

## The Good Samaritan is Christ

### Five Biblical Considerations

Viewing the Parable of the Good Samaritan as a picture of man's sin and salvation, with Christ as the Samaritan, was common in the early church, perhaps best exemplified by Augustine. However, after centuries of abuse of the allegorical method, especially by Rome, many even Reformed writers in their caution, and most modern commentators, have taken Christ out of the parable, leaving it as merely a story with a *moral* purpose, rather than as a spiritual illustration with a *gospel* purpose. For at least the following reasons, the ancient spiritual interpretation of the parable ought to be reconsidered.

**Consideration #1.** The two parables Jesus Himself interprets, the parable of the Sower and the parable of the Wheat & the Tares, have a stated gospel meaning (Mt. 13:19-23; Lu. 8:12), that is, involve the work and call of salvation, and a character who represents God in the work of the gospel (Mt. 13:37). This is the formula for parable interpretation: Jesus told His disciples if they understand the parables He interprets, they will understand all parables (Mk. 4:13). Since the ones He interprets are gospel, not merely moral improvement, we should see the parable of the Good Samaritan not primarily as a rebuke for neglecting those in need, but as a challenge to examine whether one has even the most basic evidence of being a child of God — the evidence of love.

**Consideration #2.** Nearly all of the extended parables, at least those with any character development, have a character who represents God, either the Father, the Son or both. For example,

- The “certain king” in the Parable of the Royal Wedding (Mt. 22:1-14),

- The “certain man” in the Parable of the Great Supper (Lu. 14:16-24)
- The father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lu. 15:11-32)
- The “certain rich man” in the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Lu. 16:1-9)
- The “certain nobleman” in the Parable of the Servants & the Pounds (Lu. 19:11-27)
- The “master of the house” in the three vineyard parables (the Laborers in the Vineyard, Mt. 20:1-16; the Two Sons, Mt. 21:28-32; the Wicked Husbandmen, Mt. 21:33-46)
- The “man traveling into a far country” in the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14-30)

Since there is a God-character in all of these developed parables, it is quite reasonable that the Parable of the Good Samaritan would follow the same formula.

**Consideration #3.** The Good Samaritan parable contains details that are used symbolically in other parts of Scripture; thus, the following symbolic meanings suggested by Augustine are not wild, allegorical speculation:

- Jerusalem as the heavenly city of peace is seen throughout the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms; Jericho as the accursed city is found in the book of Joshua.
- The “certain man” traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho as representing Adam, and mankind in general, in his journey from paradise to a fallen state, is also an interpretation in keeping with Scripture. Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, Eph. 2:1-6.
- Thieves representing the devil & his angels, stripping man of his God-given virtue, is in keeping with Jesus' own analogy in Jn. 10:10: *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they*

*may have it more abundantly.*” The thief is Satan and his representatives.

- Sin represented as open wounds is found in Isa 1:6: *From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment.*
- The priest, the Levite and the entire Old Testament system are presented in the New Testament, and particularly in Hebrews, as insufficient to help or to save sinners in need (Hebrews 7:11-24).
- The Lord (Christ represented by the Samaritan) as binding up the wounds of sin is pictured in Jer 30:17: *For I will restore health to you And heal you of your wounds,' says the LORD, 'Because they called you an outcast saying: "This is Zion; No one seeks her." '*
- The oil and wine representing spiritual healing are commonly recognized as biblical symbols for the Holy Spirit and grace.
- Augustine’s statement, “The *inn* is the Church, where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed” is also in keeping with the role Scripture gives to the church. (Heb. 13:1-3)

**Consideration #4.** The religious leaders themselves, in their contempt for Jesus, called Him a Samaritan. A possible reason may be found in John’s Gospel, 4:39-40 ,where after Jesus’ memorable encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, *“many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.”* We can only imagine the leaders’ reaction when word got back to them regarding His activities among the hated Samaritans.

Sometime afterwards came an encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees, recorded in John 8:37-49: *"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.... He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.”*

Note their answer is not “*Did we not say,*” but “*Do we not say,*” implying that their calling Him a Samaritan was not a one-time criticism but a habitual practice. Also, note that Jesus, who was of course not actually a Samaritan but a Jew, did not say in His answer, “I am not a Samaritan” but merely, “I do not have a demon.” The reason, perhaps, was this very parable, in which He would cast Himself as a Good Samaritan.

**Consideration #5.** The lawyer’s question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” needed a gospel answer, not simply a moral one. The lawyer didn’t need merely another duty to perform. He and the other leaders had seen Jesus, whom they had derided as “a Samaritan,” minister in love to the common people for nothing in return. By contrast, the lawyer needed to recognize his own failure to love and thus his sinful condition before God, and then realize that *this* “Samaritan” was the one who could minister to *his* needs as well as the openly sinful whom he considered beneath him.