



“And he answering said, 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,” Luke 10:27.

Be a Christian Neighbor

Lesson Aim: to promote concern for those in need

L270. Date: April 1978. **Text:** Luke 10:25-37. **Topic:** Love: Of Others.

“Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). The question was asked by a man who was seeking to justify his disobedience to the teachings of the Word of God. The man was a Jew, a specialist in Jewish religious law. He had come to Jesus with the question, **“Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Luke 10:25).

Jesus had questioned him about the teachings in the law of God. The lawyer summarized Old Testament teachings in the words, **“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”** (Luke 10:27).

Jesus replied, **“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live”** (Luke 10:28). The man knew he could hide any lack of love to God, but a lack of love to his neighbor would be evident. So he sought to justify his lack of love to his neighbor with the question, **“And who is my neighbour?”**

Jesus answered the question with a story commonly called the parable of the good Samaritan. The story speaks of three kinds of people on that Jericho road and in the world today. (1) The robbers represent people who will beat you up. (2) The priest and Levite represent people who will pass you up. (3) The Samaritan and innkeeper represent people who will help you up.

The story also presents three different philosophies of life. (1) The robbers represent the philosophy, “What is yours is mine if I can take it from

you.” (2) The priest and Levite represent the philosophy, “What is mine is mine, and I will keep it for myself.” (3) The Samaritan represents the philosophy, “What is mine is yours if you need it, and I will gladly share it with you.” The third philosophy is the Christian philosophy of neighborliness.

I have a neighbor. His name may be Smith, or Jones, or Stewart. I have no control over that. He may be a good man or a scoundrel. I have no control over that. My neighbor has a neighbor. Me! I cannot control what kind of neighbor I have, but I can control what kind of neighbor I am. What qualities mark a man as a Christian neighbor?

I. A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MEN, 10:31, 32.

A. Other men may seek only personal benefits; a Christian neighbor cannot.

Other men may be selfish and brutal, as were the robbers on the way to Jericho. Other men may have little reverence for God and no respect for the rights of their fellowmen. The Christian neighbor cannot. The man who would represent Christ must be different from other men.

B. Other men may be satisfied performing the rituals of religion; a Christian neighbor cannot.

The priest had been in Jerusalem serving in the temple of God. He had been very careful to perform the rituals exactly right.

When he left the temple, however, he left behind all concern for the needs of people. He was tired. He was anxious to get home to his family. He feared ceremonial defilement if he touched the fallen man. He was content to have served God in the temple and felt no need to serve Him by serving the victim of robbers by the roadside.

He forgot that God's real requirement is not burnt offerings of animals, rivers of oil, or sacrifices from man, but **“to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God”** (Micah 6:6-8). The Christian neighbor must not be as that priest and leave his religion at the place of worship.

C. Other men may be curious but not compassionate; the Christian neighbor must not.

The Levite wanted to know, but not to help. He was not a little inquisitive, but was not even a little compassionate.

He is like so many believers who are pleased that others help. They enjoy listening to reports of good done. Yet they do nothing personally to serve. The Christian neighbor must have compassion which is expressed in

deeds of mercy.

II. A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR NEED NOT BE OF GREAT EARTHLY IMPORTANCE, 10:33.

The Samaritan showed himself to be a neighbor par excellence. Yet, note who he was in the eyes of the Jewish people.

A Samaritan was disparaged by the Jews because he was of mixed racial descent. "Samaritan" was used of Jesus as a slanderous term of reproach (John 8:48). Samaritans were the outcasts of Jewish society. No decent Jew would associate with them. They were equated with moral reprobates and criminals. They were separated from polite Jewish society by racial and religious barriers. Such a man is presented in the parable Jesus gave as the hero of the story and the example of what a true neighbor is like.

The Samaritan in the parable had no pedigree to claim. His name is not given. There is no reference to the city of his residence. His profession is not stated. He seems to have been a stranger to the man he helped. He was "the commonest of common men." But what a blessing he brought to a poor, fallen man.

God commonly uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. **"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence,"** I Corinthians 1:26-29. The ordinary person can be used of God as he shows true Christian neighborliness.

III. A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR MUST HAVE A CAPACITY FOR COMPASSION, 10:33.

"Compassion" is a compound word made up of a preposition (meaning "with") and a noun (meaning "suffering"). Compassion is to feel the sufferings of another to the extent that one is moved to deeds of loving helpfulness. The Samaritan was moved with compassion to help the poor victim on the road to Jericho. Any element of self-pity in him was overcome by the desire to help the man who was suffering.

Compassion is a blessed quality of God. He is "full of compassion"

(Psalm 78:38). **“His compassions fail not. They are new every morning”** (Lamentations 3:22, 23). Jesus was moved with the same compassion which fills the heart of God (Matthew 9:36). The love of God has been broadcast in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). They are filled with compassion as children of God.

There is a danger that Christians grow calloused by so much need around them. It is possible for them to be halfhearted in their service. For that reason, God extends this challenge: **“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing,”** I Peter 3:8, 9.

Christian compassion must extend to anyone in need. The woman of Sychar said to Jesus, "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). That was true. But when a Jew was dying as a result of an attack, a Samaritan had dealings with that Jew. He had compassion on the suffering man even though that man would have rejected him if he had been well.

IV. A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR MUST BE WILLING TO BE INCONVENIENCED, 10:34.

The Christian spirit is always a selfless spirit. The Christian wants his family to be saved, but his interest does not stop there. He wants family members of his neighbors and friends to be saved also. He wants his family to be cared for in material needs, but he wants his neighbors to have their needs supplied as well. He works to supply the needs for his family, and he is willing to share with his neighbor too.

The good Samaritan was greatly inconvenienced when he stopped to help the man by the roadside. He exposed himself to danger; the robbers might still be lurking nearby. He invested some of his financial resources in the needy man. He placed his own garment about the victim. He used his own donkey to transport him. He poured oil and wine into the wounds. His own money paid for the room and care at the inn. It costs to be a good neighbor.

There must be a personal investment in neighborliness. The Samaritan invested his time. He went to the man, bound up his wounds, and took a slower trip to Jericho. The Samaritan invested his energy. He walked and the wounded man rode. (“His own beast” indicates he had only one animal.) The Samaritan assumed responsibility for the man he helped. There is no true neighborliness without personal involvement.

Today, there is a very impersonal element in benevolence. People give to the United Fund (or some similar agency), and relief is administered to the suffering by some professional social worker whom the giver does not know. Indeed, the people who are helped are unknown by the giver.

A percentage of the offerings to the church budget go to support homes for needy children. Again, scores of people who give never know the recipients of their bounty. Those methods of benevolent support are worthy. No Christian should consider that such acts of concern are all that is expected of him. He must be personally involved in ministry to those in need in order for Christian compassion to show.

V. THE CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR MUST HAVE A CONTINUING INTEREST, 10:35.

Christian service is not a onetime affair. It often necessitates a continuing interest and ministry to one in need. (That need may be either physical or spiritual.) It may involve the cultivation of a relationship for some while before the opportunity for a gospel witness is possible, for instance. Keeping ready to serve anyone, in any way, at any time, in any place, is essential to being a Christian neighbor.

The concern of the Samaritan for the wounded man continued all the way to the inn. The land through which they traveled is called "the wilderness of Judea." It is a barren, dry, and desolate area. The Samaritan may have grown weary as he walked beside his donkey and held the wounded man in place on its back. He did not give up and desert him. His concern was stronger than his fatigue, and he brought the wounded man to the inn at Jericho.

His concern did not end when his ward was entrusted to another. "Take care of this man," he told the innkeeper. "I will check on his progress when I return this way. If further expense is necessary in caring for him, keep a record of it, and I will pay all." What a great heart he manifest!

You may have a neighbor for whose spiritual welfare you are concerned. You might get him to attend church and Sunday School. Your concern must not then be transferred to the pastor and the teacher. Keep up with the prospect. Keep on with your witness. The Christian neighbor's concern must not stop.

VI. A CHRISTIAN NEIGHBOR MUST RELATE HIS NEIGHBORLINESS TO JESUS, 10:25-29, 36, 37.

A man can be a good neighbor and not be a Christian. He may show concern for the welfare of those about him and not be motivated by divine love. The Christian neighbor must relate his neighborliness to Jesus so that those about him know the motivation of his interest and helpfulness.

God commands His children to be good neighbors (10:25-27). The law clearly teaches love for one's neighbor comes second to love for God. Man is often tempted to neglect in practice what he knows in theory. He asks, "Who is my neighbor?" in an effort to excuse himself from the obligations of neighborliness.

Jesus replies to such questions that one's neighbor is anyone (even a stranger and a foreigner) who is in need. Every occasion of need is the opportunity for a Christian to manifest the spirit and love of God through service. Only the man who shows mercy in deeds of helpfulness can be called a true neighbor (10:36, 37). Christian neighborliness is distinctively a Christian grace.

Do not relate your neighborliness to material things alone. How could any man who knows Christ be a good neighbor if he never recommends Christ to his neighbors? Learn to honor the Lord Jesus in every relationship with your associates.

Look back over the outline of the lesson comments. They present exactly some of the qualities which mark a Christian neighbor. A Christian neighbor is a believer in Jesus Christ who (1) is different from other men, (2) needs not to be of great earthly importance, (3) has a capacity for compassion, (4) is willing to be inconvenienced in order to serve in the name of God, (5) has a continuing interest in people, and (6) relates his neighborliness to Jesus. Those principles set out the qualities of a Christian neighbor as set forth in the parable of the good Samaritan.

In view of those principles, what kind of a neighbor are you?