

Love God & Neighbor – Part 1

There are few questions in life that are of greater significance than, “How can I inherit eternal life?” However, there are so many pressing needs in our lives that we are easily distracted from the truly important concerns of life like where we will spend eternity. After all, questions about our eternal destiny seem so far off. I’ve got more pressing concerns like what I’m going to fix for dinner tonight or how can I get my teenager to clean his room. We rarely live in the realm where questions of eternity have a chance to cross our minds. There are far too many “squeaky wheels” here on earth vying for all our attention to have the luxury to think much about what is going on above in heaven.

So for Jesus to suddenly be confronted by a man asking Him about eternal life was a rare encounter even for the Son of God. If only more people had realized just who Jesus was the whole world would have lined up to ask Him about eternity.

But what a tragically lost opportunity on this day when a lawyer came to test the credentials of the One who claimed to speak on God’s behalf (10:25)! Being a lawyer in Jesus’ day didn’t mean that this man was an attorney in our modern sense. It meant that he was an expert in Biblical and rabbinical law. He would have been the legal professional that the priests, Pharisees, and rabbis would have turned to with questions about the applicability of details of the Mosaic legislation. We are told by Luke that he comes to Jesus to put Him to the test (v. 25). Imagine the arrogance of a man – a mere creature (fallen at that) - who comes into the presence of His Creator and the very one who holds this man’s every breathe in the palm of His hand to put Jesus to the test – to put Jesus in the dock! Very simply, this man doesn’t come to Jesus humbly – with his face pressed into the ground at His feet - but to make His Sovereign God take the stand before him and be forced to endure his interrogation.

The question he asks Jesus upon first hearing sounds as if he might possibly be an honest seeker of truth (v. 25). He refers to Jesus as “Teacher” or “Rabbi” and asks about “eternal life,” which refers to God’s future Kingdom after the final judgment (cf. Dan. 12:2). However, upon further analysis of the exact wording of his question along with the further clarification in v. 29, we realize that this man’s heart is far from searching for the way, the truth and the life (cf. John 14:6). “Wishing to justify himself” (v. 29) he asks Jesus, “What shall **I** do?” (v. 25). “To justify himself” is what Adam tried to do when he was confronted by God on the day of judgment and said:

Genesis 3:12 ¹² The man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

According to Adam, he was innocent of all chargers. After all, he reasoned, he wouldn't have been in this mess had God not given him that woman to be with him. "To justify oneself" is what a three-year old does when he is caught hitting his brother and tries the old adage, "Well, he started it." "To justify oneself" is to give reasons for why you should not be found guilty. This lawyer was not simply testing Jesus. He was trying to explain to Jesus how he has actually met what God requires so that he should inherit eternal life according to his own works. His mouth is open and he is defending himself in exactly the opposite way that Paul condemns in **Romans 3:**

Romans 3:19-20 ¹⁹ ¶ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

This is clearly a man who has never truly heard what the Law of God requires and that is all the more shocking when he actually reveals the correct answer to Jesus' next question (v. 26). He answers correctly by summing up all 613 commandments of Moses under the Law of love: (1) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind (cf. **Deut. 6:4-5**) and (2) your neighbor as yourself (v. 27; cf. **Lev. 19:18**). Jesus affirms the accuracy of the lawyers answers in v. 28 with the addition, "Go and do this and you will live," exactly what the law promises (cf. **Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12; Rom. 10:5**).

Elsewhere, Jesus sums up the whole law with these two commandments of love (cf. **Matt. 22:37-40; Mk 12:30-31**) as do the apostles. Paul says in two places:

Galatians 5:14 ¹⁴ For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Romans 13:8-10 ⁸ ¶ Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. ⁹ For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

Jesus' half brother, James says:

James 2:8 ⁸ ¶ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

How can anyone possibly hear these two commandments and not feel completely undone in God's presence before he begins to take his first step in an attempt to fulfill them? Where Jesus

calls these two, in another exchange, the “Great Commandments,” we might as well call them the two Great Transgressions. Ask yourself, honestly in your heart between you and God, when have you ever loved the LORD your God with **all your heart** or from the core of your being which sums up the totality of all that you are as a human being. This is another way of saying that you are to love the LORD your God with all that you are from within your very **soul (all your soul)** – that invisible, life-animating energy that causes you to be a living (as opposed to a dead) being, which is manifested visibly through physical **strength (all your strength)** and is actively pursued with the **mind (all your mind)**, which is the sovereign/ruler over your will and affections ruling what you choose to do and feel. In other words, this is no mere lip-service before God – but true body and soul love for God where every part of our being is completely without any restraint or hindrance given over to Him as lover of our soul. When have you ever loved God with all of your whole being? Jesus will give us a very tangible picture of what it begins to look like to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind in the interchange with Mary and Martha in **vv. 38-42** as He gives an example of love of neighbor in the story of the Good Samaritan in **vv. 30-37**.

And the second commandment may in many ways be all the more difficult of the two. To love God, most of the time, is probably much easier because we don’t have to regularly bump into Him. But to love others, our neighbor, means we have to love those who we have to daily interact with – that oppressive boss, that rude customer, that nosey co-worker, that unruly teenager, that unloving spouse – these we have to live with every day are often an almost an unbearable test to our Christian walk. In fact, having to love our neighbor may at times be a huge hindrance to loving God when He gives us commandments like:

1 John 4:20-21 ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Even the Jews put a limit on who their neighbor was – for them it was a fellow Israelite along with the resident alien living in the land. The thought of loving a Gentile, or even an enemy, would simply have been completely foreign to their thought. But what Jesus says next was too much of a cross for any self-respecting Jew to endure (**Luke 10:30-37**). Loving God is simple compared to loving a Samaritan.

We typically wonder what Jesus meant in another exchange when He said that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (**see Matt. 19:19; 22:39**). Did Jesus mean that we are to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves or did He mean that we are to love our neighbor in the way you

would love yourself? But who among can endure the weight of so great a commandment as the new commandment Jesus gave us when He said:

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

After all, I might have a fighting chance to love my neighbor to the degree that I love myself, but to love my neighbor to the degree that Jesus loved me – now that might as well be as attainable as my having a collection of rocks from one of the moons of Jupiter. I have never loved anyone the way Jesus loves me and certainly not my enemies.

What is so utterly shocking about this exchange between the lawyer and Jesus is that the lawyer knew the right answer when he put Jesus to the test and yet he still asked Jesus the question as if he could in fact do what the law commanded. Paul asks us:

Galatians 4:21 ²¹ ¶ Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?

Galatians 3:10 ¹⁰ ¶ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." **Galatians 3:12** ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

In other words, he truly believed that he could “do” something to inherit eternal life (**Luke 10:25**). And when asked by Jesus what the heart of the Law of God was he readily and correctly answered by giving Jesus the two Great Commandments. He knew what God required and yet he believed he could fulfill that requirement.

Jesus answered the rich young ruler similarly in **Matt. 19:16-20** when he approached Jesus with the question, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” (**Matt. 19:16**). Jesus told him that “if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (v. 17). And in that conversation Jesus then lists the 2nd half of the 10 commandments (vv. 18-19) to which the young man replied, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” (v. 20). Again, he hasn’t clearly heard the law so Jesus presses him directly where he will feel it the most. He tells the young rich man:

Matthew 19:21 "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Sadly, when this young man heard this he left Jesus in grief because he owned far too much than he was willing to give up even to follow Jesus (v. 22).

In both scenes we see Jesus answering the question of what man must do to inherit eternal life by pressing the demands of God's law upon his interlocutors. Jesus did this of course not because he thought either man could actually fulfill the requirements of God's holy law. Paul says in **Romans 7**:

Romans 7:9-11 ⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; ¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Jesus knew that until the law has had this affect on each of these men that they were not ready to hear the gospel – the good news of the Kingdom of God. It was vital that they heard the full demands of God's holy commandments in order to strip them of all self-righteousness so that they were ready to flee to Christ alone. Paul said it this way:

Galatians 3:23-24 ²³ ¶ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

In **Romans 3** Paul explains how God has accomplished our attainment of eternal life – the very question each man is asking here – by another way than through the law (**see Romans 3:21-22**). It is very important to note the time reference here – “but now” – now when? Well, it was an event that was witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets that has culminated in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The event that accomplished your attainment of eternal life was the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of your Savior Jesus who has been joined to you through faith in Him (v. 22). Whereas the lawyer tried to justify himself before Jesus (**see Luke 10:29**) God has freely justified, as a gift, those who have been redeemed by their faithful Savior Jesus (**Rom. 3:24**). Note that this is all done apart from the law of God (v. 21). You have gained the necessary righteousness God requires to justify you before His holy presence to grant you eternal life through the work of Jesus Christ. When Paul was asked by the Philippian jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul answered him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household” (**Acts 16:30-31**).

Let's look at another passage in **Romans 10** where Paul says that Jesus is the end – goal, conclusion of the law (vv. 3-6, 9-10). So the question man must ask is not “What must I do to be saved” but “what has God done for me in Jesus Christ by which I might gain eternal life?” (**see Rom. 10:11-13**). **Amen! -SDG-**