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*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)*

You can read all of this month's MOTT content in the e-mail message below, but you can also download a copy to your computer to save or print out a hard copy by clicking [HERE](#).



Previous issues of MOTT can be downloaded [HERE](#).

CORRECTION - A footnoted added to Bro. Tant's column in the May edition of MOTT indicated that John Iverson is dead. This is incorrect. Thanks to Bill Dawson for the following info:

*"It was his wife, Anne, who recently died. I visit Bro. John weekly and more often when possible. He is becoming more frail and his voice is so weak that he has trouble speaking but he still encourages all of us here at Twin City by attending services in his wheelchair. He was able to worship with us Sunday night. His work in training the young men and women who will be future leaders in the Church may bear as much fruit as his years of active preaching." (Bill Dawson)*

## QUESTION FROM NIGERIA ABOUT VICTIM OF RAPE

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

### Question

Beloved, your urgent answer needed. A girl kidnapped, tied and raped, is she guilty of the sin of fornication?

### Answer

NO! All sins spring from the heart (Matthew 15:17-20; Mark 7:20-23; James 1:14-15) and that includes adultery and fornication (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). No one is responsible for what someone else does to them against their own will, unless one's

own action led to it. You should comfort this victim of a violent crime (Romans 12:15). Do not add to her sorrow by holding the victim accountable for the crime committed against her.

Let me add to that answer what the Mosaic law said.

*But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death, for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her. (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).*

Notice verse 26, "You shall do nothing to the young woman." The man deserves to die. The woman is innocent.

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## QUESTION FROM FLORIDA ABOUT FASTING

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

### Question

Is fasting a command for Christians in the new testament?

### Answer

Neither Jesus nor his disciples fasted (Matthew 11:18-19; 9:14). Fasting is not an ordinance or practice required by the New Testament (Colossians 2:20-23). Voluntary fasting may be practiced by Christians if they so desire as an expression of sorrow (Matthew 9:15) or accompanying prayer to temporarily give oneself to spiritual things (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 7:5). It should never be done to be seen of men (Matthew 6:16-18).

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## JAMAICA PATOIS WISDOM (No. 16)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

The Jamaican Patois dialect is colorful, unique and humorous. It is my desire to share some of the philosophy shown in this mix of colorful phrases that are witty as well as thought-provoking. I hope the readers both profit and enjoy. In my quarter-century plus of teaching there, I have come to appreciate some things about their culture. - Jefferson David Tant

**Patois** - Teck weh yu get till yu get weh yu waan

**English** - Take whatever you get until you get what you desire

**Meaning** - Be satisfied with the little you have until you receive all that you require.

"Contentment" is a word that is not in the vocabulary of many. This is especially true in America, where we are blessed with material prosperity. We live in a consumer society, with billboards and ads urging us to buy the newest and best. David said, 'My

cup overflows" (Ps. 23:5). We can say "Our closets overflow." Even America's poor are wealthy beyond the dreams of billions who live in the Third World.

Some years ago while teaching in Jamaica, I met Sandra Green and her six children. She had five, and had taken in a 12-year-old girl whose mother had died, and her father didn't want her. She brought them to our Bible classes, and I asked if my wife and I could visit her. We went to her home and I was shocked to see her extreme poverty. They lived in a one room shack that was constructed of scraps - tin, wood, printing press plates, etc. She had no utilities, and the furniture was two beds. Sandra invited us in, and then I saw a poster she had made and put on the wall. "Thank you Jesus. My needs are met, and healing is mine. Hallelujah." I don't know what you would have done, but I shed tears.

The Bible has a good bit to say about contentment in this world, for in truth, our treasures here are not permanent. Jesus commented on this in Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Paul wrote about contentment in various places, including Philippians 4:11-13: "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstance I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Where was Paul when he wrote these words? In prison. Would he rather have been elsewhere? We can be pretty certain of that. But, he had learned to be content, no matter what the circumstances might have been.

As with Paul, there is no sin in desiring better things, but that should not be our consuming desire. And when we have all that we need, why do we constantly want more, newer, better? Is there not something better we can do with our abundance than spend it on ourselves? Can we not share with the Lord's work? Can we not share with those in need? Can we not help our brethren in impoverished nations who don't even have daily food? The Bible has much to say about our care for the poor, for when we do that, we are ministering to our Lord. That familiar teaching is in Matthew 25. "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." (v 40).

There is great peace to be found in contentment. "But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we

cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

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## THE BEATITUDES (6)

Patrick Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

Do we need to say that, just as the "heart," in the middle of our chest needs to be cared for, even more so the "heart" with which we believe needs attention. This is the meaning of Proverbs 4:23, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart; but that is not all that is said on the subject. The apostles Peter and Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, weigh in also; Peter saying that earnest love proceeds from a pure heart, 1 Peter 1:22 (and confer 1 Timothy 1:5); and also Paul, saying we call on the Lord from a pure heart, 2 Timothy 2:22.

A "pure" heart is one which has no room nor time for the desires of the flesh (enumerated in Galatians 5:19-21). On the positive side of the ledger, a "pure" heart seeks always to cultivate the harvest of the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-24. The "pure" heart is one which is supplemented by virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Is it your desire to see God? Then "keep your heart with all diligence" for the pure in heart are the ones who "see God."

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## THE HOPE OF THE UNVEILED HEART

Sean P. Cavender | Bradley, Arkansas, USA

Throughout the second epistle to the church at Corinth, Paul was defending his apostleship and authority as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul was constantly answering the objections made by the Judaizing teachers, who demanded the Gentiles keep matters of the Law of Moses to be saved, attacks were made towards Paul. Time and again we find when false teachers are unable to answer the objections that are brought forth, they will begin to attack the man who is making the objection. Thus, they turned against the apostle Paul. Their attempts were so that they might thoroughly discredit the apostle, so that no one would listen to him. If the man was discredited, then his message could easily be discredited.

It is within the context of the epistle that Paul explains of the constant threats he was forced to deal with. His life was constantly in danger. He was imprisoned, beaten, and shipwrecked. All of these things were connected to the problem with Judaizing teachers.

Therefore, much of Paul's teachings were attempts to thwart the influence of the Judaizing teachers. He was a man of boldness. Paul was not going to back down from his defense of the gospel of Christ. In Second Corinthians chapter three, Paul reveals the weakness of the old covenant, the glory contained in the gospel of Christ, and the superiority of the new covenant.

### **The Confidence in Christ**

The ministry of the apostles of Jesus was not looking for the approval of men, and certainly neither was Paul. The teaching and preaching of the apostles, including Paul, was done with the motives of sincerity, and devotion towards God. They were a sweet smelling aroma towards the Father in heaven (2 Corinthians 2:15-17). You can almost feel the tension, weariness, and exasperation as Paul writes, "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters from you?" (2 Corinthians 3:1)

Paul states that the brethren at Corinth ought to stand as his letter of approval, and certificate of authenticity (2 Corinthians 3:2). These brethren had seen the works of Paul, they had heard him powerfully refute the Jews, and they had been taught by the apostle for at least a year and a half. There was no sense in Paul having to write back to these brethren defending his apostleship and ministry. They ought to know whether he was sincere or not by simply looking at the fruit of his labor.

However, Paul managed to put these things aside because he was not looking for the approval of any man. The apostle was longing to please the Lord in his apostleship. "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward" (2 Corinthians 3:4). Paul knew that the message he taught was made by God, while Paul was simply proclaiming it (2 Corinthians 3:5, 12). Paul recognized he had a message that was new, or better, and one that was able to give life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The picture that Paul paints, contrasting the old and new covenant, is startling. The old covenant is described as merely ink (2 Corinthians 3:3), only carved in tablets of stone (2 Corinthians 3:3), as a letter (2 Corinthians 3:6), and as the instrument of death (2 Corinthians 3:6). The new covenant was not written with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God (2 Corinthians 3:3), which penetrated the heart (2 Corinthians 3:3). It was "of the spirit," and offered life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

### **The Glory of the New Covenant**

The old covenant brought forth death, or spiritual separation from God (2 Corinthians 3:7; Romans 7:7-12). However, the old covenant came with a certain amount of glory (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). The old law was holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12). While the Law was intended for what was right, it was weak because it could not forgive sins. The old law brought condemnation, and bondage due to a knowledge of sin (Hebrews 10:3).

The glory of Moses was intended to be done away (2 Corinthians 3:7). Moses' face was shining when he came down from Sinai with the law and commandments (cf. Exodus 34:29-35). The question that ought to come to mind is: if the old covenant came with that amount of glory, then how much glorious is the new covenant? This is exactly the question that Paul asks, and is answering (2 Corinthians 3:8). The new covenant produces righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:9), and it forgives sins (Hebrews 10:4). This new covenant is built upon a better priesthood, a better ministry, and better promises (Hebrews 8:6, 7).

Paul's argument did not consist of how useless the law of Moses was. The thrust of his argument was in how much better the new covenant is, compared to the old covenant. And if the new is that much better, then why constantly struggle with the temptation to go back to a weaker system. The old law had been passed away because it was fulfilled in Christ. The new covenant would remain forever (2 Corinthians 3:11).

#### **The Veil-Covered Heart**

Paul was unashamed of the gospel of the new covenant. It is why he preached so boldly (2 Corinthians 3:12). The confidence that a believer has is in the assurance that the gospel will remain steadfast. Fading away was not in the plan for the gospel of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:13).

Judaizing teachers who were demanding the Gentile converts keep circumcision and the law of Moses were blinded and hardened to the gospel. They were willing to put a veil over their hearts, preventing them from seeing the true blessings in the gospel (2 Corinthians 3:14). They were ultimately rejecting the gospel of Christ. Even while the reading and practice of the old testament remained, along with keeping the works of the law, and living according to the flesh, the veil continued to remain. The veil that Moses wore was hiding the true glory that he had witnessed. This is why Paul is using this illustration to make his point. The Judaizing teachers had willfully placed a veil over their hearts to hide the true glory of the gospel of Christ.

#### **The Unveiled Face of Glory**

However, when a heart of unbelief is turned to the Lord, the veil is taken away (2 Corinthians 3:16). But they must come to the Lord, as He is identified in verse 16. "The Lord is that Spirit" can be a difficult phrase in Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:17). The passage is

not about the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. The passage is not teaching that Jesus is the same as the spirit of God. The term “spirit” has been used to describe the new covenant in contrast to the old covenant throughout the chapter (2 Corinthians 3:6-9).

In the previous verse, Paul writes about the person that takes away the veil from his heart, accepting the Lord Jesus Christ. “That Spirit” is the belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and faithful obedience to the gospel. It is this spirit, the gospel, which sets us at liberty. It is the spirit of life that sets you free (Romans 8:2). The Judaizing teachers were setting brethren as captives. There was no freedom in their system of doctrine.

When one finally accepts the gospel, there is a transformation we each undergo. We are changed into the glory of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18). We become a new creature, delivered from the evil one. We are a new creature in Christ to bear the same image, united with Christ, to live in newness of life (Romans 6:4-6; 7:6).

### **Conclusion**

We must refuse to cover our hearts and minds from the gospel. If there is any veil that may prevent us from witnessing and participating in the true glory of Jesus Christ and His glorious gospel, then we must remove that from our life. The greatest blessing of the gospel is the true power that lies within it. The gospel is able to transform our lives. Certainty, assurance and hope are all a result of the life that comes with the gospel. It was this assurance that moved Paul to continue to preach the gospel (2 Corinthians 3:12). This must be the same assurance that we live with every day of our lives. Assurances ought to motivate us to continue in service to the Lord, no matter who may attempt to destroy us.

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## **MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS**

Tanner Campbell | Piggott, Arkansas, USA

One of the most recognizable verses of scripture is Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*” It is a beautiful reading from the mind of the Almighty God and Wonderful Counselor. It is a commandment for the mind of man, and to be obeyed within the mind of man. It is a commandment that demands self-control over choosing what to dwell on in thought. It is a text that outlines the building blocks by which we fulfill another commandment in Colossians 3:17, *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* If we are to do all in the name of the Lord, whether it be our choice of words or actions, these choices are first conceived in the thoughts of man. This is also what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12:35, *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things,*

" and Matthew 15:18 "*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man*" (see also Mark 7:20-23).

Therefore, it can be easily proven just how valuable the text of Philippians 4:8 is. However, a question that I'd like to address is whether the verse is completely inclusive (i.e. all-encompassing), and thus exclusive (i.e. shutting out all others from a part or share), or should the verse be rendered as non-absolute and not totally comprehensive? It's an interesting question, and should be considered, because too often scriptures are read more like poetic guidelines instead of laws that demand one thing and restrict all other things. And how many people do read Philippians 4:8 as mere poetry without thinking about what it demands out of their minds?

So again, the question is whether we can only "*meditate on these things,*" and only "*these things*" listed in the verse. Let's consider the stated list. First, meditate of "*whatever things are true.*" Does this prohibit us from entertaining anything that is untrue? Absolutely! Let's consider another one: meditate on "*whatever things are pure.*" Does this permit me to sometimes think upon anything impure? Certainly not! Thus also "*noble*" excludes things dishonorable and immoral; "*just*" excludes things that are wicked; "*lovely*" excludes things uncomely in the eyes of God; "*of good report*" excludes reports that are injurious to someone; "*virtue*" excludes anything not upright or filled with godly integrity; and lastly "*praiseworthy*" excludes everything that is not admirable or commendable to God. Indeed Philippians 4:8 is an all-inclusive text. One might wonder about the fine print, but there really isn't any.

It would be a mistake to end this article here, because we've yet to discuss an important aspect to this verse, and therefore, our understanding of the text. Let's again take the example of meditating on "*whatever things are true.*" Does this mean it would be a sin if we hear untrue words from someone else? Is it a sin to consider the doctrine of Calvinism or Premillennialism because they are untrue? How could we ever defend against such falsehood if we are not allowed to first contemplate them in order to see what scriptures they are in violation of? To answer this, we need to take a closer look at what it means to "*meditate on these things*" or, as the King James Version says "*think on these things.*" In the original language, the Greek word for "*meditate*" is *logizomai*. It is defined as "to take an inventory" (Strong's Definitions); "to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over" (Thayer's Lexicon); "make those things the subjects of your thoughtful consideration, or carefully reflect on them" (Vine's Expository Dictionary). The commandment of Philippians 4:8 does not make a sinner out of the individual that passes by something impure and it registers in his mind as impure. Rather, it teaches that individual not to reflect on the impurity that he happened to see. If a thought enters into our heads, sometimes that cannot be helped, but if we choose to entertain that thought, take inventory of it, and really give it good consideration, then the law of Philippians 4:8 comes into the picture.

Is the text of Philippians 4:8 still all-encompassing? Yes, within its own



context of things which we spend our time and effort thinking upon, it is most definitely a comprehensive verse. We are under its law. We must bring every thought under our control, dismissing anything ungodly or tempting, and embracing everything that is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Meditate on these things.

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## REFUSING TO ENTER THE ARK

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

Can you imagine what it was like for those outside of the ark once the “fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened” (Genesis 7:11)? What were they thinking as the flood waters rose? Did they have time to think? If so, did any of them suddenly realize how right Noah was and how foolish they were for not entering the ark?

The tragedy of Noah’s story is it is being repeated today. Jesus said, “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:38-39). The devices that occupy our attention are different than that generation, but the acts of being distracted and ungodly are still the same. The majority of the world refuses to fear God and keep His commandments; choosing rather to dismiss His promise of an upcoming judgment (Acts 17:30-31). When He does finally bring this world to an end, the majority of people will be doing the same thing as Noah’s generation: living for everything else except God.

What Noah’s ark was to his generation is what Christ is to our generation, in terms of salvation. The only ones who survived the flood were those in the ark. The only ones who will survive the fiery judgment of hell are those in Christ. For, “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Ephesians. 5:23). Salvation and eternal life are in Jesus (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 5:11).

Noah had to trust God’s word to build the ark, long before the flood waters encompassed the earth (Hebrews 11:7). The same is true today regarding Christ. It takes faith to believe in His saving power and to enter His body, before the final judgment. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). Unfortunately, many are dismissing these words by clinging to manmade doctrines instead. “Just ask Jesus into your heart and you’ll be saved,” say many, “baptism will not save you.” Those who reject water baptism for salvation to enter Christ are the same who would have criticized Noah for building and entering the ark. “We’re saved by faith through grace, Noah, not by works!” But, Noah ignored his critics and walked by faith in God’s blueprint. Anyone who expects to be saved from sin must fear God more than man and walk by faith in Jesus’ blueprint, which clearly requires faith, repentance, confession, and baptism for

salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39). Thus, if you are wise you will enter the ark before it's too late. Forget what your family and friends might think of you. Think about God and how much you should love Him more. Your family can't save you from your sin and its eternal, fiery consequences. You need Christ to do that. Be wise and submit to God in faith by moving with godly fear in obedience to His will. It may not seem like it now, but one Day you'll be glad you trusted in God to enter the ark of Christ—as the flames of death encompass the earth.

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## COMMUNICATION

### **Zechariah & Elizabeth | Luke 1:5-25, 57-80**

from the e-book, "*...And They Shall Become One Flesh...*"  
William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

*For there is not a word out of my tongue, but behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:4)*

### **Choosing Our Words Carefully**

It is important that we learn to communicate well. By that, I do not mean that we must all become public speakers or skilled orators, but that we must develop our ability to effectively express ourselves with those whom we come in contact with. This is important in all facets of life, but especially so in our marriages.

Part of being an effective communicator is knowing when not to speak. There are certain things which are best left unsaid.

Equally, there are times when we need to speak up:

*"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven ... a time to keep silence and a time to speak..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7)*

There would be a lot of silence in the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth - nine months worth! While serving in the temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, telling him the good news that he and Elizabeth would have a son. Hearing these words, Zechariah doubted aloud (Luke 1:18), the result of which was the loss of his speech until the child was born (Luke 1:20). Perhaps this was the time to keep silence!

Why God made Zechariah a mute for nine months, we could speculate about all day long. One thing is certain - he had a long time to consider what he said to the angel that day, and what he ought to say when he received his speech again. Nine months later, his tongue being loosed, "...he spoke, praising God" (Luke 1:64). Again, he "...was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied..." (Luke 1:67).

It is essential that we choose our words carefully, whether we are speaking to God (or His agent), our spouse, our brethren, our friends - whoever - we must be careful how we speak. Jesus said,

*"...I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by*

*your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37)*

Of our speech, Solomon wrote:

*"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." (Proverbs 18:21)*

In our relationships, do we speak words that give life or death? Does our speech build up or tear down? What is the fruit of our tongue?

### **Hearing What Is Said**

There is a difference between hearing and listening. Zechariah heard Gabriel's words, but did he listen? The message appealed to Zechariah's faith - he heard, but did not listen. Gabriel's words were filled with promises and commands from God; Zechariah's response, with doubt and speculation. James encourages us to "...be swift to hear, slow to speak..." (James 1:19).

We would do well to curb the compulsion to respond immediately when we are spoken to - consider what is said, then respond if appropriate (Proverbs 10:19; 17:27; Ecclesiastes 5:1-2).

How important for spouses to listen to one another. Men are commanded to learn to listen to the concerns of their wives, lest their prayers be hindered (1 Peter 3:7). Effective communication results when we not only hear the words of another, but when we have listened and understood what has been said to us. Zechariah was given plenty of opportunity to LISTEN to Elizabeth.

During Zechariah's mute period, we know that he and Elizabeth communicated, and she listened to what was said. On the day when the baby was to be circumcised and named, it was Elizabeth who declared, "No, he shall be called John" (Luke 1:60).

The neighbours were confused, but Zechariah confirmed in writing, "His name is John" (Luke 1:63), and immediately, his tongue was loosed (Luke 1:64). He not only heard - but finally listened and acted upon what Gabriel had said.

Let us learn to think before we speak; to listen when spoken to; to know when the time to speak and the time to be silent is.

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## **WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Luke 10:25-37

As the Master was teaching a lawyer put him to the test. Though he was putting Jesus to the test, his question was excellent and one repeatedly addressed to Christ Jesus. "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do

to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25; cf. Matthew 19:16; Luke 18:18) What question could be more important? (Matthew 16:26)

The lawyers of the Jews were the interpreters and teachers of the Law of Moses (Mounce. 1218). As a class they were diligent in binding requirements on the people while finding legal loopholes to excuse themselves (Luke 11:45-46), and they accepted neither John the baptizer (Luke 7:29-30) nor Christ (Luke 11:52).

No doubt the Lord surprised the lawyer by telling him to answer his own question. “He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’” (Luke 10:26). You’re the expert on the Law. Answer your question yourself.

In giving this answer, the Lord pointed him to the Scriptures as the source of the answer to the inquiry how to inherit eternal life. The Pharisees and lawyers may have thought Jesus was a “loose constructionist” on the Law, but He directed them past their traditions and hypocritical hair splitting to the Scriptures themselves as the source of eternal life (Matthew 5:17-20; John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The lawyer knew very well the answer to his own inquiry. He quickly and correctly replied, “‘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’” (Luke 10:26). It was common knowledge among the experts on the Law that these two passages, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, summarized all the requirements of the divine Law (Mark 12:28-33), and the Lord confirmed that these two commandments were the greatest in the Law (Matthew 22:35-40) and the key to eternal life (Luke 10:28). The Ten Commandments are correctly grouped under these two headings: commandments one through four under “love the Lord your God” and five through ten under “love your neighbor.”

But there was a crucial difference between the Master and the lawyer on these commandments, indeed on the Scriptures as a whole. To the lawyers the Scriptures were the objects of arid debates over minute points and a means of justifying themselves before men. But to the Lord the Scriptures were the practical guide to a way of living. Jesus replied to the lawyer, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). It is not enough to know; you must do (James 1:22).

But the proud lawyer wanted to save face before the crowd. “But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:29) Jesus had, as always, turned the tables on the one testing him. So the embarrassed lawyer used a lawyer’s trick long before Bill Clinton. What’s the definition of “is”? If he could narrowly define “neighbor,” his lack of love for his neighbor wouldn’t be exposed. To a Jew, “neighbor” couldn’t possibly be wider than fellow Jews. The exclusivity of the Law

erected a barrier of animosity between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:11-16).

So the Master simply related a story, a parable. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30). The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was infamously dangerous as a place where bands of brigands violently attacked and robbed travelers. The road twisted and turned sharply for most of the journey through a rugged, barren landscape and descended about 3500 feet in its approximately twenty mile course. A perfect hangout for thieves. In the fourth century Jerome called it the "Bloody Way." In the nineteenth century the trip was still notoriously dangerous.

There happened along this road two very typical travelers.

*Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side (Luke 10:31-32).*

Jericho had become such a city of priests that perhaps 12,000 lived there at this time. The priests were the divinely authorized intercessors between the Lord and His people Israel (Exodus 28:29-30). They were the sons of Aaron the brother of Moses (Exodus 28:1), and their job was to offer the animal sacrifices for the people, burn incense to the Lord, bless the people in the name of the Lord (1 Chronicles 23:13), teach the people the Law (Leviticus 10:8-11), and act as judges (Deuteronomy 21:5). They were divided into twenty-four courses by David (1 Chronicles 24:1-19), and each course ministered a week at a time in the Temple. Thus, there would be priests coming and going between Jericho and Jerusalem each week.

Levites, descendants of Levi but not of Aaron, assisted the priests in the Temple service (1 Chronicles 23:27-29).

They had the same excuses a traveler today would have not to stop on the road to assist an injury victim. The untended victim may have been bloody and filthy. They were in a hurry, and this could have been a set up to lure unwary travelers to be attacked by robbers themselves.

But in addition, if on their way to Jerusalem, they were going to minister to the Lord and did not need to delay or risk defilement. An Israelite who touched a dead body would be unclean seven days (Numbers 19:11). A priest was not to defile himself by touching any dead body except his closest kin (Leviticus 21:1-4). The priest and the Levite may not have known whether the victim was dead or alive, and though he was living, he could have died while either of them ministered to him. If so, the one who touched

him would not be able to minister in the temple for a week. If either was on his way to Jerusalem to serve, he would lose one of the two weeks out of the year he had the great honor of ministering to the Lord before the people in the house of God.

At least the Levite came closer to inspect the unfortunate traveler, but still he decided not to help. Both religious leaders were repelled by the sickening sight of the bloody victim rather than being attracted to show mercy. Each passed by on the other side.

They had forgotten a very important principle. The Lord desires mercy more than sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). Outward manifestations of piety cannot substitute for loving God and loving my neighbor. Not even being on time for worship is an acceptable excuse to refuse to assist the needy.

But there was one who understood what it meant to love his neighbor.

*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 animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you' (Luke 10:33-35).*

Samaritans were descended from the mixture of pagans and poor Israelites left in Northern Israel after the Assyrians conquered the Northern kingdom, Israel, and carried them captive. They maintained a mixture of corrupt worship of the Lord with paganism (2 Kings 17:6, 24-41). When the Jews returned from Babylon, the Samaritans wanted to assist in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but Nehemiah flatly rejected their help, and they became inveterate enemies of the Jews. The Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, but John Hyrcanus, the Jewish leader, destroyed it in 128 B.C. Samaria lay between the Jewish regions of Judea on the South, where the Temple stood on Mount Moriah, and Galilee to the North. Jews journeying from Galilee to Judea would characteristically cross the Jordan River below the Sea of Galilee into Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan and journey south to cross the Jordan again at Jericho to go up to Jerusalem. The only reason for this was to avoid contact with the Samaritans, "for Jews have no dealing with Samaritans" (John 4:9). To a Jew, to call someone a "Samaritan" was to heap a gross insult upon him (John 8:48). To comprehend what Jews thought of Samaritans, think today of Jews and Palestinians.

The Master employed a Samaritan to personify love for one's neighbor, even though the Samaritans had rejected Him shortly before this (Luke 9:51-53). There was place for neither prejudice nor grudge in the heart of Jesus, and there must not be in ours.

The venerated leaders of Jewish religious life refused to minister to the poor victim of violent robbery. But a despised Samaritan came to his aid. He gave of his time, his ability, and his money. He poured wine, an astringent, on the wounds, as well as oil to soothe the pain (cf. Isaiah 1:6), carried him on his beast to an inn, a little wayside shelter, paid the keeper of the inn to care for him, and promised to pay whatever further expenses were incurred on his return.

Then the Master forced the proud lawyer to answer his own question. "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" (Verse 36) The lawyer couldn't bring himself to say, "The Samaritan." But he had to admit it was "he who had showed mercy to him."

### Conclusion

Rather than being theoretical, the fodder for hair splitting discussions by theological lawyers, the doctrine of Christ points to a way of life that springs from faith in and love for Him. That life is one of deeds of mercy springing from a heart of compassion. That mercy knows no bounds. It is not just to my family, friends, and brethren. It is to my enemy (Matthew 5:43-48). It is to those who look different. It is to those who speak a language I cannot comprehend, have customs I find strange, and hold to beliefs I abhor. It is to the completely undeserving, just as I receive freely the love, grace, and mercy of God though I can never deserve them. It is to take to them the saving message of the gospel (Matthew 9:36-38) as well as ministering to their physical needs (Romans 12:20).

**The question is not, "Who is my neighbor?" The question is, To whom will I be a neighbor?**

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## HOW DEDICATED ARE WE?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Henry Ogutu lives and preaches in Southwestern Kenya. He regularly travels to Mombasa, the port of Kenya and a primarily Muslim city on the Indian Ocean. It takes him two days by bus, since he has no car. Western tourists have been evacuated from Mombasa due to the danger of terrorism. Henry has started two or three congregations there and trained two men to preach. Here is what he says about the terrorism in his latest report.

*Terrorism have tried to scared people from traveling during the month of May, through your prayers God protected us, regardless of how things might be in Kenya and Africa, the gospel must reach many people, I believe the first century Christians went through many hardships than we do today, there challenges and difficult we go through such as transportation, I still use Motorbikes for my work even after warning from number of brethren, I believe that one day the Lord will open up ways for the ca, be praying*

*towards that. I have told brethren to avoid traveling at night if it is possible and also avoid crowded places since the terrorist main target is where are many people and mostly when it gets dark.*

How does that compare to our measure of dedication to reaching the lost?

*At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4).*



unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp

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