

Love Your Neighbor

Expand your neighborhood to include all

Michael Heiss—July 23, 2016

I have a couple of questions for you. One leads into the other.

1. Who is your neighbor?
2. How extensive, how large is your neighborhood?

Jesus of Nazareth talked a lot about neighbors. In fact, God talked a lot about neighbors. I'm only going to hit the highlights, but I think the conclusion will be enough to 'blow your mind.' It blows my mind every time I think about it, when you let it sink in.

Let's start out with the famous parable of the 'good Samaritan.' I just can think of a better place in which to start. Remember, the concept of *loving your neighbor* stems from Lev. 19:18 where God uttered the second greatest of the commandments: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself!*

Jesus was preaching to His disciples, as He usually did, and then we find; Luke 10:25: "Now, a certain doctor of the law suddenly stood up, tempting Him and saying, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" This was not the first time that Jesus was asked this question. We're going to see the answer.

Verse 26: "And He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' Then he answered *and* said, 'You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; **and your neighbor as yourself.**' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly. Do this, and you shall live'" (vs 26-28). Remember, this is a doctor of *the law*; he can't let this go.

Verse 29: "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And **who is my neighbor?**'" You've got to remember that in the first century A.D., in the Jewish world it was very closed insolated world. They recognized nobody socially but themselves, and certain groups recognized only *their group* and no other group. They hated and despised even the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We learned that from the Dead Sea scrolls.

The doctor of the law is asking, 'Who is my neighbor?' Jesus responds, and remember that this is a parable. As you read this parable, it probably did not happen. Jesus is using this as an example. He talks about a certain man, a certain priest, a certain Levite. What are the chances of this really happening the way that he is describing it? *It didn't happen, but He's doing it to illustrate a point!*

Verse 30: "And taking *it* up, Jesus said, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and was encircled by thieves; *and* after they had stripped him *of his goods* and inflicted *him with wounds*, they went away, leaving *him half dead.*'" That phrase is important.

Verse 31: "Now, by coincidence... [hint: this really didn't happen] ...a certain priest went down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side." Giving a wide berth; he's not going to go anywhere near him.

Verse 32: "And in like manner also, a Levite, when he was at the place, came and saw *him*, and passed by on the opposite side. But **a certain Samaritan**, *as* he was journeying..." (vs 32-33). Remember that this was the *hated* Samaritan, a Gentile Samaritan; definitely not a neighbor of the Jews.

Verse 33: "But a certain Samaritan, *as* he was journeying, came to him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. And he went *to him* and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he put him on his own beast *and* brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And when he left on the next day, he took out two silver coins and gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him, and whatever you may expend above *this*, I will repay you when I come back.'" (vs 33-35).

Then Jesus asked the question, v 36: "Therefore, which of these three seems to you to have been a neighbor of him who fell among the thieves?... [the answer was obvious]: ...And he said, 'The one who showed compassion toward him.' Then Jesus said to him, '**You go and do likewise.**'" (vs 36-37).

I, right now if I can, want put in a 'kind word' for this priest and Levite to sort of soften what you might think of them. You will notice that God never criticized or condemned the Levite or the priest in this parable. Why didn't He? *There's a reason for that!* Jesus was simply trying to show that even though the priest and the Levite were good, the Samaritan turned out to be the real neighbor.

If you look at a couple of Scriptures, I want to show you why the priest went wide around the man and didn't touch him.

Numbers 5:1: "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper and everyone that has an issue, and whoever is defiled by a dead

body. You shall put out both male and female. You shall put them outside the camp...” (vs 1-3).

This Israelite had himself beaten up pretty badly, and it says that he was “...half dead...” You could hardly see him moving, if he was even moving. You think that the priest is going to risk defiling himself? Notice what God told him specifically *not to do*.

Leviticus 21:1: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, “There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people. But for his kin that is near him, for his mother and for his father and for his son and for his daughter and for his brother and for his sister, a virgin, who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may be defiled. But as a chief man he shall not defile himself among his people to pollute himself”’” (vs 1-4).

So, this priest was being very careful not to come near this man, lest he be dead, and he touch him and defile himself.

I don’t know, maybe you could see that he was still moving. Maybe the priest was uppity. Maybe the Levite was also uppity and arrogant. I don’t know! Remember, it’s a story, but I just wanted to put in a kind word for the priest and the Levite, and to say that they weren’t all that evil and indifferent. They did have a theological reason for not doing that.

This was the Samaritan who was the neighbor. Jesus was not above talking to Samaritans. This is the famous episode of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. We’ll see how Jesus is expanding the neighborhood, and He’s explaining it, of all things, to a Samaritan woman—a *woman!* Even the Samaritan woman mentions that to Jesus.

John 4:4: “Now, it was necessary for Him to pass through Samaria. And He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. And Jacob’s fountain was there; Jesus, therefore, being wearied from the journey, sat there by the fountain. *It* was about *the* sixth hour. A woman came out of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me *some water* to drink.’ For His disciples had gone away into the city, so that they might buy provisions” (vs 4-8).

Remember that this whole discussion takes place without the disciples there. This is Jesus by Himself speaking to the Samaritan woman. What He reveals to her is what He did not reveal to His disciples until the end. This is the amazing thing!

Verse 9: “Therefore, the Samaritan woman said to Him, ‘How *is it that You, being a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, to give You water to drink?....*’” She knows there’s something up here;

there’s something different. ‘Why would a Jew talk to me, a lowly Samaritan woman?’ She knows that, she understands that.

“...For Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (v 9). Jesus starts explaining some things to her and then:

Verse 19: “The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, but you say that the place where it is obligatory to worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall **neither** in this mountain **nor** in Jerusalem worship the Father” (vs 19-21).

It wasn’t until about the last week or so of Jesus’ life that He indicated anything like that to the disciples. Jesus is hinting, giving hints of what is to come.

Verse 22: “You do not know what you worship. We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth; for the Father is indeed seeking those who worship Him in this manner” (vs 22-23).

The neighborhood is no longer Jerusalem. It’s no longer going to be the sacred mountain of the Samaritans. In essence in spirit He’s preparing them for the entire earth and eventually the whole universe to be ones neighborhood and our neighbors. And of all things, He’s saying this to a *Samaritan woman!* This is what is almost mind-boggling!

Verse 27: “Now at this *time* His disciples came, and they were amazed that He was speaking with a woman; however, no one said, ‘What are You seeking?’ or, ‘Why are You talking with her?’”

They just kept their mouth shut, but later on after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ came the incredible revelation that God really was expanding the neighborhood. We all know that story in Acts 10-11 when Peter was going to visit Cornelius, the Roman centurion.

We don’t have time to read all of Acts 10 & 11, and believe me we could point out gems in there. We’re going to hit the highlights and see different reactions. Jesus was elevating the status of women and the Samaritans. He explained it to her, but He did not explain it in the same way to His disciples.

Here we are in Acts 10 and we know the story as it unfolds; Acts 10:1: “Now, *there* was in Caesarea a certain man named Cornelius... [v 2]: *a* devout man...beseeching God continually *in prayer.*”

Verse 3: “He clearly saw in a vision... [v 5]:

‘And now send men to Joppa, and call for Simon who is surnamed Peter.’” They find Peter and, he comes back and Peter is on his way.

Verse 15: “And a voice *came* again the second time to him, *saying*, ‘What God has cleansed, you are not to call common.’” Peter didn’t know what that meant, but he held it in mind.

Now Peter is already in Cornelius’ house and says, v 28: “ And he said to them, ‘You know that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to associate with or come near to anyone of another race. **But God has shown me that no man should be called common or unclean.**” You’ve got to realize how deeply engrained this was in Peter. In fact, it was engrained in all of the Jews. They over-learned the lesson.

Remember when they went into the ‘promised land’ originally? *God told them to have no dealings with the Gentiles!* Don’t follow after them! Don’t worship their gods the way they do; have nothing to do with their gods!

What did they do? *Off they went after other gods over and over again!* Read the book of Judges and you find it was with sickening regularity that they did that.

Finally, after being beaten back, going off into captivity, educated by Ezra and Nehemiah, and then came the apostasy of the priests and the rise of the Macabees, especially the Pharisees and those religious Jews, they learned the lesson to stay away from those Gentiles. But they did it to extreme!

They wouldn’t even touch them. *God never said that!* He just said not to follow after their ways. He didn’t say not to talk to them. He didn’t say never enter their house or say, ‘Hi, how are you.’ He didn’t ask them to say, ‘Hey, pagan, drop dead!’ But this is in essence what was happening.

If Jesus spelled it out to the Samaritan, why didn’t He spell it out to His disciples? There’s a reason for that. I think I can give you the answer to that. He says, ‘It’s unlawful to do that.’

Verse 44: “While Peter was still speaking these words... [to Cornelius and the Gentiles there] ...the Holy Spirit came upon all those who were listening to the message. And the believers from the circumcision were astonished...” (vs 44-45).

In a way I kind of like the *King James Version* of this. It has a word ‘astonied.’ I just like the sound of the word, but it’s the same thing. They were dumbfounded!

Mind you, this was the part of the circumcision. These were conservative Jews. Remember, they accepted Jesus as Savior. They

were part of the Church of God, and they were utterly astonished!

Remember, this was years after Jesus had been crucified and resurrected! *Years!* Jesus had said, ‘Go, therefore, into all the world and preach the Gospel.’ They still didn’t get it.

“...as many as had come with Peter, **that upon the Gentiles also the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out;** for they heard them speak in *other* languages and magnify God. Then Peter responded *by saying*, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have also received the Holy Spirit as we *did*?’ And he commanded them to be baptized...” (vs 45-47).

Acts 11:1: “Now, the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God.” Trust me, this spread like wildfire throughout the Jewish community. You better believe it did!

Verse 2: “and when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those of *the* circumcision disputed with him, saying, ‘You went in to men who were uncircumcised and did eat with them.’” (vs 2-3). ‘Peter! What were you thinking!’

Again, they couldn’t get it through their thick skulls! Peter had rehearsed his answer and you can read it through the next several verses.

Finally, v 17: “Therefore, if God also gave them the same gift that *was given* to us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I *to dissent*? Do I have the power to forbid God?” *Could I say, Lord, these are Gentiles, You know them! You can’t do this!* Peter said, ‘You can’t do that! Who am I to do that?’

Verse 18: “And after hearing these things, they were silent... [they shut their mouths; Peter shut them up] ...and they glorified God, saying... [this was a dumbfounding statement; this was so hard for them to grasp] ...**Then to the Gentiles also has God indeed granted repentance unto life.**” These Gentiles, spiritually speaking, were now neighbors of the Jews; neighbors of the Church of God. The neighborhood was expanding. *Phenomenal!* They did not actually get that.

What they heard is found in Matt. 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes.

Matthew 5:43: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” There was a reason for that, there really was. There was a good reason why they thought that.

Psalms 139:19: “Surely You will slay the wicked, O God; therefore, you bloody men, depart from me, for they speak against You wickedly and

Your enemies take Your name in vain. O LORD, do I not hate those who hate You? And am I not grieved with those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies” (vs 19-22).

Here was David saying that he hated the enemies of God. These individuals were lifting this out of context. David was talking about perfectly loving God, and despising and hating those acts of treason, violence, rebellious acts against God. David was one who was emotional. He said and did things with his heart. Sometimes he said things without fully thinking it through, too, but nevertheless, nationalists hung on to this. Jesus had to dispel this, and He elevated the teaching. This, we would say, is a hard saying.

Matthew 5:43: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you... [Ouch! That’s a hard saying] ...so that you yourselves may be *the* children of your Father Who *is* in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *on the* good, and sends rain on *the* just and *on the* unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? And if you salute your brethren only, what have you done *that is* extraordinary? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? Therefore, you shall be perfect...” (vs 43-48)—or *become perfect*.

That’s tough! Yet, we’re going to see that God and Jesus did exactly that. Incredibly so! *It’s the same for us!*

Why did Jesus not spell this out to the disciples? This took place the night before Jesus’ death; the night before He was being crucified. He’s giving a long, long discourse to His disciples: teaching them, instructing them, encouraging them.

I’ve read this many, many times and now I’m beginning to understand what He meant by that. He said:

John 16:12: “I have yet many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear them now. However, when that one has come, *even* the Spirit of the Truth, it will lead you into all Truth because it shall not speak from itself, but whatever it shall hear, it shall speak. And it shall disclose to you the things to come” (vs 12-13).

I submit to you that one of the things that Jesus believed—and He knew it—that they could not bear at that time was the understanding that the Gentiles were going to receive His love as much as a the Israelites. It took years—a decade or more—after

the crucifixion, with the help of God’s Spirit and their experiences, to bring them to the point where they could begin to accept it. They couldn’t bear it.

Read John 6 where Jesus is explaining that unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, unless you drink His blood, you have no part in Him. By the way, He was talking to His disciples, not just the 12, and what did they say? *This is a hard saying!*

John 6:60: “Therefore, after hearing *these words*, many of His disciples said, ‘**This is a hard saying**. Who is able to hear it?’”

Verse 66: “From that *time*, many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him.” They couldn’t take it. They didn’t have God’s Spirit and the grounding, yet. But it took that much for even the Church of God brethren that the neighborhood was going to expand to the entire world.

What’s most interesting about loving your enemies, we’re going to see that the Father and Jesus asks of us nothing that He has not already done and is doing.

Romans 5:8: But God commends His own love to us because, when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, therefore, having been justified now by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, **when we were enemies**, we were reconciled to God through the death of His own Son...” (vs 8-10)

Do you realize what Paul is saying? All of us were enemies. God didn’t just call His friends. All of us were enemies. *Enmity!* The human mind, the carnal nature is enmity against God! **Christ died for enemies!** So, in essence He’s asking of us than what He has already done and continues to do. He said it specifically in:

John 15:13: “No one has greater love than this: that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you” (vs 13-14). His neighbor friends!

You and I have neighbors and sometimes those neighbors run the gamut of ‘the good, the bad and the ugly.’ We’ve got good neighbors, bad neighbors and oh, sometimes we have down right ugly neighbors! It doesn’t matter, Christ died for all of them, and He died for us!

So, when you think about it, God has actually demonstrated that He loves us; we’re talking about the Divine Creator of heaven and earth. Remember the video *The Almighty God!* The One Who created all the stars, all the galaxies, electron, protons, neutrons, the entire force; all the electrical and magnetic forces.

That God demonstrated that He loves us as much as He loves Himself!

If that doesn't get to you, I don't know what would! So therefore, ***it is up to us to strive, with all of God's help and all of His Spirit, to indeed love all our neighbors as we love ourselves!***

Scriptural References:

- 1) Luke 10:25-37
- 2) Numbers 5:1-3
- 3) Leviticus 2:1-4
- 4) John 4:4-9, 19-23, 27
- 5) Acts 10:1-3, 5, 15, 28, 44-47
- 6) Acts 11:1-3, 17-18
- 7) Matthew 5:43
- 8) Psalm 139:19-22
- 9) Matthew 5:43-48
- 10) John 16:12-13
- 11) John 6:60, 66
- 12) Romans 5:8-10
- 13) John 15:13-14

Scripture referenced, not quoted: Leviticus 18:18

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