

“And this Gospel,” shall be preached... Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

The Good Samaritan

If you combine all of God's laws (as Christ did), all of God's laws and prophets come to two great principles — love toward God and love toward your neighbor. But there's a problem. If you don't know who your neighbor is, how can you love him?

Reading in Matthew 22:37: a lawyer came to Christ, and he said, “Which is the greatest commandment?” And Christ answered, “You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind — this is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Who is your neighbor?

We take it for granted that we know who our neighbor is. But there have been times when people didn't quite know. It seems some of us in the Church of God don't know either.

Interestingly enough, the first part — love toward God — is misunderstood by humans as a whole because man doesn't know God. How can you love someone you don't know? The Church of God should know who God is; so perhaps we can love God more than someone in the world. But it seems some in the world know who their neighbors are better than we do.

I want to show you who your neighbor is. I John 4:20-21 in effect says, “If you don't love your neighbor, you cannot love God . . . for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he hasn't seen? And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.”

Now of course you say, “Well, you're talking about a brother, not a neighbor.” But you see, there's our problem. Oftentimes we think only our brother is our neighbor. We don't realize that people in the world — others, strangers, enemies — are also our neighbors. We should have toward them the same attitude that we have toward our brothers.

Some of us do things to help someone only when asked to, not spontaneously as a Christian should. Why? Because we pretend sometimes (just as I'm going to show you now) not to know who the neighbor is.

Throughout my ministry I've had people ask me questions: not to understand but in hopes of justifying their not doing whatever it is they don't want to do. Would you believe a lawyer who knows the law would do the same thing in asking Christ the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

Lawyers always have good questions, but they sometimes pretend they don't understand. So in Luke 10:25 another lawyer came to Christ. He wanted to put Christ to the test, so he said, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Put yourself in the lawyer's mind. Now this man knows the law. He also knows that he's talking to a master — he calls Him master or teacher — he says, “What shall I do? You tell me; I'll do it.”

So Christ answered him: “Well, after all, you're a lawyer. What does the Book say?”

The man showed his knowledge, he said (verse 27): “Well, it's written, You shall love 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.” Christ liked the answer. Christ said, “You have it right — perfect.”

But the second problem is in verse 29: “But he, desiring to justify himself. . . . He knew the law, but he didn't want to love his neighbor, so he said, “I just don't know who my neighbor is. How can I love him?” Good old human nature, pretending.

Now if you were Christ, how would you have an-

swered him? Don't forget people then had their racial problems just as we have today, their own laws and religions. The Jews only considered their own people to be neighbors. So Christ began to give a parable, which you have heard hundreds of times.

The Samaritan's neighbor

Verse 30: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed leaving him half dead.” Now what would you, a Christian, do if you came along and saw this man?

Verse 31: “Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him” — look what it says — “he passed by on the other side.” Now why did he do that? Would you say he pretended not to see him? Possibly. Would you say that maybe he was busy? Possibly.

You might say, “Well, maybe he said a short prayer in his mind.” Maybe he did. What good is that? There's a man there dying, and you say, “Well, God, take care of him, would You? I'm quite busy right now!” And you just go by!

Verse 32: “So likewise a Levite. . . .” He also is supposed to be a man of religion. He should know the Old Testament and how to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Did he say a prayer in his mind, too, as he passed by? Sometimes we act this way in the Church; we'll let someone else do certain things.

Verse 33: “But a Samaritan as he journeyed came to where he was.” Now, from a historical point of view, the Samaritans and the Jews were enemies. The Jews dislike the Samaritans because the Samaritans were of a slightly different race and certainly not pure Israelites. They even considered their hybrid religion to be worse than paganism. Samaritans and Jews didn't talk or have any relationship with each other. But here's a man who has enough courage; he stops. Why? “Because he had compassion” (verse 33).

When you have compassion, action follows. Verse 34: The Samaritan “went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own beast and brought him to the inn and took care of him.”

This Samaritan was not ignorant; he knew how to take care of the injured. He must have been busy. But he stopped whatever he was busy doing, because to him the half-dead man was much more important.

He stayed at the inn with the person, took care of him all night. Afterward he gave money to the innkeeper, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.” Fantastic!

Christ said (verse 36), “Which of these three do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” Of course, the lawyer could give no other answer than a grudging “The one who showed mercy.”

And Christ said, “Go and do likewise.”

As you can see, only a stranger — one outside the true religion — knew how to love his neighbor as himself.

Could you or I be guilty of priest or Levite reasoning in our activities? Do we sometimes just pray about someone who is in need when actually we can do something for him? We should pray. But sometimes we can do much more. After you pray, if there is something else you can do, you better do it.

Proverbs 3:28 shows the same principle: “Do not say to your neighbor, Go and come again, tomorrow I

will give it — when you have it with you.”

Living the Golden Rule

Actually it is much harder to love our neighbor as ourself than to love God. It takes much more conversion because sometimes that neighbor hates you, is your enemy, maybe doesn't deserve it.

In Isaiah 58:6-7, God says, “Look, what do I care about your fasting if you don't have the right attitude?” What does He care about your praying if you don't do what lies in your power? But what does God want? “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless, poor, into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

How often in the Church when you have heard from the pulpit that there is a need for something or someone have you actually volunteered?

Church people used to say, “Well, you only have to love the brethren, no one else.” It was, of course, misunderstanding, but we had the attitude of looking down upon people in the world. Our love toward our neighbor was limited. I hope we know better today.

Christ says, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:32). He's putting us right on the same level as sinners. That's an awfully strong statement to us.

“And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you?” (verse 34) The good Samaritan had no idea who the man was. He had no expectation the man would ever repay.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return” (verse 35).

You might add, expecting evil in return sometimes, but help even if evil is returned for your good. He concludes, “[then] your reward will be great.”

In Luke 14:12 Christ explains another principle: “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.” There is nothing wrong with having your friends. What's wrong is the last part — “lest they invite you in return.” Invite because you want to help — that's a different story.

So He says in verses 13 and 14: “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

So when you find someone who needs help, who cannot help you back, you know who your neighbor is.

Looking at the outside

Now let me tell you an old European story about a Turkish priest named Hoja, who must have been a philosopher. One day he is invited to a banquet, and he goes, but he wants to see if people like him or like him for what he is. So he goes with very poor clothing, unannounced. And people look at him. No one talks to him and finally they push him into one corner. He says: “I see now they don't like me. They like greatness; they like power.”

So he goes out, changes his clothes, gets a big fur coat and comes in again. They all look at him and they say, “Oh, sir, please come in.” They give him the place of honor, then begin serving him. Do you know what he does? He takes his fur coat off; he says to it: “Eat. That food is for you, not for me. I came, nobody even paid attention to me. But you, fur coat, because of you I'm being served. You deserve it, I don't deserve it.”

James 2 shows the same example: “My brethren, (See GOOD SAMARITAN, page 5)

This sermon was delivered by Dibar Apatian, an evangelist-ranked minister in the Pasadena churches and director of the French Work.

Good Samaritan

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show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, Have a seat here, please, while you say to the poor man, Stand there or Sit at my feet, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

"Listen, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith? Suppose God had called us because we had fur coats, because we were rich, because we were intelligent. I'm sure that most of us would not be here. God looks at the inside. But we tend to look at the outside rather than on the heart.

"But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you; is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the honorable name, which was invoked over you?" You see, the more you have this type of wealth, the more you find that type of attitude rather than the one who really is close to God.

'As you love yourself'

Your neighbor is anyone who is in need of help. And Christ says you have to love him *as you love yourself*. Which means what? It means you have to go all the way as though you were the one in need.

The Old Testament principles are still true. Leviticus 19:13-15, for example: "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him." That includes paying the full amount of whatever you owe him. "The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning.

"You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling-

block before the blind." This is loving your neighbor in its simplest form, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

"You shall do no injustice in judgments." If you have to decide something, don't be a respecter of persons. "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."

That's Old Testament? No, it's very much New Testament. But so far, it's easy — a passive religion. What makes it difficult is that you are to love your enemy, and you are to love him as much as you love yourself.

How can you do that? Romans 12 can show us. Verse 14: "Bless those who persecute you." If someone says something bad to you or about you, what do you answer back? Well, answer something nice. Don't return evil for evil.

Verse 15: "Rejoice with those who rejoice." That is, participate. If someone has problems, sit down with him, help him. If need be, "weep with those who weep." Love is something of which you can never have less by giving more.

Christ says be a light (Matthew 5:16). That means that you are to be a neighbor. To help someone, to encourage someone, to give him hope, to set him an example, to cause him to turn to God.

"Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble . . . live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay." The moment you begin to want to get even, you don't love your neighbor as yourself. You don't even know who your neighbor is.

No longer unprofitable servants

Now let's see another hard statement. Peter came and said (Matthew 18:21-22): "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Christ said to him, I do not say to you

seven times, but seventy times seven." If you have this attitude where there is no limit on forgiving, you're bound to be having love.

Because Christ forgave and kept on loving, He gave His life. And even as they were killing, torturing, mocking, making fun, Christ said on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:59-60). Would you honestly have this thought if you were being stoned? Do you realize that unless you would, you won't make the Kingdom of God?

When Christ comes in His glory to separate His sheep from the goats, He will say to those on His right, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom." There's a reward based on the very story of the good Samaritan, believe it or not. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

The interesting part is that His hearers have no idea what He is talking about. They never saw Christ hungry, naked or thirsty.

Then He will tell all the goats, "Depart from me," because "I was hungry . . . and naked . . . and thirsty . . ." And they will say the same thing, "We never saw you that way." No, but they saw their neighbor that way and turned away.

Your neighbor is anyone who is in need at any time. And you are supposed to give him help. But it's still not sufficient until you go over and above like the good Samaritan did.

So look what Christ says to you and to me, Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded of you, say, We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."