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Leviticus 19:9-18:

“Love Without Limits: Friends, Frenemies, and Foes”

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Love Without Limits: Friends, Frenemies, and Foes

Leviticus 19:9-18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

In 2003, the sentencing of Gary Ridgway, otherwise known as the Green River Killer, drew national attention. He had confessed to murdering 71 women, though only 49 cases could be formally proven. One by one, the families of his victims were invited to speak. One mother stood before Ridgway and cried out, “You had the nerve, the audacity to kill my daughter.. You don’t even have the decency to let us know where she is.” Another grieving parent said, “You are an animal. I wish you had the death penalty. That’s the only justice that would fit what you’ve done.” Another said, “I wish for him to have a long, suffering, cruel death.” And yet another said, “He’s going to go to hell, and that’s where he belongs.” And who could blame them? Every word came from raw and truly broken hearts.

But then came Robert Rule, the father of Linda Jane Rule, one of Ridgway’s youngest victims, who was just sixteen years old when she was killed. Facing the man who had taken away the life of his beloved daughter, he said something that froze the entire room, “Mr. Ridgway, there are people here who hate you. I’m not one of them. You’ve made it difficult to live up to what I believe, and that is what God says to do, and that’s to forgive. You are forgiven, sir.” In that moment, Ridgway, who had been stone-cold through all the confrontations, broke down into tears.

I. Love Without Limits

Parts of our scripture reading for today state,

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ... You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ... You shall do no injustice in court. ... You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge ... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

It’s easy to nod along when we hear, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But the weight of that command hits differently when you stand in front of someone who has robbed you of so much. What Robert Rule did that day almost seems inhuman and impossible. Yet that is precisely the kind of love God commands: a love that has no limits, no boundaries, no conditions. That moment forces us to ask hard questions of our own hearts.

When was the last time you truly paused to reflect on how you treat the people around you, especially those who have wronged you? When you interact with others, what’s really on

your mind? What's truly in your heart toward them? Do you catch yourself judging? Looking down on them as if they're somehow less important or less worthy? Is your focus more on advancing your own interests than on caring for the mind, body, and soul God has placed right in front of you? Have you considered that the way you operate might have a more negative impact than a positive one? Do you find yourself over-analyzing situations to protect yourself, rather than seeking to serve everyone involved?

I firmly believe there isn't a single person here today, including myself, or in the history of mankind, who can walk away from these questions smelling like roses. It's quite the opposite. These diagnostic questions cut straight to the heart of the matter: our Lord in Leviticus 19 and elsewhere commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. But have you thought about what that means? It means **Love Without Limits**. It means looking at a person at the lowest of the low, like Gary Ridgway, and the greatest of the great, and loving them with Christ-like love no matter what. Loving without limits does not mean tolerating sin or excusing it. There are times when love must also speak the hard truth. While it doesn't mean being accepting of sin, it does mean giving ourselves entirely to those around us, even when they have done the worst, most egregious thing against us.

You and I struggle to forgive someone who cut us off in traffic. How can we ever hope to love like that? The bad news is, we can't. But with Christ, with His Spirit at work in us, something new happens where our hearts are changed. The hurt that we feel when someone wrongs us certainly doesn't disappear in this sinful world, but this impossible, radical kind of love becomes a reality in Christ, who first loved us.

II. Friends, Frenemies, and Foes

Initially, there appear to be three levels of Christ-like love: easy, medium, and hard, and we fail in all of them. Our friends and family are the easy part. It's not difficult in most instances to love those who already love and care for us anyway. But before we think that we can check off friends and family as if we always perfectly love them, we must remember the harsh reality that, oftentimes, forgiving and loving our friends is harder than forgiving those whom we don't even know. As the old saying goes, "Familiarity breeds contempt."

Since we live in a fallen world where everyone has rebelled against God, even our closest companions test this "love without limits" that God commands. Friends can hurt us in ways that no stranger could because we have entrusted them with something special—our hearts. The betrayal of a friend, the stinging feeling of a careless word or insult, cuts deeper when it comes from someone we trust. It is in these moments that we are called by God to release it, to give forgiveness abundantly as we have been forgiven. This is not to arbitrarily excuse wrongdoing, but to release it just as Christ released us from the burden of our sin.

Then comes the so-called frenemies. Oxford Dictionary defines a "Frenemy" as "A person with whom one is friendly, despite a fundamental dislike or rivalry; a person who

combines the characteristics of a friend and an enemy.” This could be anyone from a work rival who is always out to get you to someone in your extended family who turns every good moment into a bad one. Loving these people is just as tricky as loving our close friends and family. Our sinful nature always tends to prioritize self-protection. But Jesus teaches us to see the hidden things in others. He reminds us that these people, too, need the forgiveness that He offers at the cross. He teaches us to respond with grace rather than retaliation, and to recognize that even the half-hearted friends in our lives are people for whom He died.

Last but not least, we must love our foes. These are the people who stand directly against us, who have acted with malice, intention, and cruelty. These are the ones who would gladly see us harmed, who oppose everything we stand for in Christ, who would drag us away from the love of God if they could. They seek to tear down our faith, to wound us in body and soul, and to break our spirit. How can we possibly love them? How could we ever forgive them? It seems impossible until we remember the words of Jesus on the cross.

Having been beaten, mocked, spit upon, nailed to a tree, and left to die in agony, Christ looked upon those who crucified Him and prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” There is no deeper or purer picture of love without limits than this: the Son of God forgiving His executioners even as His lifeblood poured out for them. If Christ can love like that, and He does, then there is hope that His Spirit can work that same miracle of love and forgiveness in us, even toward those who have set themselves up as our worst enemies.

III. Nothing Beyond His Reach

You see, brothers and sisters, in God’s eyes, we were like the Green River Killer, not because we committed the same crimes, but because in our sin, we were just as guilty, just as lost, and just as unable to save ourselves. We stood guilty before God, every bit as condemned, every bit as lost, every bit as stained with sin. Maybe we didn’t take the lives of the innocent, but we certainly murdered in our hearts when we hated others. We certainly have failed to keep His Law. As James 2 states, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.” We were enemies of God, deserving the full force of His wrath for the sins that we have committed. And yet what did He do? He loved us. He sent His Son to the cross for us. Jesus took on our guilt, bore our shame, and covered us with His own perfect righteousness. If God can love and forgive sinners like us, then there is nothing beyond the reach of His forgiving love. Nothing.

Romans 5:6-10 states,

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to

God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

Friends, frenemies, or foes, there is no category of neighbor left out of God’s command to love. Along with that, there is not a single category of sinner that is somehow left out of salvation won in Christ. He died for the sins of the world on that cross. And though we fail again and again to love our neighbors and to forgive as we have been forgiven, Jesus succeeds where we do not. When we have faith, His perfect love that is without limits has forgiven every single debt you owe. Since He has loved you with this everlasting love that does not fail, the Spirit that is in you gives you the power to love what previously seemed unlovable, to forgive the unforgivable, and to shine as a beacon of the love of Christ in a world as fallen and broken as the one we live in.

So go with confidence in that love. You have been loved beyond measure, forgiven beyond comprehension, and restored. Let that love show from you to every neighbor, whether a friend, frenemy, or foe, remembering that it is God who has placed them in your path. When hatred tempts you, remember Christ’s mercy and remember His cross. When your heart says, “This is impossible,” remember the Savior who made the impossible possible by dying for sinners like you and me. I pray that God will grant you and me the courage that comes only from the Spirit’s strength, to love, forgive, and live as our risen Lord has done for us.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott