

Good Fences for Bad Offenses

1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, *all of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

“And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.”

Why?

“Good fences make good neighbors.”

Excerpts above from the pen of Robert Frost in his classic — “Mending Wall.”

The poem depicts two neighbors who are good friends. Both men meet on an agreed day, and together they walk their perspective boundary lines. The purpose is to build a wall between them. One man is very determined to build the wall based on his father’s old philosophy that “good fences make good neighbors.” The other man is perplexed as to why a fence is even necessary, seeing that the two men are good friends and that neither man has livestock, only trees. One has pine trees, and the other has apple trees. What could possibly be the purpose of fencing trees in? “Can one of my cones cross over and eat one of your apples?”

The fence was a subtle but valid recognition of the inherent differences between men and the potential of some future stress occurring in their relationship; thus, a fence built now would better safeguard their friendship moving forward. The message of the fence itself was also a reminding symbol of a time when two friends humbly subjected each other to one another’s own integrity and one’s own value system. A good fence is also a firewall of protection due to our exclusive differences. A good fence is a safeguard towards mutual respect and lasting friendship. The wall says, Be sure we are friends, but... “this is you, and this is me.”

No future blurring of the lines should occur, seeing we have together built an open wall of respect between us. We work together, building on our commonalities, all the while recognizing our exclusive distinctions. The good fences are what genders respect towards our differences. Oh, the beauty of knowing where the lines fall in our friendships and mutually respecting those lines. Good fences aid in preserving honor and integrity between men.

Consequently, while one friend is perplexed by the notion of fences between two good friends, the one neighbor is feverishly laboring dutifully with stones. He repeats once again good fences make good neighbors.

The contrast between the two friends is clear. The one man could only see the here-and-now situation. He wanted only to trust their similarities. While his neighbor, being taught by his father and willingly trusting his paternal advice, could understand the potential of unforeseen and unpredictable changes due to their personal distinctions, and those differences could possibly alter the status and position between the two men later. Most likely, their differences, indeed rather than similarities, would separate them in hard times. A good fence was now needed.

Henceforth, the best safeguard to their current friendship was to prepare now for any possible and unfortunate changes later. Who can say that the one man or even both men could perhaps later invest in livestock, and the established fence would erase any issues regarding trespassing or, worse, even stealing in the future? A good fence built now in the good times also meant no questions or boundary disputes in later generations should any other unfortunate moral issues arise between the two friends. A good fence now would help settle any future questions later.

One man had foresight. The other man was trusting but shallow in understanding. Thus he was dangerously void of the natural realities of life. The one man also assumed that he and his neighbor were equally the same and any distinctions were merely trivial. Erecting good fences reflects the revelation that not all men are at equal stations in life. "Younger" submit yourselves to "elders." Two very different stations in life. The good fence cultivates an equal respect in light of the obviously "unequal" differences.

So we now build and maintain the necessary safety lines of decency and prudence in our personal relationships with friends through ongoing clear communications to strengthen our long-term friendships. To initially set distinct boundaries and draw the lines clearly, but respectfully in our friendships without making the fence personal cultivates respect and honor between men. I now respect your "pine trees," and you now respect my "apple trees." Good fences intimately share in the investment towards each other's individual sovereignty.

Build good strong fences because good strong fences build good strong relationships.

...Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility...

Bill Pitman