

**BIBLE**

**PARALLEL**

**LINES**

## **Parallel Lines Pt.6: Character**

Lev 19:13 “*Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. “Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.”*

Let’s add in another verse just for fun. Matthew 5:20 “*For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*” God is not kidding. Take a long look at the Ten Commandments. Then take a longer look at Leviticus 19. The parallel line between them is obvious. It’s all about Godly character. Now add in another line straight to Matthew 5:20. Imagine someone telling you that your character must exceed that of the President, pastor, and Pope to enter heaven. The character and standard of God is not even close to your standards. It’s Gods standard.

Don’t you find it interesting that so many of the verses surrounding the Ten Commandments and the Levitical laws include the neighbor. Why the neighbor? It’s because family is blood. A spouse is your love. We cherish our kids. We might even hold allegiance to a co-worker or boss. Yet, who is the neighbor to you? In so many ways they are the uncomfortable stranger. That person you live near (or with). You share space like a lawn or driveway. Anything that happens in your neighborhood affects you and them. They are your friend, stranger, and co-owner of land in your living space. Yet, in many cases we don’t owe them a thing. Who are they really in our lives? The lowest priority of people you know just might be the neighbor.

God is saying that to have real Godly character is to elevate your neighbor's status in your eyes. To treat them with respect, honor, and love. Yes, love those you hold the least. People love to say God is all about rules or commands. Does that mean those laws and commands are irrelevant or over bearing? Worthless! Read again Matthew 5:37-48. This is a daunting piece of literature. The neighbor? There is no getting around the importance of your character towards those who may not merit it in your eyes. In so many ways this is God. He blesses us with grace although He has no reason to do so. Did you merit His favor? Did you win His love? How did you get God's grace? How does your neighbor get yours?

Matthew 5:37 begins with your yes being yes and no being no. Verse 48 ends with a "therefore." Therefore, be perfect as your God in heaven is perfect. That is a tall order. Matthew 20:15-16 has God saying through this parable "*Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?*" 16 "*So the last will be first, and the first will be last.*" The parallel line is clear. If God is generous, why aren't you? If the Lord chooses to bless someone, should you be jealous? What if God loves the least or last of society equally to you? What if you are great in the eyes of men? Do you think your great in your own eyes?

My Son asked me why rich people should get to keep their money. Why don't we give poor people more money? Those are good questions. We should help out those in need. Then the questions fly. Should everyone be paid equally? Should everyone be loved equally? This Matthew 20 parable seems to indicate that. Yet, there are so many other verses that tell us to work hard and set standards of effort. The real parallel line is saying that a standard must be set in all we do. Be generous. Help the least. Also expect effort and character of others and yourself as God does in heaven.

Deuteronomy 23:24-25 *“If you enter your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. 25 If you enter your neighbor’s grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.*

The respect of the neighbor runs deep in the Old and New Testaments. As Christians we are commanded to take care of those around us. Think of the parallel lines in our own culture? Our governments give to other countries. We have helped the poor and destitute from war torn lands. Some of the trouble we have had with neighbors comes from taking too much. Political interference in foreign affairs has hurt this planet. We seek their oil and products by force at times. How we have treated our fellow humans has hurt the love in this world. God never intended it to be that way. These lines in the Bible point towards sharing our wealth with respect to those less fortunate. Sharing in compassion and love. Jesus shared His own life so that we could be saved from God’s judgment of sin. The ultimate payment for a stranger and neighbor.