

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

INTRODUCTION

Those of you who were here last Sunday morning will recall that the sermon on that occasion had to do with the First and Great Commandment. "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind". "This" said Jesus, "is the first and great commandment". You will remember, however, that he went on to say that "There is a second like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself". This is the commandment that we shall consider carefully and explore at some length here today. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself".

DEVELOPMENT

This word "neighbor" I think strikes a rather familiar note with us. Right away you begin to think of the people living upstairs, or across the hall from you, or around the corner, or down the street from you. It's hard for you to think of them without remembering how kind they were to you when your husband was extremely ill, or when your child was sick, or when you yourself were in some sort of trouble. Their kindness meant a great deal to you. And you remember too how you went to them when they were in trouble, and knocked on their door and said, "If I can be of any help to you, don't hesitate to call on me"

When you really stop to think about it, it is true is it not that you find good neighbors wherever you go or wherever you live. For instance, in the country when a farmer's barn burns down, the other farmers in the neighborhood will come together and almost overnight help him to put up a new barn. Or if a man living in a small town has a talented youngster who should go on to college but almost no money to get him started on his way, the people in the town will somehow raise the money and pay for his education. And even here in the city, where we live so much more closely together and yet sometimes so much farther apart, we may think that this kind of neighborliness doesn't exist or that it's not expressed, and yet in my own limited experiences dealing with families in trouble here in the city, I have yet to find a family in trouble that does not speak of the kindness of their neighbors almost the moment that I enter their door. This genuine, human kindness to people in trouble is one of the characteristics of the human race; this willingness, this gladness to help others is one of the earmarks of humanity.

Some of you may be saying to yourselves "Now when you begin to talk about this 'neighborliness' you're talking about something that I can understand and appreciate. You're coming down out of the clouds, and I can take in what you're saying. Loving God may be all right for some people, but not for me. This is practical Christianity - this second commandment. This is my religion. To be sure, I don't know all there is to know about the creeds and the Bible; and I may not be regular in my church attendance, but this I do - I love my neighbor. At least I try to. I do unto others as I would have them do unto me. This makes sense. This is my religion."

AND YET IT'S NOT QUITE AS SIMPLE AS ALL THIS.

Unfortunately, however, the situation is not quite as simple as it may seem. Just think for a moment or two of some of the neighbors you have and you'll perhaps see why I say this. For instance, suppose you live in the suburbs and one of your neighbors is a negro family, the first negro family that has ever owned property in your neighborhood. Somehow they have managed to slip under those carefully constructed defenses that have been erected and a real estate agent, either for his

own gain or for the sake of a principle he believes in, has sold them a house. Everybody in the neighborhood is up in arms. They know the value of the property is likely to go down very quickly. What would you do? Would you work behind the scenes along with a few others to get them out of there? Would you give them the silent treatment, the cold shoulder and think that by treating them that way that they'll get the idea that they are not wanted? Would you try to befriend them, until you see that by befriending them you are losing some of your own friends. What kind of a neighbor would you be?

Or take another situation. Suppose you live in New York (most of you do), and suppose you have a neighbor who has a large family - three or four children. He makes enough to get along, but he doesn't make enough to send his children to private schools. I think it's fair to say that the public schools in this city are not the best in the world, and in this particular case, in the case of these three or four children, they are not getting the best in education, the kind of education that you and he and everybody else knows that the children should be getting. What do you do? Do you do what you can in order to get scholarships for these children in private schools so that they can get the kind of education that they ought to be getting? Would you go so far as to send the children yourself to private schools, that is, if you had the means? Would you try to work through political channels in order to improve the public school system of New York City? Would you be at all concerned? Would you say something like this to yourself, "Well that's his problem. It's not mine. I have enough to do to take care of my own family and he'll have to get along the best that he can".

Let's take another situation. Suppose you have a neighbor living in the same apartment house with you and this neighbor is doing something that you know is not right. In this case, the neighbor is a rather attractive young lady; married at an early age; divorced a few years later, and she has a three year old little boy for whom she must care. She neglects the little boy terribly. She's seldom at home. She has employed someone else to come in and care for him while she goes out to make a living. She spends most of her free time entertaining prospective husbands. She gives very little of herself - her time and her love to the three year old who is growing up. You can see what is happening to the little boy; you think about the scars that this will probably leave on him. He isn't receiving the normal love and care and affection that he should be receiving. What do you do? Do you do anything? Do you just gossip about it with some of the other neighbors. Do you try to point out to this young mother the mistake that she is making? Or do you say to yourself, "Well that's none of my business. It's her problem. If that's the way she wants to raise her child, it's all right with me so long as she doesn't interfere with my circle of living".

Let's take just one more situation, one more neighbor. This may be a neighbor who comes into your business community. He moves in quietly. He is highly acceptable; so acceptable that he begins to outshine the others who have been in the community much longer. He's younger; he has more vitality and energy, more talent, better connections. What do you do? How do you treat him? Do you try to compete with him as you see him getting ahead of you? Do you begin to fester inside. Or do you try to meet him as another human being, trying to understand him rather than undercut him?

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

Perhaps you're beginning to see, at least I hope so, that this matter of loving one's

relationship with us. We have these tensions right here in our own city, mind you. One does not have to go far from the doors of this church to find them. And in the world at large, divided between communism and democracy, not enough effort is being made by either side to look at the other objectively, fairly or with any trace of sympathy. And in our own smaller, private world that can be so torn and embittered by human relationships in which we are jealous of someone who gets ahead of us or anxious to get back at someone who has slighted us - and in our own smaller private world the poison of this hostility can destroy the best part of our life. This you see is no arbitrary command of God or of Jesus. It is written into the very nature of our existence and it's as simple as this, either we learn to live together, and to love another, or die. It's as simple as that. This is our predicament and dilemma. We do not do it; we cannot do it; and yet we know that we must.

CLOSING SECTION

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all of thy heart and soul and mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself". Over these past two weeks, as I have been working with this theme, the question has come into my mind several times as to why Jesus put these commandments in the other that he did. Why didn't he start with the second commandment. That's closer to us; this is the easier one, some might say. We can manage the second one easier than the first. But Jesus apparently saw something. Perhaps he knew that unless a man had some love of God who is the creator of us all, that he could never love other people dispassionately and with a concern that amounts to affectionate care. Perhaps he knew that unless a man really felt the love of God he could not possibly be secure enough to love in a real way the people who are a constant threat to him. And so I think Jesus is sharing with us a very great insight at this point in this whole matter of human relationships, and it would be something like this: right human relationships are the natural and spontaneous overflowing result of a deeper relationship with God. In other words, when a man begins to love God (we talked about this last Sunday) when he begins to be centered upon that which is the very core of life; when he is, if I may use this word, enraptured by the idea of perfect goodness that is at the very heart of all things; when he is drawn to this as it is incarnate in Christ Jesus so that he says that this is the thing above everything else I want to be and do in life - an agent, an instrument of his, this is what I want to be above everything else - then he begins to love other people - first for his sake, until he finds himself loving them for their own sake, people that he thought he could never love at all.

There is a novel that was published some time ago entitled, Child of Our Times, by a young Spaniard named Castillo. I haven't read the book, but I did read a review of it in Time magazine. It has to do with the author's childhood. He was born in Spain during the days of the Spanish Civil War. His father left Spain and went to live in France when the child was three years of age. A couple of years later the young child and his mother escaped from Spain and went to Paris where they found the father. His father, however, didn't want them and after a while betrayed them, both of them, to the Nazis, and both were carried off to concentration camps - the mother to one, and the seven year old boy to another. The author tells us that at that time he hated the entire world - father, mother, everyone - all grown ups because they seemed to hate him. In the concentration camp where it was supposed he was a Jew, though he was not, a German officer took an interest in him.

An interest in this little boy who had know nothing but suffering and tragedy all of his life, nothing but hatred. The German officer befriended and mothered him. He gave him what he had never had and just before the German soldier di@d, this is what he said to the boy and this is the line that caught my attention in the review and the line I would leave with you - "Leave hate to those who are too weak to love"

"Leave hate to those who are too weak to love" Turn it over in your mind and let it remain in your thought. And Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind. This is the first and great commandment, and there is a second like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as theyself. Upon these two commandments rest all the law and the prophets."

LET US PRAY: Lord have mercy upon us in all of our failures. Help us to love thee more and more so that our love for thee may lead us to have more love for the people around us, not for our skae only, but for theirs. We ask this in the name of him who was able to love even the people who were aginat him. Amen