

The Gospel According to
Luke

***“What’s the difference
between God and a lawyer?”***

Chapter 10:25-37

Introduction

What’s the difference between God and a lawyer?

Don’t think too hard about the answer, *because it’s a lawyer joke!* I’ll give you the punch line a little later.

Jesus was confronted by a lawyer. You’re told that the lawyer had sinister motives for questioning Jesus. He wanted to **test** Jesus. The word for **test** has a negative suggestion; it could be translated, **a certain lawyer stood up and tempted** Jesus. He asked a leading question, hoping to catch Jesus in some contradiction between the Law of Moses and Jesus’ own teaching.

The Law of Moses stated,

Luke 10:27 ...“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and ‘your neighbor as yourself.”

That simple statement had become the basis for a complex debate among lawyers and religious leaders. They focused on the one word, **neighbor**. They asked the question, *Who is my neighbor?*

Until you read Jesus’ response, their question seems appropriate. After you read Jesus’ response, *their question seems absurd!* You shouldn’t want to limit the people who qualify as your neighbor; you should desire to enlarge your heart by being a neighbor to everyone.

Jesus gave more than an answer to a specific question. He gave a perspective on how to read and interpret the entire Word of God.

You should read and interpret the Word of God in a way that enlarges your heart to treat others the way God has treated you.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You're Practicing Law When You Ask, *Who Is My Neighbor?*, and #2 You're Practicing Love When You Ask, *Whose Neighbor Am I?*

#1 You're Practicing Law When You Ask,
Who Is My Neighbor?
(v25-29)

I should explain that the lawyers in the New Testament were not men who practiced law before a judge, defending or prosecuting those who were accused of crimes. They were men who studied and taught the Law of Moses, and the traditions of the rabbi's based on the Law of Moses. They were biblical scholars; they were experts in the Law.

Scholars and their scholarship can be intimidating. Smart guys can put you in your place; they can embarrass you with their big words; they can intimidate you with their verbal skills.

None of that makes them right! We're not against good, solid scholarship. *We love it!* We depend upon it, to keep us from errors. But scholars and their scholarship must approach the Word of God correctly in order to come to correct conclusions. As we will see, you can go astray by asking the wrong question, no matter how smart you might be.

Let's pick up the story, in verse twenty-five.

[Luke 10:25](#) And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

The lawyers would often discuss and debate points of biblical law publicly, while the unlearned folks listened to them. It was not unusual for the lawyer to ask Jesus a question about the law. It's just sad that his motives were wrong.

His initial question is one that you should be asking. **What shall I do to inherit eternal life?** We are all sinners – dying sinners, and sinners who are going to be judged after death. *What must I do to be saved?*

The vast majority of people on this planet go through life asking other, less significant, questions. *What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?* You must ask the lawyer's question of your own soul.

Luke 10:26 He said to him, **“What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”**

Don't miss the significance of this. Here was Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, the living Word of God. Yet, when asked a question, *He referred back to the Bible!* The Bible is our only rule for faith and practice; in it, we will find everything we need for life and godliness.

Not only did Jesus refer back to God's Word; when asked a question, He often responded by asking a question! Sometimes the best answer someone can give you is a better question.

Luke 10:27 So he answered and said, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,”* and *‘your neighbor as yourself.’*

The lawyer quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and from Leviticus 19:18. His answer was the standard, and the correct, response to the question.

Luke 10:28 And He said to him, **“You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”**

If you could keep the law, you would have eternal life. The problem is, **no one can perfectly keep God's Law.** It sets an impossible standard, a standard of perfection, that is unattainable. The Law is designed to show you how far short you fall, and how much you are in need of saving.

Here comes the \$64 million dollar question, designed to stump the Savior:

Luke 10:29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

The question indicates a belief among the lawyers that there was no biblical definition of who was to be considered your neighbor. Since there was some confusion about who is your neighbor, then the best you could do was keep the Law to the best of your own ability. In other words, as long as you were trying to keep God’s Law, loving the folks you considered your neighbor, then you would be accepted by God.

Justify himself means that the lawyer wanted to show that he was, in fact, keeping the Law to the best of his ability.

The question, *Who is my neighbor?*, puts all the responsibility on others to act in ways that deserve your loving response. The opposite is true as well: You need not show love to those who do not deserve it, according to your own definition of who is your neighbor. This way of thinking invited ethnic prejudices – like the Jews had against all Gentiles, and against groups within their own gene pool. It was, quite simply, **the wrong question to ask!**

Before we look at the right question, there’s an important lesson to be learned. **We have a tendency to read God’s Word and ask the wrong questions!**

Let’s bring this into your home. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church; wives, submit to your own husbands as unto the Lord. When you read those words, what questions do you ask? It may sound odd, but a lot of times we ask, *Who is my husband?* Or, *Who is my wife?* We ‘ask’ those questions whenever we refuse to act towards our spouse as we ought until or unless they first act appropriately. We ‘ask’ those questions when we put the responsibility on others to act in ways that deserve our loving response.

Instead, we should read those passages and ask, *Whose husband am I? Whose wife am I?* In other words, *Am I letting the Lord lead my life to respond towards my spouse in the way that shows His love?*

There are too many Christian lawyers. Not the ones in courtrooms; but in life. **Too many of us are practicing law when we should be practicing love!**

#2 You're Practicing Love When You Ask,
Whose Neighbor Am I?
(v30-37)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of those passages known to just about everyone. I'd like to suggest that it may not be a parable, but a true account of an incident that actually occurred.

1. First, Jesus never said it was a parable.
2. Second, Jews would not have received this story as a parable; they would have argued that no Samaritan would ever act that way towards a Jew.

Samaritans were the descendants of Jews who had intermarried with their Assyrian conquerors centuries earlier. The Jews who had not intermarried considered them a defiled, mongrel people, and had no dealings with them. Likewise, the Samaritans despised the Jews.

Jesus reported the story:

Luke 10:30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.

Luke 10:31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Luke 10:32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

Historians tell us that as many as twelve thousand priests and Levites lived in Jericho when they were not serving on their rotation in the Temple at Jerusalem. The priests were in charge of the Temple rituals and sacrifices; the Levites were their assistants.

Here is something I didn't tell you earlier: Every morning, and every evening, devout Jews recited the passage from Deuteronomy, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.* The priest and the

Levite might also have worn - on their forehead or on their forearm - a small box, called a phylactery, which contained the verses from Deuteronomy.

Here they were, walking along the road; they were fresh from serving, and from morning devotions; they would have evening devotions; they were carrying their Bibles, so to speak. When presented with an opportunity to apply God's Word, they practiced the law rather than simply being led by love:

1. The priest **passed by on the other side** because he didn't want to risk becoming ceremonially unclean. There was blood; and the man might even be dead. The priest who came into contact with blood or death could not continue his ministry until he went through a ritual cleansing. The priest put the laws regarding his own ceremonial cleansing ahead of the responsibility to love his neighbor. (Churches sometimes do something similar, when they elevate and emphasize a particular doctrine over everything else).
2. We're not told why the Levite **looked**, then **passed by on the other side**. I suggest he may have seen the priest pass by the victim; or he may have known that the priest did so. Either way, he was curious, maybe even wanting to be helpful; but he followed the example of the priest and **passed by**. (Christians sometimes set or follow a bad example).

Luke 10:33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

Luke 10:34 So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Luke 10:35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

Without any hesitation, motivated by **compassion**, the **Samaritan** helped the wounded traveler:

1. There were no first aid kits, which meant the Samaritan had to tear his own garments to make **bandages**.
2. **Oil** was an ancient treatment for **wounds**; he probably gave him the **wine** to drink. The point is, he shared what he had.

3. All of this while still in danger of the thieves.
4. All of this while himself on a journey, allowing himself to be inconvenienced.
5. Then, arriving at an **inn**, he shelled out two days wages, and additionally told the **innkeeper** to keep a running tab.

Luke 10:36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

Luke 10:37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

There was only one possible answer to Jesus' question. More importantly, Jesus changed the original question. You shouldn't ask, *Who is my neighbor?* You should ask, *Whose neighbor am I?*

When you ask the right question, then the responsibility is on you to love people who are not so lovely – like your enemies!

I've watched people, over the years, who were on fire serving God, until they started asking the wrong questions. Typically, they discover a debate in the Scriptures; then they choose to follow the answers of a certain scholar or scholarship... But they get so into it that they neglect to show **mercy** and **compassion**.

You can always ask the wrong question, and end up practicing the law, justifying yourself. Instead, ask the right question, and practice love, having been justified by God.

Conclusion

Q: What's the difference between God and a lawyer?

A: *God doesn't think He's a lawyer!*

Get it? **The lawyer thinks he's God!** (It's a joke).

Practicing law, when you should be practicing love, is no joke. If your scholarship leads you to act like the priest and the Levite in our story, then you are asking the wrong questions and coming to the wrong conclusions.

I want to add that the Samaritan needed better scholarship. There's a passage in the Gospel of John, in Chapter Four of that Gospel, where Jesus was talking to a Samaritan woman. He lets her know that the Samaritan's have bad doctrine.

It's not a matter of giving up scholarship. Your scholarship – your study of God's Word – needs to be accurate, **and** it needs to stir you up to love others.

The key is to ask the right questions when you read and study God's Word. The key is to let the Word of God **study you** – to let it search your heart, and reveal your motives.

You'll know this is happening when you find yourself asking, Lord, who's neighbor can I be today? – At home... At work... In school... As I travel along the road of life.