

Love Thy Neighbor: A Call to Extend Our Boundaries (Lk 10.25-37)

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January 1-4, 1996 • Revised, June, 1996

Text

- 25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
[Meaning of *lawyer*]
- 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 neighbour as thyself.
[The lawyer was quoting from Deut 6.5 and Lev 19.18. Jesus confirmed in Mt 22.35-40 that these commandments were the essence of Old Testament law.]
- 28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.
- 29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
[Meaning of *neighbor*]
- 30 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.
[“The road from Jerusalem to Jericho descends approximately 3,000 feet in about 17 miles. It was a dangerous road to travel for robbers hid along its steep, winding way” (Walvoord/Zuck 234).]
- 31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
- 32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked [on him], and passed by on the other side.
- 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion [on him],
- 34 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.
- 35 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.
- 36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
- 37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Definitions

Lawyer: A “lawyer” is referred to in v 25. He was no modern-day defense attorney. The Greek word underlying the KJV’s “lawyer” is *nomikos* (νομικός). Its sense is perhaps more faithfully represented by the NIV’s “expert in the law.” A survey of the usage of *nomikos* as a noun in the New Testament reveals several facts. First, lawyers were, above all else, interpreters of scripture (Mt 22.35; Lk 10.25; 11.46, 52; 14.3). Second, they were closely aligned with (yet distinct from) the Pharisees and scribes (Lk 7.30; 11.45, 53; 14.3). Third, they are portrayed as having authority in religious/spiritual matters (Lk 11.46, 52); as being hypocritical (Lk 11.46); as rejecting the messengers of God (Lk 11.47-51); and as hindering others’ apprehension of spiritual knowledge (Lk 11.52).

Neighbor: The “neighbor” is the subject of discussion in the text. The term is not used in its modern connotation. Its Greek source is *plesion* (πλησιον); it can denote a neighbor, friend, or any other person.

Its significance is made clear by biblical usage, especially the passage in question here. *Plesion* is found some 17 times in the New Testament; in eight of these instances, it is used in translation of the Old Testament command, “. . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . . .” (Lev 19.18). Such is the case of Mt 5.43; 19.19; 22.39; Mk 12.31, 33; Lk 10.27; Rom 13.9-10; Gal 5.14; Jas 2.8. Elsewhere, *plesion* denotes fellow countrymen (Acts 7.27; Heb 8.11) and fellow believers (Rom 15.2; Eph 4.25). It is worthy of note that, in the case of Lev 19.18, “neighbor” is used in reference to fellow Israelites (vv 16, 18); foreigners come into view further along in the text (vv 33-34).

Outline

Loving one’s neighbor is characterized by . . .

I. **Unpopularity** (vv 31-32)

- A. The priest belonged to the spiritual elite of Israel. He was the elect of the elect. Yet not even he stopped to help the wounded traveler (v 31).
- B. The Levite belonged to the special tribe of Levi, which was set apart for service to the Lord. The Levite ought to have been an example to the rest of the nation. But he, having looked at the man who had been robbed, walked away (v 32).
- C. The Samaritans and the Jews regarded each other with contempt. This made the actions of the Samaritan all the more distasteful. Keener states: “Jews and Samaritans traditionally had no love for each other; although violence was the exception rather than the rule, the literature of each betrays an attitude of hostility toward the other” (218).

II. **Compassion** (vv 33, 37)

- A. The motivation for the Samaritan’s service was compassion (v 33).
- B. In sum, the Samaritan had mercy on the victim (v 37).

III. **Inconvenience** (v 34)

- A. The Samaritan had to stop to take care of the man who had been attacked.
- B. He had to give up his place on his beast’s back (v 34).
- C. He had to spend the night at a certain inn, and likely didn’t travel as far that day because of the time consumption of his compassionate work (v 34).

IV. **Sacrifice** (vv 34-35)

- A. The Samaritan provided his own supplies to administer medical care to the wounded man (v 34).
- B. He paid out of his own pocket to see that proper care was given (vv 34-35).

V. **Persistence** (vv 34-35).

- A. He made a time investment by caring personally for the victim (v 34).
- B. He made arrangements to come back to the inn to pay for the wounded man’s expenses; this involved a commitment to ministry (v 35).

Application

Jesus’ use of the “good Samaritan” illustration was a response to a man who was interested in establishing his own righteousness (v 29). He was obviously seeking to boil down the commands of God to their absolute essentials. He did so, not for the purpose of understanding God’s

requirements more fully, but in order to minimize his own responsibility. Jesus' rebuttal of his notions must surely have taken his breath away.

The lawyer who "was willing to justify himself" (v 29) made reference to the command in Lev 19:18: "... thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself..." He supposed that his "neighbors" were fellow Israelites with whom he held close contact. But Jesus redefined the term in the course of the story.

The lawyer was preoccupied with the question, "... who is my neighbor?" (v 29). His attitude said, "Whom do I have to love as myself?" The implication of Jesus' comments is that it does not matter who our neighbors are; we are to seek to establish neighborly relations with every needy person whom God sends our way. The issue then becomes, "To whom can I be a neighbor?"

The bottom line, then, is that love knows no boundaries. The Samaritan crossed a line of bitter ethnic hatred when he expressed love to a Jew. From Jesus' scathing criticism of the priests and Levites comes the obligation to you and me: to seek to make many neighbors, and to love them as ourselves.

Sources

Walvoord, John, and Roy Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, New Testament ed.

Keener, Craig. *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*.

Lesson Plan

1. Introduce the topic, perhaps in the following way: "We studied last week concerning the matter of unity among believers. The main idea of Col 3:9-14 is that we should cultivate unity with those with whom we share the common experience of salvation; this is particularly true within the local church. During last week's class, the discussion shifted to the matter of how Christians should relate to the world. Because biblical unity stems from having beliefs and experiences in common, it is impossible for committed believers to feel at one with unbelievers. How, then, are we to treat those who are outside our comfort zone? Today's lesson will attempt to answer this question—at least in part." [2 minutes]
2. Read, narrate, and explain vv 25-29 of the text. Explain who the lawyer was, including a few cross-references. [5 minutes]
3. Read vv 30-37 portion by portion. Have members of the audience act out the narration. Make appropriate comments (e.g., concerning culture) as necessary. Try to keep the atmosphere fun and upbeat. [8 minutes]
4. Present the five characteristics of love for one's neighbor. Show their derivation from the text. [12 minutes]
5. Make applications. Include a discussion of the meaning of *neighbor*. Make special emphasis on the different uses of the term made by the lawyer and Jesus (*viz.*, *having* a neighbor vs. *being* a neighbor). Challenge the audience to extend their boundaries to saved and unsaved alike—to get out of their comfort zones and make a difference in the lives of hurting people. [3 minutes]