

Being a Neighbor

INTRODUCTION:

1. Being a *neighbor* to someone today, or someone being *your neighbor*, can be a tricky thing. People can be moody, selfish, or simply not available to get to know, seeing we have much to keep us entertained inside our houses.
2. No matter how one might feel about a neighbor, when we think of a neighbor it is someone who lives near and/or around us—like in the house close to our house, or in the apartment near us.
 - A. The definitions of *neighbor* in our English dictionaries reflect this idea.
 - i. **Oxford Dictionary** – “a person living near or next door to the speaker or person referred to”
 - ii. **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** – “one living or located near another...fellow man”
 - iii. **Cambridge Dictionary** – “someone who lives near you.”
 - B. The biblical definitions of the words for *neighbor* reflect this idea as well:
 - i. Neighbor in the **O.T.** (found 120 times) is translated from the words **rea, shaken, qarob, and amith**, which are mainly defined as one who is near, but also a friend, companion, fellow [man], neighbor, associate, relative, inhabitant
 - ii. Neighbor in the **N.T.** (found 21 times) is translated from the words **plesion, perioikos, and geiton**, which are defined as one being “near, neighboring, dwelling around, a neighbor”
 - iii. Both lean toward *one who dwells near you*, one with whom you would regularly interact.
3. As we shall see, these definitions fall short of Jesus’ definition of a neighbor and do not address our responsibilities toward our neighbor. So, what does the Bible say about being a neighbor?
 - A. To answer I want us to look at the O.T., which has much to say on this subject to Israel.
 - B. And, I want us to look at what the N.T. says to us as Christians today.

BODY:

I. The O.T. and being a neighbor:

- A. Israel had a very special *covenant* with God through Abraham that no other nation possessed (Gen. 17:7-8 – “And I will establish My covenant between **Me and you and your descendants after you** in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to **be God to you and your descendants** after you. ⁸ Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and **I will be their God.**”).
 1. This was uniquely sealed by circumcision (Gen. 17:11 – “and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.”).
 2. This covenant demanded of Israel to be *separate* from the idolatrous heathen peoples around them in the Promise Land, even to driving them out (Ex. 23:32-33 – “**You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.** ³³ **They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me.** For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”).
 3. And, certain Gentiles were never to be allowed in the temple because of evil done against Israel (Deut. 23:3-4 – “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”).
 4. This should help us begin to understand why Israel felt Gentiles to be generally spiritually and physically hostile and dangerous to Israel.
- B. Yet, God sought to make Israel mindful of the foreigner among them, especially those who were peaceful and desirous to worship God with them.
 1. In Exodus 12:48 God made provision for the stranger to partake of the *Passover* by *submitting to the covenant of circumcision*.
 2. In Leviticus 19:9-10 God commanded Israel to show compassion toward the “poor and the stranger” by not wholly reaping the corners of their fields, etc.
 3. In Deuteronomy 14:28-29 it states that every third year a tithe of the Jews’ crops was to be stored up for the Levite, the *stranger*, the fatherless, and the widow among them.
 4. These demand acceptance and kindly sacrifice for certain *strangers*!

5. The foundation of these commands and an even greater demand was that Israel had been *strangers* in Egypt (Lev. 19:33-34 – “And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him.³⁴ The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall **love him as yourself**; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”).
6. The difference in treatment of *strangers among them* as opposed to the *idolaters/heathen people of the land* caused Israel to generally assume this *stranger* was a *proselyte to Judaism*.
- C. To add to this, the O.T.’s *overall emphasis* on *neighborliness* appears to refer to that shown *between fellow Jews* (Lev. 19:16-18 – “You shall not go about as a **slanderer among your people**, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.¹⁷ ‘You shall not hate your **fellow countryman** in your heart; you may surely reprove your **neighbor**, but shall not incur sin because of him.¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the **sons of your people**, but you **shall love your neighbor as yourself**; I am the Lord.”).

 1. There were special commands concerning their neighbor, which referred to their *fellow Jew* and not to the stranger/foreigner among them.
 - a. Every seven years the Jew had to release his *fellow Jew* from his debts, *which didn’t apply to strangers* (Deut. 15:1-3 – “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts.² And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his **neighbor** shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the Lord’s release.³ **Of a foreigner you may require it**; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your **brother**”).
 - b. Economical responsibilities that didn’t apply to strangers (Deut. 23:19-20 – “You shall not charge interest to your **brother**—interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest.²⁰ **To a foreigner you may charge interest**, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the Lord your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”).
 2. It is not hard to see why when the Jew read commands related to their *neighbor* they believed these to refer to their relationship with their fellow Jew.
 - a. True of ethical commands (Deut. 5:20-21 – “You shall not bear false witness against your **neighbor**.²¹ You shall not covet your **neighbor’s** wife; and you shall not desire your **neighbor’s** house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your **neighbor’s**.”).
 - b. True of commands concerning your neighbor’s goods and sharing (Deut. 23:24-25 – “When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container.²⁵ When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.”)
 - c. This doesn’t mean an Israelite could be a false witness against a stranger, or covet his wife, house, etc., seeing Lev. 19:34 says *to love the stranger as yourself*.
 - d. But it may help us understand why Jesus said it was taught in Israel, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matt. 5:43). And, their reasoning toward Gentiles might also explain our feelings about certain wicked/immoral people in our government/world!
 3. In any case, O.T. neighborly requirements were very demanding upon the Israelite.

II. The N.T. and being a neighbor:

A. The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37).

1. It was given in answer to a lawyer seeking to test Jesus (Luke 10:25-28 – “And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’²⁶ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’²⁷ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’²⁸ And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’”).
 - a. Jesus’ approach sidestepped any possible controversy by requiring *him* to answer.

- b. Jesus agreed with his answer and encouraged him to do as he had answered.
 2. So, the lawyer sought to *justify/vindicate* himself before Jesus and others and asked, “And who is my neighbor?” (10:29). He may have done this because...
 - a. He looked foolish/dishonorable by asking a question he already knew the answer to.
 - b. His answer presented *broader obligations* toward others than he accepted, as was true of Jews concerning *loving strangers as oneself* verses treatment of heathens (Lev. 19:34,18).
 3. Jesus answers with the *good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30-37 – “Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.³¹ And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’³⁶ Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?”³⁷ And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”).
 - a. Jesus shows that the Jewish limitations placed on “neighbor” were artificial!
 - i. Who *is one’s neighbor* is not determined by whether one is Jew or Gentile (or one’s brethren in Christ), but whether one is in need.
 - ii. Who *one’s neighbor is* isn’t determined by locality—this was a man on a road.
 - iii. Who acts as *a neighbor* is anyone (i.e., a despised half-blood, unclean, Samaritan) who is *willing to show compassion/mercy* to one in need!
 - iv. This lawyer asked “who is my neighbor?,” while Jesus asked *who was a neighbor* to a neighbor? One acted on *external identification*, true neighbors on an *internal decision* to be a neighbor no matter who the neighborliness is bestowed upon!
 - b. Don’t miss the extensive demands neighborliness puts on us.
 - i. Being a neighbor meant that the Samaritan *went to him in need* (he *did not live near him*), cleaned and bound his wounds, put him on his beast, took him to an inn, took care of him, and was out a *great deal more expense* to insure his recovery!
 - 1) It frightens me to honestly think of who in this lesson I am more aligned with!
 - 2) Am I willing to be the kind of neighbor Jesus describes here, showing the kind of sacrificial love this Samaritan showed to one he didn’t even know?
 - ii. To help motivate us, remember that the Good Samaritan was the final answer to not only “who is my neighbor,” but “what shall I do to inherit eternal life” (Lk. 10:25).
- B. Neighborly responsibilities of a Christians:
1. As was true of Israel, Christians must love their neighbor as themselves (Gal. 5:13-14 – “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**.¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**”).
 - a. Let that requirement sink in and ask yourself if you truly love anyone besides ourselves as ourselves!
 - b. How hard it truly is for the selfish human spirit to love a neighbor as we do ourselves!
 - c. I know there is much work in my life to be done here and I hope by God’s grace that he will bless me with enough time and mercy to achieve this.
 2. A neighbor does no harm to a neighbor (Rom. 13:10 – “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.”).
 - a. This must affect our words about others, especially about our brethren (James 4:11 – “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.”).

- b. This requires honesty in all dealings (Eph. 4:25 – “Therefore, putting away lying, “*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*” for we are members of one another.”).
 - c. Know that our words betray our hearts (Lk. 6:45 – “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. **For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**”).
3. A neighbor must seek to do that which pleases our neighbor (Rom. 15:1-3 – “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ²Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. ³For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”).
 - a. It is difficult to deal with weak brethren...because they are weak!
 - b. We must look past their shortcomings and seek the good of our neighbor, building them up rather than allowing frustration and anger to get the best of us!
 4. A neighbor shows love by doing good even toward one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43-45 –“ You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”).
 - a. Again, have I really pondered the significance of these words and their *application*.
 - b. If this must be applied to all men, how much more so toward our brethren!

CONCLUSION:

1. The struggles and demands of being a neighbor are not new nor are they a small thing to master.
 - A. Yet, the importance of being a godly, faithful neighbor is so great that it was included by Christ in a discussion concerning the question of “what must I do to inherit eternal life.”
 - B. So, without question, these responsibilities are something we need to know, ponder, understand, and apply!
2. So, where do you stand as a neighbor to the world, the lost, and to your brethren? Are you living up to the Lord’s standard that all might know that Christ dwells in you, that He controls your life!
3. Of course, this begins by deciding whether you will truly follow Jesus in – F-R-C-B.