

## **All in the Family** **- Ron Stullenbarger -**

"Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:3-8)

Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus' command to love your neighbor really means to love everybody — not just the people who live next door? But, even though Jesus wants us to love everybody, we can't show our love in specific ways to everybody. You don't have enough time, energy, or resources to care for every person on the planet. That's why you need to figure out where to start.

When our goal is to love, where should we begin? Why not start with the people closest to us? Then we can work our way out to the whole world "*whenever we have the opportunity*" (Galatians 6:10).

Believe it or not, you have a responsibility to yourself. If you don't provide for your basic needs and protect yourself from hurtful influences, you won't have much love to give others. Without the right self-love -- taking care of your mental, emotional, spiritual, and social growth -- you'll run out of gas when you try to love the other people God has called you to love.

One of our biggest tasks is loving our own family. As Paul tells us, those who won't care for their own relatives, especially those living in the same household, have denied what they believe. Such people are worse than unbelievers (1 Timothy 5:8). All people need help, encouragement, prayer, and comfort from others. Our energy to meet those needs should go to our parents, brothers, and sisters first. Caring for extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, comes in a close second (see 1 Timothy 5:16).

Then, which is often overlooked, we are to love our "*church family*." In fact, I would argue that this is our top priority. There are numerous passages in the New Testament that tell us to "*love one another*."

Do you ever wonder what God means when He says "*Love your neighbor*"? He intends your first love commitment to be to those closest to you — people who need you — and that's your family (including your church family). God wants you to love everyone. But loving everyone starts at home!

Does God's command to love everyone seem like more than you can handle? What are some things you can do to start loving the people closest to you?