

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37)

10:25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"

10:27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

10:28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."

10:29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke gives no setting for this conversation. "And behold" (Καὶ ἰδοὺ - untranslated in the NAS) is an indefinite connective meaning "sometime later" (Edwards, 318), so it is unclear how much time has passed since verse 24. Nevertheless, Luke commonly uses it to show some kind of relationship to what had just preceded (Bock, 1022).

Verse 25 begins by saying that a lawyer stood up. "Stood up" implies that a group of people was seated around Jesus who was apparently teaching. A "lawyer" was a scribe, a highly educated scholar whose profession was to interpret the OT. To stand up showed deference for Jesus; teachers sat, students stood as a courtesy. Calling Jesus "teacher" or "rabbi" was also respectful. Although the lawyer appeared courteous, he was disingenuous (Edwards, 318); he had no intention of following Jesus. His question was intended to test Jesus (ἐκπειράζων is a participle of purpose – Bock, 1023); although the word "to test" can mean to test someone with the hope that they will fail, it does not necessarily imply evil intent; it can also simply mean that the lawyer was trying "to ascertain His orthodoxy or His ability" (McClaren), or he may have simply wanted to see how Jesus would answer (cf. Jn. 6:6 where Jesus "tested" Philip).

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" was a common question in Judaism and Jesus was asked it on numerous occasions (Lk. 18:18; Matt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34). To a Jew in that time period "eternal life" was the future world that God promised to come, including the resurrection of the righteous.

Jesus answered the question with a question; this was a typical style for rabbis when they engaged students in debate, but it also avoided the lawyer's test. Jesus' tone is quite sharp and rather dismissive: "You are a lawyer, a trained and recognized authority of OT interpretation, what do *you* think?"

The scribe responded with a conflation of Deuteronomy 6:5 (the Shema) and Leviticus 19:18 (Jesus used the same verses in Mk. 12:30-31 and Matt. 22:37-38). The logic is that loving God involves loving the one made in the image of God. But verse 29 makes it clear that in the lawyer's mind the term "neighbor" did not include all humanity. He quoted the Law but wanted to limit its scope. Most Jews in that day saw the unbelieving as being God's enemies, not their neighbors, and thus they were not required to love them. However, at face value, he had answered correctly.

It should be mentioned that Jesus was not suggesting that it is possible to reject Him and still inherit life by loving God and others. Rather, He is simply agreeing with the OT, God's revealed will to mankind up

to that point of time. Jesus came to bring clarity to what God had said and reflection upon what God required; He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). In fact, to downplay OT authority would undermine its authoritative witness of Jesus' messiahship. By pointing the lawyer to the law, Jesus simply referred him to their common authority. Furthermore, loving God is at the heart of Judaism, and when combined with loving others it is an expression of faith. As Bock says, "At the heart of entering the future life is a relationship of devotion, a devotion that places God at the center of one's spiritual life and responds to others in love" (Bock, 1025). This does not conflict with the New Covenant. Of course, it is clear elsewhere that the one who truly loves God will love the One sent by God. In John 8:42 Jesus said, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God." Furthermore, He had said that He was the only one who knew the Father, and it was His will that revealed the Father to others (Lk. 10:22). One cannot love God if he rejects Him when He reveals Himself in the Son. However, that is not the conversation here; what the lawyer had confessed was correct in light of the revelation he had.

After commending the lawyer for His answer, Jesus paraphrased Leviticus 18:5, "*Do this* and you will live." It is obedience, not simply knowledge, which results in life.

"Had Jesus merely affirmed the lawyer's theology, he may have pursued matters no further, for he had 'answered correctly' (v. 28)" (Edwards, 320). But Jesus' words stung. Suddenly the lawyer's conscience was awakened; he felt uneasy. Although no specific accusation had been leveled against him, he felt the need to justify himself. Apparently, he was comfortable about his duty toward God. "The tithe, down to the anise and cumin, had been scrupulously paid; his fasts had been rigidly observed, his feasts carefully kept, his prayer-formulas never neglected" (Pulpit Commentary). But, perhaps sensing a rebuke in Jesus' tone, he wanted to show that he had loved his neighbor as well. However, in order to do that, he, like his peers, needed to soften the demand of the law, so he asked, "who is my neighbor?" The very question betrays that he did not see all people as neighbors to be loved. "The Pharisees held that the 'Jews' only were to be regarded as such, and that the obligation did not extend at all to the Gentiles" (Barnes). In Jesus' day the popular teaching propounded by the Rabbis was to hate your enemy. Jesus confronted their theology in Matthew 5:43-45 when He said to the crowds, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. . . ." The lawyer knew his "neighbor" extended beyond the person next door, but how much more? The answer comes in the parable of the Good Samaritan that follows.

Before looking at the parable it helps to think about what is demanded in the expression, "love your neighbor as yourself." This is a command based on that inborn, deep, defining human trait of love for self. All people have a powerful instinct of self-preservation and self-fulfillment. Everyone wants to be happy and to live with satisfaction. People naturally want food, clothing, shelter and protection for themselves. Self-love is the deep longing to diminish pain and to increase happiness. These desires are not evil, but when they are controlled by the sin nature they become a loveless self-obsession.

"Love your neighbor *as yourself*" is a command to make our self-seeking the measure of our self-giving (Piper). If we are energetic in pursuing our own happiness, we should be equally energetic in pursuing our

neighbor's happiness. In order to fulfill this command, obedience to the first commandment is absolutely necessary. "The command to love one's neighbor arises from the command to love God, and the command to love God is empty unless it issues in love of neighbor" (Hooker, Mark, 288). Before we make our self-interest the measure of self-giving, we should make God the focus of our interest. When we love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind we find that all our longings for joy, hope, love, and security are fulfilled in Him. God becomes the never-ending fountain of our joy, and we are freed to love others without competing desires of self-fulfillment.

Whatever this lawyer had in mind for the answer, it wasn't the story Jesus told. The Jews sought to justify their hatred so they brought the law down to their standards rather than attempt to frame their life by its requirements. Jesus destroys all hope of limiting the word "neighbor" to "fellow Jew." Everyone was a neighbor, even those despised by the Jews.

10:30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.

Anyone traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho descended down a steep, zigzag road from approximately twenty-five hundred feet above sea level at Jerusalem's height, through desolate country to Jericho's depth, some eight hundred twenty-five feet below sea level. "The distance is about 17 miles and the road descends more than 3000 feet" (Morris, 206), or, about six-tenths of a mile.

Bandits recognized that the surrounding desert allowed for easy escape and provided a secure place for hiding. Many persons who traveled the road were attacked, as Jesus' parable indicates. In this story, as a man was traveling down this road, he was robbed, stripped, and beaten, being left half dead.

10:31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

10:32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

Two people eventually came down the road. One was a priest, the other was a Levite. Both were of the tribe of Levi, but a priest was also a descendant of Aaron. Priests functioned as the mediators between God and the people, while Levites assisted in the temple, maintained the grounds, and policed the temple courts. The Levites "stood midway between the people and the priesthood . . . [they] proclaimed and taught the law, and judged controversies, with the priests and chiefs of Israel, in Jehoshaphat's reformation (2 Chr. 19:8-11). They praised the Lord as singers before his army (2 Chr. 20:19-22) . . . [and] served the Lord and Israel, standing in the holy place" (ISBE).

Both the priests and the Levites were connected to Judaism at its most intimate point. One would assume that these men would exemplify love for God and love for their neighbor, but both hurried by showing no compassion toward the man in distress.

10:33 "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,

10:34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

10:35 "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'

Considering the hatred that existed between the Samaritans and Jews, a Samaritan would have been the last person Jesus' audience would have expected to help a Jew in need. But it was the Samaritan who felt compassion for the man in the road and went well beyond his duty in helping him. He poured wine on the wounds as an antiseptic and oil to keep the wounds moist and ease the pain. Since the victim couldn't walk, the Samaritan put him on his own animal and transported him to an inn.

Even when he brought the man to the inn, the Samaritan did not consider his responsibility fulfilled. Verse 34 says that even after arriving he took care of him. Verse 35 implies that he stayed with the man for the night, caring to his injuries, for he gave the innkeeper two denarii the *next day*. A denarii was a day's wage and some scholars say that two denarii would cover about two months at the inn. In addition, the Samaritan promised to pay whatever costs the innkeeper incurred until he returned.

This was shocking. The despised outcast, the one who had no access to the temple to offer sacrifice or worship God, did the right thing. He gave the injured man the greatest care imaginable. This is love without limit, love without boundaries. The Samaritan loved the man as he loved himself.

10:36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"

10:37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

Jesus then asked the lawyer who the neighbor might be. The answer is obvious. The Samaritan who helped this man "proved to be the neighbor" (10:37).

The parable was the answer to the lawyer's question about what was necessary to inherit eternal life, and his subsequent, related question about who is one's neighbor. The real issue is not trying to figure out who one's neighbor is; it is responding to the needs of those around us, regardless of their social standing, race, color, or beliefs. Paraphrased, Jesus is saying, "If you love like the Samaritan did, you are loving your neighbor as God demands and you will inherit eternal life."

This significant passage also teaches about the ethics of all those who follow Christ.