

GOOD FENCES, GAL.6:1-5, LK4:38-44

Art of Neighboring #6

◆**Intro:** For the past five weeks we've been studying what the Bible says about being a caring neighbor to the people around you. Still, it's likely that some of you are truly hesitant to interact with a particular neighbor and for some really good reasons. Some neighbors cause serious problems. If the police are frequently showing up on the neighbor's door step for domestic violence, you have reason to be careful about how you be a neighbor. If your child has been abused or beaten up by a neighbor, you have reason to be wary.

◆**1. Good neighboring requires good boundaries.** We're talking here not just about property, but responsibilities, and actions. When God tells us to be loving and to care about our neighbors, he is not saying that everyone must be our best friend, or that we must ignore dangers and offenses, or give in to all requests. We shall have to be able to draw some lines we will not cross. There's an old saying: good fences make good neighbors. Why? Because good boundaries outline where our responsibilities stop, and where the other person's begin.

◆Bill's father went to a counselor for help with his son, who didn't come along because he "didn't have a problem. Dad did." Bill had struggled with drugs and an inability to stay in school or find a career. Although his parents loved him very much, nothing they did seemed to help. They always gave him everything he needed. Plenty of money at school so he wouldn't have to work and would have time for social things. When he flunked out they

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helped get him into another school. But he kept up the same habits. The counselor shocked Dad when he agreed that Bill didn't have a problem. And yes, Dad did. He explained: "Bill doesn't have a problem because you take all his problems. You pay, you fret, you worry, you plan, you bail him out. Those are his problems but it looks like you're making them yours. Would you like for me to help you help *him* to have some problems?"

◆What Bill's dad was learning was that good relationships require good boundaries. For relationships to be healthy, people need to learn to carry their own responsibilities. In the same way, being a good neighbor requires appropriate boundaries.

◆**2. Setting up boundaries is simply making it clear what you are willing to do or not do, in loving your neighbor.**

◆Here's something about people that it's worth recognizing: real people have real problems, just like us! That means your neighbors have real problems too. When Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor like he loves us, he is not telling us to take on all their responsibilities for them or to bail them out of all consequences of their actions. God does not expect me to live another person's life for them. Jesus himself set limits on what he would do, and who he'd do it for.

◆A. In Luke 4 the people are quite excited about his healing of their illnesses. Luke says they tried to keep him from leaving their town. Clearly he was a helpful resource, that there were more people with cancer or migraines, or macular degeneration

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back there. But Jesus had other places he planned on going.

Does that make Jesus selfish, or uncaring?

◆ Suppose the beaten man in the Good Samaritan story, now in a hotel, being cared for by the innkeeper, –suppose he sat up and said to the Samaritan,

◆ “What? Are you leaving?”

◆ “Yes, I have business in Jericho.”

◆ “Don’t you think you’re being selfish? Like, I’m pretty bad off right here. Who’s gonna keep me company? What ever happened to “deny yourself”? You’re abandoning me in my time of need. You’ll never make it into one of Jesus parables in the Bible if you skip out on me now!”

◆ “Well, I guess you’re right. I could do more. I could postpone my entire trip for you and lose my business and go into financial ruin and not be able to help anyone ever again. How uncaring of me.

◆ I know I’m making the Good Samaritan seem sarcastic. But I think you can see how nonsensical that scenario would be. Still people do this all the time. Relatives do it to each other. And neighbors do it too.

◆ B. God’s Word teaches us that we have responsibilities **to** our neighbors, but we are not responsible **for** our neighbors. Being responsible to people is healthy. Being responsible for people is not. If you try to be responsible for your neighbors decisions or actions you may very well be very overwhelmed while also doing them a disservice. As followers of Jesus we are responsible *to*

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love our neighbors, *to* pray for them, *to* help them as we can.

But we are not responsible *for* their happiness, or for their choices, or for their successes, or for their marriages. When we try to be, we likely will enable more of the same for them.

◆C. Our text for today points this out. At first reading it seems a bit confusing. Verse 2 saying to “carry one another’s burdens.” But verse 5 sums it up by saying “everyone should carry their own load.” So which is it, or how do these concepts fit together? The context is our guide here.

◆1) Paul is talking about “restoring” or “mending” the troubles brought about by a moral lapse of another person. Some folks might take a rather stoic, fatalistic approach and shrug a person’s folly off as “their choice that doesn’t involve me.” But the Christian community is supposed to care and help restore that person, not to ignore their wrong, or pass it off. This term for “burden” refers to excessive, or intense difficulty. The suffering of an illness, or an overburdensome taxation for example. It’s over and beyond ordinary demands of life. Paul is instructing us to help restore people in dire failures.

◆2) In verse 5 Paul uses the different word “load” which refers always to a personal responsibility, or task, not to weight, whereas “burden” is a term referring to something *overbearing*. So here Paul is saying that we each also have tasks, responsibilities that belong to us, and we must fulfill

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them. Other people being responsible for something that belongs to us, is unhealthy for all involved.

◆Let's say the neighbor has three kids who are constantly playing in the street. Meanwhile the parents are in their pool in the back yard oblivious to the immanent danger. It's certainly appropriate to raise a warning with the kids or the parents because you care. But it happens regularly and the parents are fully aware. You are certainly free to stand guard whenever you see kids in the street. But if you didn't and one of the parents came over to blame you for not watching their child, it would be clearly inappropriate. The responsibility was theirs.

◆I'm sure none of you do this, but some parents do their child's homework for them, or flat out give them the answers in an effort to "get it done". You might tell yourself you're being compassionate, but in reality you are hurting your child's hope of learning. In the same way, we need to respect the responsibility of our neighbors. When we get close enough to our neighbors that they share their pains with us (the deeper level we talked about last week) it may mean we are tempted to cross boundaries we should not.

◆Suppose the neighbors have a domestic disturbance, and the wife comes over with her pillow asking if she can stay here tonight. That may be legitimate, but if she keeps coming over every night, you need to love her enough to

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say, "I'm sorry. You can't keep sleeping here. You and your husband need to face your disagreement, and deal with it."

◆Or, your son is smoking weed at his friends house which is illegal. Being a loving neighbor to that family is not to look the other way. Being a loving neighbor is to talk with the parents, and the boys, and draw your boundaries. "I'm sorry. I don't want to cause trouble, but if you give my son drugs again I'll have to turn you in."

◆These are examples of setting clear boundaries as we love our neighbors.

◆3. A Summary of misconceptions about setting good

boundaries: (From Boundaries, Cloud & Townsend)

◆A. It's cruel not to help. Not necessarily. A handout is not the same thing as a helping hand. Your bailing someone out can make their life worse. Remember Bill?

◆*Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death. Proverbs 23:13-14 (NIV 1984)*

◆B. Setting limits is selfish. Is it really selfish to tell your child she may not play with knives? Was Jesus selfish for not healing everyone in Israel? Was Paul selfish when he told the Christians in Thessalonica to teach...

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◆ *For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." 2*

Thessalonians 3:10

◆ C. Setting boundaries will cost me more in the long run.

On the contrary, it is the lack of boundaries (same thing as what we call "laws") that costs us the most.

◆ D. Setting boundaries means I mad or angry. This is obviously mistaken. Making a good rule is always an act of love.

◆ My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. Proverbs 3:11-12

◆ *Revelation 3:19-20 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

◆ **Conclusion:** I'd like to make a shift as we conclude. There's a deep spiritual principle at play here. In our text Paul refers to eternal realities.

◆ *v7-8 do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows... from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

◆ This is a clear theme in scripture.

◆ Hosea 10:12-13 (NIV 1984) Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed

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ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception.

◆ He who sows wickedness reaps trouble Prov.22:8

◆ What's all this saying? Reality is there are consequences for how we live here on Earth, even eternal ones and we each are responsible for our own. Heaven has set some good boundaries and mankind has often jumped the fences. This means some important things.

◆ I'm not going to get your consequences, and you are not going to get mine. And you will not get you father's consequences either. Or your grandma's. They may be church-going, moral people but that doesn't make you right with God. Each of us needs to face the responsibility we carry for our lives.

◆ So in the end, health and life come from realizing what we are actually responsible for. You are responsible for the state of your own soul. Now the good news of the gospel is that Jesus' death paid for the sin and wrong you and I are responsible for! But we need to turn to him and ask him to apply it to us. We each need to ask for and receive the forgiveness of Jesus for ourselves! Good news is we can do it right now!