

**Parable of the Good Samaritan**

**Luke 10:25 – 37**

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## PERICOPE 0

### Exegesis of the Parable of The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25 – 37

<sup>25</sup> Καὶ ἵδοὺ νομικός τις ἀνέστη ἐκπειράζων αὐτὸν λέγων· διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;

<sup>26</sup> ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν· ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τί γέγραπται; πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις;

<sup>27</sup> ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης [τῆς] καρδίας σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἴσχυΐ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

<sup>28</sup> εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ· ὅρθως ἀπεκρίθης· τοῦτο ποίει καὶ ζήσῃ.

<sup>29</sup> ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν· καὶ τίς ἔστιν μου πλησίον;

<sup>30</sup> Ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· ἄνθρωπός τις κατέβαινεν ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ εἰς Ἱεριχὼ καὶ λησταῖς περιέπεσεν, οἷς καὶ ἐκδύσαντες αὐτὸν καὶ πληγὰς ἐπιθέντες ἀπῆλθον ἀφέντες ἡμιθανῆ.<sup>31</sup> κατὰ συγκυρίαν δὲ ἱερεύς τις κατέβαινεν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκείνῃ καὶ ἵδων αὐτὸν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν.<sup>32</sup> ὅμοίως δὲ καὶ Λευίτης [γενόμενος] κατὰ τὸν τόπον ἐλθὼν καὶ ἵδων ἀντιπαρῆλθεν.<sup>33</sup> Σαμαρίτης δέ τις ὁδεύων ἥλθεν κατ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἵδων ἐσπλαγχνίσθη,<sup>34</sup> καὶ προσελθὼν κατέδησεν τὰ τραύματα αὐτοῦ ἐπιχέων ἔλαιον καὶ οἶνον, ἐπιβιβάσας δὲ αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ ἵδιον κτῆμα τὸ γαγκρατικόν εἰς πανδοχεῖον καὶ ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ.<sup>35</sup> καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον ἐκβαλὼν ἔδωκεν δύο δηνάρια τῷ πανδοχεῖ καὶ εἶπεν· ἐπιμελήθητι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὅ τι ἀν προσδαπανήσῃς ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαι με ἀποδώσω σοι.<sup>36</sup> τίς τούτων τῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος εἰς τὸν ληστά;

<sup>37a</sup> ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος μετ' αὐτοῦ.

<sup>37b</sup> εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· πορεύου καὶ σὺ ποίει ὅμοίως.

#### A. TEXTUAL CRITICISM

No major variants in this pericope.

#### B. LEXICAL AND TOPICAL STUDIES

10:25 ἐκπειράζων verb, present, active, participle, nominative, masculine, singular, from ἐκπειράζω to prove, test thoroughly – τόν Θεόν, to put to proof God's character and power: τόν Χριστόν, by irreligion and immorality to test the patience or the avenging power of Christ,

10:25 κληρονομήσω verb, future, active, indicative, 1st person, singular, from κληρονομέω 1. to receive a lot, receive by lot; especially to receive a part of an inheritance, receive as an inheritance, obtain by right of inheritance; in later writings not infrequent with an accusative of the thing; absolutely, to be an heir, to inherit: 2. universally, to receive the portion assigned to one, receive an allotted portion, receive as one's own or as a possession; to become partaker of, to obtain.

10:29 δικαιώσαι verb, aorist, active, infinitive, from δικαιόω 1. properly, to make δίκαιος; to render righteous or such as he ought to be; but this meaning is extremely rare, if not altogether doubtful; 2. to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered; passive used reflexively, to show oneself righteous: 3. to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be, a. with the negative idea predominant, to declare guiltless one accused or who may be accused, acquitted of a charge or reproach, pregnantly with ἀπό τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν added, to be declared innocent and therefore to be absolved from the charge of sins; simply, to be absolved, hence, figuratively, by a usage not met with elsewhere, to be freed, ἀπό τῆς ἀμαρτίας, from its dominion; b. with the positive idea predominant, to judge, declare, pronounce, righteous and therefore acceptable;

10:30 λῃσταῖς noun, dative, masculine, plural, common, from λῃστής 1. robber, bandit, highwayman, one who seizes by violence, in contrast to a thief (κλέπτης), who uses stealth; 2. politically insurrectionist, revolutionary, rebel who favors the use of force; 3 figuratively, of unscrupulous, greedy, or overambitious leaders.

10:31 Priest –these were, during biblical times, the divinely authorized and officially designated ministers of God who were to officiate in sacrifices, ceremonies, and religious celebrations. As one who performed sacrificial, ritualistic, and mediatorial functions, he represented the people before God. Biblically, while priests were of the tribe of Levi, they also have to be descendants of Aaron.

10:32 Levite –these man, also of the tribe of Levi, received no inheritance in the promised land, but were sustained by the tithes of the other 11 tribes. They were charged with the maintenance of the sanctuary, whether it was the tabernacle in the wilderness or the Temple in Jerusalem. They were also the representatives of the firstborn of the other tribes. Their duties came to include those of gatekeepers, temple musicians, administrators. Judges and scribes. As such, they were highly regarded and came to constitute part of the cream of Jewish society.

10:33 ἐσπλαγχνίσθη,

10:37 ἐλεος noun, accusative, neuter, singular, common, from ἐλεος mercy; kindness or good will toward the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them; 1. of men toward men: 2.

of God toward men.

### C. GRAMMATICAL NOTES AND LITERARY DEVICES

Literary Genre: Illustrative Parable

A parable is an extended simile. It is used in discursive teaching to make a few profound points. The word literally means "to cast alongside of," or "to lay alongside of." Teaching by parable, or "laying alongside of," assures the audience that the essential ideas are compared and contrasted and that exceptions to the teaching (unlike analogy and allegory) cannot occur by appeal to the nature of a real life context.

Aristotle's analysis of stories placed them in one of two categories. The first is the narration of an actual historical event. The second is the narration of tales, or "invented" stories. The invented story is also divisible into two sub-categories. The first of these, the parable, may or may not depend on an historical event for its theme, but does enjoy at least a *potential historicity*. That it *did* or *did not* occur historically is quite unimportant, while the fact that it *may have happened* is essential to the force of the story. The second sub-category, the fable, is deliberately contrived to exclude any historical possibility and calculated to make one simple point.

Although parables generally make but one point, such is not the case of necessity. Being contrived, a parable can make several points if properly constructed. Details and the number and actions of persons in a parable are carefully controlled to establish only the point or points under consideration, with no extraneous material allowed.

Parables often include irony or have a surprising conclusion. Frequently, the point of a parable is to contrast *real* expectations and *moral* expectations.

Beyond these points, however, there is little that allows parables to be handled by a single interpretive method. Thus, for example, although the Parable of the Prodigal Son can be analyzed in a similar manner as "modern" short stories, the Parable of the Good Samaritan cannot. Other parables may indeed best be interpreted in some other way.

The Good Samaritan is an "illustrative" parable, its point being provided by the dialogue between Jesus and the Lawyer. There is no plot, character development, or developed character conflict within the parable itself, making strictly literary analysis impossible.

While the larger pericope contains a story that is parabolic, E. Earle Ellis points out that its *narrative form* is "yelammedenu rabbenu," in which a question is posed and answered. Our example takes as its texts Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, and Leviticus 18:5. The pattern of its presentation is 1) *problem*, 2) *text*, and 3) *conclusion*.

A tighter analysis of this particular parable reveals this basic outline. First question: how shall I inherit life (v. 25;)? Counter question: what is written (v. 26)? Answer: love God and neighbor (O.T. texts v. 27). Statement: correctly spoken (v. 28). Second question: who is my neighbor (v. 29)? Illustrative parable (v. 30-35;). Counter question: who do you think . . . etc. (v. 36)? Answer: the one showing mercy (v. 36). Statement: do likewise (v. 37).

In this case the pericope is made up of two parallel sections, of the (1) question, (2) counter-question, (3) answer, and (4) concluding statement, the only difference between them being the interjection of the illustrative parable between the question and counter-question of the second section.

Important designations (historical characters and literary figures) include several persons. Luke is, of course, the immediate narrator, while Jesus is the "Author" of the parable itself. The historical and immediate literary context places the parable in a dialogue between Jesus and a "certain lawyer."

That it is a lawyer who asks the question is interesting. As a lawyer, this man, who condescended to speak with Jesus, was a professional interpreter of the Mosaic law, hence the pentateuchal text for this pericope. According to Luke, lawyers generally rejected the teaching and baptism of John (Luke 7:30), and Jesus roundly rebuked them for their sinfull, unhelpful attitude (Luke 11:45;-5;2). The lawyer is the "professional," educated member of the dialogue.

Jesus, who gives the parable, is uneducated and "nonprofessional." This provides an interesting dynamic when seen against the backdrop of the parable itself. For both the Levite and the Priest are educated professionals, peers of the lawyer himself. The order of the priest is not designated specifically and need not be. It was part of his function to represent man before God. The Levite conceivably could have been a priest, a musician, a scribe, or an assistant to a priest. The Samaritan was uneducated and not a member of the professional elite. Indeed, the Samaritan was the "proper" object of scorn and ridicule to the Jews, and the very paradigm of human dregs, religiously, culturally, and ethnically.

The argument or teaching of the pericope is this: "Neighbor is who neighbor does."

#### Section One:

- v. 25 Question: . . . stood up to test Jesus . . . "what must I do . . . ?"
- v. 26 Counter question: "what is written in Torah? How do you read it"?
- v. 27 Answer: "you will love the Lord . . . and your neighbor."
- v. 28 Statement: "do this and you will live."

#### Section Two:

- v. 29 Question: wishing to justify himself, . . . "who is my neighbor"?
- (The parable proper)
- v. 36 Counter question: "which one of these three seems to you to be a neighbor"?

v. 37a Answer: "the one having shown mercy."

v. 37b Statement: "go and do likewise."

It is worth noting that Gentile audiences might have expected the lawyer to have asked for a definition of *love*. Such abstract topics seem custom made for such disputations. Even Pilate was recorded to have asked Jesus "what is truth?" But most of the Jews antagonistic to Jesus were quite sure they already *knew* what *love* was. So the demand for a definition for a more concrete entity is noteworthy.

## **D. HISTORICAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Samaritans – they were descendants (of mixed lineage) of the Jews left in the North Central part of the Holy Land after Sargon partially depopulated the area in 722-721 BC. Soon after Sargon's deportation of 29,000 Jews from the Holy Land, it came to his attention that many of the Jews were still rebellious. Many pagan colonists were introduced into the holy land for the purposes of the denationalization of Israel. These pagans brought a variety of religious beliefs and cultic practices.

Over the years, this resulted in a hybrid race and culture as well as worship of both God and pagan deities. By the time the Jews returned from exile, the Samaritans were a homogeneous population with a hodgepodge of religious practices. At that time, the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Temple, but their offer was refused and the social gulf between the Jews and the Samaritans widened ever afterward.

Earlier, the Samaritans had voiced pro-Israel sentiments when Israel was strong and anti-Israel sentiments when she was weak. But after Zerubbabel refused their aid in rebuilding the Temple, the Samaritans made no more overtures toward the Jews, but instead tried to hinder the rebuilding of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

By the time of Jesus, their religion had been purged of paganism and was essentially a form of Sadduceeism. However, the Samaritans accepted only the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses, as authoritative. By this time, the animosity toward the Samaritans on the part of the Jews was acute to the point of personal avoidance. Samaritans were richly despised by most Jews and had become a symbol of the baseness and perversity it was possible for humankind to achieve.

## **E. TRANSLATION**

10:25 And behold a certain lawyer stood up testing him, saying, "Teacher, what *must* I do so that I will obtain eternal life?"

10:26 And he said to him, "What is written in Torah; how do you read?"

10:27 And answering he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

1028 And he said, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

10:29 But wishing to justify himself he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

10:30 Taking it up Jesus said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers, who, having both stripped him and beaten him, departed leaving him half dead. 31 Now by coincidence a certain priest was coming down that road, and after seeing him, he passed by on the opposite side. 32 And likewise a Levite, having come to that place and having seen *him*, also passed by on the opposite side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, while traveling, came upon him; and after seeing *him* he felt compassion. 34 And after coming to *him* he bandaged his wounds, rinsing them with olive oil and wine. And having loaded him on his own beast, he brought him to an Inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day, having taken out two Denaria, he gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him, and whatever you might spend additionally I will repay you on my return'. 36 Which one of these three seems to you to have become neighbor of the one having fallen among the robbers?"

10:37a And he said, "The one having done mercy to him."

10:37b And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise!"

## F. EXPOSITION

10:25 "And behold a certain lawyer stood up testing him, saying, 'Teacher, what *must* I do *so that* I will obtain eternal life'?" We do not know precisely what was in the mind of the lawyer. The question itself may have occupied other religious minds of the time. But was the testing of Jesus to involve him in advocating a new approach to life, a misinterpreted Biblical position, or did the lawyer just want to challenge Jesus' understanding of the text? Two things are clear; we cannot know the answer to this question on the basis of the text, and it is not important for the meaning of the parable. It is important to notice that the lawyers question, whether prompted by true motives or false, showed an interest in life eternal, and in doing something to merit it. So straightforward is this, in fact, that we are justified in seeing it not as the test question itself, but the ground work upon which the test question will be based.

10:26 "And he said to him, 'What is written in Torah; how do you read'?" Jesus answers the lawyer's question with a counter question. By using a common practice of posing a counter question, Jesus forced the lawyer to sharpen the issue himself, thus avoiding stepping into any immediate "trap."

10:27 "And answering he said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself'." The lawyer here combines the teachings of Deuteronomy 6:5; (love God) and Leviticus 19:18 (love neighbors). While the latter short quotation is identical with the Septuagint, the former passage

differs from it in the word used for *strength*, the prepositions before *soul* and *strength*, and by adding the clause regarding *mind* (which is missing from the Hebrew text as well). That these two items correspond well to the duties commanded in the ten words, is easily seen and well known. That it formed a well-known part of contemporary midrashic thought is likely.

10:28 "And he said, 'You have answered correctly; do this and you will live'." This is reminiscent of Leviticus 18:5, which may have been the third part of the midrashic teaching outlined above. If this is the case, the test proposed by the lawyer may have been to see if Jesus was aware of this teaching or to see how he dealt with it. The form of reply, however, if it does in fact come from Leviticus 18:5; is not a quote, but a paraphrase specifically tailored to answer the lawyer's question.

10:29 "But wishing to justify himself he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor'?" Thus begins the second section of our pericope. At the end of the first section, the lawyer could have walked quietly away, at peace with the world and friends with Jesus. But he stayed. The reason he stayed might be that he had not yet put Jesus to the test. If such was the case, the Midrashic teaching considered above did not constitute the test itself, but only laid the ground work for this question.

Or the reason might have been that he now wished only to justify himself, as the text can be taken to indicate. Was the wish to justify himself somehow synonymous with testing Jesus, or was the need to justify himself something which arose subsequently to his testing Jesus? Interestingly, we cannot tell. Even the question, "Who is my neighbor"? can be taken two ways. The objective genitive construction would make the question be, "Who is the neighbor to me?" We might expect this of one seeking to justify himself for not loving his neighbors. Thus the question would mean, "Why should I be love my neighbors? What neighbors have been loving to me?" He seeks to justify himself for not loving anyone at all because of not having first been loved (but cf. I John 4:9-10).

The subjective genitive interpretation phrases the question to mean, "Who is my neighbor; that is, who qualifies as my neighbor?" This seeks to objectify "neighbor," to make him identifiable. Thus, one may properly bestow ones love on one's neighbor and not squander it on strangers. Seen this way the lawyer knows the law but is asking to whom he is to extend his love. The unusual word order suggests that something unusual is meant, but what?

Although we tend to divide these possibilities, taking one or the other, it is possible that such ambiguity, aside from being impossible to resolve satisfactorily, is probably deliberate and logical. The test probably is just this; to force Jesus to resolve the ambiguity and to objectify neighbor in such a way as to discredit himself (e.g., "your neighbor is any Jew"!) or to involve him in an ethical dispute regarding the chosen texts. The ambiguity of the case renders the sense of the question thus: "Upon whom shall I bestow my love seeing I have no neighbor to reciprocate? Who is my neighbor"?

Answered directly, either question is sure to cause problems, for the minute the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" his trap was set. But as we have seen already, Jesus has a strange way of answering questions explicitly without falling into traps.

10:30 “Taking it up Jesus said, . . . “ Apparently Jesus saw the trap, for he deliberately "took up" the challenge.

10:30 "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . . “ Interestingly, the victim is anonymous. No race, religion or nationality is given for the victim, though every other figure in the parable is identified at least by his nationality.

10:30 “. . . and he fell among robbers, who, having both stripped him and beaten him, departed, leaving him half dead.” It should not be assumed that only such dire extremes deserve our attention. We are given this extreme example because it results not just in *great* need, but in *visible* need. That is, the need is not only real, it is *dire*. But it is not only dire, it is *visible*. As such, deliberate response is *necessary*; no one can walk that path and remain ignorant of what has happened, so the behavior of all who come that way is undeniably *deliberate*.

10:31 “Now by coincidence a certain priest was coming down that road, . . . ” The priest is a Jew. He represents the people before God. He is highly educated and has all the privileges due one of his class.

10:31 “. . . and after seeing him, he passed by on the opposite side.” He was doubtless trained in the law and quite able to justify by proof-text his avoidance of the nameless unpleasantness on the road. Because the victim is not identified, he could have been anyone, even the priest’s father. The point is, his identity is unimportant, because *whoever* he is, the priest, being more concerned for his ritual purity, or something else, does not help him.

10:32 “And likewise a Levite, having come to that place and having seen *him*, . . . “ The Levite was also a Jew. He also was dedicated to holy service. He, too, was educated and enjoyed the privileges of his class.

10:32 “. . . also passed by on the opposite side.” He, too, was doubtless trained in the law and quite able to justify by proof-text his avoidance of the mess in the road. Similarly, the victim could have been the Levite’s brother, but he gets no more help from the Levite than if he had been a rabid dog.

10:33 “But a certain Samaritan, while traveling, came upon him; . . . “ Now came a lowly Samaritan. He is no Jew. He is dedicated to only God knows what. And if he is educated, it certainly doesn’t matter; he is a *Samaritan*. And privileged? Not where the lawyer resides. He represents, to the Jews of Jesus’ time, the dregs of humanity, religiously, culturally and ethnically. He has *no* class. Or does he?

10:33 “. . . and after seeing *him* he felt compassion.” Compassion, that uniquely human sentiment, characterizes the Samaritan. Even if the victim had been his worst enemy, the Samaritan’s compassion saves him.

10:34 "And after coming to *him* he bandaged his wounds, rinsing them with olive oil and wine." The lawyer is seeking life. The Samaritan is saving life. By bandaging his wounds, and rinsing them with a mixture of his olive oil and wine (for such was the medical procedure of the day), The *eternal* life sought by the Lawyer is curiously related to practice exemplified in the *earthly* life of a nameless nobody.

10:34 "And having loaded him on his own beast, he brought him to an Inn and took care of him." By dressing the man's wounds and placing him on his own horse, etc., the Samaritan truly loves his neighbor.

10:35 "And the next day, having taken out two Denaria, he gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him, and whatever you might spend additionally I will repay you on my return!'" Not content to take care of the man's *present* needs only, the Samaritan takes care of the needs of his immediate *future* as well. The character of the Samaritan is briefly shown to be both *trusting* and *trustworthy* in his instructions to the innkeeper. He apparently trusts the innkeeper both to take care of the man, and not to be too reckless with his funds. The innkeeper obviously trusts the Samaritan to return. This, in itself, may constitute a revelation to the lawyer, but there is more. For here, by "going the extra mile," so to speak, it is made clear that the Samaritan not only loves his neighbor, but he loves his neighbor *as himself*.

10:36 "Which one of these three seems to you to have become neighbor of the one having fallen among the robbers?" Here, then, is the big question: The lawyer must choose between his peers (the Priest and the Levite, the cream of the Jewish crop) and a lowly Samaritan. But Jesus' question is not so much a question as a statement of fact. So strong is the presumption that the Samaritan is the correct answer, the question itself is very nearly rhetorical. If the lawyer sought to trap Jesus, he now finds himself trapped. The parable is weighted to favor the Samaritan. He alone does anything at all. Whether or not the Lawyer would defend the actions of his peers on the basis of avoiding ritual defilement, it is obvious that only one man *does* anything to *become* a neighbor. And even if he wants to choose the Priest or the Levite, no basis is given in the parable for such an option, since Jesus plainly asked for only one "neighbor."

Furthermore, to choose either the Priest or the Levite without a sound basis is not only impolitic, it could ruin the Lawyer's reputation as an interpreter of Torah. For ethical behavior toward ones neighbor (even if *neighbor* means only *kinsman*) is part and parcel of the texts the Lawyer himself had chosen. The Lawyer chose the weapons, and he cannot now deny them.

But the choice is predetermined by the way Jesus asks the lawyer to decide, i.e., by identifying with the victim. "Which one seems to you like the neighbor *of the victim*?" is another way of asking, "Who do you feel the victim would think of as neighbor to himself?" and at the same time, the question implies, "Who should the victim, by all rights, love?" In forcing the Lawyer to identify with the victim, the counter-question Jesus asked him guarantees the answer.

10:37 "And he said, 'The one having done mercy to him'." Again, the Lawyer properly answers his

own question. Instead of trapping Jesus, he finds himself in the trap. For no matter how he intended his original question, the answer is the same; and because he gives the answer himself, there is no point left to argue. All that remains is his uninterrupted need for self-justification.

10:37 "And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise'!" Now, even his self-justification is stripped away. For having defined neighbor objectively as one who receives mercy (and conversely by having defined neighbor subjectively as one who bestows it), The Lawyer is admonished not to *look* for neighbors, not to *wait to identify* them by their tell-tale mercies, but to go and *be* a neighbor. And although the lawyer will not say, "Samaritan," Jesus tells him to live like one!

## **G. ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It is interesting to note that the Torah quotations of the lawyer were intensely ethical in nature. The entire context breathes narrow limits of what one may and may not do. The immediate context is not only negative ("you will *not* take vengeance *nor* bear a grudge"), it is also narrow, dealing only with "the children of thy people."

But characteristically, Jesus went far beyond the negative instruction to a positive instruction, from defining love as *not* doing certain things to one's kinsmen, to defining it as the positive action of bestowing mercy on strangers.

Had Jesus answered the Lawyer's question "who is my neighbor?" with the pure distillate of the parable, i.e., "neighbor is who neighbor does!" the parable itself would have been unnecessary. But the parable crystalizes in terms of behavior what Paul says in I Corinthians 13. For both the Priest (that supposed paragon of wisdom and virtue) and the Levite (the exemplar of divine service) were nothing of importance, while the Samaritan, the cultural symbol of baseness and perversity, was literally a *savior*.

The irony of *eternal* life being tightly bound to our behavior in *daily* life is reminiscent of I John, where eternal life clearly is a state of being we enter *now*, and not something granted after we *die*.

For behavior *reveals* who we are, contrary to the contemporary Jewish belief that behavior *determines* who we are. *Neighbor is who neighbor does*. For no matter how one may long to identify with the Priest or Levite or to justify their actions in passing by on the other side of the road, he is forced to identify first with the victim and at last with the Good Samaritan.

The net effect of Jesus' parable and teaching is this: Who is your neighbor? (Whether this means who loves you, or who you should love?) Who was the neighbor of the victim? (Either "who loved the victim?" or "who should the victim love.") The answer is and must be "the good Samaritan." Then Jesus charges the hearer rather than to *wait* for a Good Samaritan, to *be* one.

From the edge of the roadside, one is compelled to admit that godly response must be accepted as

indicative of godly character, regardless of the person showing it, while class designations and social stigmata are indicative of nothing, and are not a substitute for love or help. (Cf., James 2:14-18.)

Another point to be made concerns the ethics of Jesus. Much debate has exercised theologians for centuries regarding the sermon on the Mount. Some find there the overthrow of the Old Testament Law. Others find a new and deeper expression of it. Some think it reflects the ethics of the perfect world to come. And so it goes.

What is been common to these viewpoints is the positive nature of Jesus's ethics. For he does not define righteousness by what one does *not* do, but by what one *does* do. Such righteousness very quickly involves sacrifice when it is viewed as positive behavior rather than mere avoidance of some evil or impurity. This gives rise to the very deeds, not that save us, but for which God "chose us." (Ephesians 2:10)

This prepares the Christian for such admonitions as "take up your cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Mark 10:21; Luke 9:23). Only such positive ethics, and the implied self-sacrifice, can ever be viewed as taking up one's cross. Especially in the passage in Luke do we see the ethical implications of this. For he alone records the word "daily" in his admonition to "take up your cross." It is most obvious here that a literal cross and literal death are not meant, but instead some aspect of daily living, or behavior.

And so it is with becoming a neighbor. The final thrust of the parable is that we, like the lawyer questioning Jesus, are to look for ways to *become* a neighbor, not merely to wait for one to show up on our doorstep.

## **H. SUBJECTIVE IMPLICATIONS – PSYCHOLOGICAL AND DEVOTIONAL**

For any person who has ever received mercy, care, or badly needed help of any kind, from another person, the definition of neighbor is not difficult to discover. Indeed, it is in his head, his heart, his memory. To love another as yourself means nothing more than role-reversal. Just as there were neighbors at hand when you needed them, see to it that you are a neighbor to others when they are in need.

Regarding compassion, we may note that it has a distinct place in godly behavior. We see, for example, in our parable (and again in the parable of the prodigal son) a certain process. The first part is the recognition of an objective need, or the acknowledgment of an objective situation that requires redress. The second part of the process is that godly response (which is to be our example) involved being emotionally or sentimentally effected by the situation to the extent that the desire to alter the situation or its consequences becomes a motive for action. The third part is the pragmatic response in altering the situation with whatever means are available. This ability to be moved emotionally on behalf of another is one thing that separates man from animals.

Indeed, the more we read the Bible and discover truths about God and man, the more striking it becomes that the characteristics God exhorts men to exhibit are precisely those that separate him from mere animals. The development of conscience, the keen use of intellect, the inculcation of compassion, the practice of love, the exhibition of mercy, the development of faith. These and others distinguish man from mere animals and *allow* man to be godlike.

These qualities, however, do not *save* a person. Even very great sinners *can* exhibit these qualities, but usually do so *only when it suits their own purposes*. And even the altruistic exercise of qualities such as compassion are as unable to save as the slavish adherence to the law. We see an example of this in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus. For even the rich man, who is in torment, still is able to exhibit compassion on behalf of his brothers. He implores Abraham to send a witness from the dead, that they might repent and avoid joining him in that place of torment. But this compassion saved neither him, nor them.

Salvation is coming to the end of one's self and calling upon God to exercise these traits in regard to him. This end of self-centeredness and the beginning of a renewed relationship with God is intended to make these qualities *characteristic* of us in our daily being. We are to exhibit these qualities as our new essence, not merely when it suits our purposes.

Merely *having* such attributes does not save us, nor does their *exercise* commend us to God. For such behavior is the way we were *meant* to behave. Yet salvation is invisible without these behaviors for they are the ones we were foreordained to walk in.

## I. PARAPHRASE

<sup>25</sup> Now a certain lawyer stood up who wanted to test Jesus. And he began by asking, "Teacher, what ought I to do in order to have eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> And Jesus answered, "How do you understand what is written in your Bible?" <sup>27</sup> The lawyer replied, "It says that we are to love God with our whole being, and that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves!" <sup>28</sup> And Jesus said to him, "That is right. Do these things and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> Instead of going home happy, the lawyer stayed and tried to test Jesus and justify himself. He asked, "How do I know who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup> Replying to this challenge, Jesus said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell among some waiting robbers. These robbers stripped him and beat him and left him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by coincidence, a priest, supposedly a paragon of wisdom and virtue, was going down that road. But when he saw the poor man lying beside the road, he passed by on the opposite side, instead of helping him, <sup>32</sup> And likewise, a Levite, reputed to be an exemplar of service, came down the road. And when he saw the man lying helpless, he also refused to help, but instead, quickly passed by on the opposite side. <sup>33</sup> But then a lowly Samaritan, who was a symbol of human depravity, also came down the road. And this social outcast, rather than hurrying past, as might have been expected, was moved at the sight of the man

lying beside the road.<sup>34</sup> And he went over to him, and cleaned his wounds with a mixture of olive oil and wine. Then he bandaged the wounds securely. And when this was done, he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn where he cared for him.<sup>35</sup> And the next day, when he was ready to leave, he took out some money and said to the innkeeper, "Take care of my friend for me! And I will repay you for any extra money you spend on him when I come back."

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which one of these three men do you think the injured man would have called his neighbor?"<sup>37</sup> And the lawyer said, "The one who showed mercy by helping him," and Jesus said, "Go and do as that man did!"