

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

A certain lawyer, seeking to tempt Jesus, asked, “who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). The lawyer could have been quibbling with Jesus in an attempt to claim that an appeal to the mere “words” of the Law could not answer the lawyer’s initial question, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). The following parable given by Jesus, however, seems to imply that the problem lies with the lawyer’s definition of “neighbor,” which he seems to confine only to his Jewish brethren and thus excludes all other nationalities.

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. 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” (Luke 10:30-37).

The two men who were considered “neighbors,” by the lawyer’s definition, would have nothing to do with one of their own countrymen who was in dire need. Contrariwise, a Samaritan, considered “most despised and detested” (Matthew Henry's Commentary) by the Jews, had compassion on the man in need with no prejudice. The Samaritan did not study the man to determine his nationality, he simply stopped in order to give all the help that he could. The parable answered two questions: 1) “Who is *my* neighbor?” or, *who* is it that I am to love as myself (Luke 10:27), and 2) “Who is *a* neighbor?” or, according to God, *what* is it that characterizes an individual as a neighbor. The parable defines a neighbor as anyone who is in need, answering question #1, while at the same time defining a neighbor as one who has mercy and compassion for others and acts accordingly, which answers question #2. The man who fell among thieves was not a fellow countryman of the Samaritan, but he was a man in need. The Samaritan was not one with whom Jews would normally have anything to do, but he was a man who was willing to help another.

Many define the word “neighbor” in different ways. Perhaps the most common definition ascribed is that of one who lives next door or nearby. The Bible, however, does not limit the term’s definition to merely that of location. God attributes certain characteristics to one who is considered a neighbor. In the example above, the one who “was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves” was “he that shewed mercy.” A neighbor then, is merciful and compassionate. Let us look at just a few qualities of a Scriptural neighbor.

- A neighbor **will not “bear false witness”** against another (Exo. 20:11; Psa. 101:5).
- A neighbor **will not deceive** another (Pro. 26:18-19; 29:5).
- A neighbor **will love** others (Jam. 2:8).
- A neighbor **will** love others enough to **rebuke** their public sin that they may be saved in the end (Lev. 19:17-18).

- A neighbor *will* “*shew mercy*” (Luke 10:37).
- A neighbor *will* only *speak the truth* (Zec. 8:16; Eph. 4:25).

We all desire that men treat us neighborly. “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Mat. 7:12). If we want men to be good neighbors towards us, we need to be good neighbors ourselves. Let us follow the Biblical pattern for being good neighbors one to another and in so doing we shall glorify God (Mat. 5:16) and win souls to Christ. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16).

– *Brad Green*