



Lesson 34 / January 28, 2018

## LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

Luke 10:25-37

### Key Verse

“And the lawyer answered, ‘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.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’”

Luke 10:27-28

### Question 67: What are the greatest commands?

Short Answer: *The greatest commands are that we should love God and love our neighbor.*

Full Answer: *The greatest commands are that we should love God and love our neighbor, loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves.*

### Question 68: How shall we love our neighbor as ourselves?

Short Answer: *We shall love our neighbor as ourselves without discrimination.*

Full Answer: *We shall love our neighbor as ourselves without discrimination, granting equal dignity and worth to all people, and generously giving mercy to those in need without expectation of return.*

### Discussion Questions

1. What two commands are the most important? Why these two?
2. How do the two commands to love God and love neighbor go together? Would you say that we love God *by* loving our neighbor?
3. How would you define a neighbor?
4. What does the Samaritan *do* to love his neighbor?
5. What is the relationship between love and mercy?
6. How does Jesus' parable scandalize the lawyer?
7. What if Jesus was telling the parable to you today – what cast of characters would he use?
8. How can we grow in our love for our neighbors?
9. What specifically can you do to love your neighbor in this way today?

## Summary

Can you think of a person in your life who is difficult for you to love? Some people are easy for us to love, especially our family, our friends, and those people who are generally like us. But other people are difficult to love, often because their differences make it hard for us to understand and sympathize with them. In other words, they are not inside our close circle of family and friends; they are outsiders.

We have already seen in Luke's gospel that Jesus loved the unlovable and welcomed outsiders. We should not be surprised, then, that Jesus would call us as his disciples to do the same. In Luke 10:25-28, a lawyer – an expert in the Jewish law – proposes to Jesus that the most essential commands of the Old Testament are that we should love God with all our being (see Deut 6:5; lesson 12) and love our neighbor as ourselves (see Lev 19:18). Jesus agrees with him that there is nothing more essential than loving God and neighbor (e.g. Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34). “Do this and you will live,” Jesus says.

The lawyer asks a logical follow-up question in Luke 10:29: Who is my neighbor? The lawyer hopes to define “neighbor” in a narrow way as those people who are closest to him and easiest for him to love so that the lawyer can feel justified in his present way of living. As long as his neighbors are only those people he already loves, then surely he has fulfilled this essential command.

Jesus answers his question with a parable. A parable is a simple story told by Jesus to illustrate a deeper spiritual truth. In this particular parable, Jesus tells a story about a man who is robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of a road. Three men happen to come across this injured man. The first two avoid the man and walk by on the other side of the road, but the third man goes above and beyond to care for the man. He gives him first-aid and bandages his wounds, then he transports him to an inn and pays out of his own pocket the expenses of his recovery.

Which one was a neighbor? Of course, it was the one who showed mercy. Remember that mercy is not only pity but also doing good for others in their distress (lesson 25). We must “go and do likewise,” Jesus says (Luke 10:37). We must love our neighbor by showing mercy to those in need. And notice that

Jesus does not identify the man in need other than to say that he was in need. We do not know his race, nationality, or background, precisely because those things do not matter. We are to love all people as our neighbor and show mercy without discrimination. Who is my neighbor? Everyone.

But Jesus does identify the three people who encountered this stranger, and here lies the deeper scandal that surely touches a sensitive nerve for this lawyer. The two men who bypass the man in need are a priest and a Levite, while the man who renders aid is a Samaritan. Priests and Levites worked full-time in the Jerusalem temple as the spiritual leaders of Israel. Samaritans, on the other hand, were the descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel, after the northern kingdom fell into exile and intermarried with the Assyrians (see lesson 15). The Jews deeply despised the Samaritans as half-bloods whose ancestors had diluted their Jewish ancestry by intermarrying with pagans. For the lawyer, the priest and Levite are the ultimate insiders while the Samaritan is the ultimate outsider.

But Jesus does not tell a parable where a priest or Levite gives charity to a lowly Samaritan; instead, Jesus tells a parable that reverses the very fabric of society as they knew it. He casts the Samaritan as the hero and he casts the priest and Levite as the villains. The parable, in other words, teaches us that we must do more than merely show mercy to outsiders, since such acts of mercy can leave us with feelings of superiority, as if we are still above those in need. We must also learn to embrace the outsiders as our neighbors, bringing them inside and acknowledging their equal worth. What if those who have nothing in our eyes actually have the most to offer? What if they are the heroes?

Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of reversal. He turns our world upside down, knocking us off our proud pedestals and granting dignity to the very people we despise. This is the natural consequence of his subversive grace, as he loves the unlovable and welcomes the outsider, and he now calls us to become like him in his love. We are to love those whom he loves in the way that he loves them, as our neighbors, even when they are hard to love. Let us, then, learn to love every neighbor as ourselves.