

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

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Luke 10:25-37 contains one of Christ's most well-known parables, commonly known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus taught the parable in response to a question asked of him by one of the Jewish lawyers. The question was not sincere, but the lawyer "*tempted him*, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" As he often did, the Lord turned the tables on the man and replied to him by asking him a question: "He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?" The man answered discreetly, echoing Jesus' own teachings about the greatest commandment in the Law of Moses (see Matthew 22:37-40): "*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.*" The Lord replied, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." The problem arose with the man's second question, which was rooted in his effort to rationalize his own disobedience to God's commandment to love his neighbor. Therefore, the man, "willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, *And who is my neighbor?*" The great parable that Christ teaches in the following verses teaches us both *whom* we should love and *how* we should love them.

Love in deed and in truth

In this parable, Jesus 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. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and 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. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, 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 10:30-35). After teaching the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves" (Luke 10:36)? The lawyer said, "He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37). The parable teaches us to do as the Samaritan man did. *That* is loving our neighbor in the way that God commands. The Jewish priest and Levite ignored their own brother, showed no mercy, and therefore did *not* love the man. As 1 John 3:16-18 says, "Hereby perceive

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(continued)

we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*" The love of God is demonstrated by *deeds*, not mere words. The Samaritan in the parable truly did love his neighbor in deed and in truth.

Love everyone

The Jews and Samaritans had a mutual hatred towards each other (Luke 9:52-53; John 4:9; 8:48) stemming from 722 B.C., when the Assyrians carried away the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive and brought in peoples from other lands to inhabit Samaria (2 Kgs 17:23-41). The descendants of these people, the Samaritans, became enemies of the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity. From about 537-520 B.C., the Samaritans actively resisted the Jews' efforts to rebuild the temple (Ezra 4-6), and then resisted the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in 456 B.C. (Neh 4:1-3,7-8,11). They occupied land that God had previously given to Israel, and clearly did not welcome the Jews who returned to live there, and Israel resented and detested the Samaritans' presence. This animosity between the two peoples continued up to the time of Christ. The man who asked Jesus who his neighbor was did so to justify himself (Prov 16:2; 21:2). He wanted to have the narrowest definition of the term "neighbor" as possible, as that would excuse him for his obvious lack of love to so many. Yet Jesus gave the broadest possible definition for who our neighbor is. Jesus taught that even the bitterest enemies of the Jews were their neighbors whom they should love. This is also what he taught in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*" (Matt 5:43-48). Thus, the parable of "the good Samaritan" teaches us that every person is our neighbor, and, as that Samaritan man loved his Jewish neighbor in deed and in truth, so we should "go and do likewise."