

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

With Study Questions

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And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"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."²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead."³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back."³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37).

Introduction

Prior to this parable Jesus is thanking the Father that He has hidden the truths about Himself from the "**wise and understanding revealed them to little children**" (Luke 10:21). Also, what we will read in this parable is a demonstration of how one would keep the second portion of the Ten Commandments (loving our neighbor). Directly after this parable we see what appears to be a demonstration of the first portion of the Ten Commandments (Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus while Martha is distracted with "**much serving**" (Luke 10:40).

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”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.”

The Question

The parable springs from a question posed by an expert in biblical law. But the question is not asked in earnest. He is putting Jesus to the test (*ekpeirazo*-tempt, entrap). There is nothing sweeter or more dangerous for human lips and ears than discussions about the things of God.

The pursuit of religious dialogue as mere academics or the fulfillment of curiosity or the satisfaction of intellectual superiority bring us dangerously close to violating the Second Commandment—in fact we all, no doubt, trespass in our very vain thoughts of God on a regular basis. Whenever we talk or think of God, it should be toward a genuine worship and piety.

Nonetheless, the question itself is legitimate (the Philippian jailer asked the same question in sincerity—Acts 16:30) and should be answered. Of course when Paul and Silas answered this question, it appeared to be a different answer:

And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

We’ll get to that difference in a moment.

The Written Word

Jesus appeals to the knowledge this expert in the law already had. Would this knowledge be a testimony to God’s grace or evidence of this man’s wickedness? To whom is given much, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Jesus doesn’t ask the man how he feels about the things of God. He doesn’t ask if he is happy or content. He doesn’t appeal to an emotional religious experience (not that that is necessarily bad). Jesus will bring to bear upon the conversation something very objective: **“What is written in the law? How do you read it?”** In other words, what does the Bible say?

Jesus makes the assumption that Godly people will read the Scriptures. We have a moral mandate to read the Scriptures. This is one reason good missionary efforts include teaching people how to read.

The Answer

The lawyer then gives the accurate answer: Love God and love your neighbor with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. He knows the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). He gives a wonderful summary of the law in terms of how men ought to conduct their lives in order to live a life pleasing to God.

Keep the first four commandments in terms of your love, worship, devotion and piety toward God and keep the second six in terms of a sacrificial, selfless, loving devotion to your fellow man. And in this pursuit, you must never fail—ever. Of course this poses a serious problem.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:10, 11).

But this is not a testimony against the law. The law of God should not be de-emphasized because of our failure. The problem is not the law but the flesh. And God knows this well.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3, 4).

In other words, what we could not do (keep the law) the Father sent His Son to do. Jesus conquered and condemned sin, thus fulfilling the requirement to love God and love our neighbor, and by faith that law is fulfilled in us. Of course I am transplanting the doctrine of Paul to help us through these things.

Jesus doesn't always launch into what might appear helpful lessons. He seems to have a pretty good idea of who He is speaking with and responds accordingly.

And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor" (Luke 10:28, 29)?

Do This and Live

"Do this, and you will live???" It would almost appear that Jesus is teaching a works righteousness. And this isn't the only time! The rich young ruler had a similar question and received a similar answer (Matthew 19:16-30). **"What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"** Jesus answered, **"Keep the commandments."** The rich young man said he had kept the commandments. Jesus seemed to call him on that with the imperative, **"sell what you possess and give to the poor."** This caused the young man to exit in sorrow because of his great possessions.

Though we're not studying that particular encounter, it is worth noting a statement made by Jesus at the end of that dialogue which has universal application when it comes to salvation.

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:25, 26).

That applies as much to this lawyer as it did to that rich young ruler. It applies to you and me as well. Now this lawyer, or you or I can accept that fact (that it is impossible) and throw ourselves upon the mercy of God (which God freely gives) or we can do what this lawyer is about to do, which is try to justify (*dikaioo*—show to be right [appear] righteous) ourselves.

But why does Jesus put it this way—"do this and you will live?" It almost seems that Jesus doesn't merely hang the law out there as something we hypothetically can't do; it is something He continually calls us to do. Why doesn't He just answer the way we all would answer, which is "believe in Me?" At least two answers come to mind:

First, the law of God is active in the unbeliever to bring them to despair in themselves and seek the mercy found in the cross of Christ, as well as active in the life of the believer to keep them aware of their own sin and continual need for the body and blood of Christ.

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin...¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure (Romans 7:7, 13).

Secondly, it might also be worth entertaining the notion that faith in the lordship of Christ is so attached to faith in Christ as Savior that Jesus would not shrink from presenting Himself either way. It can be argued that a person who has a genuine, God given, desire to obey God, will necessarily have a genuine, God given, faith in Christ. Hence the call to believe is often associated with the call to repent (Acts 2:38).

I fear this may not be very politically correct in a world of people saying they are trying to obey God, but Jesus taught that love for Him was evidence of faith in God Himself. **“If God were your Father”** Jesus taught, **“you would love me” (John 8:42)**. The necessary conclusion is that those who reject Christ, though they might say otherwise, are not seeking to lead a genuinely godly life.

One last thing to consider—we hesitate (and rightfully so) telling people they must live up to some standard in order to be saved because of the impossible task that would impose upon them. But we must realize that the command to believe is just as impossible for a sinful man to keep as the command to keep the law. Fallen sinners need God’s grace either way.

The alternative to God’s grace is to do what this lawyer does—seek to justify himself with academic sophistry. He asks, **“Who is my neighbor?”** Jesus will get this man to answer his own question, and in doing so, as Jesus does so often, the man will hear the testimony of his own guilt from his own lips.

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed,

leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back' (Luke 10:30-35).

The Parable

In this parable (indeed this type of event might have been so common that some doubt it is merely a parable at all), Jesus speaks of a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho (about 15-20 miles from 2500 feet above sea level to about 800 feet below sea level). The man is robbed, beaten and left for dead.

A priest and a Levite both see the injured man and pass by on the other side. Priests were descendants of Aaron and had what would have been considered to hold highest moral/spiritual station in life. Levites were descendants of Levi who assisted priests in their various sacrificial duties, also policing the temple. The comparison of these two men to a Samaritan would have been obvious to the listeners—who were Jews.

Samaritans were despised by the Jews. Prior to Christ, the kingdom of Israel was divided into northern and southern tribes. The ten northern tribes, through various circumstances, became intermingled with non-Jewish people and were derided as half-breeds. It was from there that the Samaritans sprang. The Samaritans set up their own temple on Mount Gerizim which was destroyed by the Jews in 128 B.C. and the hostility remained fierce even unto the time of Christ—often used as an insult or accusation—even against Jesus

The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon" (John 8:48)?

You might recall the Samaritan woman's surprise that Jesus would even speak with her (John 4:9).

To a Jew a neighbor was another Jew, not a Samaritan or a gentile. Jewish tradition would not allow a Jew to kill a gentile, but they would not be under any obligation to save one either.¹ Biblical law did require the helping of a neighbor in need.

You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again (Deuteronomy 22:4).

But if you could narrow the field of who a neighbor actually was, it would lighten the load of moral responsibility.

What the priest and Levite failed to do the Samaritan did with compassion and thorough efficiency. He provided medical care, gave him a ride to an inn, paid for his room and board and whatever else might have been needed. There is certainly a call in the life of a Christian not to be indifferent to the misfortune of others.

A Parenthesis

It seems a parenthetical message is required here due to the nature of our culture where panhandlers have become aware of, and will seek to take advantage of, this moral mandate. The man in this parable was beaten and left for dead. There is a distinction between someone who is in immediate need of attention due to some misfortune or ill deed and someone who has decided to make a living by sitting at the onramp of the freeway with a piece of cardboard displaying their love for God and need of money.

We happen to live in a society with private and government organizations seeking to cater to the needy and homeless. I have supported and worked with these organizations for years. And if someone needs help, it is through that vehicle that they will receive it. In other words, I will help the needy but I will also determine how I will help them. And it is inefficient, if not unwise, to simply randomly hand money out to strangers who seem like they need it. There is a verse we seldom see on the placard:

¹ Henry, M. (1996). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume (Lk 10:25-37)*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

On the other hand, and this has also happened to me numerous times, we should not walk by those who are in immediate threat of death by ill deed, misfortune, exposure, etc.

Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise" (Luke 10:36, 37).

Who Was the Neighbor?

Jesus brings the lawyer to the place where his lips utter his own guilt. It's almost as if he couldn't say "the Samaritan" but "the one..." In calling the lawyer to go and do likewise, Jesus is likely employing the same methodology he did with the rich young ruler when He called him to "sell all his possessions. The man's abiding sin (for he was likely horrified at the prospect of imitation a Samaritan) is exposed by the word that was made flesh. It makes you wonder...if the lawyer had the resolve to actually attempt what Jesus calls him to, how long he would last before other sins were exposed? How long before he, like Paul, would say, "**Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death**" (Romans 7:24)?

There is a beauty in the interdependent of God's law and Christ's gospel—both gracious—teaching our hearts to fear and then relieving those very fears. It is in our seeking to love God and love our neighbor with all human effort that we come to discover more fully the love of Christ for us and the remission of sins found in His cross.

Questions for Study

1. What did Jesus do just prior to this parable? What do we see directly after this parable (pages 2, 3)?
2. What was the lawyer trying to accomplish with his question (page 3)?
3. Where does Jesus assume the godly will go to find answers (pages 3, 4)?
4. What problem can you see with seeking to rely on the law to be saved (pages 4, 5)?
5. When Jesus says “Do this, and you will live” is He teaching a works righteousness—that we’re saved by human effort? Why do you suppose Jesus puts it that way (pages 5, 6)?
6. Is it possible to reject Christ yet believe in God (pages 6, 7)?
7. What was the lawyer trying to accomplish when he asked who his neighbor was? Discuss what that means (page 7).
8. How did the Jews feel about the Samaritans? Why do you suppose Jesus compared a priest and Levite to a Samaritan (pages 7, 8)?

9. Simply put, what does this parable teach (page 8)?
10. Does this parable teach us that we should always give money to people who ask, who seem to need it? What does it teach (pages 9)?
11. Discuss the effect Jesus might have had on this lawyer with His final charge that he should go do likewise (pages 9, 10).