

WHO'S MY NEIGHBOR?

Lev 19:13-19

I. LINGUISTIC CONSENSUS: physically nearby (not everyone everywhere as pilloried in Dickens' *Bleak House* humanitarian Mrs. Jellyby)

- A. Hebrew: *rea*—friend, companion
- B. Greek: *plesion*—nearby one
- C. Latin: *vicinia*—vicinity, propinquity
- D. German: *der Nachbar*—nearby one
- E. French: *voisin*—see-able, nearby
- F. English: *neighbor*—OE “near dweller”

II. DIMINISHING SPHERES OF RESPONSIBILITY—primary? secondary? tertiary? non-existent? how decide what's due to whom?

- A. Familial: “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever” (I Tim 5:8).
 - risk life? give money? invest time?
 - 1. Wife, children, parents, grandparents
 - 2. Uncles, aunts, cousins
 - 3. Clan, tribe
- B. Spatial: “those who we come up against, who enter our moral space” (A.M. Smith)
 - risk life? give money? invest time?
 - 1. Household (kin; employees)
 - 2. Next-door, visible neighbors (paradoxical difference between rural and urban folks)
 - 3. Town, county, nation, world
- C. Friendships—risk life? give money? invest time?
 - 1. Circumstantial—via chance, casual associations (e.g. cruise)
 - 2. Vocational—job-related bonds (e.g. military buddies)
 - 3. Recreational—hunting buddies, quilting gals
- D. Faith: congregation, denomination, catholic/universal church militant—risk life? \$\$\$?

III. BIBLICAL CLUES (N.B. near-equal stress on both Silver & Golden Rules)

- A. Words:
 - 1. No false witness (Ex 20:16); no talebearing (Lv 19:16); no idle talk (Ps 12:2); no backbiting (Ps 15:3); no slander (Ps 101:5); no flattering (Pro 29:5); no misleading statements (Jer 9:8);
 - 2. Be truthful (Zech 8:16); speak truth (Eph 1:25)
- B. Thoughts: no devising evil (Pro 3:29); don't take up reproach against (Ps 15:3); no despising (Pro 14:21)
- C. Deeds:
 - 1. Don't steal (Lev 19:13);
 - 2. Do keep entrusted valuables (Ex 22:7); reimburse lost animals, items (Ex 2:9); repay lost borrowed goods (Ex 22:14);
 - 3. Follow fairness in commerce (Lev 25:14), no usury (Ps 15:5)
- D. Courts:
 - 1. No false witness, perjury (Ex 20:16); tales no bribes (Ps 15:5)
 - 2. Insist on impartial decisions, favoring neither rich nor poor (Lev 19:15); execute right judgment (Jer 7:5)
- E. Do no evil (Ps 15:3), do no harm (Rom 13:10)
- F. Do good: help when needed (Is 41:6)

RE: DESIGNATING OUR “NEIGHBOR”

“There are two ways, one of life and one of death; and great is the difference between the two ways.

“This is the way of life: ‘First you shall love God who made you, secondly, your neighbor as yourself; and whatever you would not like done to you, do not do to another.’” --*The Didache: Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, I, 1-2*

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people.” --G.K. Chesterton

“People glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbors.” --George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

“He will not go behind his father’s saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’”
--Robert Frost

“We can’t have moral obligations to every single person in this world. We have moral obligations to those who we come up against, who enter into our moral space, so to speak. That means neighbors, people we deal with, and so on.”

--Alexander McCall Smith, *The Sunday Philosophy Club*

“Discover the fulfillment of intimate relationships with flesh-and-blood neighbors and teammates in concrete place and time, and we escape the pressure of mainstream media to channel intimacy only as virtual embrace.” --Jose Panate-Aceves & John Hayes

“The best way that a man could test his readiness to encounter the common variety of mankind would be to climb down a chimney into any house at random, and get on as well as possible with the people inside. And that is essentially what each of us did on the day that he was born.” --G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics*

“Hedges between keep friendships green” --English Proverb

“It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one’s neighbor.” --Eric Hoffer

“. . . man is by nature a political [social] animal.” --Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2

“He was a foe without hate, a friend without treachery, a soldier without cruelty, and a victim without murmuring. He was a public officer without vices, a private citizen without wrong, a neighbor without reproach, a Christian without hypocrisy, and a man

without guilt. He was Caesar without his ambition, Frederick without his tyranny, Napoleon without his selfishness, and Washington without his reward.”

--Benjamin H. Hill's "Tribute to Robert E. Lee,"
in Thomas Nelson Page's *Robert E. Lee*

“A GREAT SPIRITUAL DOCUMENT”

“Our forefathers came to certain conclusions and decided upon certain courses of action which have been a great blessing to the world. . . . They were a people who came under the influence of a great spiritual development and acquired a great moral power.

“No other theory is adequate to explain or comprehend the Declaration of Independence. It is the product of the spiritual insight of the people. We live in an age of science and of abounding accumulation of material things. These did not create our Declaration. Our Declaration created them. The things of the spirit come first. Unless we cling to that, all our material prosperity, overwhelming though it may appear, will turn to a barren scepter in our grasp. If we are to maintain the great heritage which has been bequeathed to us, we must be like-minded as the fathers who created it. We must not sink into a pagan materialism. We must cultivate the reverence which they had for the things that are holy. We must follow the spiritual and moral leadership which they showed. We must keep replenished, that they may glow with a more compelling flame, the altar fires before which they worshiped.”

--President Calvin Coolidge,
speech in Philadelphia on July 5, 1926,
marking the 150th anniversary of
The Declaration of Independence