YOU CAN’T PICK YOUR NEIGHBORS
(Leviticus 19:13-18; Matthew 5:43-48)

INTRODUCTION

A young Jewish lawyer asked Jesus one day, “Who is my neighbor?” Remember Jesus’ answer? He answered by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. The lesson Jesus wanted the lawyer to get was, “Am I being a good neighbor to someone in need?” Am I being like the Good Samaritan who helped the Jew who was beaten and robbed on the road to Jericho?

Our passage this morning is also concerned about neighbors. The lesson is similar in that it will end by emphasizing that I should be showing mercy on those who have a need. But the question the Scribes were asking is “Does the command to love your neighbor extend to my enemies?” The Jews of Jesus day wanted to say, “No, we are to hate our enemies.” Jesus corrects their misunderstanding and says:

Matthew 5:43-44 HCSB ”You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. (44) But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

The typical Jew of Jesus day thought it is all right to hate his enemies. Many have that same view today. Do you love your enemies or hate your enemies? That is the question God puts before us today.

THE JEWS’ OMITTED PARTS OF SCRIPTURES

How did the Scribes arrive at their conclusion to love your neighbors but hate your enemies? The Old Testament is clear about the command to ‘love your neighbor.’ It is found in Leviticus 19 with details on how to show this love to your neighbor. We read that this morning. The conclusion of the paragraph in Leviticus is: “love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh.” (19:18)

The Scribes knew this verse well. But notice that they left out an important part of the verse. They said, “Love your neighbor” but they left out ‘as yourself.’

Why did they leave off the end of the phrase, “as yourself?” Simply because it is a lot easier to love your neighbor if there is no standard by which to judge that love. God says to love your neighbor with the same consideration and intensity with which you love yourself. This is a form of the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself.
The Scribes omitted the last phrase in order to make it easier to fulfill the command to love their neighbor, according to their way of loving. They were looking for the easiest way or the minimum way of keeping God’s commands. We do too.

THEY ADDED TO THE SCRIPTURES

The second part of the Scribes teaching was worse than leaving out part of the Scriptures. They added a command that is not found in the Old Testament, “We are to hate our enemies.” Now they could point to some passages in the psalms where David said that he hated the enemies of God. But we don’t see where David hated his personal enemies. Consider David and Saul.

The Scribes seemed to have been selective in what they read in the Law of Moses. Exodus 23:4-5 gives an illustration of showing love and kindness to an enemy.

Exodus 23:4-5 HCSB  "If you come across your enemy's stray ox or donkey, you must return it to him. (5) "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you lying helpless under its load, and you want to refrain from helping it, you must help with it.

You are to treat your fellow Jew or your friend and an enemy the same. You are to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the specific teaching of Leviticus 19:34:

Leviticus 19:34 HCSB  You must regard the foreigner who lives with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt; I am Yahweh your God.

But the Jews wanted to define their neighbors as only their fellow Jews or only those with whom they got along with. They didn’t want to include as their neighbor those who were not like them or those who were their enemies.

Now it is true that not all neighbors are easy to love. Wouldn’t you say that? Not all neighbors seem to even want our love. Some are just down right mean in general and some are mean in specific to you.

Someone has said with tongue in cheek, "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors and also to love our enemies, probably because they are generally the same people."
But Jesus will tell us to love all our neighbors, even our enemies the same. The Jews wanted to love their neighbors, but not their enemies.

WHO IS MY ENEMY?

We may want to say that “I don’t have any enemies.” So who is my enemy? Verse 44 tells us whom Jesus is thinking of. Now I’m reading the NKJV, not the NIV or HCSV because this read differently. (It is in Luke 6:27-28)

(Matthew 5:44 NKJV) "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,

Your enemy is anyone who curses you, hates you, or spitefully uses or persecutes you. Do you have anyone who has cursed you? Do you know of anyone who has spoken bad about you? Do you suspect that there is anyone who may even hate you or not like you? Has anyone ‘spitefully used you’ or even ‘persecuted you’? If you have people in your life that fits this description, then maybe you have an enemy in the sense that Jesus is speaking of. These are the people you are to include in your circle of loved ones!

A little boy was out in the yard playing with his sister. There was a most unpleasant woman who was his neighbor. She was always finding fault with them and getting on to them. The boy said to his sister, "I just hate her!" His little sister, greatly shocked, said, "Oh no! The Bible says we must love everyone, even our enemies." "Oh well," the boy remarked, "Old Mrs. Jones wasn't even born when that was written."

HOW TO LOVE YOUR ENEMY

How are we to love our enemies? Jesus gives us some practical ways. He says to bless, to do good, and to pray for them. Do you seek to bless your enemies by doing good things to those who you know hate you? Do you help them out when they need help? Do you pray for your enemies?

Paul took Jesus’ teaching to heart. Here is his take on how to love your enemies:

Romans 12:18-21 HCSB If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone. (19) Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: Vengeance belongs
to Me; I will repay, says the Lord. (20) But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. (21) Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

When someone does things to you to spite you, do you pray for them or do you retaliate? Jesus says, “Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Someone has said, “It is impossible to pray for someone without loving him.”

This is how your love your enemies: bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. It is not having a positive emotion towards them, but doing good to them.

CHRISTIANS ARE TO ‘DO MORE’ THAN OTHERS

You may say, “Well, that is not normal. People just don’t act like that!” What Jesus is saying is that “His followers are expected to do more than others in showing love.” They are to go the extra mile. Jesus tells us this by bringing in the example of the tax collector. Look at verses 46-47:

Matthew 5:46-47 HCSB  For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same?

Even ungodly, unscrupulous, unloving tax collectors love those who are like them and don’t hesitate to greet their own kind. Jesus is saying, “I expect you to do more than others.” Boy this is really convicting. Jesus actually expects me to do more than others in showing love to all my neighbors, even my enemies. He wants us to live differently than the world.

THE STANDARD OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Jesus then gives the standard and the motivation for loving our enemies. It is what your heavenly Father does. The standard and motivation for loving your enemies is the example of God, our heavenly Father. We are to be like him.

Matthew 5:45 HCSB  so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
Does God discriminate between his enemies and those who love Him when He causes the sun to rise? No, obviously not. Neither should you discriminate doing good to people when it is in your power. Does God discriminate between the righteous and unrighteous when he sends the rain? No, obviously not. Neither should you discriminate doing good to people when it is in your power to do it.

CONCLUSION

What is the main point of this message? It is you can’t pick and choose whom you will love. If you love your neighbor as God loves his, then you will love all of your neighbors, even your enemy.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 48: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

This is not being sinless. This is being perfect in our love and mercy like God is perfect in His love and mercy. He is not talking about moral perfection. No man is perfect in that sense. But he is talking about being perfect or mature and God-like in our love. We can be all loving. Our love can embrace all peoples, friends and foes.

You can love your enemy as God loves His. Now this doesn’t come naturally. We need some help. We can receive help by:

First, admitting your failure and your inability to love this way. Admit it to God. Confess that you need his power and his guidance and his presence in your life if you are to love this way. Ask God for help.

Second, keep in mind that God loved you while you were his enemy.

Romans 5:8-10 HCSB  But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! …. (10) For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...

Once you were an enemy of God, but He showed His love for you. He did something good for you. He sent His Son to die for you. He blessed you. He reconciled You to Himself through the death of His Son. He prayed for you. Jesus, our great High Priest made intercession for you. How could you do anything less than to be like your heavenly Father and love your enemies?

Again, the main point of the message is: You can’t pick and choose your neighbors. You can’t pick and choose whom you are to love. You are to love all
of them, even your enemies. This is God’s way. This will cause you to be like God, your heavenly Father.

Amen? Amen!