

*What is the greatest commandment in the Law?* Jesus was asked this question by a Jewish lawyer, as recorded in **Matthew 22**. The answer was two fold: First, LOVE GOD. Second, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Jesus goes on to say that by understanding and embracing these two things, every other law of God will naturally be honored, for all of what God wants us to be falls under these two.

This was true of the Law of Moses. The 10 commandments of Exodus 20 are really just 2:

Love God – “no other gods before Me” “not make idols” “not take My name in vain” “remember the Sabbath.”

Love Neighbor – “honor father and mother” “not murder” “nor adultery” “not steal” “not bear false witness” “not covet your neighbor’s house or wife.”

But what about now? What about life under the new law of Christ? When you add together everything Jesus taught in His ministry, all of the words of His apostles and all the prophets’ letters in the New Testament, everything God asks of us adds up to this: Love God and Love Your Neighbor.

The first one is easy. Okay, maybe not easy, but easy to understand and embrace. God is al-powerful and glorious and loving Him is acknowledging His greatness, following His instructions, worshipping Him and using our lives to bring honor to His worthy name! He is worthy to be loved and we speak of it often.

But “Love Your Neighbor” is a bit more difficult. The objects of our affection are not as glorious or worthy as God, and we often may struggle with WHO should be loved and HOW they should be loved. I mean, everybody loves the people close to them, but is my “inner circle” the neighbors Jesus expects me to love the most? And if more are involved, how exactly should I go about showing love for them?

Jesus was such a profound and amazing Teacher, that our questions are beautifully answered by one short story: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10).

Background:

- **Luke 10:25** – Another Jewish Lawyer asks Jesus an important question. Though his motives may have been questionable, the question is valuable and Jesus answers by going back to the Law.
- **Luke 10:26-28** – Love God. Love your Neighbor. Do this and you will live!
- **Luke 10:29** – “Wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”
  - Like most everyone else, this man treated his “inner circle” well. He loved those who loved him. He served those who could serve him in return. He was a “good guy.” At this point, he can’t catch Jesus in a mistake, so maybe he can at least get Jesus to tell all hearers that this lawyer is a Great Neighbor!

I do not propose that there is anyone like this Jewish lawyer in this room. He was deceptive in the beginning and prideful in the end. However, the lessons he was about to learn is needful for us all!

*Who is my neighbor? And what does it mean to be a good neighbor?*

**Luke 10:30-35** – The Parable of the Good Samaritan. It almost sounds like a joke: “So a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan are walking down the street.” To the lawyer it might have sounded like one. Clearly the priest would help the man in need, but he doesn’t. A Levite of the priestly tribe for sure. But no. A Samaritan? Unheard of. Would he actually stop to serve a Jewish man in need?

Everyone knows that family and friends and brethren and people like you and people immediately around you and those whom you have connections: these are your neighbors. It is important and right to be nice to such people, and serve them with great love. But do you realize:

**Your Neighbor...**

- **Is not just someone you know** (These two had never met -- Not based on history, but present).
  - Every person we meet and come in contact with, though it may be for the first time, it may be only once, they may just be in the car next to me, IS my neighbor!
- **Is not just someone like you** (These two were nothing alike -- Not based on name, but deed).
  - Neighbors aren’t just people like me, who share my last name, Christ’s name, love for baseball or a neighborhood address. They may be different in every single way: economic, social, and background. But a soul is a soul is a neighbor.

- **Is not just someone who can help you** (These two did not have a “scratch my back and I yours” deal).
  - Often times friendship is based on mutual respect and service. In marriage, we love each other and do for one another. Brethren and friends the same. But a neighbor is not someone who can help me, who has helped me or ever will, *just one who needs me*.

So, Jesus has answered the man’s question. A neighbor is any human being you come across, at any time in your day, or in your life, who has need. Just like you always address your own needs when they arise, and you are there to help a friend or someone close to you when they hurt, so too should that attitude and action be ever ready to be shared with everyone, *perhaps especially when they don’t expect it*.

But the point He makes with this story is much, much more powerful than identifying a neighbor!

**Luke 10:36-37** – Identification is just the beginning. “Who is my neighbor” is an important breakthrough for some to learn, but the more pressing question is: “HOW DO I LOVE MY NEIGHBOR?”

### **I Love My Neighbor when...**

- **I am moved by Emotion** (“he felt compassion”)
  - He felt compassion for this person. Nothing else mattered, not who he was or their history or what might happen next. He saw a man who was hurting. He felt and acted.
  - **Galatians 5:22-23; 6:9-10** – Don’t lose heart in doing good to ALL MEN.
- **I am willing to expend Energy** (“came” “bandaged” “brought” “took care of him”)
  - Feeling something was just the beginning. He acted sacrificially as substance of love.
  - **Galatians 5:22-23** – These are not JUST emotions, they are also motivators to act: to show kindness, be good to someone, even showing patience or control when someone isn’t neighborly to you. But they DO something. Neighbors are difference makers BEYOND simply looking at them and saying: “I will pray for you.”
- **I am undeterred by Expense** (“took out two denari” “take care of him... I will repay”)
  - Actions cost. Maybe money. Most always time. The man didn’t go in thinking, “I’ll expend a little energy but no more.” He wanted to make a difference.
  - **Galatians 6:2,9** – This will, at times, include time and money! First among God’s people, but not limited to them: maybe our money can make a difference. If it can; if an hour spent buying someone groceries can help them eat and bring them to spiritual matters, would a neighbor give those things, or keep them for himself?

A neighbor feels for people: people close to them and people they have never met. A neighbor wants to act on that feeling for the other person and is willing to prove himself a neighbor by action. A neighbor doesn’t stop short of actual expense, but considers such expenditures to be a joy in Christian service!

If I close the lesson now, I’ll have to stand in the back to a long line of people who say, “*I see your point. But does this mean I have to help every single homeless person holding a sign in Smith County? And what if they use the money for booze?*” Hey, slow down. Relax. ☺

I would First say: no matter your answer to that, it does not change the answer to these two questions: “*Who is my neighbor?*” and “*How do I be a neighbor?*” -- Don’t let one scenario stop you from serving!

Second, we cannot help everyone and some people aren’t sincere in their request, but let’s not be disqualifiers. Jesus was a qualifier! He saw all souls as valuable and longed to help anyone He could!

**Jesus on the Cross** – He assisted his friend and mother. He offered his aid to a stranger who sincerely sought it. And for those who didn’t, who’s hearts were not sincere, He expressed a desire to help them. This covers all!

**Luke 10:33-37** – “*Go and do the same.*” Are you ready to do that? Lives will be changed and souls may be saved. Yours preserved for following the two great commandments of Jesus. And perhaps even the person you help, who finds Jesus through you. But maybe first you need someone to be a neighbor to you. Let Jesus love you. Let God’s people pick you up. So that each and every one of us, strengthening by neighbors, can go out and be one.

*Example: Mrs. Charnell Ross – Called Tuesday morning.*