

NEIGHBORS: STRANGERS OR FRIENDS

Well if we ever needed a message on being a neighbor... this is a good time isn't it? In the next few minutes we are going to explore three questions: WHY LOVE MY NEIGHBOR; WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR; and HOW DO I LOVE MY NEIGHBOR?

I. WHY LOVE MY NEIGHBOR?

A. Order in God's courtroom (the world). Rom 13:6-8 [zoom out for larger view]

1. When we zoom out of this passage and look at what Paul is discussing in chapters 12 and 13, we see him talking about love and the law. When we love our neighbors we automatically uphold the Law.
2. In Romans 12:9-10 we read, 'Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.' (The Message)
Be good friends who love deeply. More on that in a minute.
3. Of course, staying out of trouble with the law isn't a bad motivation for loving your neighbor. But those who love their neighbor need not fear the law. Much more than this, **love inspires us to do good to our neighbor, thus both fulfilling and surpassing the minimum standards set by the law.** It is love, therefore, and not law which should motivate and guide us in our dealings with our neighbor. When we walk in love, we also keep the law.

B. Fulfilling the Law. Rom 13:8-10

1. Christ came to fulfill the Law.
 - a) He said this Himself when He walked among us, and we learn this of course in writings like Galatians and even here in Romans. Jesus didn't ever break the law. Jesus didn't abolish any part of the civil law. In fulfilling the Law, Christ did away with the CEREMONIAL LAW which is that part of the Law that was designed to give you access to God the Father and find favor with Him. The fact that Jesus fulfilled this law is the reason that we are part of the church and we do not worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, bringing lambs, bulls, and doves with us to sacrifice before God for this year's sins only to turn around and have to do it again for the following year.
 - b) We know that the Law that God gave to Moses was good and perfect. Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law. But there was another important part to the Law that indicated righteousness before God

but was designed to ensure functional relationships from human to human. This section of the law is the CIVIL LAW.

2. As Christ's followers, we should seek to fulfill the Law also.

a) Fulfill vs. obey (power of the Spirit vs. power of the flesh).

(1) Today is Pentecost. Last Sunday was Ascension Sunday. For Christians who observe them, these days are special because they remind us of the life of Christ, and different aspects of Jesus' perfection, personality, and purpose. Every one of these special days and seasons: Advent, Christmas, Transfiguration, Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost remind us of Him. None of these other days existed before Jesus came on the scene, except Pentecost. Did you know that Pentecost has its roots in Jewish tradition? Two celebrations occur at once in Pentecost: 1) it's a celebration of God giving the Law to Moses, and 2) it's a thanksgiving for the wheat harvest. So on the day where it's celebrated that God gave the Law to Moses, God gave the Holy Spirit to the followers of Christ and started the church. On the day of celebration for a harvest of crops God now sends the Holy Spirit to gather a great harvest of souls, saved through the message of the Gospel.

(2) The Holy Spirit gives us power to fulfill the law. When we try obeying in our own strength we find ourselves bummed out, worn out, stressed out and burned out. But in the power of the Holy Spirit, we Christians can find ourselves revitalized, energized, and empowered to do God's will.

Another reason to fulfill the Law is that... it is...

b) For our sanctification. How many of you know that the day you get saved is the day you START walking with God. It's not the day you start coasting. Being born again then means that there's growing to do... and we grow in our faith we begin to look more and more like one Person, our Lord Jesus Christ. That walking, growing up process in which we become mature in Christ, in which we become healed and complete and holy, is called Sanctification. The Law, insofar as it helps us say no to sin and yes to righteousness, trains our minds toward being like Christ - toward being sanctified.

Another reason to fulfill the Law is to ...

- c) witness to unbelieving neighbors. Matthew 5:16-17 says, ' "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. '

So, some good reasons for loving our neighbors are Keeping order in God's courtroom: our world and society, Fulfilling the law which has the rewards of being like our Lord and Savior, and finally...

3. Preparing for the end of the world. Romans 13:11-12, 'Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. '
- a) Whenever the Bible says, "You know the time" it is not an invitation to complacency. "You know the time," never means look back and be thankful... "you know the time," means something is about to happen.
- b) When Jesus ascended, the disciples watched Him go and as they were squinting into the clouds some angels appeared THIS SAME JESUS SHALL COME BACK THE SAME WAY YOU'VE SEEN HIM GO! You know the time! The birth of Christ was foreshadowed in the early days of the history of the world and was predicted by the prophets and psalmists for thousands of years. Then "bam!" in the fullness of time God brought forth His Son, born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life, He died on the cross for Your sins, through the power of almighty God, He rose again in His body from that tomb... the Bible says He was the firstfruits of them that sleep. Why did He say that?
- c) I'll tell you what I'm looking for next. The trumpet shall sound. The dead in Christ will rise first and then we who believe in Jesus, who are alive and on the earth shall be caught up together with them in the clouds. I'm looking for the coming of Christ. I want to be like and with Jesus. And that's why I need to love my neighbor so that when He appears and I am called on to give an account for how I treated my neighbor I won't need to be ashamed.

II. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

- A. Teachings of the Rabbis: Jewish tradition, over the years had changed the command into a saying: *love your neighbor and hate your enemies*. (Matthew 5:43). Along with this came a narrower definition of neighbor that excluded:¹
1. Tax-gatherers
 2. Sinners
 3. Anyone else who didn't believe as they or their colleagues did.
- B. Teachings of Jesus: Now, it is true that your neighbors live next door, across the street, and behind you. Often but not always, your neighbors look like you, talk like you, have some common values with you, and speak the same language you do. Often but not always, your neighbors like you and hope to get along well with you. When Jesus was asked who is my neighbor, what was Jesus' response? THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN. If you don't know the parable of the Good Samaritan, you can find it in Luke 10:25-37 and if you don't know it, you might as well open your Bible app or your Bible and read it, because reading it will be more beneficial to you than hearing my thumbnail analysis and we will be finished at the same time.
1. Meet the good Jewish man. He was traveling alone. We are not told why he is traveling alone, but he is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. It's dangerous to travel alone, but there he is, traveling alone.
 2. As the bird flies, that's 15 miles. The road, however, going around mountains, is 18 miles of winding path, through a high desert at 2500 feet, to Jericho, 825 feet BELOW sea level. The road is well-known, but people on that road are often targets for gangs of thieves.
 3. Lo and behold, he was too much for the thieves to resist, they jumped out, robbed him, stabbed him, beat him, and left him on the side of the road fighting for his life.
 4. Three men passed by this beat up victim: a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan.
 - a) The priest was likely on a mission, as his home was probably in Jerusalem. It is possible that he had some sort of entourage and that he was even carried on some sort of sedan chair. He was a priest, an inherently good guy. Surely he would stop to help the wounded man. BUT... He was likely advanced in years and this road was challenging for him. He probably had to get back to the Temple for a scheduled duty that he alone, or only those in a small, specialized group, could perform. If he stopped for every emergency, who would serve the people who so desperately needed him? He had no

¹ MacArthur, John. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Matthew 1-7. Pgs 340 & 341

time to investigate what that mess was on the other side of the road, so, he drew his ceremonially clean garments around his ceremonially clean self, crossed the street way before he could see what he was avoiding, and hurried on.

- b) The Levite was also a religious leader with an official position at the Temple. Unlike the priest, the Levite likely served on a larger team of people that probably would have managed okay if he were delayed. Also, the Levite did not live in Jerusalem; he lived out among the people of Judea. He would likely be less intimidated by non-kosher situations than the priest, and could be more street-smart. Surely the Levite, who like the priest lived a life dedicated to following the Law of God and facilitating Temple worship - surely the Levite would stop to help. He actually walked close enough to the object on the side of the road to identify that this was indeed a badly injured son of Abraham. But the Levite realized, much to his regret, that caring for this man's needs was far beyond his limited training and resources. What could he possibly do that would be helpful? Plus, the cell reception was horrible in this area, so there was no way he could call for help.

ACCORDING TO THE PREVAILING TEACHING OF THE DAY, BOTH OF THESE MEN WERE GOOD CANDIDATES TO HELP THE WOUNDED MAN. BUT THEY SIMPLY LOVED THEIR NEIGHBOR. THEY DID NOT LOVE THEIR NEIGHBOR AS THEY LOVED THEMSELVES.

- c) Of course we know the rest of the story... the Samaritan with his donkey... using his own personal first aid kit to care for a Jewish man in spite of the fact that at other times they would have hated on each other. Yet the Samaritan, the half-breed, the one who should have been least likely to help, help. Not only that, but he took him to a good Jewish hotel establishment. He risked being treated as "less than", and again spent his own resources to help this person he found along the road in need... someone whom Jesus identified as his neighbor.

III. HOW DO I LOVE MY NEIGHBOR?

- A. First Love God, Mark 12:30-31; 'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ' Love for neighbor must spring from a

love for God. The purity, righteousness, and holiness of God will guide your conscience in all your dealings with your neighbors.

B. Be Forgiving, Leviticus 19:18 [Lev 19:17-18

' "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 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 . '

1. Not seeking revenge

2. Not holding a grudge against them or against *the sons of your people* (future generations).

3. In case you feel like saying "but you don't know my neighbor," God punctuates this with four words: I AM THE LORD. There are no exceptions. There are no deviations. This is how I want it to be. I am the Lord!

C. When someone is transformed by the life-changing power and love of Jesus Christ, it changes their life, and this is most clearly seen in the radical way a believer loves. There should be a supernatural love in the life of believers, which distinguishes them from the world.²

IV. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

A. Careful what you Stir Into the Mix (2 Tim 1:6 - stir up the gift of God)

1. You can stir up envy, disagreement, gossip, arguing, and disrespect. Or you can stir in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. 2 Timothy 1:6 ways stir up the gift of God within you. And in doing this, we can wear a new uniform.

B. Uniform: Put on Jesus, Romans 13:14. 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.'

'But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. '

Romans 13:8-10,14

² Greg Brown. Sermon, *Radical Love*, April 4, 2020