

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-42

Although there are several chapters in Luke between this one and the entry into Jerusalem, we might note that from verse 51 of chapter 9 we learn that the Lord is already on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. The subject matter of these chapters is largely composed of parables, teaching for the disciples, a few miracles, and the exposing of the states in which the religious leaders were. The first part of chapter 10 contains a condemnation of those whose minds were closed, and the teacher should read it in preparation for the lawyer's question and the Lord's answer, which bring the matter into clear light.

Doctrinal Points

Worship of the Lord is the first essential of a good life.

All the truth we need can be found in the Word.

Faith must result in good works.

The good in everyone is the neighbor to be loved.

Notes for Parents

The parable of the Good Samaritan is given us only in the Gospel of Luke, but it has become one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. The lesson of simple, everyday helpfulness which comes to us immediately as we read it is one which every good, kindly person readily sees and accepts. But unfortunately people sometimes misunderstand and misuse this parable, making it teach that if one does the outward good deeds, he is a good man, even though he does not go to church or read the Bible or even believe in God. We have all heard people say, "I do all I can to help my neighbors; that's my religion." Have you ever realized that the person who says this is simply praising himself, and that self-praise is one of

the indications of inherent selfishness? We do many things for the sake of thinking well of ourselves and of being praised by our neighbors.

If you have read the whole lesson for today, you will see that the parable does not teach this at all. In the first place, the Lord made the lawyer admit that the two great commandments of the law are love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. In another Gospel the Lord says of the first of these, “This is the first and great commandment.” A lawyer in those days was one who was learned in the laws of the Old Testament, and he had to be outwardly a devout worshiper of the Lord. So the lawyer had no fears for himself on that score. But he was not so sure on the second. The Lord used the Samaritan in the parable because the Jews despised the Samaritans. To them the “neighbor” could only be one of their own people. So you will notice that it was not the man who fell among thieves who is called the neighbor, but rather the Samaritan himself. The Lord was teaching the lawyer that the good in everyone is the neighbor to be loved, regardless of race or color or station.

And the Lord—knowing how prone we are to make things mean what we want them to mean—gives us immediately in the Word another story to prevent our misunderstanding the parable, for He foresaw that the time would come someday when people would be trying to “justify” themselves not for failing in love to the neighbor but for failing in love to the Lord. In the second story Martha was “distracted with much serving”—as many people are today—and the Lord told her that her sister Mary, who sat at His feet and heard His word, had chosen the better part. We do not really do good unless we constantly try to learn from the Lord what is really good, for only in this way can our self-love be driven out and the Lord’s unselfish love come in and act through us in the world. Love to the Lord is the first and great commandment.

Primary

It is suggested that the teacher divide the reading from the Word, first telling

the story of the lawyer's question, explaining what a lawyer was in those days, then reading the parable and talking about it, and finally reading the story of Mary and Martha. In this last reading be sure the children understand what "that good part" means. Call their attention to the two great commandments, of which they will often hear. Be sure they understand what the parable means and what it does not mean. They should also know who the Samaritans were and why the Jews despised them.

The Lord came into the world to teach us the right way to live. One day a lawyer—a man who knew well the laws of the Old Testament—came to Him and asked Him, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" That is, he wanted to know how to get to heaven. The Lord first showed him that he really knew what was necessary himself, because he knew the Old Testament. He asked the lawyer what the Scriptures taught was the most important thing for us to do. And the lawyer did know. He 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." The Lord told him he was right. But the lawyer had not been living exactly according to this law of love to the Lord and the neighbor, and he tried—just as we sometimes do when we know we have been doing wrong—to find some excuse for himself. He asked the Lord, "And who is my neighbor?"

The Lord's answer was a parable.

A parable is a story made up to teach a lesson.

The priests and the Levites were the ones whom the Jews of that day most respected.

In the parable what did the priest and the Levite do?

What did the Samaritan do?

Do you remember who the Samaritans were?

The Jews despised the Samaritans.

What was this parable meant to teach the lawyer?

But the Lord knew that people might later misunderstand the parable.

So He gave us right afterward in the Word the story of Mary and Martha.

What did Martha do?

What did Mary do?

Which did the Lord say was doing the better thing?

We have to learn from the Lord how best to help our neighbor.

The Lord put this story in the Word right after the story of the Good Samaritan because He did not want us to make the mistake of thinking that just taking care of other people's bodies was what He meant by love and kindness. We have to learn from Him other things we should do for people also—things which will help them even more. We must love the Lord first or we cannot do any good at all.

Junior

There are two simple and needed lessons here for the Juniors: the obvious lesson in the parable, and the lesson pointed out by the last verse of the chapter. The proper relation between the two is brought out by the order of the two great commandments. The children might well learn verse 27.

How many apostles were there?

What does *apostle* mean?

What powers were given the apostles?

What was their message?

Who were the three apostles closest to the Lord?

What vision was given them?

To whom did the Lord speak the parable of our lesson today?

A lawyer in those days was one who knew the laws in the books of Moses.

What did the lawyer ask the Lord?

The Lord made him answer his own question from the law. The laws he quoted are found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

What do we call these two laws?

In verse 29, to “justify himself” means to excuse himself for not fully keeping the law. He apparently felt that he had kept the first law, but was not so sure about the second. He hoped the Lord would tell him that his neighbor meant people of his own religion and class. Instead, the Lord told him the parable and then again made him answer his own question.

Jerusalem is built high among the hills, while Jericho is on the low plain near the Dead Sea. The distance between them is about eighteen miles and the road is rough, steep, and lined with jagged rocks among which robbers used to lurk and spring out at travelers.

The priest was one of those most admired and respected by the people, and so was the Levite. The Samaritan, on the other hand, belonged to a group of people who were despised and hated because, you remember, they had been brought in long ago to supplant the Israelites when they were carried away captive by the Assyrians. By the parable the Lord made the lawyer see and acknowledge that it is mercy and kindness which counts, and not race or position or learning.

A *neighbor* means “a near one.” It is love which really brings people near together. Selfishness always drives people apart. We are good neighbors when we think kindly of other people and try to help them in right ways. This is one of the lessons of the parable. For you notice that it is not the man who fell among thieves who is called the neighbor, but the good Samaritan himself. We should look for the good in other people and love it and try to help it in every possible way.

Another lesson we may find in this parable is that we often need help ourselves. Do you see how the journey of the man from Jerusalem to Jericho pictures times when we go down from high states—from our ideals and our good resolutions—to the lower plane of our daily work and play? Do we ever “fall among thieves” on the way? Very often temptations take away from us all our good thoughts and intentions and leave us half dead spiritually. Then we need the help of a good Samaritan, someone who will lift us up again and heal us with love and good advice—the oil and wine—and carry us along until we get back our strength. This is one of the things our parents are doing for us constantly because they love us.

Our lesson does not end with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The people then understood the lesson the Lord was trying to teach in it, but the Lord knew that in later times there would be some people who might try to make an excuse of this very parable. You know that there are many people today who do not read the Bible or go to church or take any interest in religion, and some of them point to certain kind things they do for others and say they

are like the good Samaritan whom the Lord praised, and that the parable teaches that external good works are all the Lord requires of us. So the Lord, when He wrote the Word, put the story of Mary and Martha immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan.

When the Lord was in the home of Mary and Martha, what was Martha doing?

What was Mary doing?

What did Martha ask the Lord to do?

What did the Lord tell her?

The Lord did not tell Martha that it was wrong to do the work of the house. All the external services we perform for each other are useful and have their place in our lives. But there is something more important: We should make the most of every opportunity we have to learn of the Lord. If we do not try to learn what the Lord has to say to us, we shall never be able to help our neighbors in the really important things of life. And when we do the outward good works, if we are not doing them from love to the Lord, we are giving ourselves the credit for them, and that takes all the real good out of them.

Intermediate

The correspondence of the parable should be taken up in some detail. Then discuss the story of Mary and Martha and the relation between the two stories as they illustrate the teaching of the two great commandments.

This is one of the most familiar of the Lord's parables, but it is found only in the Gospel of Luke. The lawyer and his question are found also in Matthew 22:35, and there the Lord Himself answers with the two great commandments. In Matthew the lesson is connected with the question of the Lord's authority, but in Luke it is related to our personal life. The lesson here taught the lawyer was that mercy and kindness are the important thing—not race, or class, or learning. He had to admit that the despised Samaritan might be a better man than the priest or the Levite. We should notice, however, that it is the Samaritan who is called the neighbor, which places the emphasis on his worthiness to be loved.

Every one of the Lord's parables has an obvious lesson of this sort which anyone can see and take to heart. But there is much more to be drawn from the study of their correspondence. Jerusalem, where the temple was, pictures the church, or states of spiritual insight and resolution in which all of us are at times. We cannot stay in these states, however, without being called upon to do something about it. We have to go back to the low plane of everyday living where we are to carry out our good resolutions. The thieves which lurk by the wayside are the evil impulses and wrong thoughts stirred up in us by the hells which are likely to attack us suddenly and rob us of our high ideas and intentions, leaving us half dead spiritually. Doesn't this very thing happen to every one of us over and over again?

The priest and the Levite, representatives of the corrupt church, picture knowledge of what is right and true held in the mind only, with no warm affection for doing good. Such knowledge does not help us when temptation attacks. The Samaritan represents the simple desire to do good which comes to our aid. He binds up our wounds, pouring in oil and wine—love and truth—and mounts us on his own beast, which pictures reasoning from a basis of simple goodness, and brings us to a haven where we can regain our strength. And he promises to do more for us if we have need of it.

So the Lord pointed to goodness as the neighbor to be loved. Swedenborg tells us that it is the good in everyone which we are to regard as our neighbor. It follows from this, for one thing, that to love our enemies is not to condone the evil in them but to try to check it, and to recognize that there is also good in them which we may help to bring out and increase if we try. People are drawn together by similar qualities of good. So in heaven people who are close together in their affections are close together—externally—neighbors indeed.

Some people have pointed to this parable as teaching that the only thing really required of us is external good works, but this is not what it means. The very next incident in the Word makes this clear. Notice this particularly. If we will read carefully enough, the

Lord always helps us to avoid misunderstanding His teaching in the Word. Mary and Martha were both good women. But Martha's thought was centered on ministering to the Lord's bodily needs, while Mary sat at His feet and heard His words. When Martha asked the Lord to send Mary to help her in the external good works, the Lord told her that Mary had chosen the better part—the one thing really needful.

If we do not use all our opportunities to learn what the Lord has to say to us, we shall make many mistakes, and often do more harm than good. To help a bad person in external ways may merely be helping him to continue in his evil course. And if we do not care to learn of the Lord, we fall into the thought that the “good works” we do are evidence that we are good. We praise ourselves and condemn people who are not doing just what we do. So our good works are not inwardly good at all.

If we can keep in mind that it is the good in other people which is the neighbor to be helped, and that we can do nothing good except as we look to the Lord for guidance and power, we shall become better and better able to serve both the Lord and the neighbor, and really help to bring about the Lord's kingdom on earth.

Basic Correspondences

Jerusalem = a spiritual state

Jericho = the plane of outward thought
and activity

thieves = wrong thoughts and desires

oil = love

wine = spiritual truth

Senior

The lesson for this class should be centered on the lawyer's question and the Lord's way of answering it. The young people need to know Swedenborg's doctrine of the neighbor and what it means in our daily decisions.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often misused. For the

lawyer who wanted to “justify” himself in his selfish esteem it taught the lesson that mercy and kindness are better than position or learning or birth, and that the neighbor to be loved was everyone who was good. This is one of the true lessons of the parable. But people sometimes assume that this parable teaches that external kindness is the only thing needed to make a man good. They say, “There are better people outside the church than in it,” and use this as an excuse for not supporting the church. It is true that some people outside of the church are better than some people in it, but this is only because there are people who are outside the church only because they have not been able to find it, and because the church is not free from hypocrites whose profession of religious belief is lip service only.

The priest and the Levite in the parable do not represent the true church and its doctrines, but the corrupt church, which had forgotten the “weightier matters of the law”: justice, mercy, and faith. They picture knowledge of what is right held in the mind merely, with no warm affection for doing good. Such knowledge does not help us in times of temptation, when selfish desires and false reasonings seek to rob us of our good resolutions. Only the simple determination to do good, the Samaritan, can be counted on to help us.

That the parable does not teach the sole importance of external good works is evident from the story of Mary and Martha which follows immediately on purpose to save us from just such a mistake. Martha was “distracted with much serving,” and the Lord rebuked her gently, telling her that Mary had chosen the better part in sitting at His feet and hearing His word. Good works must be done under the guidance of the Lord’s truth or they are done from self and are not really good.

What the Lord points out to us in the parable is the fact that goodness is the neighbor to be loved—not any individual as such. Swedenborg tells us that it is the good in everyone which we are to regard as our neighbor and to love. This applies to our love for our friends: we are not to let our love close our eyes to their faults,

if we can help them to overcome them. True love of the neighbor requires of parents that they recognize and seek to correct their children's faults. And when we are told to love our enemies, it does not mean that we are to excuse and condone evil, but to try to check it and at the same time to look for and foster all that is good in them. In this world people are drawn together by similar states of good, and in heaven such people are neighbors in fact.

This teaching is much needed in the world today. Not only every individual, but every nation and every race has its good qualities and its bad ones. Love to the neighbor demands that, instead of condemning others because they are different from ourselves or of pretending that they are not different—as the inner enemies of race prejudice sometimes do—we must love the good and hate the evil whether it is in others or in ourselves. And we must always keep in mind that love to the neighbor is the second of the two great commandments. The first is love to the Lord. In the Gospel of Matthew, where the Lord Himself speaks these two commandments, He says of love to the Lord, "This is the first and great commandment." So the story of Mary and Martha is tied in with the opening verses of our lesson.

Adult

Discussion topics for this class might be: (1) the order of the two great commandments, (2) the meaning of the parable for the lawyer and its meaning for us, (3) the practical applications of the story of Mary and Martha, and (4) the wonderful balance which the Lord always preserves for us if we are careful to study each story in the Word in its context.

With this lesson we enter upon the last period of the Lord's life. The Lord is on His way to Jerusalem for the final scenes of His earthly career (Luke 9:51). The greater part of the teaching in the next few chapters is in the form of parables, most of which are not found in any of the other Gospels.

In our lesson for today the teaching of the Scriptures is reduced at the outset to its simplest terms. The lawyer—we must remember

that the law then was primarily the Scriptures—asks his question and is directed to the Scriptures for his answer. In Matthew (22:34-40) the Lord, instead of the lawyer, answers the question and emphasizes love to the Lord by saying of it, “This is the first and great commandment.” In Luke He approves the lawyer’s answer and says, “This do, and thou shalt live.” Love to the Lord and love to the neighbor are a summary of the teaching of the whole Word. Of the two tables on which the ten commandments were originally given, the first contained those relating to our duty to the Lord and the second those relating to our duty to the neighbor. We cannot break the first great commandment and keep the second, nor break the second and keep the first. It is generally recognized today that love to the Lord is not genuine unless it expresses itself in justice and kindness to the neighbor—nothing is more common than criticism of a church because some of its members show a lack of justice and charity in their outward dealings. But it is often asserted that love to the neighbor is possible without love to the Lord. (“So-and-so hasn’t any use for religion, but he’s always doing things for other people.” “There are better people outside of the church than in it.” “I always try to treat other people right, and I’ll take my chance at salvation with anybody in the church.”) The immediate popularity in its day of the poem by Leigh Hunt (1838) *Abou Ben Adhem*, in which love to the Lord is made a sort of involuntary appendage of love to the neighbor, testifies to this feeling. But the fact is that no one can do genuine good to the neighbor without recognition of his dependence upon the Lord for the will and the power to do good, as well as upon the Lord’s guidance as to what is good. If a man does not do good from love to the Lord, he does it from love of self, which renders his goodness spurious. People reject this teaching at first, but it is not hard to demonstrate. Those brought up in orderly, respectable homes find it much pleasanter and more profitable to fulfill—even at the cost of some personal inconvenience—the ordinary external requirements of civilized neighborly living which will make them liked and respected in their community than to be openly selfish, miserly,

and uncharitable. They like the approval of their neighbors and they like to feel pleased and satisfied with themselves. We remember the story of the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-26). He had kept all the commandments but turned away when the Lord told him to sell all that he had and follow him. To sell all that we have represents giving up the sense of our own goodness and wisdom. And without looking to the Lord for guidance we cannot know what is the neighbor nor how we should express our love for him. The lawyer in our story unconsciously showed this and confessed his own ignorance when he asked, “And who is my neighbor?”

The Lord’s answer, the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is recorded only in Luke, is one of the best known and most frequently referred to of the parables, but its lesson is not always carefully analyzed. It is often cited as evidence that we should look outside of the church for true charity and also that the essential of love to the neighbor is caring for the bodily wants of others. We like to imagine ourselves as filling the role of the Good Samaritan. In truth, however, we are all much more likely to play the role of the man who fell among thieves.

A brief study of the correspondence of the story will repay us. “To go down from Jerusalem to Jericho” is to go from “the truth of doctrine to the good of life” (AE 458¹⁰), that is, to try to put into actual practice something that we have learned of the Lord and His will. On this journey we are all often attacked by our own selfish desires and the false reasonings that come from them, and are robbed of our garments of truth, weakened in our good resolution, and fall by the roadside half dead—with very little of our spiritual vitality left. The priest and the Levite in a good sense represent worship of the Lord and the good of charity; so in a bad sense as here they picture the opposite, namely those who have no love to the Lord and no love to the neighbor (AE 444¹⁴), who are indifferent to our spiritual condition. The Samaritan pictures those who are in “the affection of truth” (AC 9057²), that is, in the love of practicing what truth teaches, or “those who are in the good of charity toward the neighbor” (AE 375⁴²). Such people

can and do help us, pointing out to us good and true things—the oil and wine—to strengthen our shaken resolution, carrying us along so far as their own understanding permits, and bringing us to those who can give us more instruction and help. An inn signifies a place of instruction. Thus the whole story is a picture of spiritual service. Even in the letter it should be noted that it is the Samaritan and not the injured man who is called the neighbor. Swedenborg tells us (AC 6708) that the Samaritan is called the neighbor because he exercised the good of charity and that everyone is our neighbor in accordance with the quality of his love to the Lord (AC 6711). That is, it is love to the Lord in a man that is the “neighbor” to whom we are to do good, and in all our dealings with others we are to act in such a way as to foster love to the Lord in them. With this end in view we shall not give alms indiscriminately to everyone who asks, for to give alms to an evil man is to make it more possible for him to go on in his evil course. AC 6703 to 6712 states the general principle very clearly, as does TCR 428. When the Lord made the lawyer acknowledge that the despised Samaritan might be more his neighbor than the priest or the Levite, he taught that genuine goodness is to be recognized wherever it is found.

And lest one should feel justified in misinterpreting the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable is immediately followed in the Word by the story of Mary and Martha. “Martha was cumbered about much serving.” How often we are so distracted by our external activities—useful though they be—that we think we have no time to sit at the Lord’s feet and hear His word! We see these activities as duties, as services to the Lord, just as Martha was preparing for the Lord’s physical entertainment. But we become so “careful and troubled about many things” that we lose our sense of proportion. Churches sometimes become so busy with external service that they almost wholly neglect the study and teaching of the Word. It is a common plea that it is of no use to talk to men of spiritual things until their physical needs are met, but not only is this not true (for many have found peace and joy in spiritual things

in spite of physical want): if we take this attitude, we shall never finish the work of supplying physical wants and never find the right time to supply the spiritual. The Lord teaches this elsewhere in connection with this same Mary, when she anointed Him with costly ointment which Judas thought would better have been sold and the money given to the poor (John 12:3). Read also the Lord's words in Mark 14:7. To Martha He said, "But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part." Love to the Lord is the first and great commandment. We cannot do good to the neighbor unless we learn of the Lord what is good and perform our services in His name instead of in our own. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Further helpful numbers are AE 240, 962; AR 316; TCR 287, 407-411; NJHD 84-90.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine, n. 85: "It is a common opinion at this day that every man is equally the neighbor, and that benefits are to be conferred on every one who needs assistance; but it is in the interest of Christian prudence to examine well the quality of a man's life, and to exercise charity to him accordingly. The man of the internal church exercises his charity with discrimination, consequently with intelligence; but the man of the external church, because he is not able thus to discern things, does it indiscriminately."

True Christian Religion, n. 428: "Doing good to an evil-doer is like giving bread to a devil, which he turns into poison; for in the hands of the devil all bread is poison, or if it is not, he turns it into poison by using good deeds as allurements to evil. It is also like handing to an enemy a sword with which he may kill someone; or like giving the shepherd's staff to a wolfish man to guide the sheep to pasture, who, after he has obtained it, drives them away from the pasture to a desert, and there slaughters them; or like giving public authority to a robber, who studies and watches for plunder only, according to the richness and abundance of which he dispenses the laws and executes judgments."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

J. What is an apostle? *one sent out*

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- P. How many apostles were there? *twelve*
- J. When the Lord sent out the apostles, what were they to preach? *kingdom of God*
- J. How were they to be cared for? *by those they served*
- P. How did the Lord help the apostles to feed the multitude? *multiplied loaves and fish*
- I. What question did the Lord ask of the apostles? *who do people say I am?*
- I. What was Peter's answer? *the Christ of God*
- P. Who were the three apostles closest to the Lord? *Peter, James, John*
- P. What vision were they allowed to see? *transfiguration*
- J. In our lesson for today what does the lawyer ask the Lord? *how may I inherit eternal life?*
- P. To what does the Lord refer him for his answer? *Scriptures*
- J. What answer does the lawyer find? *love Lord and neighbor*
- P. What question does the lawyer ask to "justify" himself? *who is my neighbor?*
- P. With what parable does the Lord answer him? *Good Samaritan*
- P. Where was the man going when he fell among thieves? *Jerusalem to Jericho*
- P. What two men passed him by without helping him? *priest, Levite*
- P. Who did help him? *Samaritan*
- J. Who were the Samaritans? *people Assyrians had brought in*
- J. What did this parable teach the lawyer? *to help anyone in need*
- J. What was the difference between Martha and Mary? *first served, latter listened*
- P. Which one did the Lord say had chosen the better part? *Mary*
- S. Why are we given this story immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan? *to help us learn how to love the neighbor*