

## Introduction:

One of the greatest inventions by man is the line (slide 1). Certainly, some can rightly debate such a statement. Some may argue that the **wheel**, or **fire** or the **iPhone** is the greatest invention of man and they would have a legitimate case to stand on. But, I would **place the line** in the **top five of man's inventions since the dawn of time**. I call the line an invention, because nature is full of curves, shapes and figures, but the straight line is something that originated in the mind of men and women. *"If necessity is the mother of invention,"* then perhaps lines were invented right from the beginning because we just can't live without them. Lines to create a **MAP** from one place to another (the straightest course between any two points is a straight line), lines to **BUILD SHELTER** or lines are used to **PLACE LANGUAGE IN WRITTEN FORM**. Lines are all over the place.

Lines are so common in our world, we tend forget that we live in them and use them in almost everything we do. Lines create order, they provide definition, they tell us which way to go and how to get there.

Take for instance, a **track and field race (slide 2)**. Lines provides both the boundaries and the course for each runner. Without them, the race could not be run in a fair and orderly manner.

Or **driving a car in traffic (slide 3)**. Lines define what is the road and what is the shoulder. Lines organize specific lanes for each driver and different colors and patterns of lines define the flow of traffic, independent lanes for folks traveling in the same direction and lines even are supposed to provide a safe haven for pedestrians when they cross a street.

Then there is reading a book or magazine (slide 4). Though some advertisements take great license and creativity in how they communicate, for the most part, when there are words to be read, there is order (from left to right in English) as if a straight line was under each line and framing each page.

The point is that **LINES ARE INDISPENSABLE PART ARE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF OUR LIVES.** Yet lines in and of themselves are **BENIGN, INDISCRIMINATE, THEY HAVE NO MORAL AGENDA or VALUE.** Lines simply do what they were made to do and **THAT IS TO ORGANIZE, DELINEATE AND PROVIDE DEFINITION TO LIFE.**

**BUT HOW A PERSON USES A LINE AND WHERE THEY DRAW IT SAYS A LOT ABOUT THAT PERSON ESPECIALLY ABOUT HOW ONE LIMITS WHO THEY LOVE.**

Take for instance **THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA (slide 5).** Built over a thousand year period, this **4,500 mile long wall would extend from Miami, Florida to the North Pole and was guarded by over a million men.** Or, to give a better picture, if you laid out all the bricks to form a wall around the **equator** you'd end up with a wall **five feet high and three feet wide.** Such a massive project cost a modern-day equivalent of **\$500 billion—about the same as we've spent on our nation's highway system in the last 40 years.** **The purpose? The main purpose was to stop the marauding bands of Mongols.** Essentially, the Great Wall of China is like any wall which tends to communicate a few messages: **“Stay out, keep to yourself, and leave us alone.”**

And then there is **THE MASON-DIXON LINE between the Pennsylvania and Maryland borders (slide 6).** The term Mason-Dixon Line is still sometimes used to mean **the boundary between the North and the South.** Before the Civil War the

Mason Dixon Line separated the slave states from the free states. If you were a black person in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, living on one side or the other of this line was the difference between **slavery and freedom, acceptance as an equal or property for someone to own, life or merely survival.**

After World War II a line was drawn through Europe separating democratically run governments from their communist counterparts (slide 7). *“A barrier now separated east and West.”* Winston Churchill stated in a speech at Fulton, Mo., U.S., on March 5, 1946, *“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent.”* The line of ideology, the line of values, the line of worth divided a continent for over 50 years.

**Lines in our world (slide 8):**

1) Homosexuals vs. Straight 2) Democrats vs. Republicans, 3) Christian vs. Muslim, 4) Immigrants vs. Naturalized, 5) Single vs. Married, 6) Homeowners vs. Renters, 7) Business owners vs. employees, 8) Private School families vs. Public School families

**Lines that SEPARATE. Lines that DIVIDE. Lines that choose WHO WE ACCEPT AND WHO WE REJECT. Lines that tell us WHO IS OUR ENEMY AND WHO IS OUR FRIEND. Lines that DISTINGUISH, DEMARK and DISCRIMINATE**

. The world is full of lines. Always has been. Always will.

Well, **Jesus has something to say about these lines and what they say about the type of love we radiate and give.** This morning, we are going to explore some of these lines and take a close look at what Jesus says we are to do with them. But before we do, let's pray. (slide 9-10)

## Exposing our Lines:

Once again, we find our selves in the, “You have heard that it was said,” “But I tell you” pattern repeated 6x in Matthew 5 (slide 11). Here we are at the 6<sup>th</sup> and final of these sayings and we must ask ourselves again **what distortion the Pharisees were teaching and what correction Jesus is bringing?** First the distortion (slide 12).

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘**LOVE your neighbor and HATE your enemy.**’

Matthew 5:43

The distortion here is deliberate and **some of the worst twisting of God’s Word one can find anywhere in the Scriptures.** The OT context for this quotation is found in the book of Leviticus that says (slide 13):

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor **AS YOURSELF.** I am the LORD.”*

Leviticus 19:18

The Pharisees make **TWO ERRORS HERE** and we should learn from their mistakes to make sure we do not follow suit. **First, THEY TAKE AWAY from the text by simply dropping off a few words.** “Love your neighbor **AS YOURSELF.**” (slide 14) This **CRITICAL QUALIFIER** provides the high standard the OT gives are how **we are to treat our neighbor - the same way we treat ourselves.** Most of here take care of our self, we feed our stomach, we maintain good hygiene to stay clean, we naturally care for our bodies. In fact, the preservation and care of self is one of the most basic instincts known to men and women. **Yet, for the Pharisees, this standard is too high, requires too much work, takes to much care and provision so they simply drop it off.** However, for others, because we can’t love **OURSELVES,** we can’t love

**OTHERS.** Some have been so beaten down, or allowed themselves to be beaten down, they don't even know how to love anyone let alone themselves.

Second, they **ADDED** to the text (slide 15) and thus, created **A DOUBLE STANDARD** for people to live by - **ONE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR AND ONE FOR OUR ENEMY.** One for those we like and one for those we hate. One for our family and friends and another for the stranger, the foreigner, the invader to our circle. *'Love your neighbor AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.'* As Charles Spurgeon said, *"The words "and hate your enemy" are a "parasitical growth" upon God's law; they have no business there. God did not teach His people a double standard of morality, one for a neighbor and another for an enemy."*

Now where did this come from? The Pharisees would respond in much the same way Bible teachers tell students to look at the context. The first three rules of Biblical interpretation: **Context. Context. Context.** Looking at the setting of **Leviticus chapter 19**, the Pharisees would say, and would be correct in saying it, that these words of instruction were given **TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.** Verse 2 of chapter 19 says (slide 16): *"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel"* (Le 19:2). Thus, they would say, I only have to love my neighbor that according to this text is my fellow Jew. **The law says nothing about strangers or enemies.** Check!!! Yet, if they would look at two other verses in this text which **precede** and **follow** our text in hand, they would hear these words. (slide 17-18):

<sup>10</sup>*"Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God."*  
Leviticus 19:10

<sup>34</sup>*The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*  
Leviticus 19:34

Check mate!!! (slide 19).

And so we see that the Pharisees were like so many folks today who come to a text with **AN AGENDA, A GOAL, A PET ISSUE** they want to justify. And through some juggling, twisting and often a big hammer, they find a way to place a square peg in a round hole and in doing so begin to draw a line. **A LINE THAT CREATES TWO CLASSES: OUR FOR OUR NEIGHBOR AND ONE FOR OUR ENEMY. A LINE THAT CREATES TWO STANDARDS: ONE THAT HAS LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR AND ONE THAT HAS HATE FOR OUR ENEMY. A LINE THAT CAN WRITE IN AND WRITE OUT SOMEONE SOME ONE ON A WHIM, A LINE TO DISCRIMINATE, A LINE TO JUSTIFY MY SELECTIVE LOVE.**

Now for most of us, these lines are **SUBTLE, DISCRETE**, and often **HIDDEN** from our view. We may not share the animosity of the Pharisees, we may not have overt enemies in our life we are trying to harm, but **I DO BELIEVE WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH OUR PREJUDICES.** We fight with our partiality. We all battle with our lines. *For instance, its after service and you decide to get something to eat. Who you ask to go with you and who you overlook could be exposes a line in your life? You are in Facebook and someone wants to become your friend. Do you accept them. You come home and hear on your answering machine the voice message of a person at school who asks to borrow a book or CD of yours. You don't want to give it to them. Your hesitancy to let them borrow it may expose an ill feeling or a line you toward them.* **Bottom line - we all have lines which delineate who we invite into our life and who we turn away.**

*In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.” That usher’s prejudice, that ushers lines not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.*

## Enemies and ALL THOSE WHO ARE IN BETWEEN:

Jesus has some challenging words to these nasty lines of ours. Look with me as I read his response (slide 20):

*<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*

*Matthew 5:44-45*

The Bible tells us to **LOVE** our **NEIGHBORS**, and also to **LOVE** our **ENEMIES**; probably because, for some, they are generally the same people. For many of us who grew up in church, we have heard talk about “**who is our neighbor**”, but it bears repeating. **OUR NEIGHBOR ACCORDING TO JESUS INCLUDES OUR ENEMY (2x).**

**\*\*\*A WORD ABOUT THOSE GOD SOVERIEGNLY PLACES IN OUR LIVES\*\*\***

Now you may say I don't have any enemies. Enemies may be a strong word. Most of us do have people who **FRUSTRATE, BOTHER** or **IRRITATE** us. God sovereignly places some people in our path to teach us how to be kind, patient, not self serving (1 Cor 13). **WE LEARN HOW TO LOVE BY THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT.**

**IF YOU ARE CALLED TO REACH OUT AS FAR AS ONE WHO WOULD BE CALLED YOUR “ENEMY”, THEN THAT CERTAINLY IMPLIES THAT YOU ARE CALLED TO ALL WHO ARE IN BETWEEN. THOSE WHO TEST US, THOSE WHO CHALLENGE US, THOSE WHO CAUSE US TO TURN THE OTHER WAY WHEN WE SEE THEM. IN ESSENCE THAT MEANS EVERYONE.** Your room mates, your siblings, your boss, your classmates, your teammates, **EVERYONE.** If we can learn to live with the person on the other side of the line who we despise, who we neglect, who we simply just can't stand, then we can certainly love anyone.

## LOVE our enemies:

What then is our duty to our neighbor to the one who is outside of our line? (slide 21): What are we called to do to two things: To **LOVE** our enemies (not like them) and to **PRAY** for those who persecute us (not spit in their face). Both of them **COMMANDS, NOT SUGGESTIONS**. Both of them very familiar words to our vocabulary. But not always explained. Now each of these needs its own explanation so we will take them one at a time. **FIRST, THE CALL TO LOVE THEM.**

It has been said, *“The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him into a friend.”* Nice cliché, but how does it work? Well, the text gives us a few ways on how to love our enemies and I want to highlight those with you. *John Lennon tells us, “All you need is love.” Well, Mr. Lennon, can you define for me what that looks like? Isn’t it ironic that love is the topic of most songs today whether country, r&b, heavy metal, alternative, jazz, blues and folk is love, but we almost never define it. Well, Jesus has some words about what love looks like,*

When it comes to love we need a **MODEL** and Jesus chooses **GOD** (slide 22).

<sup>48</sup> *Be (You) perfect (in love), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (in love).*

Matthew 5:48

We are called to be **PERFECT** (that is all embracing, without any restrictions or lines) in our love, **PERFECT** in our acts of mercy and **PERFECT** in kindness, **PERFECT** in patience for that is what God is like. The followers of Jesus are children of God and they should manifest the family likeness of God by following **HIS STANDARDS, HIS QUEUES, HIS EXAMPLE**. In fact we show the world who we are,

“sons (and daughters) of our Father in heaven” (v.45a) by acting the way the Father acts.

Now some folks get hung up in the idea of **perfection**. In fact Wesley and the holiness movement **made perfection, or entire sanctification or a sinless life**, a precept of their movement and encouraged people to pursue perfection believing it to be a realistic goal for the believer this side of heaven.

Now Jesus can **NOT** mean this...

for in the Sermon itself He has told us that **hungering and thirsting after righteousness is A PERPETUAL CHARACTERISTIC** of His followers.

And in the next chapter Jesus will teach us to **pray constantly**, “*Forgive us our debts*” inferring we were going to have sins and transgressions throughout life.

**THUS, JESUS DID NOT EXPECT HIS FOLLOWERS TO BECOME MORALLY PERFECT IN THIS LIFE. Rather, THE CONTEXT HERE IS LOVE AND THE PERFECTION HE IS SPEAKING ABOUT IS THE PERFECT LOVE OF GOD THAT IS SHOWN TO THOSE WHO DO NOT RETURN IT.**

**AND WHAT ARE SOME TRAITS OF THIS “PERFECT LOVE” WE ARE CALLED TO EMULATE?**

**Divine love is INDISCRIMINATE love (slide 23):**

<sup>45</sup>*“He causes His sun (notice who owns the sun) to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”*

Matthew 5:45

**DIVINE LOVE IS INDISCRIMINATE LOVE** shown equally to good men and bad, to black and white, rich or poor, educated or ignorant, male or female, Christian or agnostic, Democrat or Republican, Gay or Straight, Muslim or Christian. Divine love does not have lines. Theologians call this common grace whereby God graciously sends the blessings of rain and sunshine on all people. God does not hold back His love against those who reject Him. He provides health, food, family and vocation not only to those who **embrace Him**, those who **follow Him** or those who **serve Him**, but even those who **defy Him**, those who **despise Him**, those who **desert Him**.

What does this mean? **OUR TREATMENT OF OTHERS MUST NEVER DEPEND UPON WHO THEY ARE OR WHAT THEY DO TO US.** If we are to follow Christ, then we are to follow the Father and that means **we love everyone without every drawing lines.** This, then, is to be the standard of Christian love. **WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE LIKE GOD, NOT LIKE MEN.**

This is particularly true when it comes to our evangelistic attempts. *Let me illustrate. When Janae and I were first married, there was a young couple in the church about our age who kept requesting that we get together with them. They said we were “fun” to be with. After several weeks of planning, we finally picked a night we were all free and we decided to have them over our apartment. After a great meal, we were just about to pull out a game, when they decided to bring out*

*their Amway product. After an hour of hearing their spiel, I finally had a enough and told them out right that we are not interested. Janae and I agreed early in our marriage to not run any businesses in our home. We wanted to have pure motives with all of our guests and didn't want to give into any temptation to view a friend or guest as a potential client. Once they saw we were resolved in our stance, they lost interest in us and moved on to another "fun" couple in the church.*

In the same way, our evangelist efforts often views people as **prospects**, as **converts**, as **savages** to be tamed by the **Gospel**, rather than as **individuals**, as **sensitive human beings**, as **people worthy of God's love** regardless if they **acknowledge Jesus** or not. How many times have we seen Christians write off folks or draw a line simply because the refused to embrace Christ? Though I understand that temptation, the desire to walk away, the thoughts of dropping them like a bad habit, we must stick with them, befriend them and continue to love them. **Why? Because we are called to love like God, not like men. God still provides for those who want nothing to do with Him. He still cares for those who care nothing for Him. He still loves those who reject Him. In the same manner, we are to love those who may not want anything from us. We have to erase our lines.**

## DIVINE LOVE IS GOES WAY BEYOND WHAT IS EXPECTED (slide 24)

DIVINE LOVE IS GOES WAY BEYOND WHAT IS EXPECTED. Divine love goes the distance, the second mile, it hangs on for the duration. *Raising three kids, Janae and I have tried to teach them certain societal norms that are required when one interacts with people. Important phrases such as, “Hi,” “Please,” “Thank you” “I love you” and “Please forgive me” are all phrases that are expected vocabulary in our world.* Yet, both the Christian and the Hindu, the believer and the atheist, a follower of Christ and one who follows no one tends to use these words as a part of their common language. Now Jesus notices these societal norms and frankly is not particularly impressed when He addresses those who choose to follow Him down this road less traveled. Listen to what He has to say:

*<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

*Matthew 5:46-47*

Jesus acknowledges that people everywhere are capable of loving. There is not debate on that point. But all human love, even the highest, the noblest and the best, is contaminated to some degree by the impurities of self-interest, by being selective, by drawing lines.

*Two apples up in a tree were looking down on the world. The first apple said, “Look at all those people fighting, robbing, rioting—no one seems willing to get along with his fellow man. Someday we apples will be the only ones left. Then we’ll rule the world.” Replied the second apple, “Which of us—the reds or the greens?”*

We, though are called to love like God, not men. We are called to love our enemies in which there is no self interest, no reward, no glory. If we only love those

who love us, then according to Jesus we are no better than swindlers and thieves. If we only greet our brothers and sisters, our fellow Christians, we are no better than people who reject God or worship the trees.

*Now this issue of greeting brings up a point I want to briefly touch on because it rings true in our own setting today. Who we greet, who we choose to extend our hand, who we sit by in church and welcome, who we invite out to lunch or to a movie, exposes our lines big time. And the point Jesus is making is to break the circle and embrace the spiral. I hate circles. Circle are closed objects which tend to have one's back to anyone who tries to enter in. Unfortunately, all too often, churches, youth groups, adult settings like church, can become a closed circle where the visitor comes in and finds no way to enter in. A spiral on the other hand is never closed and every growing in radius and size. Valley Christian must be a spiral ministry and not a circle ministry. A true measure of our maturity and love as a ministry is how we treat the visitor. Not fake. Not offense. But genuine, sincere interest in their lives. If we do not take care of our visitors, we have no right asking God for growth, for increase for fruit in our ministry. We, though are called to love like God, not men.*

Yet, even in such acts, as important and critical as they are, **Jesus is not impressed.** Tax collectors and pagans, grocery store clerks and bank tellers, gas station attendants and blockbuster workers can boast in their ongoing ability to love those who love them and greet their friends. No, Jesus has a much higher standard.

### Praying for those who persecute us (slide 26):

Which leads us to the second duty our neighbor, which I believe is a subset or our expression of love, and that is to **pray** for them. Now Jesus does not give us much instruction here. But Jesus does focus our thoughts on who we should pray for (slide 27).

<sup>44b</sup> *Pray for those who persecute you.*

Matthew 5:44b

Not the first person I would put on my prayer list of who I want to pray for but **once again Jesus want to shows us where we are drawing our lines.** Essentially, if we can pray for those who persecute us, then we can pray for anyone.

Look at the cross. While His tormentors were nailing in the spikes, while they were in the very process of executing him, while while Jesus prays for his persecutors and says, ***“Father, forgive them; for hey know not what they do.”*** If the cruel torture of the crucifixion could not silence our Lord’s prayer for his tormentors, can we justify our silence in prayer for them

**Intercession is the summit of Christian love.** Bonhoeffer writes, **“Through the medium of pray we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God.”** It is impossible to pray for someone without loving him and it is impossible to go on praying for them without discovering that our love for them grows and matures.

Essentially, this text is saying that we have not loved until we prayed. If you are not praying for that one who bothers you, irritates you, frustrates you and even teases you, chances are you have drawn a line.

## Conclusion:

What makes Christianity different from all the other religions of the world? Years ago that very question was discussed at a conference. Some of the participants argued that Christianity is **unique in teaching that God became man**. But someone objected, saying that other religions teach similar doctrines. What about the **resurrection**? No, it was argued, other faiths believe that the dead rise again. The discussion grew heated. C. S. Lewis, a strong defender of Christianity, came in late, sat down, and asked, “What’s the rumpus about?” When he learned that it was a debate about the uniqueness of Christianity, he immediately commented, “ Oh, that’s easy. **It’s grace.**”

Loving our enemies. Praying for our persecutors. It’s all about grace. Grace that extends from heaven to people though you and I. Grace that can get blocked if we have lines which redirect, which block, which limit. Lines that most of us never consider.

Jesus has a much higher standard, I believe it reflects the core challenge of this text which is phrased in a single question.

<sup>47b</sup>“What are you doing **MORE** than others?”

Matthew 5:47b

One of the most probing questions found in the Scripture. **Mediocrity of faith is NOT acceptable**. Living in the midst of the crowd will **NOT** cut it. Having a righteousness that **DOESN’T** exceed societal norms just won’t do.

We are called to go further. To live higher. To be different. Different in our **character**, different in our **influence**, different in our **thinking**, different in our **morality**, different in our **attitude**, different in our **marriages**, different in our

**commitment**, different in our **words**, different in our **responses** and different in our **love**.

The simple word **MORE** is the spirit of what Jesus is saying. It is **NOT** enough for Christians to **resemble** non-Christians; our calling is to **OUTSTRIP** them in virtue. Our righteousness is to **EXCEED** that of the Pharisees and our love is to **SURPASS** that of the Gentiles. Bonhoeffer puts it well when he says, *“What makes the Christian different from other men is the “peculiar”, the “extraordinary”, the “unusual”, that which is not norm.”*

*While at the mall last week, I went into variety store. I wanted to go in the back where they have the black lights. A friend of mine told me that if I take my credit card and place it under a black light, a dove, not the one in silver box, but another dove will appear on the card. This peaked my interest so I went into the store to see. I pulled out my credit card and placed it under the light and sure enough, the dove appeared. I had used that cards hundreds of times and never knew that was there. It was beyond my ability to see.*

In the same way, I believe, we all have lines the Holy Spirit wants to show us tonight. Lines that divide. Lines that choose. Lines that discriminate. He wants to erase those lines and allow your life to be a venue of grace to this world. By loving our enemy and praying for those who persecute, we allow torrents, rapids, waterfalls of God’s grace to touch this world and change lives. Will you allow Him to erase those lines so grace may flow.

**We are called to love like God who has not lines, not like men who do.**