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## **DOING, TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE.**

– LUKE 10:25-37. – SEPT. 9. –

GOLDEN TEXT: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"  
– Lev. 19:18.

PROBABLY while our Lord was preaching, and his audience seated about him, either upon the hillside or in a synagogue, a lawyer stood up, and thus politely intimated his desire to say a word in connection with the subject under discussion. The term "lawyer," amongst the Jews at that time, signified one versed in the Law of Moses, one claiming to be able to expound that Law, and to teach others its true meaning. Such persons today we term theologians. These were also termed scribes or learned men – irrespective of their religious convictions, some of them adhering to one view and some to another; some being Pharisees, [R2683 : page 251] others Sadducees, etc., – each endeavoring to interpret the Law in harmony with the teachings of the sect to which he adhered.

Luke does not give us the connections, but quite possibly this lawyer raised his question in connection with some discourse in which our Lord held forth that he himself was the Bread of Life, of which, if a man eat, he may live forever – or in which he had been representing himself as the Good Shepherd, who would give his life for the sheep; or as the Redeemer who had come, that God's people might have life, and that more abundantly – eternal life. This lawyer (or, as some today would say, this D.D.) was probably of the Sadducees, who denied a resurrection and any future or eternal life, interpreting the Law, which promises life upon certain conditions, as merely a decoy, intended to promote holiness amongst the Lord's people, but nevertheless a deception, since the holiest and most faithful of the race had not inherited eternal life, but had gone down into death, even as others.

In this view of the matter this Jewish D.D. propounded to our Lord a question, hoping that the answer would give room for a discussion, in which he would be able to show himself the greater of the two teachers, and to prove to his pupils, at least (who were probably present with him), that his theories were correct – that no matter how faithfully the Law might be kept no reward of eternal life would be given, and that faith in Christ would be equally futile in this respect. The Evangelist says he asked the question, "tempting" the Lord, that is, to prove him, to draw him out, to expose the weakness of his argument: saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" You recognize me as a scribe, a doctor of the Law, a teacher; as one, therefore, who is living a godly and upright life, so far, at least, as his neighbors and pupils may be able to discern. Looking back I see that the holiest and best of our nation (the holiest nation in the world, and the only one recognized of God) have not inherited eternal life. I see that, on the contrary, they have died as other men; I see that for some cause (whether it be the Lord's failure to fulfil his promise, or man's failure to comply with the conditions) all have died, none having attained eternal life. Tell me now, what shall I do that I may not share the same fate of death – that I may live everlastingly?

Our Lord answered the question with great directness, at the same time signifying his unquestioning faith in the promises of God, that whatever God had promised he would surely fulfil – implying, therefore, that if he failed to obtain eternal life it would be his own fault, and not the fault of God. Our Lord practically said, I stand by the Scriptural record: you are versed in the Law; quote, as you understand it, the teachings of the Law on this subject.

The answer shows that this Doctor of the Law was well versed, for he quoted correctly the most direct statement on the subject to be found in the Law. Our Lord's reply was equally to the point: "Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live" – I confirm the Law; I uphold it; I vouch for its truthfulness; none who keep that Law can

possibly die. The difficulty with all Jews who have died has been, that they did not fulfil that Law requirement toward God and man.

The Doctor of the Law was trapped. He had hoped to entangle Jesus in a discussion, and had himself become entangled; for the great Teacher had pointed out that the fault was not in God – that God was not unfaithful to his agreement under the Law; that the fault lay with the people. And this included the lawyer as well as the remainder of the race; and that he so understood it is implied in the statement, "He, desiring to justify himself, said, And who is my neighbor?" It was very shrewd of the lawyer to avoid discussing the first commandment, respecting the love for God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength; because no one can thoroughly judge another in respect to this feature of the Law; only God and each individual heart knows absolutely whether God is loved with every talent, every power of heart, of mind and of body. But others can judge to some extent respecting obedience to the second commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The lawyer felt that he could safely leave the first proposition and claim that none could judge his heart, provided he could "justify himself" in respect to the second proposition, his dealing with his neighbor. Hence it is that he brought up this point, saying, "But who is my neighbor?"

There was a difference of opinion amongst the most learned Jews on this subject of who is the neighbor meant in the Law, – some claiming that it meant all Jews, and Jews only. Others claimed that the word "neighbor" would mean only those Jews who lived holy lives. Thus the lawyer practically said, I shall be obliged to yield my contention and acknowledge you superior to myself as a teacher, unless we can get into a contention on this subject of who is the neighbor. In that event I shall at least be able to bring a strong argument that will appeal to all the hearers. But when the great Teacher had, in parable form, explained the true meaning of the word neighbor, the lawyer found himself without an argument.

Some have supposed that our Lord meant that this Doctor of the Law and others who heard him should understand that the Samaritan of the parable, by doing a kind and neighborly act, won for himself the inheritance of *eternal life*, and that our Lord meant further to teach that the lawyer and all of his hearers might inherit eternal life if they would go and do likewise – do as the [R2684 : page 252] Samaritan did – do good, help their neighbors. This view is a serious error. In the first place, we do not know that any Samaritan ever did just such an act of kindness. It was merely a parable, a suggestion: Suppose that such conditions existed, and suppose that a Samaritan had done such an act, would he not be a good "neighbor"? The reward of eternal life was not offered on condition of being a good neighbor merely. This was one of the conditions (the one the lawyer questioned), but it was quite secondary to the main proposition – Thou shalt love the Lord with every power and talent of mind and body. The lesson which the lawyer and every other Jew needed to learn was that no imperfect man could possibly fulfil that requirement. All so learning that "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), would be prepared to look for the promised Messiah as, first of all, their sin-bearer, to justify them and to discipline them and make them perfect and able to obey the Law.

Our Lord in the parable represents a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan, in order to give force to the matter. The priest was specially consecrated to God, the Levite also was consecrated (and most of the Doctors of the Law were Levites), while the Samaritans were outcasts, without God and having no hope in the world, aliens and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. The Samaritans, altho they lived in a part of the land of Israel, shared none of Israel's promises; but, as our Lord testified, "Ye worship ye know not what: we [Jews] know what we worship; for *salvation is of the Jews.*" The Samaritan, therefore, was introduced into the parable to make a strong contrast before the minds of the hearers, and to say, A neighbor is one who does a neighborly act, however high or however low he may be in the scale of intelligence or dignity or divine favor.

What our Lord wished to prove to the lawyer and to all hearers was, that the Law was just and holy and good, and that any Jew complying with its conditions would inherit its promise – eternal life. He wished all of his hearers to realize, therefore, that the fact that neither they nor their fathers inherited eternal life proved, not that the Law was imperfect, but that they were imperfect, sold under sin, and unable, therefore, to comply with the just demands of the Law. It was difficult for the Jew to learn this great lesson; *viz.*, that he could not keep the perfect Law of God, and hence that he needed a Savior, a Redeemer, who would keep the Law for him, and thus justify him before God, and who would then grant him eternal life as a gift, as a favor – not of the Law, but of grace.

In harmony with this, the Apostle assures us who trust in the sacrifice for sins which Jesus gave, and who have entered into New Covenant relationship with God through him, that "the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us – the true sense, meaning, purport of the Law being in our hearts, God accepts this as instead of absolute fulfilment of the letter of the Law. The sacrifice of our Lord Jesus compensating for all our imperfections, for all differences between the actual demands of the Law and our efforts to conform our lives thereunto, we, walking not after the flesh but after the spirit, are reckoned as no longer fleshly beings but new creatures.

### **THE GOOD SAMARITAN.**

Altho this parable of the good Samaritan was not given to illustrate by what good works the lawyer, or any other man, Jew or Gentile, might attain eternal life, but, on the contrary, was given merely to head off the argument of the lawyer, and to leave him without excuse, it nevertheless contains a rich lesson, which has brought a blessing to many. Not only has it made clear to many of the Lord's dear children the course of conduct pleasing in the Father's sight, *viz.*, that of generosity, love, benevolence, etc., but it has also brought blessing to many who are not the Lord's children, in that they

became recipients of mercies, favors and kindnesses in adversity which, otherwise, they might never have known.

The road leading from Jerusalem to Jericho has a steep downward grade through a rocky country, which abounds in caverns, the hiding places of highway robbers. It has always been a dangerous road, and on it the traveler is not entirely safe to this day, unless under some kind of a protective guard. This feature of the parable was, therefore, in strict accordance with the conditions of the time; so was the fact of the priest and the Levite passing, for Jericho was one of the appointed cities of the priests and Levites, and it is estimated that twelve thousand of them resided there then. These, with other priests and Levites from other parts, took their turns in the service at the Temple in Jerusalem, and, consequently, were frequently on this road.

Our Lord's parable seems to imply that the religion of the Jews, instead of bringing them nearer and nearer to the spirit of the Law, was really, by reason of the formalities and ceremonies and pride connected with it, tending to separate them further and further from the condition of heart which would be acceptable to God. The priest, most fully consecrated to the service of God in the Temple, is represented as having *least* interest in the brother in distress. He passed by on the other side (of the ravine), not counting the circumstance worthy of attention; reflecting, no doubt, with a self-righteous feeling respecting the honor of his own position as a servant of God, and unwilling to run the risk of ritual contamination. The Levite, also consecrated to God and his service, but not so high in **office [R2684 : page 253]** and privilege, was more disposed to consider the poor brother, and to render a helping hand. He went so far as to stand and look at the sufferer, and to think over how much trouble would be involved in assisting him, and how much risk he himself might run in so doing (altho we are inclined to believe that the priests and Levites were, on account of their office, generally exempted from molestation by the robbers).

Then our Lord chose, as the hero of his parable, a despised Samaritan, unrecognized by God and disowned by his favored people. This heightens the force of the picture, by suggesting the thought that one who had never learned at all respecting the true God and his will, one who had never been offered eternal life on the terms of obedience to that Law, might nevertheless exercise so much of brotherly kindness and sympathy as to lend a helping hand to a neighbor in distress.

And it is still true that many who, by reason of their better knowledge of God, through his Word and plan, should be possessed of a larger measure of his love and grace, are instead more deficient in these qualities than some who have been less highly favored. It might indeed be that some who are strangers to the covenants and promises of God as yet, possess, by reason of being well born, a large measure of natural generosity, benevolence, kindness, sympathy, and might be good Samaritans by nature, rather than by grace; and it may also be true that some who have been begotten again to the new life and to the new hopes may *naturally* have less of this good Samaritan element of kindness and generosity, because low born according to the flesh – born with a predominance of selfish proclivities. However, such an one, coming under "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus," will soon be taught in Christ's school, that love is the fulfilling of the Law; and if he be an obedient pupil he will gradually attain to a better appreciation of the heavenly Father, and in heart, in spirit, will learn to love him with all his mind, with all his being, with all his strength. And so surely as this condition obtains, and in proportion as the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, it will enlarge them also toward our fellow-creatures, so that every "new creature" must at heart come into such a degree of fulness of love toward God and toward his fellows as would make him not only an obedient and self-sacrificing son of God, but also a good Samaritan, a kind friend, a loving father and husband, a generous neighbor to all with whom he stands related. He will be a living exemplification of the Apostle's injunction, – doing good unto all men as he has opportunity, especially to the household of faith. – Gal. 6:10.

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