

“DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE”

I. Introduction

A. “Just Do It.”

1. It is one of the most memorable advertising slogans of our time.
2. Now why do you think that is?
3. I suspect that part of the reason lies in the fact that these words resonate with something that lies deep within the human heart.
4. We like to be challenged to show what we are made of, to prove ourselves by our performance, to press through adversity, to accomplish our goals.
5. And this is not only true with respect to our athletic endeavors or career pursuits.
6. It also finds expression in the way we think about God.
7. Our default setting is to think that the way to gain acceptance with God is by our doing.
8. In other words, we are wired for law.

B. This is demonstrated in our text from Luke’s Gospel.

1. We see it in three uses of the word “do” in these verses.
2. The passage begins with the lawyer asking Jesus, “what shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?”
3. Then, after getting the lawyer to answer his own question, Jesus tells him to “*do* this, and you will life.”

4. Finally, after answering the lawyer's question about who counts as his neighbor by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus says, "You go, and *do* likewise."
5. As we study this passage today, we will consider how it teaches us the sum of God's law while also illustrating just what it is that the law requires of us.

II. The Sum of the Law: Love Perfectly

- A. Luke refers to the man who came up to question Jesus as "a lawyer."
 1. This is another name for the scribes, the men who functioned along with the Pharisees as the custodians of the law and the traditions that had been added to it.
 2. This lawyer asked Jesus a question in order to test him.
 3. He wanted to see if Jesus would give the answer that was correct in eyes of the Jewish leaders.
 4. He wanted Jesus to tell him what must be done in order to have a share in the end-time kingdom of God.
- B. Jesus doesn't answer this question directly.
 1. Instead, he passes it back to the lawyer for him to answer.
 2. After all, this man is the expert in the law.
 3. What does he think the law has to say about this?
 4. The lawyer responds by summarizing the demands of God's law with two Scripture citations.
 5. The first is from Deuteronomy 6, where we are commanded to love God with our entire being.

6. The second is from Leviticus 19, where we are commanded to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
 7. This was a good way to answer the question.
 8. The essence of God's law is to show perfect love toward God and our fellow human beings.
- C. There is a close connection between these two commands.
1. True love for God is expressed in love toward others, and true love for others depends on love toward God.
 2. As the apostle John says in his first epistle, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:20)
 3. Moreover, we are so devoted to ourselves that all of the kindness we extend to others is tinged with self-interest unless it is done out of love for God.
 4. As Jesus explains in John 15, the only way our lives can bring forth good fruit is if we abide in him and love him.
- D. People sometimes try to pit love against law.
1. We hear it said that we should not be so uptight about rules.
 2. We should just focus on loving people.
 3. The problem with this way of thinking is that it empties love of any stable meaning.
 4. It turns love into pure sentiment, and sentiments can quickly change.
 5. The law serves as the rule of love.

6. It tells us how to go about life in a loving manner.
 7. It shows us what love looks like.
 8. This is why the law of God is such a wonderful gift.
- E. That being said, there is a problem.
1. The law has been weakened by the flesh.
 2. The lawyer did not understand this.
 3. Like many other first century Jews, he thought that the way for God's people to usher in the Messianic age was to try harder at keeping the law.
 4. He probably would have liked the slogan, "Just Do It."
 5. This is why Jesus responded to his summary of the requirements of God's law by telling him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."
- F. Now, in saying this, Jesus was not telling the lawyer that he could actually merit salvation by his law-keeping.
1. That would have been in direct contradiction to the teaching of Scripture when it says "by works of the law no one will be justified." (Gal. 2:16)
 2. Jesus's response was an accommodation to the lawyer's question.
 3. He had asked Jesus what had to be done in order to obtain eternal life.
 4. Jesus's answer pointed out that the only way we can secure salvation by our doing is by doing all that is required in God's law.

5. If we try to approach God with a “Just Do It” mindset, we put ourselves in an impossible position.
6. Listen to the way Walter Marshall explains this in the book that we are studying in the adult Sunday school class: “If we seek salvation by ever so easy and mild a condition of works, we do thereby bring ourselves under the terms of the law, and do become debtors to fulfill the whole law in perfection, though we intended to engage ourselves only to fulfill it in part (Gal. 5:3); for the law is a complete declaration of the only terms whereby God will judge all that are not brought to despair of procuring salvation by any of their own works, and to receive it as a gift freely given to them by the grace of God in Christ. So that all that seek salvation, right or wrong, knowingly or ignorantly, by any works, less or more; whether invented by their own superstition, or commanded by God in the Old or New Testament, shall at last stand or fall according to these terms.” [*The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, 69]
7. The only way we can obtain eternal life by our works, by our doing, is to do every work that the law requires and to do it to perfection.

III. What It Looks Like to Love Perfectly

- A. Hearing Jesus give this response, the lawyer did something that lawyers have a tendency to do: he tried to find a loophole.
 1. This is what Luke means when he says that the man was desiring to justify himself.
 2. He wanted to make the law easier to obey.
 3. So he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”
 4. Now, this was a question that had been addressed by the Jewish rabbis.

5. They taught that the only people who qualified as a neighbor to a Jew were other Jews who were faithfully keeping Torah.
 6. The lawyer wanted to hear Jesus say the same sort of thing.
 7. But Jesus did not do that.
 8. He did not give an answer that helped this man feel good about how he was doing at keeping God's law.
 9. He gave an answer that illustrated just how much is required of us by God's law.
- B. Now, Jesus could have answered the lawyer's question by simply telling him that everyone qualifies as his neighbor.
1. But instead of doing that, he told a story that illustrated what it looks like to be a neighbor to someone in need.
 2. The setting of the story is the road that goes from Jerusalem to Jericho.
 3. First century Jews would have known that this was a dangerous road to travel.
 4. It was a winding road that went through rocky areas with plenty of caves, which served as ideal hiding places for would be robbers.
 5. In Jesus's parable, a traveler on that road falls into the hands of bandits and is left for dead.
 6. This leaves him in dire need of help, but when a priest and then a Levite come upon him, they simply pass by on the other side of the road.
 7. The surprise comes when it is a Samaritan who stops and shows love to the poor man.

- C. As we noted a couple of weeks ago in our study of the passage where Jesus was passing through a Samaritan village, Jews and Samaritans hated each other.
1. For a Jew, the Samaritans were among the people whom they least respected.
 2. Samaritans were regarded as unclean because of their impure blood and their impure theology.
 3. Yet the Samaritan in Jesus's parable pays two days wages to ensure that this man who had been victimized will be well-cared for at an inn.
 4. This would have been enough money to pay for twenty-four days room and board.
 5. The Samaritan even promises the innkeeper that he will pay any additional charges that are incurred in taking care of the injured man.
 6. This would have been like telling the innkeeper to charge his credit card with whatever else he deemed necessary, and innkeepers were not known to be the most trustworthy characters in that world.
 7. Jesus's point is clear: this Samaritan went to the utmost lengths to help this man in need.
- D. After telling this parable, Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"
1. The lawyer cannot bring himself to utter the name 'Samaritan', but there is no getting around it.
 2. So he simply says, "The one who showed him mercy."

3. It was not the priest or the Levite who fulfilled the law in the story, but the hated Samaritan.
4. This man who belonged to a group that was the sworn enemy of the Jews was the one who acted as a neighbor when he came across a Jew in need.
5. Jesus told this parable to give a picture of what the law of God requires of us.
6. It calls us to extend our compassion and help to anyone we come across who needs it, even if that person is a stranger or an enemy.
7. Everyone with whom you come into contact is your neighbor.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The lawyer's error was in thinking that he could merit eternal life by his adherence to the law.
 1. What he did not understand is that the bar that is set by the law is far too high for any of us to reach.
 2. None of us loves God perfectly.
 3. None of us loves our neighbors perfectly.
 4. This means we cannot inherit eternal life by our doing.
 5. We need God to do what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. (see Rom. 8:3)
 6. And this is exactly what God has done for us in Christ.
 7. As Martin Luther explained in one of the theses in his Heidelberg Disputation, "The law says, 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this,' and everything is already done." [thesis 26]

- B. God still calls us to love him with all our being and to show our love for him by loving our neighbors.
1. It was natural for man in his estate of original righteousness to love God.
 2. But in our fallen condition we cannot love God unless we first knows that we are beloved by God.
 3. As the apostle John said, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19 KJV)
 4. God's love for us in Christ calls forth our love for God.
 5. This is why we need to take time to ponder the amazing love that God the Father has for us in Christ.
 6. To that end, I want to leave you with these thoughts from John Owen: "Few rest their souls in the love of the Father. They live below it, in the troublesome region of hopes and fears, storms and clouds. But all here is serene and quiet. This is the will of the Father, that he may always be eyed as kind, tender, and loving. The Father is the great fountain of all gracious communications and fruits of love. In his love is the only rest for the soul. In his love we find a design, a purpose of love, a good pleasure towards us from eternity, a delight, a contentment, a good will in Christ, and all causes of anger and estrangement taken away. The soul thus, by faith through Christ, and by him, is brought into the bosom of the Father, into a comfortable persuasion and spiritual perception and sense of his love, and thus reposes and rests itself. God loves, that he may be beloved. He says, 'My son, give me your heart, your affections, your love. You shall love me with all your heart' (cf. Luke 10:27). When the soul sees God, in his dispensation of love, to be infinitely lovely and loving, he will rest in this and delight in him and have communion with him in love." [John Owen, cited in *Voices from the Past*, vol. 2, 37]