

The Parables of Jesus

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most beloved, and yet, one of the most heart-probing teachings of Jesus. It strips us of all pretense and confronts us with the reality that, how we treat people demonstrates the condition of our relationship with God, because the two can't be separated. We cannot say we know and love God and then neglect to love people made in the image of God.

The underlying question Jesus answers in this parable comes from an expert in Jewish law. **v. 25** *“Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?”*

CONTEXT

vv. 18-20 Jesus sends out 72 disciples to share the good news of the Kingdom, and they return excited because of their success, even over demonic spirits. Jesus says to them, *“Yes, in my name there is no demonic spirit you cannot overcome, but even more important than that is this: Your names are written in heaven.”*

vv. 21-24 Jesus, being filled with joy through the Holy Spirit, praises his Father in heaven for the special relationship he enjoys with his disciples, and then tells them *privately* how privileged they are to have what they have with him.

TEXT

vv. 25-29

The lawyer's 1st question to *“test Jesus”* - *“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

As was the custom, a skilled rabbi showed his superior theological prowess by responding to a question with a counter question that probed deeper into the matter.

Jesus' 1st counter question: *“What is written in the Law? How do you read (interpret) it?”*

The lawyer's response is brilliant! *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Note: Obeying the Law of Moses *is a matter of the heart*. Love God comprehensively—with one's entire self (**Deuteronomy 6:5**), and love others empathetically—as one's own self (**Leviticus 19:18**).

Jesus' response: *“You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”*

Just one problem - **James 2:10** *If we break God's law at one point, we are guilty of breaking it all points.*

All have sinned and fall short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**), The soul that sins shall die (**Ezekiel 18:20**).

Without any kind of qualification, the command to love God from the heart with our entire being and love others from the heart with empathy, is impossible for us. If that's what it take to “live” (inherit eternal life), we're all doomed, because there are no qualifications limiting the love God requires.

The lawyer's 2nd question to *“justify himself”* - *“Who is my neighbor?”*

This is nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt to define the love God requires on one's own terms.

The issue of identifying one's neighbor was a point of sharp debate among Jews in Jesus' day. Racial prejudice ran deep in the Jewish community.

Leviticus 19:18 God's people must love their neighbor as themselves (neighbor = one's own countrymen).

Leviticus 19:33, 34, God's people must love the aliens living among them (neighbor = people of all nations).

What about the enemy among us—Gentile Romans who are less than fully human, anyway?

What about the Samaritans among us, who betrayed God and are now less than fully Jew, anyway?

To ask the question, *“Who is my neighbor?”* reveals this man's heart of prejudice that falls woefully far short of the love God requires.

vv. 30-32 – Jesus response: The Parable of Good Samaritan and his 2nd counter question.

The priests and Levites held a place of high status in the Jewish community.

Their decision not to assist the anonymous man in the ditch would have been lauded as good and wise— religiously prudent—behavior by the listening audience.

According to God's law, it would be utterly insane to value religious ritual over the life of a person, let alone an animal, but in Jesus' day the Jewish nation had cluttered God's law with hundreds of added rules and regulations that, often times, nullified God's law. Jesus' parable reminds us how religion can get in the way of loving God and loving our neighbor.

How much of *"doing church"* gets in the way of our loving others as God requires?

In this parable, through the priest and Levite, Jesus takes a direct shot at the Jewish religious establishment as a failed system that knew nothing of eternal life, because it knew nothing of godly love.

In stark contrast, the Samaritan's "compassion" is the same term used for God's compassion (cp. **1:78; 7:13**).

Imagine the most socially, racially, morally, or politically vilified people by those in your circle of friends. That's how deeply despised the Samaritans were by a good Jew in Jesus' day, and how scandalous it would have sounded to this Jewish lawyer for Jesus to make a Samaritan the hero of this story.

The Samaritan is not conditioned by the constraints of Jewish culture and religious tradition..

v. 36 - Jesus 2nd Counter Question: *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"*

Jesus' question turns the lawyer's religious culture on its head. By means of this parable, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter with an entirely different question: *"Who was the neighborly one here?"*

In other words, if you really know and love God, if you have inherited eternal life, you will show neighborly love to those who need your help, no matter who they might be. You will not theorize, categorize, or discriminate who is or is not your neighbor. You will see your neighbor as the person with whom you come into contact that desperately needs your help.

God loves without limits. His love extends to all nations, to every person in every ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, or moral setting. God shows no favoritism (**Acts 10:34; Galatians 2:6; 1 Peter 1:17**), and if we know him and his love, if we have eternal life in relationship with him, then God's love has been poured into our hearts (**Romans 5:5**), and we can love without prejudice, as well (**Ephesians 5:1-2**).

We will NOT be content to care for "our own kind" in our own religious, social, or political circles.

NOTE: We can't be responsible for everyone and we can't meet every need. God does not expect that. We must be wise when helping others

Jesus, himself, walked away from human need on occasion, in order to meet the greater human need in doing his Father's will in fulfilling his mission of redemption (**Mark 1:35-39**).

Jesus modeled what Paul taught later in **Galatians 6:2-5**—we fulfill the law of Christ by carrying people's burden (crushing weight), not their personal load (their backpack), which they are responsible to carry. We are to be "good" Samaritans not "enabling" Samaritans.

The compassion demonstrated by this Samaritan is typical of those who have eternal life, which is the issue this lawyer asked about in the first place.

Jesus completely shatters this self-justifying man's concept of who God's people are. The parable of Good Samaritan declares that, if we are followers of Jesus, if we have eternal life in him, then it will show up in our compassion for others.

NOTE: In this passage, Jesus is NOT saying the good works of love are the basis for inheriting eternal life, but rather, a life of love is the hallmark of those who have eternal life.

Jesus' emphasis on love from the heart made active in caring deeds in order to have eternal life, was the same tactic he used with the rich young ruler with reference to his money. Both men were lost in works-righteousness, thinking they could somehow be good enough to earn eternal life. By raising up standards of perfection for both men, Jesus was helping both realize how their entire approach to *"inheriting eternal life"* was utterly bankrupt.

The actual answer to both men's questions which boils down to: *"What must I do to do the work of God to have eternal life?"* Jesus reveals in **John 6:28-29** - *"This is the work of God; believe in him whom he has sent."*

Because the disciples believed in Jesus and had inherited eternal life—their names were written in heaven—they were able to accomplish their mission to live, love, and lead like Jesus throughout the land. The lawyer overhead Jesus celebrating this with his disciples and didn't like it, so he tried to "test" Jesus' theology on the matter, and then tried to justify himself when Jesus exposed his heart of prejudice.

As those who have inherited eternal life and our names are written in heaven, we are able to love all people like God loves all

people, because, in Christ Jesus, God first loved the likes of us
(1 John 4:7-19).

He who has an ear, let him hear.