

If we are honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that there are people that we would not be concerned about being outside of the grace of God. We all have a line.

This is part of our fallen human nature. During the time that Jesus walked the earth, the nation of Israel had people that they hated so much they declared them to be beyond the hope of redemption.

A Question for a Question

Jesus confronted this way of thinking and challenged the norms of culture during his earthly ministry. We read about his confrontation with a Mosaic law expert in Luke 10, and we know it as the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Sometimes we forget that Jesus told the parable in response to a challenge. A lawyer had posed this question: *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*

To the lawyer’s chagrin, Jesus answers the question with a question, asking, *“What is written in the Law?”* In response, he begins sparring with Jesus. Jesus directs the man to an authority that they can both accept – the law of Moses (Luke 10:26).

The lawyer answers Jesus’ question by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. He connects these two different passages, showing a good understanding of the law of Moses.

“And he 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.” (Luke 10:27)

Jesus commends him and seems to move on, but the learned man is not satisfied. He knows that he is not perfectly loving towards his fellow man, so he is looking for a definition that will lower the bar on the requirement of the law. He asks Jesus, *“Who is my neighbor?”*

A Parable for a Problem

Jesus tells a parable to correct the scribe’s false understanding of who his neighbor was.

In this parable, a man is beaten to the point of death, and three people walk past him as he lay on the side of the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

The priest, who should have been the first to help, walks by on the other side of the road. A man from the tribe of Levi does the same thing and keeps on walking.

The third person to come by is a Samaritan. Samaritans were hated by the Jews because of racial position and religious differences. The Samaritans were judged and condemned by the Jewish people.

We do not know if the injured man was a Jew or Gentile, but it made no difference to the Samaritan; he did not consider the man’s race or religion. The Samaritan only saw a person in need of assistance, and he assisted him by going above and beyond in his care.

A Question for an Answer

Jesus made his point by asking the scribe a laser sharp question, “*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*” (Luke 10:36).

Once again, the lawyer’s answer reveals his personal hardness of heart. He refers to the Samaritan as, “*the one who showed mercy.*”

Jesus then tells the lawyer to “*go and do likewise,*” Jesus means that the man should start living what the law tells him to do by following the Samaritan’s example of merciful care, irrespective of the recipient’s race, religion, financial position or nationality.

The lesson is the same for us. If someone has a need and we have the means to help, then we are to give generously and freely without expectation of return, regardless of the recipient’s race, religion, socioeconomic status, or political views.

A Parable for Our Practice

As we put this into practice, we will find that mercy always costs. Mercy is compassion that is willing to pay the price. Mercy is what we have received as followers of Jesus. We deserved death (see Romans 6:23), but Jesus paid the price that we could not pay.

Jesus in turn calls us to show mercy to those we meet along the pathway of life, and it will usually cost us something. Often it will cost us our prejudice.

However, there is no person on earth who can meet this standard, Jesus sets the bar impossibly high; our heart is selfish to the core. When left to our own devices, we do the wrong thing. We see the person in need and justify why we don’t need to help them. The drug addict, the homeless person, the illegal immigrant, the person who looks different...

Dr. Albert Mohler wrote, “*There is not a single human being, made in God’s image, who does not deserve our compassion, care and mercy.*” That is a challenging statement.

The compassion that Jesus showed on the cross should be the mark of every Christian even towards those we feel are beyond mercy (see 1 John 3:16).

A Question for an Eternity

Getting back to the original question of this legal expert, “*What must I do....to inherit eternal life?*”

We know from Scripture that we will never be able to do enough good things to inherit eternal life. We need a savior, Jesus Christ. And only then, as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we be equipped to love our neighbor.

Although compassion is a pillar of the church, it is an outflow of the ministry of the church. Compassion is essential in the church, not because it is what good people do to help one another but because it is the way the church points people to Jesus. Jesus views compassion very seriously (see Matthew 25:34-36).

Until Jesus comes again, the church is called to the Great Commission and to works of compassion, displaying the love of Christ to a broken world.

Isaiah 58:6-7

