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# APPLIED CHRISTIANITY.

## WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

BY REV. R. K. SMOOT, D. D.

*Pastor of the Free Presbyterian Church, Austin, Texas.*

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‘And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readeest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. . . . But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?’—LUKE x. 25-29.

THE one who introduced this conversation claimed to be seeking the way of eternal life. He was on the right track. Had he pursued it he might have been saved. He had gone to the right person. For Jesus Christ is the only source and fountain-head of all the knowledge the world has of the thing which this man sought. Through him alone comes the fact of redemption and the truth of salvation. The way to that unknown God, in search of whom the whole world was groping, was all dark and trackless till Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through his gospel. To him we must go, whether we would have that knowledge or the wisdom whose function it is to guide all knowledge. It was in the image of God that man was created “in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,” but the wisdom to adjust and keep these in their proper play was the one thing that man had not. And seeking to find that wisdom in forbidden ground, his hopes, for time and eternity, were wrecked. And man was broken

to pieces on the adverse wheel of fortune in this rash experiment upon the veracity of the Almighty. From that day to this, in all ages, among every people and kindred of the earth, there has been a longing of man to get back to God.

And why? Because in all the vast range and wide sweep of creation man alone is the only creature endowed with a moral nature; a nature in which there could be planted a moral standard of action—the proper and only field for the existence and exercise of conscience. It is this moral nature which separates man—by the whole diameter of his conscious being—from all the other animal creation. The wild beast of the field devours his victim; the bird of the air consumes his prey; the fish of the deep live on their kind. But with them there is no regret, no remorse, no conception of crime, no idea of murder, simply because they are not rational, they have no moral nature, no conscience. Nowhere in all animate nature, outside of human nature, is there such a thing as social life, or fellowship, or binding reciprocal obligation, or sense of duty. Where there is no moral nature there can be no moral law, and consequently no moral accountability, no duty to God, no duty to man, no final judgment, no eternal life. It is in man alone that both duty and accountability to God and his fellow-man is vested. And every time that a question of conscience arises it involves both of these, either directly or remotely.

I. "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is a moral question. "Who is my neighbor?" is equally a question of conscience. This lawyer, eminent, distinguished and learned in his profession—"a certain lawyer"—was dealing with a question of conscience. He came to the proper person, the only one who could lead him as an unerring guide and instruct him as an infallible teacher.

“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” A question which each one of us must ask at some time. A question the solution of which each one of us must find if we would escape eternal death.

But the context says, he “tempted him.” Yes, that is the way it reads—“a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him.” After such investigation as I have been able to give this passage, governed, as I have been, by the accepted rules of interpretation of Scripture, I have reached the conclusion that this lawyer was not “in contempt.” I do not believe the question was asked in any spirit of hostility, even though there may have been no great and overpowering desire for a clear and unequivocal answer. Habits, of thought, and investigation, and utterance, fasten themselves on men like a “second nature” and characterize the individuality of each. This man’s habits were those of a lawyer. He wanted to find out, by questions, what this great Teacher from Galilee knew of this the chiefest of all issues. He was testing the Saviour. He was moving along the lines of investigation for information. In proof of this we must not forget that the word here translated “tempted” is a broad word in its meaning. It may indicate, as I think it does in this case, no bad purpose, but a test merely to bring out fully facts before unknown. For we must remember that it is the intent of the one putting the test, the motive in the heart, which makes it either good or bad. Many illustrations of this might be given. In Luke xxiv. 28 our Saviour tempted his disciples when “he made as though he would have gone further.” Also in Mark vi. 48, when he came unto his disciples and “would have passed by them.” I do not mean that the language in each one of these passages is the same; but I do mean, that in each case the disciples were put to a test by their Saviour. And I do further claim that the meaning

of the word here used does, in the original language, justify fully the interpretation I have given it. Then, again, the question itself involves an issue too grave and too grand to allow any malignant intent to attach, and the final answer of the lawyer himself is offered in proof. We find all through these Scriptures that the "Son of man" never failed to give a respectful hearing and a suitable answer to any and all who came to him with honest doubts and serious questions. This lawyer was evidently feeling for the truth. He would test the power of God's greatest witness by putting the greatest of all questions, one involving the issues of eternal life. The Saviour turns him back upon his own profession, asking him to state the laws of the case. He was its professed teacher, now let him become its practical expounder. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" A double question, involving a double answer. What is the text of the law? How do you interpret it? To the law he went. His perfect knowledge of that law enabled him to refer at once to the very passage in question. (Deut. vi. 5, and Lev. xix. 18.) He quotes correctly and gives the meaning, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." A true and correct answer, a fair and consistent interpretation, a manly, frank, and open confession. Then said the Saviour, "This do, and thou shalt live."

II. How near many a man comes to the kingdom of God and then stops in a dead halt, a stubborn, selfish resistance, a refusal to yield any further; but moving off at right angles, springs with amazing alacrity, a side issue, a different and subordinate question. And so here a difficulty comes up, a new obstacle arises. "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, Who is my neighbor?" Self-justification. It is the old Adam. It first made its

appearance in the garden of Eden. This man, "willing to justify himself," willed exactly as the first man willed, to justify himself, as "he heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. (Gen. iii. 8.) It is one of the wayside arguments for the unity of race. It tells of the origin of man, and the nature of sin. We feel it in our own sinful nature and wicked hearts. We see it all around us and on every hand. Every man "willing to justify himself." It is the outworking of man's depraved nature. It is the wild growth of original sin.

The question is raised by this lawyer as to what constitutes neighborhood. The question itself implies much. It indicates a troubled condition of mind, an anxious solicitude of heart. It is a partial confession of a consciousness that something is wrong, that somehow some duty is left undone; while at the same time it intimates a readiness to do if he only knew when and where and how to do. "Who is my neighbor?" As though he would say I am ready to show mercy, but, to whom? I must know before I do lest my doing should be wrong. Difficulties lay in the way of this lawyer which need never lay in our way. Perplexities arose in his mind which need never arise in ours. The training of ages had taught him, and his people, that he and they owed no duty to man, woman, or child, outside of the Hebrew commonwealth. The very law which he knew so well had been used to teach him that no Gentile was his neighbor. The Hebrew statutory, criminal law would not put an Israelite to death for killing a Gentile, for he was not his neighbor. If a Hebrew saw a Gentile in danger of death he was under no obligation to save his life. Such statutes had been enacted from that covenant constitution given them by the Almighty. This rubbish Jesus had to clear away in laying the deep foundations for the gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus swept by these



criminal statutes, trampled them under as he went along, and opened up the wonderful law of love as it lay in the heart of God and the covenant promises.

But with us no less, or hardly less, than with this learned jurist there is a hazy indistinctness as to who is our neighbor. Our compound derivative from two Anglo-Saxon words, *neah* and *gebur*, signifying near and to dwell, or one dwelling near, has led the masses of the people to feel that a neighbor is merely a contiguous settler whose farm or home joins ours, separated only by a division fence, the children of both families making common playgrounds of the woods and the meadows lying between, and belonging to each. We thus limit "neighborhood" to hamlet, village, or district, and the busy lives of our narrow surrounding constitutes our neighborhood. The word which our Saviour here chooses to define his meaning is one of a broader and deeper import and a wider and more comprehensive range. The Greek word is *plasion*, signifying the same in kind, having no reference to proximity of location except in a secondary sense. He makes it generic and applies it to the race. Humanity is the field of operation; distress, want, poverty, misfortune, pestilence, famine, and crime are the conditions calling for action. He who understands the deep and wide import of the word will bound the limit of his charity only by his ability to do. Village and city, state and country, and suffering humanity everywhere lay claim to our beneficence, and it is only God's providential dealing with us, as emergencies may arise, that can determine how great shall be our ability to do or where our liberality shall end. This is God's law of love to our neighbor. It demands that all the powers of our nature shall be brought into requisition in the fulfilment of our duty to him who made us and to those whom we call our fellows.

III. Humane nature is one,—one in its origin, essence, aims, and purposes. There is a base line of humanity from which all the wonderful surveys of its relative bearings and final courses must be taken. And the lesson when cast up will be that every part is like the whole, and every human heart is human. There is a similarity, a kinship, a brotherhood running through the race from its origin to its close. For God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” (Acts xvii. 26.) Here is the revelation of the origin of man, and the argument for the unity of the human race. It is not in the similarity of skeletons and bones, nor the peculiar build of the spinal column. It is not to be sought in the vertebræ or tibia. The argument lies not in the curves of the back-bone, or the fluting of the shin-bone. But it does lie and is to be found in the “one blood.” For the stream of life in the whole human race is one and flows from one fountain. It was this human nature, with its life and the unity of that life in the “one blood,” that Jesus Christ assumed when he became man. His human nature consisted of “a true body and a reasonable soul.” And so the human nature of the Son of God having its life in this “one blood” made it possible for that blood, when it flowed on the cross, to atone for the sins of the chosen people of God out of every kindred, and tongue, and nation in all times and through all ages. The base line of salvation lies in the “one blood.” Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin. (Hebrews ix. 22.) It was the blood of the nations which flowed on the cross, that some of all nations might be saved by the cross. It is that “one blood” which saves to the uttermost them that come unto God by Jesus Christ (Hebrews vii. 25), who poured out his

life in that "one blood" when on the cross he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. (John xix. 30.) For, "God set him forth as his Son to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" for the remission of sins. (Romans iii. 25.)

But in this unity there is a marked and wonderful diversity, physical, social, intellectual and moral, as marked as that of the various trees which make up the forest with its "deep contiguity of shade," or the flowers which adorn the earth with their rich fragrance, their delicious perfume, and diversified beauty. For God, who made man and appointed the earth as the habitation of the children of men, deals with man through his providence in time and space. The appointments of the divine mind are determined in his ordering of providence. Nothing comes by chance. God has appointed the time of our coming into the world, the part we are to play, the little or much we are to do, the circumstances by which we are surrounded, and the time of our departure. (Eccl. iii. 1, 2.) Our times are in his hands, to be lengthened or shortened, to be embittered or sweetened, as it may please him. His determinations are not rash, sudden, or equivocal. They correspond to an eternal purpose. They counterpart the divine decrees. God has harnessed man for the whole draft. Some are in the lead and some are at the wheel, for the mighty pull, that the secrets of eternity may be drawn to the light. Of the chosen ones there are some who stretch out their hands to God; they stir themselves up to lay hold upon him; they agonize for the dawn of that light. These are they who gather the graces of the Spirit for the joy of church, as the lofty peaks of the great mountains gather the snows and send down rivers of waters to refresh the earth. There are others of the "many called" who, as the parable tell us, are "compelled to come in." But, alas! for them that are the

cast out. Still,—it all works together! The lilies which grow, the young lions which are fed, the hairs which are numbered, and the sparrows which fall, are but the fractions in one vast and mighty sum to be worked out in time. There is no place in the everlasting covenant of God “which is both ordered and sure,” (2 Sam. xxiii. 5.) for the wild disorder of the anarchist or the commune of the socialist. No place for the Utopian dreamer or the spiritual somnambulist. He who said, “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground” (Gen. iii. 19), meant that word “face” to represent the whole person, soul and body. It is intended to include all labor, manual, intellectual, and moral. “It means a sweat of the brow, and a sweat of the brain, and a sweat of the heart.” The hewer of wood, and the drawer of water, is no less in his place than the man who measures the stars, or codifies the laws, or guides and trains the conscience. That sweat of the “face” mitigated the primeval curse, and stands as the seal of the covenant promise that our bread and our water are sure if there be sweat on the face, but not otherwise. Just as that other sweat in the garden of agony was to mitigate the curse on the soul, and stands as the seal of the other covenant promise that the soul shall have the bread and water of eternal life if it be found believing in Christ, but not otherwise. (Luke xxii. 44.) For the same God who said, “He that believeth not the son shall not see life,” (John iii. 36.) said also, “that if any would not work neither should he eat.” (2 Thess. iii. 10.)

As far back as the confusion of tongues, at the building of Babel in the plains of Shinar, God outlined this physical, social, moral and intellectual distinction, existing then, existing now, and to continue as long as there shall be a race of men on the face of the earth. Yet we find it is equally true touching the one great

issue of redemption, salvation and eternal life; there is no difference, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans iii. 9.) It is just here that God applies the unit rule. The Gentiles, who had not the law by revelation, had "the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." (Romans ii. 15.) Not because they were Gentiles, but because they were of that "one blood," and therefore belonged to that humanity, the secrets of which God shall judge by Jesus Christ according to the gospel. (Romans ii. 16.)

IV. We must believe, then, that God's law of love is the inculcation, and the practical application, so far as our fellow-man is concerned, of universal equity. It has nothing to do with vocation, or grade, or rank in organized society. It draws no line between peasant and king, or monarch and vassal. The rich may sometimes need it, and the pauper may stand at our gate begging for bread. It has nothing to do with the adjusting, or readjusting of the inequalities of life—social, civil, or political. It is not lodged in that sentimental philosophy which would level all men to the same social plane; neither does it lift itself up into a frigid condition of normal justice merely. In obeying this law of love we must not be expected to conform our actions to the arbitrary demands of humanitarian schools of philanthropy, or associations of men. But it does require us to render precisely the same equity to others, in given conditions, which it would be reasonable and equitable for us to expect from them if we should be placed in their circumstances and surrounded by similar conditions. We may very reasonably infer that it was to bring out these facts, touching the duties of the second table of the law, which induced our Saviour in predicating the

condition of this parable to select a Samaritan, whose social, civil, and political condition could never be so re-adjusted, under the Hebrew law, as to make him the neighbor of a Jew. And the man who was the recipient of that equitable charity, who had been sorely beaten and bruised by these merciless robbers, stripped of his raiment and left half dead, may or may not have been a man of rank and a Jew. Nothing is said of his social standing, his civil position, or his political predilections. The Samaritan made no inquiry about these, nor did he propose to change them or in any way interfere with them. It was suffering humanity that lay before him; it was a fellow-man suffering, and it stirred his compassion; it was one of the sons of humanity, and he ministered to his wants. He met the conditions in personally administering to the relief of the sufferer with his wine and oil, and used his pennies to foot the hotel bill. There is no proof and no argument to prove that this "good Samaritan" did anything more than comply, as opportunity offered, with the requirements of the second table of the moral law. For the argument all along this line was to develop and establish the unity of the race in the "one blood," and the consequent necessity for the exercise of the kindlier offices and the heart's compassion in times of suffering and distress; and to show that this obligation was enforced by the authority of God and conduced to the relief of human need, and thereby promoted individual happiness. Along this line much has been done, and much will yet be done by unregenerate men for relieving the distress of the world. Hospitals, homes of charity, reforms of every kind, works of philanthropy, and compassion of pity and mercy, all go to establish the truth of the proposition. And so whatever may come from the kindlier feelings of unregenerate nature,

is better than no response to the call for sympathy and help. Light is better than darkness, but all nature would lose her beauty, the earth would grow sick, and the world would die, if no other light fell upon the face of creation than the light which rules by night—the moon's pale light. It is the light of the morning, the splendid beams of the rising sun, which lights the world in glorious day. The one illustrates the charity of unconverted men, the other illustrates that charity which is done in the name of Christ by the believing child of God.

It was precisely along this line of the second table of the law which pertains to our fellow-man that the rich young man had lived and acted, who, responding to our Saviour, said: "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" A model specimen of a cultivated gentleman of the best and most refined society in the world. His great wealth, open heart, and sunny life had made him an object of personal admiration with all. His frankness, sincerity, and very nearness to the kingdom of God, drew out the love of Jesus Christ toward him. But there was one thing lacking, and because he would not pass up to the requirements of the first table of that divine law of love he turned from the loving look of that compassionate Saviour and went away sorrowful. (Matt. xix. 20-22.) Could we but get a glance into the hearts of the very best of these unregenerate benefactors of the race, and hear these hearts speak out in the frankness of their own conscious wants, there would no doubt come from each of them the inquiry, "What lack I yet?"

V. The whole duty of man can be performed only when the life and power of that law which underlies both tables shall enter into the heart and dwell there with complete control over all its thoughts and actions. When this takes place, and the graces of Christianity are planted

and rooted in the human heart by the Spirit of God, its capacity for doing good is enlarged in every direction, whether in human charity, personal benevolence, general philanthropy, or Christian privilege and duty. Man cannot be a lover of his race, as God would have him love that race, without first having the love of God shed abroad in his own heart. It is only when human charity proceeds from the heart in which Christ dwells that it becomes Christian charity. In that matchless delineation of gifts as arranged by Paul (1 Cor. xiii., *passim*) of understanding, and knowledge, and charity, this one grace of God's love underlies and overlaps them all. Though one should give all his "goods to feed the poor," and hath not this divine love (*agape*) planted in his heart, "it profiteth nothing." It is deemed necessary just here to speak with emphasis of this fact, because of the very strong disposition and tendency on the part of many to make the outworkings of the kindlier feelings of unregenerate nature answer both conditions of the law of love—duty to God and duty to man. Christian charity can no more exist in the human heart without first coming from God than the love of God can exist in the heart without producing that charity. Christ was never in prison; neither did you ever visit him, or feed, or clothe him; yet when done to his people in need of them, the full conditions are met, and you have done these things to him. Herein lies the germinal idea of preaching the gospel at home and sending it to the uttermost parts of the earth. It is the love expanding, but not dividing; widening, but not breaking. This law lies at the foundation of that comprehensive teaching of Paul (Romans xiv. 7) that "no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." The man who loves the Lord Jesus Christ obeys his commandments willingly and cheerfully. There is no such thing as physical com-



pulsion in all the vast round and range of Christian life. The will is free to fall in with the eternal purpose of God, and the heart is responsive to every call. Applied Christianity may consist in giving vast or small sums of money, according as God has prospered us (1 Cor. xvi. 2), for the support of the gospel at home and for the conversion of the world, or a cup of cold water to a thirsty beggar, or a crumb of bread to a hungry outcast, or the bread of life to the perishing soul. Christianity enlarges the heart so that it does not serve God with a spirit of resistance, or even of reluctance, for God makes his people willing in the day of his power. (Psalm cx. 3.) It makes a man seek out opportunities to do good, and run with alacrity to do it. At every turn of the road, in this "valley of tears," we can find some one who has fallen by the way, with many passing by on the other side, leaving the Samaritan's work for us to do; or when, weary in our journey, we sit on the curbstone at the brink of the well, we may see many a poor outcast seeking to draw from the deep waters of earth, whom we might lead to fountains the streams whereof would bring gladness and joy.

Some of the grand masters, who are worthy to be read and studied, have so systematized their great works that certain personages appear at given points, and many times in rapid succession, and then pass out and are seen no more. Their parts are performed, their work is done; and yet they have given all the tone and character to the play. But God, in the grander unfolding of his eternal purposes through human instrumentality, has made this truth even more impressive. His mysterious hand guides the footsteps of his people in ways they know not of; and by bringing the incidents of one man's life into the necessities of many others, is perfecting that splendid fabric of glory which he is weaving for himself out of the lives of us all.