

Christian Love Finds His Neighbor—Even When He’s An Enemy

Galatians 5:22; Luke 10:30-37

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Jesus summarized all of our duties to our neighbor in these few words: “Thou shalt love (*agapao*) thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

But it’s at that point that a question arises, “Who is my neighbor that I am commanded by God to love?”

The Jewish rabbis of Christ’s time commonly interpreted the word neighbor, either of one that is related to them by blood (an Israelite), or one that professed the same religion. There was no obligation to love anyone outside those parameters. However, the Lord Jesus clearly condemned this very narrow rabbinic interpretation of the duty of love that one owes to his/her neighbor (as we shall see).

Dear ones, we too can become as narrow in our interpretation of our “neighbor” as were the rabbis of Christ’s time. The rabbis took a passage like **Leviticus 19:18** (“thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”), and gave it only a very narrow interpretation and application to those of the same blood or of the same religion. But Christ taught that they had sinfully limited the divine application of this passage. We can do exactly the same thing as did the rabbis when we apply passages that speak of our obligation to love our neighbor to only those of the same blood or of the same church. Dear ones, let us not draw a circle in restricting our Christian love to only these, and then seek to defend such a position from Scripture (as did the Jewish rabbis). Such an exclusive view will not hold up to Christ’s inclusive interpretation as to who our neighbor is that we are bound to serve by way of Christian love (in fact, such an exclusive view will be condemned by Christ).

The main points from today's sermon are the following: (1) Who Is My Neighbor? (2) Am I To Love Even My Enemy?

I. Who Is My Neighbor (Luke 10:30-37)?

A. One day as Christ was ministering in Judea, a lawyer from among the Pharisees put an ensnaring question to the Lord Jesus: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life" (Luke 10:25)?

1. Luke states that this was not an honest question, but a question that was meant to tempt or test Christ by way of being able to catch Him in some error for which the Lord might be accused, or to catch Him with a question that He was unable to answer, so as to make Him look stupid (a kind of "gotcha" question).

2. As the Lord so often does with such captious and entrapping questions, He answers a question with a question (in Luke 10:26): "What is written in the law? How readest thou?"

3. To which, the lawyer replies in summary: Read Luke 10:27 (these two commandments of love summarize all of God's Moral Law).

4. The Lord Jesus states that the lawyer has answered correctly, and that if he would inherit eternal life he must practice these two commandments (without fail): Read Luke 10:28.

a. Christ was absolutely right in His response to this lawyer who believed eternal life depended upon what he must do, upon his own obedience to the law: keep it, do it, practice it without any fault or stumbling and you will inherit eternal life. Love (*agapao*) God perfectly, and love (*agapao*) your neighbor perfectly, and you will inherit eternal life. That is the right standard, dear ones: perfect obedience to God's Law. There is nothing wrong with the standard (in fact that perfect standard remains the same throughout time and eternity). The problem is that none of us can attain it (because we are all sinners by nature and

all sinners in practice). However, in the great kindness and mercy of God, that perfect obedience to God's Law has been kept by Jesus Christ (who fulfilled all righteousness for those He chose in love from all eternity and to whom was imputed all of the sins of His people that He might in love suffer in the wrath of God in their place).

b. But in this case, the Lord placed the burden of perfectly keeping God's Law upon the shoulders of this lawyer in order to drive it home to him that he was incapable of perfectly keeping God's Law, that he was hopeless in his own effort to secure eternal life, and that he must look to God's mercy in Christ Jesus alone for eternal life.

c. Dear ones, the words of Christ ("do, and thou shalt live") should have each and every one of us on our knees before Him, crying out to Him, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" "Do, and thou shalt live" should be the means of humbling us, turning us from all our self-righteousness, and casting us now and forever upon the love of God in Christ Jesus. These words of Christ should have had that very effect upon this lawyer, but to the contrary, he sought to justify himself (and make himself appear righteous) before the Lord by asking (in Luke 10:29), "And who is my neighbor?" Oh, the pride in each of our hearts (and not just in the heart of this proud, self-righteous lawyer) that blinds us to our sin and particularly our sin in not loving God with a whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves. For we will make every effort to justify ourselves, excuse ourselves, or blame others for our sin, our rebellion, and our lack of love for our brethren (who rub us the wrong way, who disagree with us, who will not pat us on the back as we think we deserve), and we will especially justify our lack of love for those who are not brethren in Christ and who even make themselves our enemies.

5. The self-justification offered by this lawyer becomes the occasion for Christ to present in a parable a most memorable answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor to whom I am to show love (*agape*)?" Are there boundaries to Christian love? Are there those who are

deserving of our Christian love (*agape*) and those who are undeserving of our Christian love? Let us continue with the parable of our Lord in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

B. The Lord gives the Parable of the Loving Samaritan (fits better with the context to call it “the Loving Samaritan”). For this parable is intended by Jesus to teach the lawyer (and us all) who our neighbor is to whom we are to serve with *agape* love.

1. A certain man (most likely a Jew) was traveling along the road leading from Jerusalem to Jericho (a distance of approximately 15 miles), when he was robbed, savagely beaten, severely wounded, stripped of his clothing, and left helplessly for dead by a gang of brutal thugs (“half-dead” in Luke 10:30 would seem to indicate that this poor man was helpless and unable to help himself, and without help he would perish from his wounds and from exposure). Here was one in desperate need. Who would show himself a neighbor and come to his aid?

2. The first to pass this way was a priest (Luke 10:31), who was likely coming down from Jerusalem, having served and fulfilled his duties in the temple. A minister of God, knowing the Scriptures and having studied the Law of God, surely he would know his duty to love and to serve a fellow Jew in such desperate and needy straits (Malachi 2:7). After all, the Law of God even required God’s people to care for the beast of an enemy which had fallen under its great burden and load (Exodus 23:5). One who appears in the presence of God on behalf of God’s people would surely show mercy and compassion to a fellow Jew, who lay helpless and dying under the extreme burden of a savage beating and open wounds. However, he steered clear of the man (perhaps out of fear of being treated the same way, or perhaps out of fear of touching one who was dead and becoming unclean, or perhaps he was just in a hurry to get home and did not want to be bothered). He did not even stop to look or come close to the helpless Jew (1 Corinthians 13:2). But all of his

professed knowledge of God's Law was mere pretense and hypocrisy—he had a form of godliness, but by his inaction he denied the power thereof. Whose crime was more aggravated in the sight of God, the ruthless ruffians who left the man for dead, or the minister of God (who knew and spoke the Word of God) and left the man for dead?

3. After the priest had passed by, a Levite (Luke 10:32), an ordained servant and helper to the priest within the temple, came upon the helpless Jew. Surely, here was one who would help the helpless, for a Levite was accustomed to assisting, helping, and serving within the temple. We watch as the Levite approaches the half-dead Jew, and he actually stops and observes from the other side of the road the wretched condition of this badly beaten man and dying man. Will he cross the road to show mercy and love to one who so desperately needs his care? No, he resumes his journey to be the servant of God, but not the servant of man (1 Corinthians 13:3). He was servant in name only, but not in actual day to day practice. Whose crime was more aggravated in the sight of God, the ruthless ruffians who left the man for dead, or the Levite (who was the servant of God) and left the man for dead?

4. Look, here comes another traveler, but no, he surely would not help this dying Jew, for he is a hated Samaritan. The Jews and Samaritans generally despised one another and had nothing to do with one another (Luke 9:52-53; John 4:9). This was due primarily to the perversion of the only true religion of Jehovah by the Samaritans—they were guilty of apostasy from the true faith (John 4:22). In fact, when the Jewish religious leaders wanted to cast the greatest slander and humiliation upon Christ they called him a Samaritan (John 8:48). Not all Samaritans were unbelievers as the gospel brought them to Christ (John 4:39-42). I understand this Samaritan to be a true worshipper of Jehovah God: (1) His agape love for this helpless and hopeless Jew presupposes his agape love for God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength; (2) He is a picture of the Lord Jesus. And though this man is a Samaritan, the

Samaritan approaches the helpless Jew (Luke 10:33), he comes near him, looks upon him in his helpless and hopeless condition, and has compassion upon him (showing *agape* love and a reality of faith in the one true living God). The hostilities of other Jews and Samaritans toward one another will not quench his *agape* love.

a. But that love is not a mere feeling of sympathy or mere words (“poor man”), but is an active *agape* love in giving of himself to this helpless Jew. For we read (Luke 10:34-35), that the Samaritan poured wine as an antiseptic and olive oil as a lubricant into the wounds, covered and bound his wounds with bandages, set him upon his own beast to be carried, and took him to an inn (a place where he could be cared for), and paid the manager to care for him (even promising that whatever expenses the manager incurred, he would repay him when the Samaritan returned).

b. The Jewish man was not a family member, or a friend, or of the same nation, and perhaps not even a true believer, but the Samaritan had compassion upon the helpless Jew in his desperate need, and showered him with *agape* love (in sacrificially giving of himself to the half-dead Jew out of his love for the one true living God). The invisible God was seen through the visible acts of *agape* love on the part of this Samaritan believer (1 John 4:12).

C. Now the Lord Jesus turns the tables upon the lawyer, asking him (Luke 10:36), “Which now of these three [i.e. the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan—GLP], thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?” The self-righteous lawyer could not even bring himself to answer the Lord by using the word, “Samaritan”, for his resentment apparently ran so deep that he could only say, “He that shewed mercy on him” (Luke 10:37). He was compelled by Christ’s parable to honestly deny the teaching of the rabbis, that our neighbor is only one to whom we are related by blood, nationality, or faith. The Lord

knows the heart of this self-righteous lawyer that his love is only skin deep, for he has set boundaries to his love (which is not *agape* love).

D. In light of Christ's clear teaching in this parable, we must all do some serious soul searching.

1. Who have we excluded from being a neighbor to whom we are commanded to show Christ's love?

2. Perhaps you were wounded and abused in childhood or in adulthood by one who should have protected you, and you have become filled with such resentment and bitterness that you cannot possibly view that abuser as a neighbor to whom Christ's love is to be shown. It's true that you cannot actually forgive (until there is genuine repentance evidenced), but you certainly can pray for that one, you can call upon the Lord to come as the Loving Samaritan to heal you and care for you, and you can stand ready to forgive (as does God, Psalm 86:5), hoping that day will come. Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, I will repay—not you will repay—not I will repay, but the Lord will repay.

3. Perhaps there are those (whether Christians or unbelievers) that just annoy you and grieve you due to their insensitivity, callousness, selfishness, blasphemy, or immorality. If the love of Christ can change the heart of one who called himself "the chief of sinners", then let none of us write such people off as a neighbor to whom the love of Christ is to be. Even if we must correct them, rebuke them, and separate from them, we do so not with glee, not with resentment, not with vengeful anger, but with a heart broken by the holy love of Christ that is indignant with their sin, but also prays, and hopes, and gives to the undeserving, to the unloving, to the ungodly (1 Corinthians 13:7).

II. Am I To Love Even My Enemy (Luke 6:35-36)?

A. It is clear from the very words of Christ that we are to love

(with *agape*) even our enemy, for God Himself showers His enemies with *agape* love in the form of life, breath, food, clothing, shelter, rain, sunshine, and even restraint of sin (even when he/she continues in rebellion against our Lord God). This, dear ones, is a love of free benevolence to the undeserving. That is the nature of *agape*—it gives not on the basis of one's merit, one's loveliness, one's favorability, one's usefulness, one's righteousness, or one's likelihood to reciprocate. *Agape* bestows its kindness, its longsuffering, its service, its help, its prayer, its faithful testimony, its correction, its rebuke, and its life for the undeserving, for a neighborhood that encompasses the whole world.

1. Even when *agape* love cannot forgive the sins of others because there is no confession or repentance, *agape* stands ready to forgive (like God Himself in Psalm 86:5), willing to forgive, and hoping to forgive, rather than mired in resentment, bitterness, and misery.

2. Is there anything more difficult (yea impossible in our own strength) to do than to actively serve those with *agape* love who have hated us, despised us, criticized us, slandered and lied about us, hoped for our downfall, persecuted us, robbed us, and sought to make our lives miserable? The only way to love the undeserving is to be filled with the love of Christ, who loved the undeserving. The undeserved love of Christ begets an undeserved love for others.

a. The reason we are not showing the love of Christ to the degree that we should is because we are not consumed with the love of Christ for the unworthy and undeserving as we should be. The reason why we draw comfortable boundaries around those whom we call our neighbor is because we realize once we include that unlovely, hostile person as a neighbor, we are then bound by our God of love to show forth the unselfish, serving, giving love of Christ to that person. Dear ones, it's a signal to us that our love is yet self-centered and tainted with pride (and what others can do for us, rather than what we can do for others—even the undeserving, the unlovely, the hostile).

b. I don't know that one toward whom you may be harboring bitterness, resentment, a personal revenge, or hatred, but I do know that it will consume you, it will eat you up, it will flare up at various times into a fiery furnace of anger within and toward others, it will make you miserable, if you do not repent of such grievous sins, seek the forgiveness of Christ, and open your heart to understand and practice the undeserved love of Christ for unworthy sinners (like you and me), who had committed infinitely greater sins against the love, the righteousness, and the truth of Jesus Christ. We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Whereas we act at times as if God loves us because we first loved Him (as if His love for us is conditioned upon our love for Him). This is a practical denial of the Covenant of Grace, dear ones.

B. But someone may offer an objection: Doesn't David declare that he hates his enemies with a perfect hatred (Psalm 139:22)?

1. Absolutely, and I submit that this is a holy hatred and displeasure for who we and others are in our fallen state in Adam. By the fall in Adam, we are all enemies of God. By the fall in Adam, we hate righteousness and love wickedness. By the fall in Adam, we are hostile to the love of Christ, hostile to our need of Christ, hostile to the salvation of Christ. That hostility of fallen mankind in Adam toward a loving and righteous God is something that we (who have the love of Christ) must hate, even as it was true of each of us. Are we to love ourselves (with a love of approbation) as we were at one time the enemies of God? God forbid! We are rather to hate who we were as the enemies of God. And likewise, we are not to love (but rather to hate with a holy displeasure) all those who are yet the enemies of God (in Adam) and resist His righteousness and His love (revealed in His many acts of kindness to them).

2. Does not God Himself hate in this sense those who are rebels against Him and enemies in opposing Him (Psalm 5:4-6; Psalm

11:4-7; Romans 9:13)? So you see, it is not true that God only hates the sin (but loves the sinner), but God also hates the sinner (as the sinner is God's enemy). For it is not only sins that are cast into hell, but sinners who commit sins. Thus, as fallen mankind is God's creation, made in His image, He loves and shows kindness to them. But as all men in Adam have made themselves God's enemies, the Lord has a holy hatred and displeasure with them. That's what God's reconciliation changes—God is no longer our enemy and we are no longer God's enemy—we are reconciled by the redemption of Christ, who removed the enmity.

3. Dear ones, David is not speaking about those who simply have made themselves his personal enemies, but those who (due to their rebellion against God, against His holiness, against His love) have revealed themselves to be the enemies of God. I must love (with a love of moral approval) those who are the friends of God, and at the same time, I must hate (with a holy moral disapproval) those who are the enemies of God. That hatred which I declare about my own sinful, rebellious state in Adam, I must also declare about the sinful, rebellious state of all in Adam.

4. However, having said that and having joined with David in his words spoken out of a fervent love for God in Psalm 139:22, let me be quick to add that though we have a holy hatred for man in his/her rebellious state as enemies of our most holy and most loving God and Savior, nevertheless, like God Himself, we are to shower forth agape love by way of acts of kindness and longsuffering toward even our enemies—not repaying evil for evil, but feeding, clothing, helping, praying, and bearing a faithful testimony of the gospel of Christ to them (Matthew 5:44,46; Psalm 35:11-16; Romans 12:17-21).

C. As I close, I want you to look beyond the parable as it related to the lawyer and all of us who have sought to justify ourselves before God on the basis of our own law-keeping or love-giving. For I submit that this parable has an application beyond that of exercising Christian love

(agape) to our family, to our brethren, and to our neighbor (whoever he/she may be). For we, like the poor man, have been beaten, robbed, and left for dead by Satan and sin. Many false shepherds, priests, and ministers walked by, who cared not for our souls, but gave a passing glance to our sad estate, because they were only hirelings (John 5:13). Being completely unable to help ourselves, Christ had compassion upon us who were ungodly and gave Himself in love for us (Romans 5:6). He did not set His love upon us because we were lovely, righteous, or acceptable to Him. He being the eternal Son of God came into our neighborhood (He became flesh and dwelt among us, John 1:14), and humbled Himself to become not only a neighbor (a man), but a Savior, in graciously healing us of our wounds that the curse of sin had caused (applying the wine of His blood and the oil of His Spirit to our healing), and binding up our broken hearts with His own garments of righteousness. The Lord Jesus brought us into His Church to be cared for by those appointed by Him to feed us and care for us, and promised payment to those who faithfully ministered to us when He comes again. Let us never forget that we love our neighbor (regardless of his condition), only because Christ became our neighbor and loved us, who were ungodly. While we were drowning in our own blood, He cried out, Live (Ezekiel 16:4-6). That was our condition when Jesus came as our Loving Savior and powerfully declared to us, "Live". What a debt of gratitude is ours in being a loving Samaritan to those all those around us who are no more undeserving than were we of Christ's *agape* love. And the words of Christ are yet heard, "Go ye and do likewise."

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