it's the last thing I do."

And Jesus tells the parable about two men -- one who owes, in our translation of money, about \$10 million and the other about \$20. And the point of the parable is that we are to forgive others if God is to forgive us. Our debt to God is utterly unpayable - we cannot "make good" our sins and so we are like the man who owed \$10 million. And so we turn to the Lord and Saviour who bore those sins on the cross. But if we are to be prepared to receive the forgiveness of the debt we owe, we must first forgive others lest we bar the way of God's forgiveness and salvation for us.

I John 7 expresses the teaching of Jesus on love. John says: Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God and love is God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God, for God is love. Anyone who says that s/he loves God but hates his/her brother or sister is a liar; for how can s/he love God who s/he has not seen and hate her/his sister/brother whom s/he has seen?

If we love then, as Jesus commands -- remember "A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another even as I have loved you" -- if we love we cannot help but glorify God, adore God, ... there will be no other gods before God; there will be no carved images or idols of any sort in our lives to replace God; when we speak God's Name it will be with reverence and wonder and awe; and we will come eagerly into God's presence in the midst of the fellowship of believers, delighted in a day away from the busyness of life that we may focus on God's grace and goodness to us.

If we love one another as Jesus has loved us, we will be unable to harm anyone - not through stealing, adultery, killings, gossiping, or coveting/desiring/envying what the other has. In fact, if we really loved, we will seek not only to avoid harming another, we will go out of our way to do good to act out our love for them in concrete tangible ways -- beginning in our homes, honouring our parents, and then going beyond to love others as ourselves.

The rules of the game of life and living together are endless -- maybe there needs to be even more rules, given the strife and pain we cause one another. Or maybe we should hear and heed the word of love. It is multifaceted, but if we could begin with the 2 faces we've thought here -- humility --knowing that the other person with whom we are having the confrontation or

disagreement is holy and precious in the sight of God -- and forgiveness -- seventy times seven.