

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶“What is written in the law?” he asked him. “What do you read there?”

²⁷He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁸He said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.”

²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell among robbers who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹It just so happened that a priest was going down that way. But when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²In the same way, a Levite also happened to go there, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³³A Samaritan, as he traveled, came to where the man was. When he saw him, he felt sorry for the man. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day, when he left, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him. Whatever extra you spend, I will repay you when I return.’ ³⁶Which of these three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?”

³⁷“The one who showed mercy to him,” he replied.

Then Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

What must I Do?

I.

You see them on TV. They make their appearances on local news and national news alike. They are there to discuss the latest crime that has been committed and what the possible tactics for the defense team of the accused might be. They come on to discuss the latest bombshell Supreme Court decision and what the limitations and ramifications might be for various people and other laws that might be or might have been affected.

They are the legal experts or legal analysts. It’s kind of like calling the IRS with a tax question—none of them has quite the same take or the same answers to the questions, but every one of them gives an answer, none-the-less.

II.

Sometimes it seems the legal experts are not there to give answers, but to stack up their own knowledge against someone else’s. “Just then, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25, EHV).

This man knew the Law of Moses inside and out. He knew and understood all kinds of intricacies and seeming-loopholes that had been codified through the years by all kinds of analysts and experts. His first intention was to ask his question in a way that would be difficult for Jesus to answer without getting caught in some sort of legal trap.

Lawyers love to do things like that. Lawyers want to say things very precisely. You have to listen closely both to what they are saying, and what is *not* being said.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Even in English the legal expert’s question presents some gotchas. “Inherit” is not a word that implies doing. A person inherits because

of the generosity of the giver. It would seem the legal expert wanted to present an impossible question. Doing and inheriting don't go together.

But there's more. 18 English Bibles I looked at all had some variation of what the EHV translates "what must I do?" There really isn't a better way to convey the sense of the Greek words: "what having done?" would be the literal Greek. In other words, the legal expert was already asserting that he *had* done what was necessary to "inherit" eternal life. He merely wanted to know which of the things he had already done might have qualified him.

Jesus is not one to be fooled by legal trickery. "What is written in the law?" he asked him. "What do you read there?" (Luke 10:26, EHV). "You profess to be the legal expert; you tell *me*." The legal expert proceeds to summarize the Moral Law quite well: "Love God... love your neighbor."

"He said to him, 'You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live'" (Luke 10:28, EHV).

Should Jesus' answer not bring one up short? "Do this and you will live"? First of all, the legal expert had assumed he had already *done* what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer implies that he has not. Those who aren't so egotistical to think they have been fabulous in God's eyes and deserve his inheritance might rightly despair. Love God and love your neighbor means *perfect* love. No one is capable of perfect love.

Legal experts being legal experts, the man standing before Jesus trying to test him wasn't deterred in the slightest. There were loopholes to be explored; he knew they were there. "He asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:29, EHV).

There just *had to be* some exclusions. There *had to be* exceptions. To do what is necessary to be done to inherit eternal life, who, exactly, was to be treated in this neighborly fashion?

If your parents brought you to Sunday School, you have heard the parable Jesus told of the Good Samaritan. It's a staple.

The priest could see the bruised and bloodied man lying in the road ahead. He didn't want to fall under some sense of obligation to do anything about the situation, so he pretended not to notice. He made sure to get to the other side of the road, where he might be presumed to be so preoccupied with his own thoughts that he didn't notice the crime victim.

The Levite could see the bruised and bloodied man lying in the road ahead. Like the priest, he didn't want to be bothered or thought to have an obligation. He did the same thing, passing by on the other side as if he had blinders on that prevented him from even seeing this victim of violence.

I wonder if these days the two of them would have gotten out their cell phones and filmed the beating and robbery, but still have done nothing to stop it or help the victim.

The Samaritan man came along and went out of his way to help. Since he was a foreigner who could be presumed to have racial prejudice against the crime victim, he ran the risk of being accused of the very criminal act he sought to help with. He used his own money and resources to make sure the victim was properly cared for. Certainly it could be said that he went above and beyond.

How many times have you been the priest and the Levite? How many times have you been too busy or too preoccupied to help someone in need? Do you come up with your own set of criteria as to whether someone is deserving of your mercy or not? Do you ask yourself whether their own carelessness with their resources has put them in a position of need and

therefore you aren't bound to offer assistance?

The Samaritan didn't just roll down his window at the traffic light and hand over some cash and say: "Hope everything goes well; God bless." He actually stopped to see what was really needed. A cash gift might actually be counterproductive. Cash might be used to feed an addiction rather than take care of needs. The Samaritan investigated, and then acted accordingly.

III.

"Which of these three do you think acted like a neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?"³⁷ "The one who showed mercy to him," he replied. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:36-37, EHV).

We aren't told about the legal expert's demeanor as he walked away. Was he just disappointed that he hadn't been able to trap Jesus with his test? Perhaps he was at least led to think: "I'm not who I thought I was."

Did you notice that Jesus never really speaks the gospel to this legal expert? Despite his title, the man didn't actually understand the law. He needed a full dose of the law to understand that there is nothing whatsoever that anyone can *do* to inherit heaven. Inherit, after all, means that there is a gift involved, not a payment.

Now consider the one Jesus identified as "the man who fell among robbers." Who was that bloodied, beaten-up man lying on the side of the road, anyway? That was us lying there. Knocked down, beaten up, left for dead, ripped off—by life, by sin, by our own sinful desires.

Sometimes we act like legal experts. We look for every loophole to justify ourselves and seek to validate our own behavior. There are no loopholes. Sin is sin. Sin is inexcusable. Sin demands a payment.

Paul started today's Second Reading: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1, EHV). Jesus Christ was the Good Samaritan to undeserving beaten, bloodied sinners to set us free from the sin that has entangled us. *He* carried those times we have refused to help to the cross. He bore the burden of our preoccupation with things that are so important to us. He bought our freedom with his own lifeblood on the cross. He paid as much as it took, without counting the cost.

IV.

That sets *us* up for real freedom. What does a Christian do with that freedom? Paul explains: "Serve one another through love."¹⁴In fact, the whole law is summed up in this one statement: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:13-14, EHV).

Jesus explained "love your neighbor as yourself" by contrasting the Good Samaritan with the un-neighborly priest and Levite. Paul simply says: "serve one another through love." He went on in our Second Reading to explain service as the fruits of faith. He said: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law...²⁵If we live by the spirit, let us also walk in step with it" (Galatians 5:22-23, 25, EHV).

Use that fruit of the spirit to love your neighbor as yourself. Don't try to twist it back into some legal loophole by which you do things to inherit eternal life. Use that fruit of the spirit in the way it was intended: as a show of thanks to the Lord Jesus who bought your freedom.

You must do nothing to be saved. You can do nothing to be saved. But you *can* thank the Lord Jesus for this precious gift by loving your neighbor as yourself. Amen.