

Introduction

Black Lives Matter. You all know to what that term refers. It's an activist movement that gained national recognition after the police shooting of Michael Brown in 2014. It was highly visible in July after two police shootings of black men in Baton Rouge and Minneapolis. I'm not here to discuss the *Black Lives Matter* movement. I am here to discuss the issue its very existence raises. What should our posture be toward **"red and yellow, black and white"** to quote the old child's song? The celebrated Good Samaritan parable in Luke 10:25-37 tells us. It's that all neighbors matter and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Interpreting parables is a five-step process.

Step #1 - We identify who the original hearers of the parable were. Here, in verse 25, it was **"a lawyer."** Lawyers or scribes as they were sometimes called, were copiers of the Law of Moses and closely aligned with the Pharisees. This one in fact was almost certainly a Pharisee.

Step #2 - We identify the circumstance that gave rise to the parable. In verse 25, the lawyer-Pharisee asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. In verses 26-28, Jesus referred Him to the Law of Moses. He must love Yahweh with his whole being (Deuteronomy 6:5) and his neighbor as himself (Leviticus 19:18). In verse 29, he then asked Jesus a question about Leviticus 19:18, **"Who is my neighbor?"** thinking the answer would make him look good.

Step #3 - We identify the points of reference, the details in the parable that represent something else. Here they are the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. Each stands for **"your neighbor."**

Step #4 - We identify how the parable impacted the original hearers. That is the key to interpreting this parable. Notice who the first two people were who wouldn't help the wounded man - a priest and a Levite. Priests and Levites ministered in the temple at Jerusalem and

cooperated with the Roman authorities who ruled there. The Pharisees, who were fierce patriots, despised them because they did.

I can imagine what this lawyer-Pharisee was thinking at this point in the parable: **“It figures that the priest and Levite wouldn’t help the wounded man. Who’d expect anything else from the likes of them? Everyone knows they don’t love their neighbors.”**

I can also infer what he was expecting next: **“The next person down the road is going to help this wounded man and it’s going to be a Pharisee like me. After all, everyone knows that we Pharisees love our neighbors.”**

Here’s where the story turns. The next person down the road helps the wounded man just as the lawyer-Pharisee thought he would. But surprise of all surprises, it isn’t a Pharisee but a Samaritan. Samaritans were racially mixed, half Jewish and half Gentile. If there was anyone Pharisees despised more than priests and Levites, it was Samaritans.

This lawyer-Pharisee was taken back the moment Jesus said, **“Samaritan.”** He immediately got the point Jesus was making: **“Pharisee, you don’t love your neighbor. It isn’t because you wouldn’t have helped the wounded man because you would have. It’s because you look down on priests, Levites, and Samaritans.”**

That brings us to the fifth step in interpreting parables. We identify the message or truth they teach. Here it’s that the **“neighbor”** Yahweh commands us to love can’t be defined in limiting terms. It includes everyone who is near us no matter what his or her race or creed is.

Prejudice and Racism

That’s the correct interpretation of the parable. Now let’s apply it. It speaks to a timeless problem of humans, prejudice. The lawyer-Pharisee was prejudiced and so are many if not most people today.

Prejudice arises from a natural tendency humans have – the tendency to categorize. We classify different aspects of reality into categories. Doing so enables us to make sense of the complexity of our

world and lives. It allows us to process information quickly and efficiently. Categorization occurs in numerous contexts including the social. In that context, we categorize people, including us, into groups.

It's here that another natural tendency occurs. It's to view and treat people without neighbor-love, which I'll explain later, based solely on their membership in a group. **Prejudice** occurs when we do. So a Summit County Common Pleas judge I knew wouldn't hire Christians as his law clerks because **"Christians are preachy and hard to get along with in the workplace,"** which is a gross generalization. He was prejudiced against Christians.

Understanding prejudice helps us understand **"racism."** Racism is a specific form of prejudice. It's viewing and treating people without neighbor-love just because they're red, yellow, black, or white. We've made dramatic strides against racism but there's still plenty of it left in the minds and hearts of many Americans, including professing Christians.

My sister attended a Baptist Church in Virginia that she left because of an incident that occurred there. One Sunday night, a black couple came in before the service and sat down at the back of the sanctuary. They were new to the community and were visiting churches hoping to find one they liked. After meeting briefly at the front of the sanctuary, several church leaders walked back to the couple and politely asked them to leave. They didn't offer any explanations and didn't have to. It was clear. Whites only. No blacks allowed.

That's racism and its consequence, ironically, is racism in return. It's psychologically and sociologically true. Racism breeds racism. It causes an almost demonic bitterness in its victims that eats away at them like a cancer. The result is numerous minorities who are just as racist toward whites as whites are toward them. Freddy Phipps, a black pastor of a mega church in Cincinnati, acknowledges that: **"The acceptance of white people from African-Americans needs improvement. We are still somewhat bitter about what has taken place in the three hundred years as a result of slavery. Not many of us have realized**

that if we're going to move forward, we have to take our eyes off the past."

Let's face it. Prejudice and racism permeate our culture and world.

No Prejudice Allowed

But they don't the kingdom of Yahweh. In His kingdom, there's no prejudice or racism allowed. The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us exactly that. Premise #1 – To get into Yahweh's kingdom, we must love our neighbors. Premise #2 – If we're prejudice or racist, we don't love our neighbors. Conclusion – If we're prejudice or racist, we don't get into Yahweh's kingdom. That's the logic of the parable.

Clarence Jordan told about a tiny church of white people in the hills of South Carolina back in the 1950's that hired an old country preacher. On his first Sunday, he preached from Galatians 3:28 about being **"one in Christ Jesus"** and said that **"real"** Christians don't pay any attention to things like the color of people's skin. After the service, the deacons called him to the back room and forbade him to preach that way anymore. Jordan, to whom this old preacher was telling the story, asked him what he did then. **"I fired them deacons,"** he shot back. **"I mean, if deacons ain't gonna 'deac' like the Bible says, they ought to be fired."** Most of the congregation agreed with the deacons though and this old preacher preached the church down to four people. But then they began to pick up new members, he told Jordan, and they wouldn't let people become members unless they were **"real"** Christians. **"But how did you know if people were 'real' Christians?"** Jordan asked. **"That was easy,"** the old preacher replied, **"Down here, from when we're knee high to a grasshopper, we're taught that there's a difference between black folks and white folks. But when people become Christians, all of that stuff is forgotten. In Jesus, we overcome all of that racist evil, and we work hard at becoming one in Him."** The result was a church of 300 people, in a time and place of rampant racism, that was thoroughly integrated – black and white

worshipping, fellowshiping, praying, and working together.

That church illustrates the message of our parable. Real Christians as the old preacher called them and real churches aren't prejudice or racist. There's no prejudice or racism in the kingdom of Yahweh.

Neighbor-Love

Verse 27 identifies what there is instead. It's "**neighbor-love.**"

The word "**neighbor**" there connotes "**near dweller,**" anyone who is near or around us in day-to-day life. So, our neighbors are those that we're able to act upon and interact with in any way, no matter what their race, color, creed, or membership in any group is. I'm on a housing board with a person who is black and politically liberal. I'm white and politically conservative. He's my neighbor. I saw a Muslim whose car was broken down and who needed help. He was my neighbor.

Now, notice what we're to do with our neighbors. Love them as we do ourselves. We're just as devoted to their well-being and joy as we are to our own. We desire and seek their good as much as we do our own. This love involves compassion, which is feeling our neighbors' needs.

What I've just explained is called "**neighbor-love**" and we're quick to see it. If we don't feel people's needs, and don't desire and seek their good just because they belong to a particular group, we don't have neighbor-love. What we do have is prejudice instead.

Perhaps you've read about employees at a Dunkin Donut, an Arby's, and a Whataburger refusing to serve police officers who came into their restaurants. Those police officers, as customers, were the neighbors of those employees. But those employees didn't feel their needs, and didn't desire and seek their good just because they were police officers. They didn't have neighbor-love. They were prejudiced instead.

Or consider a man at Dollar Tree. A Muslim woman with a baby in one arm and merchandise in the other was approaching the door to go out as he was coming in. But he wasn't courteous enough to open it for her. I then heard him whisper to his companion after she passed, "**I ain't**

doin' nothin' for no Muslim." She, in his presence, was his neighbor. But he didn't feel her needs, and didn't desire and seek her good just because she was Muslim. He didn't have neighbor-love. He was prejudiced instead.

Those two anecdotes, by way of contrast, illustrate what neighbor-love does. It feels the needs, and desires and seeks the good of those who are near it. It does so no matter what their race, color, creed, or membership in any group is. It serves the police officer. It opens the door for the Muslim. It doesn't discriminate at all in for whom it does good. It is, in the end, the only solution to the problem of prejudice and racism in individuals and in the groups they form, including Christians and churches.

Conclusion

I'd be remiss though if I didn't point something out in verse 27. The neighbor-love I've talked about today isn't something we can conjure up on our own. It's a consequence of Yahweh-love. We learn how to routinely act upon and interact with Yahweh so that we come to know and love Him, which our First Aim study teaches us how to do. Loving our neighbors then flows steadily from that. We increasingly come to have the same posture toward them that He does. What is that posture? The old child's song tells us: "**Red and yellow, black and white; they are precious in His sight.**" To Yahweh and His followers, in other words, all neighbors matter.