

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD SERIES

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Luke 10: 25-27 "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, what is written in the law? What is your reading of it? So he answered and said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

It speaks about love. Loving our neighbor as our self. Verse 28 "And He said to him you have answered rightly, do this and you will live. But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?" That is what we are going to talk about this morning. Who is my neighbor? We have talked about the love of God but the love of God is easier shown to those you meet once in a while than those who live in the same house with you. Sometimes we pick and choose who we want to love, whom we want to show love to, whom we want to let the compassion of God flow through. So Jesus spoke this parable to answer the question who is my neighbor. He is not just telling us about the story about compassion, although it does cover compassion and the kindness of the Samaritan but He is speaking here in answer to the question who is my neighbor. Here He speaks about a parable. There is where we have the famous parable of the Good Samaritan.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing and wounded him and departed leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came that road and when he saw him, he

passed by on the other side. Passed by was not enough, he has to pass by on the other side. That is the priest. So here we have the scene of that man lying down. The Good Samaritan has not come yet. So he could be lying down on one side of the road. I guess the road was not like our broad highways today. In those days the roads are quite narrow. So the poor man was lying on one side of the road where the thieves left him. I guess the priest was probably on his way to worship God. The priest was on his way to do some religious assignment or activities. And if I read what the bible says here, the priest was probably walking on the same side of the road as that poor man. There is no reason for him to cross on the other side if he was on the other side. So the other side refers to the opposite side where the man was. He was walking in the same side. He was walking along that road to fulfill his religious activities in Jerusalem. He came to that man and he wouldn't even want to come near that man for the purpose of avoiding that man. He went over the other side. There the man was down there and would be saying, "Help, help" and the other man would be on this side and he just looked this way and walked past. Now of all things he was a priest. Priest was supposed to be helping the people. In our days he would have been a pastor. Could you imagine that? The pastor comes by and sees that man there; there he is half dead, half naked, wounded, bruised. The only sound that comes from him was "help, help." Can you imagine a pastor walking on the other side and then just passed him by leaving that man? That hits us pastors harder because we can identify that the priest is the religious leader at that time. That was the first man.

Here comes the second. Jesus said in verse 32, "*Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.*" So this was slightly better. See the first man came, he saw. The word saw is usually used from a distance. The priest saw and went on the other side and he walked by. But this Levite came near to the man. Came, looked and then quickly went on the other side and continued his journey. All he did was look.

Then came a third man. Jesus called him a Samaritan. A Samaritan would have been a man that was shut out of the normal Jewish society. See Samaritans and Jews normally have no dealings. It is just like a Jewish man was injured and then two Jewish men came by and walked on the other side. Then here comes an Arab and he looked at this Jewish man. They are already enemies. He might

have looked and said, "Very good, you deserved it." He has all the right to say that under normal circumstances. So this is what the Samaritans are to the Jews. The Samaritans and the Jews are like the Jews and the Arabs today. Here is the Samaritan; there are a lot of barriers to the Samaritan in the natural to helping him. No. 1 There was no relationship between them. No.2 As far as race is concerned, their races were at enmity. There was a cultural barrier; there was a relationship barrier. And the third area is that the Samaritan was on a business trip. This was out of his way. That was a social barrier. It has nothing to do with his program. It was not part of his planned program.

So here comes the Samaritan, and as he look at this man, in verse 33, *"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animals, brought him to an inn, and took care of him."* That's not bad, the Samaritan came on a donkey. The priest came walking, the Levite came walking but here comes the Samaritan on a donkey. He gets down from his animal, helped the man, bandaged his wound and after everything, he sacrificed his donkey, carried him with all his bleeding and put him on the donkey. The Samaritan has to walk. It's quite inconvenient. He has to go out of the way to inconvenience himself and not only that, the first place he landed was a small motel. He comes to the place, he said to the innkeeper in verse 35, *"and he said, take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you."* In other words, he paid money for this man to stay at the motel. He said charge it all to my account and when you see me again, I will settle all the bills. He really went all out of the way, inconvenienced himself, took account of his whole expenses of this man. And after the whole parable, Jesus went into such detail. Jesus turned around and said, in verse 36, *"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And He said, 'He who showed mercy on him.' Then Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise."*

The purpose of His parable was to show who is my neighbor. All of us have a circumference around our life. In other words, you go through certain circumstances. You meet different people that I meet. Your life revolves around a different group of people. Some of the people are the same, like in church but otherwise you meet certain groups of people and you have certain activities in

your life. That is what I call the circumference of your life. And the priest came, and he had his own certain activities. Here was the poor pilgrim injured, half dead and wounded. He had his own life and so the two circles meet. The priest said, "I don't want to let him into the circle of my life. His suffering is his suffering. My life is my life." So he never opened the circle of his life out. He just went aside and walked on. That priest never enters the circle of the injured man's life. Likewise the injured man never enters the circle of that priest's life. Came the Levite, the same story. But the Samaritan had business, he had his own activities and here he comes. He could have said, "Your life is your life. My life is my life." When he came he took that man into the circle of his activities. He got that man involved as a part of his life. He became involved in that man's life. That man became involved in his life.

So all of us have a circumference circle by which we conduct our life. For example, when you go to the supermarket, you normally would not spend much time there. You should be reading your bible, and when you go to the supermarket, you don't sort of hang around. You want to hang around, hang around praying and have some other spiritual activities. So you don't go to the supermarket and get to know people there. People are walking all around and you say, "Hello! What's your name?" You don't do that because in the supermarket everybody come and go, come and go. They don't bother about who you are or what your name is. Everybody has his or her own circle. So they are not opening their circle or their life, unless you meet your friend there. So what I mean is here are strangers that are meeting and each has his or her own circumference of life. They open their part of life to the other. So all of us have a circumference of our life. It's up to us whether we want to open the door of the circle to let someone to participate in our life and we participate in the other person's life.

There are some situations where the circle of your life already involved others. Like for example, your parents, your brothers and sisters in the family or those who live under the same roof. Or those in your office, or those in your school. They are already some people involved in the circle of your life. Your relatives or whatever it is. When Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," He is talking about loving those who come within the circumference of your life. He is not talking about someone very far away whom you see him

or her once in a blue moon. Sometimes the people you see once a year, if you see everyday, you may not like them as much. And that's the same way when people start getting to know each other. Do you know when people get to know each other and they fall on love. There are three stages. The first stage is they discover what is nice about each other and they try to be the same. It is a sub-conscious reaction as well as in their words and conversation. They try to find what is likable and what is similar. That's the first stage.

After sometime, when the blue moon has turned red, they begin to find what is not so nice about the other person. There are differences in opinion and differences about their character. They discover traits that are not so similar. Then they enter the second stage. They have to make a decision on how much they want to be involved in the circle of each other's life. If they get through the second stage, then they reach the third stage. After knowing all that is good about you, after knowing all that are not so nice things about you, then the third stage you say, "Well, I will still decide to love you." Then your love has matured. Before that your love is immature. You cannot stand the pressure of life.

So there are these three stages and in the same way there is a circle of our life where we want to emphasize here. That is you begin to develop love among those who are closest to you: your husband or your wife, brothers or sisters in Christ or the members of your family or those living under the same roof with you, in your office or in your school. They are not the thorn in your flesh. They are not the devil or enemy against you. You do not wrestle against flesh and blood. Don't you dare call your wife your thorn in the flesh. They are not. If they are then you must be worse because you married her. Your brothers and sisters are not your thorn in your flesh. Your love has to develop to them first before your love can develop to others whom you do not know.

Now this is what I believe happen as the background to the Samaritan, to the Levite and to the priest. The priest and the Levite probable was accustomed to religious activities. They do them out of duty and they have an objective and goal. Perhaps they are people who don't mind stepping over people's head to pursue their spiritual pursuit. When the Samaritan started helping the pilgrim, I don't think that was the first time he did it. It must have been part of his nature.

When he sees that he reacts the same way. When you react in the circumstances, you react out of what you already have. If you are someone who has a tendency to help others, then when that circumstance come, you will in all circumstances react the same way. If you are someone who turn the other side and walk on the other side then in that kind of circumstances, you will still do the same thing. I believe that the development came in his own private life. You can see the way the Samaritan talked to the innkeeper, like it was his old friend, saying charge it all to my account. You can see the closeness and relationship that he has and this is the point that we want to gather.

Those who are in your circle of life, if you do not love them and develop love for them, you will never be able to love others who are outside the circle or form love relationship with others outside your circle. You have to choose to show love to those within your circle. It is an easy thing to love those whom you don't meet so often but it's a different thing to show love to those you meet everyday. You have to develop love. You have to determine to love and to keep showing love. It is not easy but it is the very place where people failed or they succeed in developing love in their life. I have found out that sometimes those who have a poor family relationship become poor in relating to others. It seems natural. Do you know some people find it hard to relate when they come to a big group, in a class or in a church. You know what's the problem? They have a problem in their own home. In their own home they may not be close to their father or mother or brothers or sisters. So then when they come to the school, they find it difficult it develop relationships. But on the other hand, those who have good relationships at home, who have a close attachment, for example to their parents or to the brothers or sisters in Christ or to those who are living with them. When they move out, they tend to be very bold. They form relationships very fast. They are not filled with fear. So your relationship within your own family will affect your relationship with other people no matter how much you try to avoid that. If you cannot get close to your parents it will affect your life. Later on you will reap what you sow.

See Samuel was called to be a prophet. But Samuel when he grew up, he had a problem with his children. Look at I Samuel verse 8 *"Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel."* Samuel was married, he had sons and he made his sons judges. Verse 2-3, *"The name of his*

first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice."

Samuel was the prophet, had a powerful and anointed ministry, a mighty man of God, yet his sons took bribes. His sons were not righteous. Tell me why did it happen? When I prayed and sought the Lord, the Lord said it is because Samuel in his life has a flaw in his life. He never knew what a good family should be like. If you remember he was born into a family of Elkanah who had two wives Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was one of two wives and those two wives never agreed. He spent the early part of his life as an infant in his family. His family was a poor example. They were divided. That's why some want to excuse themselves and say it says in the bible: David got many wives. Solomon got many wives. Elkanah got many wives. And I reply, "I know what you are saying. You want to have many wives, why don't you just say it; I want to have many wives instead of trying to excuse yourself." Do you notice that all those who got more than one wife got problems without fail because it was not the perfect plan of God.

Jesus makes it very clear. In the beginning it was not so. Follow the man of God but don't follow them when they fall. Don't follow the imperfection. In the beginning it was not so. So here he is in the family where there were two wives and he is one of those sons. If you read I Samuel, they were not in good term. He never knew a happy home. So that resulted in a flaw in him. When Eli adopted him, Eli was also not a very good father. Do you remember Eli his sons, you know what they were doing? In the temple they were sleeping with the woman. His sons were greedy sons. When people came to give the offering, before everything was burnt, before the blood was cleansed, they grab it and the person who offer it say wait. God was angry with Eli's sons. So Samuel never had the opportunity to see a perfect family. When he grew up, he is good in his ministry but because he never knew what a good home is like so he produced the same thing. He was responsible for that. See if you don't develop your relationship with those you know, no matter where you go, no matter where you run, you will face the same thing.

I once talked with one person in the ministry many years back. This person had never known authority and this person whenever he confronts a hard situation he would run. He would go to another church to try to serve. When the same circumstances come, the person would run. That person hopped from church to church until he had gone to about five to six churches. And I asked him, "When are you going to stop running?" See the problem is that such persons are not confronting and correcting their own weaknesses. They are trying to hide from themselves not from others. One of the blessings that God promised Abraham was because and conditioned upon Genesis 18: 7 when He said, I know that he will command his children to obey Me. So parents relating well with their children is very important. On the opposite side, the children relating well with the parents is also important.

We talked about love, if we don't practice it and start doing it in the home; it's not going to work outside. Lets be realistic about it. It's not going to work in the church if you cannot work it in your home. Do you know the bible says he who does not rule his own home, how can he rule the household of God? If it doesn't work in your home, in your circumstances, don't expect it to work outside. Somewhere along the line it's going to falter and fall. I did not say that you have to be perfect, I did not say that you cannot make any mistake but I say that if ever you make mistake you must know how to come back together to love. Lets face it.

Thy neighbor are those you live with, those who are around circumference of your life, those whom you contact daily. These are the people you have to start showing your love. Don't say I will show love to the people in the church and not to the people in my office because they are non-believers. You are obligated to show love to those within your circle, those who you contact with, you cannot run away from that fact. And you have to show love to your brothers and sisters in the Lord. You have to show love to Christians in the same church. You have to show to those who are under the same roof with you. And children, whether you like it or not, you have to learn to show love to your parents. Learn to respect them. I have found that many people have problem in relating to others because they never learned to relate to their own parents. I tell you the Holy Spirit will get at you. The Holy Spirit went after me for that. When I was in the second year in my seminary, the Holy Spirit dealt with me. See all these

things the Holy Spirit has dealt with me. If I had not allowed the Holy Spirit to change me in my relationship with my parents, today my ministry would not take off. It's those inner things, small little things that the Spirit of God would deal in your private life that will change you in the public.

See I grew up in a broken home, we were one family together but I was never close to my brothers or sisters in the flesh. I was never sort of in good communication term with my parents. We were a typical oriental home. I mean children are to be seen not heard. And so in that kind of home we didn't know love. All we knew was to be quiet. Don't be noisy and don't do anything they don't like. Throughout my life, my father, my mother never said I love you. And I also never said that to them. I could get away with it but the Holy Spirit in the second year of seminary dealt with me. He said, "When you go home for the holidays, I want you to tell them you love them." I said "Oh no, it's difficult." The Holy Spirit kept at it. He never gives up. When I went home, my father was sitting on his armchair and I said, "Pa I got something to tell you. I just want to tell you that I appreciate you for bringing me up and that I really love you." I don't know what happened in his life but in my life something happened. Because I broke through in love to those whom are in my circle, I was able to love others whom I have never met earlier. And sometime after that my father came to know the Lord. I don't know whether if it's because of that. So we are obligated to love each other, especially to those under the same roof.

The next time you talk about love thy neighbor as thyself, not just loving someone you see once in a while but loving those who live under the same roof with you. That guy that you may not like so much, your parents who may have made mistakes in front of you, your husband or your wife who has made mistakes. It is those very people the Lord Jesus is talking about. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The opposite is true as I said about children loving their parents. Exodus 20, one of the Ten Commandments is you shall honor thy father and mother. I found that those who have never honored their father and mother, their Christian life have problems. Somehow if they never breakthrough to that Ten Commandments, something hinders their life and their ministry. It can almost literally be seen. There is something lacking in their life. Something that's not there that should have been there. They do not know their parents.

Eph. 6: 1-4, Jesus still demands the same thing when it comes to honoring your parents. Let me give you two points on loving those who are close to you. You have to know the difference between idolizing and loving. On one extreme when you just ignore and you don't love. The other extreme is when these people become like God. That is when Jesus said in Luke 14 that if you love Me, those who are your husband, your wife, your children, Jesus said if you love Me you must hate them. What does Jesus mean when He said hate them? This is what Jesus mean: In the gospel of Mark when He talked about you cannot love two masters, for you will love one and hate the other. He is not talking about showing hatred otherwise He contradicts the other part of the scripture. What Jesus is saying is that the love you have for the Lord is so great, when you compare it to your love for others; it is like the difference between love and hate. That only one is your master; only one is your God. But as result of loving God, you will love your neighbor. So there are two extremes. You have to know what the balance is. Do you know on the opposite side, some honor their family above the Lord? That's not the opposite extreme. So love is balance. You should know how to press on in love.

The second point on love in Matthew 7, it says what you want others to do to you, do it to them first. If you want your parents to be loving to you, you have to do it first. If you want your children to be loving to you, you have to do it first. If you want others to love you, you have to love first. Jesus positive statement, if you want others do to you, you do it first.

The third area is one of the most important. Love does not take advantage. Love knows its limitation. II Cor. 11, you will notice that Paul in writing to the Corinthians, he talks about how he doesn't want to be a burden to them in verse 9.

Lets read verse 8 to 10. *"I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.*

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.” Notice he says in verse 9, I don’t want to be a burden to you. Love does not take advantage. Do you think Paul love them? Look at II Cor.2: 4 “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.”

Paul loves them and he stayed with them. One of the reasons he wrote Corinthians is because the Corinthians were being swayed by false apostles. These apostles came and they began to take advantage of the Corinthians. One of the things they did was they took the offerings from these Corinthians. Paul never did that. II Cor. 11: 20 *“for you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you.”* He is talking in reference to those other ministers who came to the Corinthians, claimed to be somebody and then began to take from them. The Corinthians felt happy to give and they asked *“Why doesn’t Paul take from us?”* So Paul wrote to them and explained the reason. He did not want to be a burden to them because he loves them so much. He never wants to take advantage of them. Now that is an area of love when we talk about close circle of love. Because if you open yourself to another person and the other person open the circle to you and others, do you know that sometimes you can take advantage? Human love takes advantage. But agape love never takes advantage, because when you love someone, you actually put yourself in a vulnerable position. You make yourself vulnerable to be hurt, vulnerable to be robbed. When you set yourself to love another, you will not take advantage of another.

Do you know that love has to have self restrain? One of the things Paul said about love in I Cor. 13 is that love is becoming mature. Look at I Cor. 13: 11 *“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”*

He is talking about love. Love is maturity. Your operation of the gifts of the Spirit, your operation in the ministry does not show maturity as much as you show love. That’s the reason why we teach a series on love because love seems to be the most important thing in the bible. And it would be a shame if we never

taught on that. We have taught about faith, taught about healing, taught about anointing, it will be a shame if we never taught about love. Love is God and God is love. People need to be taught the love of God. Now this is what is like. When little children grow up, they don't know the limitation of their action. They have to be told by others what they can do and what they cannot do. Isn't that typical of children? They misbehave then we say you cannot do this. They run all over the chairs, so you say, you cannot do that. What happens, the adults are coming in to set the limits to what they can do and what they cannot do. That's typical of children and being childish. But when you grow up, you have to have self restrain. In other words, you don't behave like a child and do what you want. You don't have to wait for others to give you the rules. Which is where we say, love learns and knows how not take advantage. You control yourself.

Take for example, something very simple. You live in the same dormitory with people. You share the same refrigerator and all have limited funds. You buy your breakfast, your bread, your butter, etc. Somebody comes and says, "Praise God, I love peanut butter," and you never ask the owner of that peanut butter. You say, "Well, we are brothers in Christ. We are one family." And that was the last he ever saw his peanut butter. What happens is you claim to have love but your love have taken advantage. You know the brother won't mind, you know he is a kind hearted brother but if it had been another brother who have come and punch you right on your nose, you wouldn't dare to touch that person's peanut butter anymore. So what is happening here? You are allowing others to set the standard for you. Love knows how to set its own standard. Love is maturity. Love is not childish. Why do you have to wait for another person to come and say, "Look here! This is my tenth peanut butter that you finished in two days." Then the person has to tell you, "If you want to take the peanut butter, please just take two don't take ten." What is happening here is the other person has to tell you how to behave. The other person has to tell you what is the limit of your conduct. Look at it very carefully, it is just an adult who has grown up in the flesh but has not grown up in the soul. Childishness is still there.

Love does not take advantage. Love knows its limit. For example, as a minister of God, let me tell you how it can affect the ministry. If I travel and stay

in somebody's house, I will know my limit. I don't have to wait for you to tell me what my limits are. For example, I come and stay in your house and I empty your refrigerator. You bought a bunch of grapes and you say, "Hi brother, help yourself." If I really take your word and I helped myself to the bunch of grapes, I didn't consider you might have bought it to share with your whole family. And you came to take some fruits for your children and you found there was nothing left in the refrigerator. What is happening here? I have taken advantage of your love. I have no self-control, no self-restrain. Love has self-control. So even when a person offers, for example, a person says anytime you have a need, just let me know. Doesn't mean that everyday you phone up and say this is what I need. But do you know that some people would do that? This is what I mean - these people are childish. They have no agape love because agape love does not take advantage. If you behave that way in the ministry and if you travel and people host you, they will never want to be the host again. So when I stay in people's house, I don't want to inconvenience them. I have to know my limit. They have inconvenienced themselves to a certain extend. So I don't want to overstep the boundary. I don't wait for them to tell me what the rules are. I have to set the own rules if I have love and maturity. There is self-control in love.

Now in the ministry of God we have to learn the same thing, otherwise our ministry will have a bad reputation. I have people come to me and say if you have any needs just let me know. But I have never asked one cent. Why, because I set my own standard. Why should I ask? I don't want to take advantage of love. Can you see the limitation of love? Love must know its limitations but many times I have to help another ministry to come up. Some of them would grab at every opportunity, which is where you know their love has not developed.

Do you know people appreciate you if you respect the boundaries? People will lose the respect of you if you don't set a boundary. They will see you as a child. Paul says, when I was a child, I spoke as a child. When I grow up, I know the limitations. And sometimes some of those ministers will come and say I want to join the ministry here because the way we set up the church we are opened to many ministries. And many times when I sit down and talk to them, I talk frankly and openly with them. I pulled out things that people will hide. I said, lets talk about financial arrangement because if we don't talk it out, it's

going to come up somewhere in the future and then we are going to have a quarrel and its not going to glorify the Lord. I don't want the person to come into the ministry and say I am on this church's payroll. So for that reason, sometimes people don't know their limitations. But if you have agape love, you would set limitations on yourself.