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"Who Is My Neighbour?"

By Ivan T. Blazen, *Instructor in Religion, Emmanuel Missionary College*

CAIN once asked ironically, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In Jesus' time a lawyer inquired, "Who is my neighbour?"

Christ answered both questions in the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. He said that all men are brothers and that to all we owe the obligation of neighborly love. We are our "brother's keeper."

A discussion that Christ had with a Jewish doctor of the law forms the background for the parable of the Good Samaritan. As Jesus was teaching, "behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered with another question, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?"

This reply was disconcerting to the lawyer. It was as if Jesus had said, "Since you are a specialist in the law you ought to know the answer to your own question! Is it not contained in the very law of which you are an expounder?"

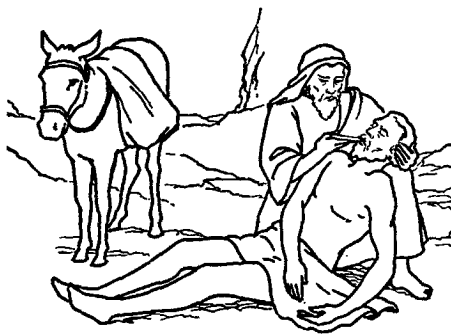
Quickly the lawyer replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." "Right," said Jesus. "This do, and thou shalt live."

The lawyer had started out on the offensive but he ended on the defensive. He had answered his own question. This placed him in a bad light. His question appeared superfluous, and he looked insincere. He must justify himself in the eyes of the hearers. He must demonstrate that more is involved in the question than was at first apparent. "Yes, the Old Testament says we are to love our neighbor as ourself," he agreed, but added, "Who is my neighbour?"

That the lawyer should even ask this question shows that his spiritual experience and understanding were nil. Anyone who asks whom he is to love shows that he does not know what true love is. Love has no limit; it is universal. "God so loved the world." Paul says we are to "owe no one anything, except to love one an-

other" (Rom. 13:8, R.S.V.). George Buttrick says of the lawyer's question: "To ask the question is a condemnation. True neighborliness is not curious to know where its boundaries run; it cares as little for boundaries as sun and rain care for the contour lines upon our maps. It seeks not for limits but for opportunities."—*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 152.

Jesus saw that the lawyer needed to take his eyes off that limited number whom he felt obligated to love and turn his eyes inward upon himself as the one who should show love. The lawyer needed to know that he himself must be a neighbor.



Not alone for the lawyer did Jesus tell the parable of the Good Samaritan but also for all who draw lines of distinction between rich and poor, bond and free, Jew and Gentile.

Jesus began, "A 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."

In going from Jerusalem to Jericho, the traveler literally had to go down. Jerusalem was about 2,500 feet above sea level while Jericho was about 800 feet below sea level. The almost 20 miles of road between the cities wound through wild and mountainous country. The limestone caves along the way were infested with robbers who were eager and ready to plunder the purse of any unsuspecting traveler. So many killings took place on this road that it later became known as the Bloody Pass.

As the poor traveler of the parable lay wounded in the road, "by chance" a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side." The parable says that it was "by chance" or "by coincidence" that the priest passed by. Was it really chance? We think not. Many times what we call chance or coincidence is an opportunity extended to us by God.

Here the priest was being given an opportunity to show that he knew what was meant by "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). He had just come from the Temple in Jerusalem where it had been his privilege to stand in the presence of God. Now, when he should have been filled with God's Spirit, he was not; the priest had left Him in the Temple. Undoubtedly he had been careful in fulfilling his ritual duties in Jerusalem, but now, in passing by a needy sufferer, he was clearly omitting the "weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith."

Likewise the Levite, who appeared soon thereafter, was coming from Jerusalem. He caught sight of the bleeding man in the road, stopped with curiosity, and looked at the sufferer. His conscience told him what he should do, but he refused and "passed by on the other side."

The callousness of the priest and the Levite is appalling. These men were functionaries of a law that in its interest for the preservation of life commanded, "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again" (Deut. 22:4), yet here a human being and fellow countryman was lying wounded and they showed a complete lack of concern. They had not only missed the spirit of the law but had even missed its letter.

Undoubtedly, they tried to justify their consciences. Was it not better for one man to die than for others also to perish? If they paused, the robbers would probably give them the same treatment. Furthermore, the priest might have argued that the duty

of ministering lay with the Levite who was following him. Perhaps the Levite thought that since the priest ahead had not seen fit to help the man, why should he undertake to give aid? If it were a spiritual duty, the priest would have done it. With such rationalizations as these the priest and the Levite left their brother to die.

"But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'"

The fear of himself being overtaken by robbers or of being suspected of the robbery, did not influence the Samaritan. Only one thing moved him—compassion; only one thing mattered—that the dying man be saved. "Love . . . seeketh not its own." The Samaritan had transcended the boundaries of human prejudice—the Samaritans and Jews were bitter enemies—and had entered the higher reaches of a worship that is performed in spirit and in truth.

Knows No Boundaries

As with worship, so with service. It is not to be confined to this mountain or that one, or to this person or that one. True service, as with true love, knows no boundaries. Jesus said that we should love even our enemies. The Samaritan was doing just that. No greater enmity existed at that time than the enmity that the Jews and Samaritans felt for each other. And yet, the Samaritan had compassion on a man who might have spit on his face, had he been able to do so.

In applying the lesson to our lives today, the Spirit of Prophecy says, "It is not possible for the heart in which Christ abides to be destitute of love. If we love God because He first loved us, we shall love all for whom Christ died. We cannot come in touch with divinity without coming in touch with humanity; for in Him who sits upon the throne of the universe, divinity and humanity are combined. Connected with Christ, we are connected with our fellow men by the golden links of the chain of love. Then the pity and compassion of Christ will be manifest in our life."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 384, 385.

According to Buttrick there are three reasons why the Samaritan was a model neighbor. First, he had the insight of sympathy. Of the three that traveled the Jericho road only the Samaritan really saw the wounded

man. Only he recognized that here was a human being like himself, a person made in the image of God, a soul of eternal worth and value. To the priest and Levite the sufferer was only an obtrusion in the road. They believed in humanity, but not in humans. While it may be true that we can miss the forest for the trees, it is also true that we may miss the trees for the forest. The world is filled with individuals who need help. None are too low to be worthy of our ministry.

Second, the Samaritan was a model neighbor because he rendered a personal service. He might have hired an ancient ambulance or called a committee together. Instead *he* bound up the wounds. *He* poured the oil and the wine. *He* took the sufferer to the inn. In giving aid personally he was giving himself; it was this that made his actions of so great worth. Dwight L. Moody once said, "I may hire a man to do *some* work, but I can never hire a man to do *my* work."

Finally, the Samaritan was a model neighbor because he rendered a thorough service. His efforts were not half-hearted. He saw the job through to the end. He did not leave the man in the road after treating him, but he took him to an inn where the man might receive the further aid he needed. Truly does the old adage say, "Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well."

Having told the parable, Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy

on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

Jesus not only lets the lawyer answer his own question but also shows that the question itself was asked from the wrong point of view. The lawyer had asked, "Who is my neighbour?" For this Jesus substitutes, "Who was neighbour?" that is, "Whose claims on my neighborly help do I recognize?" The lawyer was not to worry about who his neighbor was; he was to be a neighbor to everyone.

Jesus' statement, "Go, and do thou likewise" is (in the Greek) in the present tense. It therefore signifies that the good life, the life that gives evidence of God's salvation, is not a one-act affair; it is a continual, daily process. In effect Jesus is saying, "Go and keep on being from day to day the kind of neighbor I have described."

The parable of the Good Samaritan presents a great challenge to each one of us. We are challenged to *love* and to love *all*. Every needy soul within the sphere of our influence is to be given all the help we can render. Perhaps we cannot bear all the world's pain, but we can minister to those who lie in our own pathway. We may not have drink enough to quench the thirst of all thirsting humanity, but we can pour out the oil and wine that we have.

"And this commandment we have from him, That he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21, R.S.V.). "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18, R.S.V.).

Human Relations—2

The Christian Home

By Frederick Lee

THE home is a school in human relations. There, as children, we make our first contacts with other persons. There we learn to get along with people. Or, perhaps, we do not learn to do so. In that case the effects in afterlife may be disastrous.

As a community of interests the home is the smallest segment of society and the most important one. Every member of the home must learn to live together as a unit. Without unity of thought and action there will be confusion and disorder, followed by a breakdown of the community of interests. The house may remain, but the home is gone, with its members coming and going at will without regard to the interests of the

others. Such a life can only be productive of frustration, insecurity, and unhappiness in the life of every member, but mostly in the lives of the children.

Children reared in such a home develop a defensive attitude that will make them unable to meet the give and take of society in later life. They have little hope of success, or peace of mind. The mental institutions and the prisons are crowded with them, and the doctors have more than they can do looking after those who may possibly be rehabilitated. How important is the home in the formation of habits that will bring happiness to its members and to everyone with whom they come in contact.