

The Lawyer, His Questions, and the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

An educated man in the Law of Moses came to test and debate with Jesus academically. When Jesus didn't debate the lawyer's first question and answer, he came back with a second question. The Parable of the Good Samaritan was meant to prompt listeners to realize the answer on their own.

I. The Lawyer & Question #1

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted (Lit. - tested) him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? ²⁶ He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? ²⁷ And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. ²⁸ And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do , and thou shalt live." Luke 10:25-28

The Setting – The way this reads suggests it happened during a formal teaching time of Jesus at the Synagogue. Verse 1 tells us that the lawyer stood up to speak; this is how questions would be directed to the speaker. We would expect it to have been somewhere in Judea.

The Lawyer – This is essentially the same as the term Scribe that we have read elsewhere in the Gospels. Luke uses this word almost exclusively. They were experts in the Law. We find that the lawyer's objective was to test Jesus. There is a split among Bible teachers over the sincerity of the test: did he really want to know Jesus' answer as a wise teacher, or was he trying to find a fault, to showcase his own cleverness, debating skill, or academic knowledge? The evidence is mixed, but we can only hope that whatever was his motive, he left a changed man.

Question #1: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" – I was surprised to read several times that this was actually a theologically debated question among the Jews. "What does someone **do** to gain access to eternal life?" Please realize, this is all about "**doing**." As a matter of fact, closer to the cross, we will read of a young Jewish leader asking Jesus the same question: "Good Master, what good thing shall **I do**, that I may have eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16.) And even in the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus will answer this question before Nicodemus can ask it! **Read John 3:2-3** But really, we should not be amazed by the interest in **what must be done** to gain eternal life; it is still a big question among many people today, still debated, still a concern, and, to many people, still a mystery.

I find it interesting that in His answer, Jesus asks him two questions:

Jesus' Answer: "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" – We find Jesus sends the lawyer right to the source, to where the answer is found – the Word of God! In John 5:39, when debating Religious Leaders, Jesus said the same thing, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." The reality was, the Jews, like us today, have the answer concerning eternal life in the Bible, and here we see this Lawyer could even quote it.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” – Boom, and there you have it! To love God with your whole being and all others around you. Jesus will commend the lawyer by telling him that his answer was correct. I want to give some background to this statement and then tear it down. Let’s start with....

Background: This statement is actually Old Testament principles found in two different places. This first section, called the Shema (skee-muh), is found in Deuteronomy. 6:5, and was even quoted in the synagogues during worship. It was basic to the Jewish understanding of their obligation to God – to love Him wholly. The second section about loving one's neighbor is found in Leviticus 19:18.

Definitions: Let’s look at each of these phrases

Love God “with all thy heart” – This was the inner life of a person.

Love God “with all thy soul” – This was their conscience being, personality.

Love God “with all thy strength” – This was about their physical strength.

Love God “with all thy mind” – This is their intellect.

Loving God was to be done by their total person! Not just outward evidence of loving God, but their outward actions of commitment to God were to be driven by a **total inner delight, faith, and passion for God!**

Love neighbors “as thyself” – Then the loving of others, the “neighbor,” would be an overflow from the love of God!

Days before the cross, Matthew 22 tells us that the Pharisees were testing Jesus with questions, trying to find some fault with Him. They asked Him what the greatest commandment was. Jesus answered exactly with these two principles. Listen to verses 37-39, “...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” I love how He summed it up in verse 40, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The love of God and others was basic to the Old Testament law and relationship with God....

“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” – After the lawyer gave his answer, Jesus simply said, “this do.” That would be the loving God and the neighbor. Evidently, **he was doing neither!** In Matthew 19, when speaking to the man we know of as the rich, young ruler, Jesus centered on the love of one's neighbor, probably because this was his greatest need.

Really, this should have ended the conversation....

II. The Lawyer and Question #2

**“But he, willing (Lit. - wanting) to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?
Luke 10:29**

“willing to justify himself” – This lawyer wanted to prove that he was alright. He had hoped to spark a debate, to win an argument, but instead, Jesus agreed with him. So, to prove that he had the upper hand in both the debate and that his life was “perfect” in following the law, he asked another question.....

“who is my neighbor?” – This is an interesting question given by a religious leader at the time of Jesus....

- The Jews dogmatically believed a “neighbor” was only a Jew in good standing. So that would take out publicans, sinners - those who did not follow the law or the many traditions of the elders, of course, Gentiles, and lastly, Samaritans. All of those should be hated and treated as enemies. But, Jesus had already given His heart on this point to His listeners and followers. **Read Matthew 5:43-48.**
- Also, the lawyer could have been looking for an excuse for his lack of love for God and unneighborly living, so he threw out this very vague question to Jesus. He needed an out for his failure to live perfectly within the law. Like many religious debates, the lawyer went the route of quibbling over definitions.

It’s impossible to know the exact thinking of the lawyer by asking this question, but as we look at it, we realize that, whatever the motive, it is such a **selfish question!** “Are there people I don’t need to be neighborly to? Who can I not show help, friendliness, or compassion to? Please, give me the list of people I can ignore and despise.” And get this — instead of Jesus answering the question, “Who is my neighbor?” He will tell the lawyer **how he can be a neighbor!**

Jesus’ Answer: The Good Samaritan The Gospel of Luke contains the largest collection of Jesus’ parables. The Good Samaritan is one of the most beloved stories of Jesus; it is only recorded by Luke, but neither Jesus nor Luke calls it a parable. Some Bible teachers believe this might have been known as a real, current happening, even familiar to the crowd, or just the lawyer himself!

“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked (Lit. - gazed, stopped to take a good look) on him, and passed by on the other side.” Luke 10:30-32

The Journey: Notice the word “down.” I read the significance of this word many times in my study of this incident of Jesus. At that time, there was actually a road called “the Jericho Road” which went between Jerusalem and Jericho. It is still visible today! It was a winding road that dropped about 3300 feet in approximately 17 miles. (Jerusalem – 2500 ft above sea level; Jericho – 825 ft below sea level) It went through narrow passageways and around blind corners; perfect hiding for ambushing robbers. It was known as a dangerous area.

As we go through the characters of this story, let’s consider the attitude of each one...

The Thieves: These were the bad guys who took advantage of this man traveling alone.

Attitude concerning the traveler – They saw the man as an object to exploit. In their minds, they said, “What’s yours is mine, and I’ll take it!” And they did so violently, leaving the man “half dead.”

Let’s talk about **priests and Levites**. Who were these two groups? I read that there were 12,000 priests and Levites who lived in Jericho at the time of Christ. Priests were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, and their heritage made them priests! When their weeks of temple service were scheduled, they would make the 17-mile trip to Jerusalem to serve in the temple and then return home. The Levites were religious laymen who

assisted priests. They were of the tribe of Levi, but not direct descendants of Aaron. They, too, were scheduled to serve in the temple and would travel back and forth as needed.

The Priest: In our story, the priest was supposed to be a good guy; everyone listening would have thought, “Wow, what great luck for the hurt guy, help is here!” But that is not how the story went. When the priest saw the injured man, he purposefully “passed by on the other side.” We might say, cautiously stepped over him! Wow! The **priest's attitude toward the traveler** was that you are a problem to avoid and not worthy of my time, money, or personal safety. He certainly would have had the means to be helpful, but instead avoided the whole situation!

The Levite: Next came another potential good guy who actually was not! Another person with the means to help the terribly injured man, but would not. Jesus simply said that the Levite saw the man, “came and looked on him” and then passed by on the other side. Other words, this Levite took a good long look! He gazed down at this hurt man, sized up the situation, and then basically walked around him! What was his **attitude toward the traveler**? You are an object of curiosity, but not worthy of my time, money, or personal safety. Really, you would think both the priest and the Levite would have been sensitive to the needs of others after a spiritually enriching work shift serving God at the temple, but that didn't seem to be the case.

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, ³⁴And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence (Lit. - two days wadges), and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”
Luke 10:33-35

The Samaritan: When Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of the story, I'm pretty confident, the crowd would have been shocked. You probably could have heard the whispering and complaints! This turn in the story would not have been the cultural norm! Saying that a Samaritan helped a Jew was unthinkable and morally very uncomfortable. Jesus was displaying this despised man, though hated and mistreated by the Jews, as the hero in contrast with those who held a religious position. He was underscoring the Samaritan's compassion and generous care throughout this whole section. It would have gone against every Jewish fiber in the crowd that day. But that was the point they needed to hear! **Remember, Jesus was teaching how Israel needed to understand how they had fallen short in obeying the heart of God found in the law**

His **attitude toward the traveler** was simply, “What I have is yours if I can help you.” Though the traveler's needs were disregarded by his fellow Jews, it was a heathen who risked safety, sacrificed time and money, and took on all responsibility for the welfare of the desperately needy man. In the story, the Samaritan gave the traveler all that would have been expected of a friend or a brother...but of course, he was a foreigner and a stranger, an enemy and a foe.

Jesus' Point:

“Which now of these three , thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? ³⁷And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”
Luke 10:36-37

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?” – We all know the answer was pretty obvious, any child in the audience could have answered this. The “wise and prudent” lawyer was in an uncomfortable predicament – he hated to admit anything positive about a Samaritan, so he avoided it by saying, “He that showed mercy...” and I am sure that was hard enough! Notice, not being able to say even the name Samaritan betrayed the Lawyer’s lack of love, which he had said the Law commanded!

“Go, and do thou likewise” – I want to start this section by reading from a few Old Testament passages. (**Exodus 23:4-5; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 10-11; Proverbs 19:17; Isaiah 58:7-10; Micah 6:8**) Living generously was part of the entire Old Testament. This lawyer should have known generosity, been teaching generosity, and been doing generosity! Again, instead of Jesus answering the ridiculous question, “Who is my neighbor?” **Jesus reminded all who heard that God expected His people to generously assist all those in need, and that doing anything less was in direct disobedience to Him.** To love God was to hold no prejudice or boundary, and to serve and love one another. Jesus showed what it looked like to be a good neighbor – giving sacrificially to anyone in need! He went from “Who is my neighbor?” to “This is how you love neighborly!”

Believers’ Application:

1. Let’s consider:

What is a good definition of a “neighbor”? A neighbor is any person with a need that one is able to meet, and the proof of neighborliness is one’s response to the need. We must realize that meeting the needs of others is a matter of our will.

- 1) Remember, a lack of love is often easily justified – but never right! – we might say---they are lazy, bad people, undeserving, don’t know them, nothing in common
- 2) Remember, our neighbor is anyone of any race, creed, or social background
- 3) Remember, love acts to meet needs! (Matt. 5:48)

Often, we think of helping a neighbor financially, but sometimes that is not possible. In your age group and circle of family/friends, give three ways you can be a neighbor? Giving of our time - meals, doing tasks, visiting, look about and see what needs to be done and just doing it - dishes, folding clothes, washing clothes, babysitting, take to appointments, weeding, mowing lawns

What would be your plan to live more sensitively and show compassion to those in need around you?

- 1) Pray and ask God for a more selfless attitude.
- 2) Live with your head up to the needs of others. Needs are all around us – elderly, young moms, illness, traumas, big moves

Let’s remember loving our neighbor is evidence of our relationship with God – our salvation! **Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8-11, 15-17**

2. Let's consider:

Jesus acknowledges that the lawyer knew the correct answer to the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

What does it mean to love God? To acknowledge Him, be devoted to Him, trust and be faithful to God in all things with our whole being. (heart, soul, mind, and strength)

What does it mean to love your neighbor? Give sacrificially to people in need.

Can we gain eternal life by loving God and our neighbor? One cannot gain eternal life by **doing!** Jesus sent this lawyer to the law, not because I could save him, but because it shows we need to be saved! He did two things here: Jesus set the standard of love towards one's neighbor high, higher than any man could attain, and gave man the realization that he needed a Savior. The Old Testament Law was a tool to show man their inability to obey God. Man always needed something else. In the Old Testament, it was blood sacrifice – birds, lambs, goats, bulls; a picture of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God that came to take away the sin of the world! (**Rom. 3:19-20; Eph. 2:8-9**) The lawyer in our passage could have admitted his inability to satisfy the law, but instead, he sought to "justify" himself. It is interesting that in Matthew 19:20, the honest, rich young ruler knew that something was lacking beyond law-keeping. Let's finish with Paul's message to the Galician church. Here he reminded them that only Jesus could give eternal life! **Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:11-13; 4:4-5**