



# LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

**How Should We Conduct  
Ourselves in Relation to  
Other People?**

St. Innocent of Alaska, embracing the Aleuts with love.

*By: Metropolitan Gregory of St. Petersburg, 1904*

The answer to this question is given by the Lord Himself: ***Love thy neighbor*** (Luke 10:27).

The Lord Jesus Christ very categorically demands that we love one another. While giving His last instructions to His disciples before His suffering, He often, and with great force, entrusted them with this love. Namely: *This is My commandment, That ye love one another ...* (John 15:12). *These things I command you, that ye love one another* (John 15:17). *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another...* (John 13:34). This is precisely what all of the apostles oblige us to do. The holy Apostle Peter, together with all the other apostles, commanded us to love. St. Peter writes: *...See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently* (1 Peter 1:22). St. John the Theologian writes: *Beloved, let us love one another* (1 John 4:7). *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another* (1 John 3:11; John 5). *And this His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment* (I John 3:23). St. Paul says: *Walk in love* (Eph. 5:2). *... For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another* (I Thess. 4:9). The holy Apostle James writes: *the royal law according to the Scripture [is], Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...* (James 2:8).

The measure of this love is clearly defined by the Lord Himself. He demands that we all love our neighbor as ourselves, for He said: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself* (Luke 10:27). *... Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them* (Matthew 7:12). This is exactly what all the holy apostles said. Therefore my reader, take note and fulfill the following instructions.

1. You want the best for yourself and are satisfied when everything works out for the best. On the other hand you are not pleased when for some reason things fail. Therefore wish the best for all of your neighbors: rejoice when they are happy and commiserate when they fall into misfortune.

2. It is unpleasant when people react to you poorly and suspect you of some evil doing. Therefore do not speak poorly of anyone, and without sufficient cause do not be suspicious of anyone. *Love thinketh no evil* (I Cor. 13:5).

3. It is pleasant for you when people speak well of you. Therefore you should speak well of all your neighbors. Be especially careful not to slander your neighbor. Slander is the work of Satan, let it belong to him alone (Rev. 12:10). You speak only good of your neighbor.

4. When someone speaks poorly about someone outside your circle, try, if at all possible, to defend or excuse him. Besides this, never repeat that which you have heard. For it frequently happens that things are said about people because of malice or out of revenge, and to repeat that which was said can cause enmity. Enmity is described in the Word of God as one of those vices which can prevent one from entering the Kingdom of Heaven (Gal. 5:20).

5. It is unpleasant for you when people divulge your shortcomings and especially your vices. Therefore when you see the weaknesses and vices of others, do not announce them to everyone for: *Charity ...beareth all things,... endureth all things* (I Cor. 13:4-7). Look for the right occasion and lovingly point out the weaknesses and vices you noticed; incline the person to correct himself. After a time, if you see that the vices you noticed do not scandalize others, then you yourself cease from mentioning them.. If possible tell them to a person (like the priest) who is assigned to correct and check them and protect others from temptation and harm. To tempt others is a terrible sin (Matt. 18:6). .

You do not like it when others treat you roughly and offend you in some way. Therefore you should treat everyone kindly without exception. Be especially careful not to use swear words or offensive ones. If it so happens that someone treats you crudely, angrily, and says unpleasant things to you, then answer him meekly, for, A soft *answer turneth away wrath* (Prov. 15:1). If it happens that because of an offense you became angry with your neighbor, then say nothing, for immediately your anger will flame up, and in an impassioned state you are likely to consider it necessary to say something that you later sorely regret, but will be incapable of correcting. While angry say nothing but wait until you have completely calmed down. If your neighbor is for some reason very angry with you, do not attempt to talk him out of it, even if it seems very necessary, for while he is in the heat of anger the passion is in control of him and not his reason, therefore you must not try to dissuade him – it is impossible to speak convincingly to someone out of his mind, your words will only make him more angry and force him to do something possibly harmful to you.

7. You are pleased when people help you when you are in need. Therefore strive yourself, as much as you can, to help your neighbor in all of his needs. For *alms* (all good deeds) *doth deliver from death, and shall purge away all sin. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life* (Tobit 12:9) the Word of God tells us.

Here we must follow a special rule. Namely:

a) We must first, before helping other people help those whom God's foresight has united us with, i.e., parents, relatives, authorities, benefactors, those under our authority, and fellow believers. St. Paul says concerning the first group, *But if any provide not for those of his own house, he hath denied the Faith, and is worse than an infidel* (I Tim. 5:8). Concerning fellow believers the Apostle teaches: *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of Faith* (Gal. 6:10).

b) Among the above, before others, come to the assistance of those who are especially in need, that is the ill and disabled. Even if you cannot give them what they specifically need, then at least visit them, serve them in some way, and comfort them. Act in this way even if they are totally ungrateful to you, for *Love does not seek its own* (I Cor. 13:5), and the Lord will reward you.

8) Having assisted those among your living neighbors, do not deny those among your departed neighbors. Pray for all the departed, and especially for those who died suddenly and without proper preparation, and while still in serious sins. Remember them more often and offer what alms you can for their salvation. Many of our departed neighbors, especially those who reposed without proper preparation, need our help incomparably more than those among the living who are extremely impoverished, because the reposed are now incapable of helping themselves. Only we the living can offer them help.

9) Our love for ourselves can be and, unfortunately, often is truly misplaced. How many people desire and strive for earthly goods, great honor, respect, prosperity. Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ was so pleased to place a specific condition on our love for our neighbor; He commanded that we should love our neighbor as He loved us. *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you* (John 15:12). *Love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34). The Lord Jesus Christ so loved us, the faithful, His Church, that He *gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify it... That He might present it to Himself...not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish* (Eph. 5:25-27). He strove and strives to create in all of us firm faith in God the Father and in Himself (John 3:16), to offer us a true knowledge of God (John 1: 18; 17:3), to inspire us to love Him (John 17:26), to lovingly and zealously fulfill the commandments of God (John 14; 21, 23, 24) and to lead us to eternal life (John 3:16).

Therefore each of us who sincerely loves himself should in every way possible strive to acquire firm faith in the Lord God, true knowledge of Him, heartfelt love for Him and the most zealous desire to fulfill His commandments. Thus we should also act in relationship to our neighbor so that he might acquire firm faith in the Lord God, true knowledge of Him, acquire love for Him, zealously striving to fulfill His commandments and thus continually grow towards eternal blessedness. Every one of us should in every way possible inspire our neighbor to care for the salvation of his soul, to support and increase this concern by whatever means possible. None of us should dare say: "What do I have to do with the quality of my neighbor's life?" Quite the opposite, each of us, when we notice that a Christian is behaving in an improper way, should look for the right time in order to privately and with love bring him to his senses and direct him on the right path of salvation.

Now we exhort you (not just ask), brethren, warn them that are unruly (1 Thess. 5:14). In order to assist our neighbor spiritually we should strive much more earnestly than to help him physically. Physical help must be offered in such a way that it more or less contributes to the spiritual perfection of our neighbor and to his salvation. The spiritual need of our neighbor is incomparably more important than any of his physical needs. And to give spiritual assistance is often much more difficult than to give physical because, as a rule, for to physical assistance people usually respond with gratitude, but to spiritual, almost never, and it is not unusual for them to repay us with hatred and even vengeance.

10) As in offering physical help, in offering spiritual help we must also follow a special rule mainly: before others we should heed the needs of people that God's Providence has closely bound us with, such as our children, relatives, friends, benefactors, employees. He who strives to instruct, correct and awake the conscience in strangers while his own children or employees run out of control and fall into sins and error, does not fulfill the commandment of love for his neighbor. He is not a friend to his neighbor but an enemy, one who is at times extremely harmful and destructive.

11) If the opportunity arises we should never refuse physical and especially spiritual help to the depraved, to foreigners, non-Orthodox, heretics, atheists, and enemies, for all of them, no matter what their orientation or disposition, are human, all created by the Creator, all with an immortal soul and in the likeness of God. They are all redeemed by the priceless Blood of Jesus Christ and therefore all children of the Heavenly Father, all redeemed by Christ and all co-inheritors of the one, eternal, all-blessed Kingdom of God. Therefore we should show love to all people. People who are depraved, heretics, and atheists, all are in the greatest need of our spiritual aid, especially our prayers and our example to them. Concerning our enemies there is the clear commandment of the Lord: *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you* (Matthew 5:44). There can be no contradiction here, for the Apostle John makes it clear to us that: *Whoever hateth his brother is a murderer* (John 3:15).

This is how we should love our neighbor. If we were filled with love for all our neighbors we would be perfectly happy. Then there would not be such unhappiness on earth and our life would become like the life of our ancestors in blissful paradise. Let us zealously fulfill the Lord's commandments of love for our neighbor, and in every way possible strive to bring our lives closer to that of our ancestors in paradise!

*Metropolitan Gregory of Saint Petersburg, 1904. Translated from the book "A Day of Holy Life, or the Answer to the Question, How Can I Lead a Holy Life."*