



# What Love Is This?

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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September 8, 2013

PM Assembly



## Introduction:

Let's begin with a story. A Jewish man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance, a priest was going down that road. When the priest saw the beaten man, he passed by on the other side of the road. Sometime later, a Levite was also walking down that road. When he saw the beaten man, he also passed by on the other side. Sometime later, a Samaritan, a man hated by Jews, came to the place where the man was. The Samaritan had compassion on this man who likely would have passed by had roles been reversed. He went to him, bound and treated his wounds using his own oil and wine. He set the man on his own animal and walked the rest of the way to the inn. He spent the rest of the day and night taking care of him. Then he gave two days' wages to the innkeeper to care for the man and promised to cover any other expenses when he returned (cf. **Luke 10:29-37**).

As we learned in our last lesson, we must not remove this story from its context. Jesus didn't just walk up and tell this story. He told it when a lawyer asked him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. He turned the question back on the lawyer asking him what he read in the Law. The man said to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus agreed, but the lawyer wasn't happy with that answer. He wanted better lines drawn. So he asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus told this story. In our last lesson, we considered who is my neighbor or who we are supposed to love. But there are other aspects of this story we need to recognize. When Jesus wrapped up this exchange with the lawyer, He said, "You go, and do likewise." In other words, "Lawyer, if you want eternal life, you need to go and love like this." That leaves us with a question? What love is this? We have learned the shocking and challenging answer to our question who we are to love. Now we need to consider how we are to love.

## Discussion:

### I. The Samaritan and the law of loving your neighbor.

A. When the lawyer said he believed the Law taught he had to love his neighbor as himself to inherit eternal life, he was quoting from **Leviticus 19:18**. The context of this quote is fascinating.

### B. **Leviticus 19:9-18**:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD

You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor: I am the LORD (ESV).

C. The story of the Samaritan is far deeper and more profound than I imagined. Jesus masterfully tells a story that actually ties back to this passage about loving your neighbor. As we compare Jesus's story to this section of the Law, we can highlight the difference between loving like a lawyer and loving like the Samaritan.

1. God told the Jews not to glean all the way to the edges of their fields, but leave some behind for the poor and the foreigner. They were not to hoard their goods but set aside part of it for others less blessed. The lawyer, knowing this law, would leave some grapes and olives in his fields and vineyards. But then he had fulfilled the Law. The Law didn't say anything about using some of your oil and wine to serve the downtrodden. The lawyer would find the line. When the Samaritan came upon the beaten Jew, he used his own oil and wine to help treat the man's wounds. He did not hoard his own blessings but set aside some of it for someone less blessed. The Samaritan didn't dicker about the lines. He took the Law to its

next level. The purpose of this Law was to teach God's people to help others in need using our own resources, not provide a hoop to jump through so we could claim heaven because we measured up. Loving our neighbor means recognizing God has blessed us to be a blessing to others. Do we set aside some of our blessings to be used for those less blessed or do we spend all we have and then borrow so we can't devote anything we have to help others?

2. God's statement that you shall not swear by God's name falsely doesn't seem at first glance to apply to loving our neighbor. But I can't help but think about that priest and Levite who passed by on the other side of the street. How often did they swear by God's name? How often did they call on God's name? How often did they declare they were God's people? They wore God's name like a badge. We don't know exactly what excuse the priest and Levite offered, but they might have tried to declare their service to God. If they helped the man and he died while they were carrying him, they would become unclean before God. How bad would that be? And yet, when they saw this dying man, they left him to die. Were they not wearing God's name falsely? When they called on God to be a witness to their dedication and devotion to Him, didn't their passing by this dying man show that God would have to witness against them? The lawyer would look at a Samaritan and claim that any time he swore by God, he did so falsely because he wasn't worshiping God properly. In fact, the lawyer might pass by the beaten man and use his strict religious practice as justification. "I may not have helped the beaten man, but I keep God's Law about worshiping Him better than you do." The Samaritan, on the other hand recognized that swearing by God wasn't just about going to the temple, but about how we act from day to day. I think of a story I read last week about a young teenage lady who, to the embarrassment of a young man who worked up the nerve to ask her out on a date, loudly and proudly proclaimed that she didn't date non-Christians. Later that day, on a pop quiz, this same young lady accepted a cheat-sheet from a friend to help with the test. Someone noticed and also proclaimed: "I guess the girl who can't date a non-Christian can accept a cheat-sheet from one." Amazing that Jesus would use a person who didn't love God properly to teach a lesson on loving like God properly. The point is not, of course, that if we love our neighbor it doesn't matter how we worship. The point is it doesn't matter how we worship if we don't love our neighbor. Do we love like lawyers? Do we bypass people in need, not helping, and justify our lack of love because we follow the pattern better than everyone else? Or do we love like the Samaritan.
3. God told the Jews not to rob their neighbor. The lawyer would proudly profess that he never robbed anyone. The passing priest and Levite might defend themselves by pointing out that they didn't actually rob the man or oppress him. The lawyer had a great legal defense to prove that he loved people enough. He had always lived by this statement. But the Samaritan took this to the next level. The Samaritan recognized that passing by the beaten man was essentially the same thing. He may not have hit the man, but if he refused to help him recover, he might as well have been part of the robbers' band. The lawyer would say the person's plight was not his fault. The Samaritan didn't worry about blame, he just loved.
4. God told the Jews not to withhold wages for an employee. That, of course, has some application all on its own. But the lawyer would proudly declare that he had always loved his neighbor because he always paid what he owed people. However, we see the Samaritan give two days wages to the innkeeper on behalf of this beaten man and then the promise of more. He did all of this for someone who had never done anything for him. He didn't owe this man anything, but how could he withhold this good. In fact, in **I John 3:16-18**, the apostle John drives this same point home. We don't just give to those we owe. When we see someone in need and we have the ability to help, we give to them as well.
5. God said not to curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but rather fear God. The point is that the Jews were not to take advantage of those who couldn't do anything to stop them. They might curse the deaf because the deaf would not hear them. They might put a stumbling block before the blind because the blind could not see them. Rather, they were to fear God who hears and sees all and will call them into account. Of course, the lawyer would again point out that he hadn't beaten the man. He hadn't left the man for dead so that he had no reason to fear God. He was good. But the Samaritan didn't hang his hat on knowing he hadn't cursed the man or caused him to stumble. He knew passing by a man who was suffering from someone else's curse and stumbling block was tantamount to being the curser. So he stopped and helped the beaten man.
6. God told the Jews not to do injustice in court. They were not to be partial either to the poor or the rich. The point was that they should not pervert justice and bear a false witness against anyone for any reason. They were not to receive bribes to slander a neighbor in court so that he would be judged and possibly executed. Notice how God says it: "you shall not stand up against the life [blood] of your neighbor."

The lawyer would certainly say that the beaten Jew was not standing on trial in a court. But how often do we put those who are less blessed on trial before we will aid them? Again, we don't know why the Levite and priest passed by, but another excuse they might have offered is that this must be God's judgment against the man. Who were they to intervene when God had brought this calamity upon him? The Samaritan thought differently. Who was he to stand up against the life of this man he didn't even know? He would be violating love if he testified falsely against this man in court, how much more if he judged him unworthy of help and good deeds?

7. God told the Jews they were not to take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of their own people, but should love their neighbor as themselves. But who proved to be the man's neighbor in Jesus's story? A man against whom the Jews bore a grudge and wanted to take vengeance. Samaritans were mistreated and reviled by the Jews and the feeling was pretty mutual. There was a whole lot of grudge-bearing and vengeance that went on between them. But the Samaritan didn't even hesitate to think about that. He simply saw a man in need and helped him. If tables were turned, the lawyer would probably say that the Samaritan was not a son of his own people and therefore didn't get love from him. The Samaritan simply saw a creation of God in need and showed him mercy and compassion. He did not worry about lineage, value, or worth. He simply saw the need and met it. The Samaritan didn't kick the man and claim, "You deserve it you Jewish bum." He didn't revel that the robbers got a Jew instead of a Samaritan. He didn't rejoice that another Jewish man would die. He helped the man. How do we react when the person in need is someone we have something against?

## II. Loving like the Samaritan.

- A. As we wrap up this lesson, let's notice some overarching principles and contrasts. Let's put ourselves to the test. What love is this? What kind of love do we have? Do we love like a lawyer or like the Samaritan?
  1. Lawyers love from obligation; Good Samaritans love from compassion and mercy.
  2. Lawyers love as a means to gain blessing; Good Samaritans love because they have been blessed.
  3. Lawyers look for lines and limitations on their love; Good Samaritans take love to the next level.
  4. Lawyers seek to preserve their goods; Good Samaritans love with sacrifice.
  5. Lawyers see love as an event; Good Samaritans see it as a process.
  6. Lawyers love by refraining from harm; Good Samaritans love by actively helping.
  7. Lawyers love in order to pay back; Good Samaritans love in order to give freely.
  8. Lawyers love those they judge worthy; Good Samaritans love those who need it.
  9. Lawyers love friends; Good Samaritans love enemies.
  10. Lawyers believe their love for God makes up for not loving their neighbors; Good Samaritans know they don't really love God if they don't love their neighbor.
- B. What love do you have? Are you more like the lawyer or the Samaritan?

## Conclusion:

What love is this? It is a huge love. That's what it is. This study has been a hard one for me because in this lesson and the last, I've had to realize that I am all too often like the lawyer. Amazingly enough, even after reading the story of the beaten Jew and the benevolent Samaritan I usually end up with questions like, "Yeah, but I can't do that for everyone, so who do I really have to do that for? Do I have to stop for every stalled car? Do I have to give something to every begging bum? Do I have to donate to every possible charity? I can't do all of that. Surely God doesn't expect that of me." I spend a lot of my time asking, "Do I have to? What happens if I don't? Will I lose eternal life if I don't?" The fact is nobody can do everything. But what amazes me is Jesus doesn't provide limits. He doesn't hand us our copouts to get out of opportunities to love. He just challenges us. He tells us a story that places loving our neighbor on all but unattainable level and then says, "You go and do likewise."

Perhaps the real problem is that all too often I am asking this question from the same motivation the lawyer was. This whole thing started with, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" I continue to think I'm trying to jump through hoops and requirements to get heaven. The problem is if that is the journey to eternal life, it ain't going to happen. I can't possibly love that thoroughly, that completely, that universally. I don't have the resources, the time, the strength. As long as I'm trying to earn God's blessing of eternal life by jumping through hoops of love, I'm only ever going to despair. Instead, I need to recognize that God loved me first and let my love flow from that. I don't love in order to get life; I love because God has given me life. If I'm going to be like the Samaritan, I don't try to figure out who I have to love to get to heaven. Rather, I pass along the love God has given me when I can, where I can, and to whomever I can. Please don't try to soften this lesson or discover limits by asking if you have to do something. Simply pursue your life asking how you can love the person your with the way God has loved you.