

Biblical Ethics – Do Not Murder

(by Jim Hughes) [218/365 – 2025-10-05]

The Good Samaritan

The parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Lk 10.25-37) is probably the best known of Jesus' parables. A Google search lists dozens of 'Good Samaritan' hospitals, numerous jurisdictions have passed 'Good Samaritan' laws that protect people who help someone in need from being sued if they make a mistake while offering assistance, and a person called a 'Good Samaritan' in our culture is considered to be generous and ready to assist anyone in distress without hesitation and without expecting a reward. In 2019, Netflix streamed a movie called *Good Sam*, applying aspects of this parable. Interpretations of this parable vary. Social justice activists say that Jesus was speaking against racial prejudices. Some people claim that Jesus was showing that those from other religions can have superior moral behaviour to Jews (or Christians), and others suggest that Jesus teaches that caring for the needy in society (e.g., drug addicts or homeless) is a prerequisite for admittance to heaven.

For its primary meaning we need to consider when Jesus delivers it during his ministry. The disciples had just returned from announcing Jesus' final Judean preaching tour. They were excited over their ability to cast out demons, but Jesus warned them not to focus on temporal miracles and miss the greater spiritual miracle—that their names were written in heaven and that they had been given spiritual sight. It is at this point that a lawyer arrives and asks what he must do to inherit everlasting life. The encounter of the lawyer with Jesus teaches us about true spiritual sight (Lk 10.21). It is not obtained by casting out demons, but by demonstrating a heart filled with a desire to do God's will.

The lawyer arose to test Jesus about how to inherit everlasting life (Lk 10.25) and asked a question to justify himself (Lk 10.29). Therefore, his sincerity in asking for directions to everlasting life is suspect. However, Jesus ignores the ill intent and the purposed trap and capitalizes on the opportunity raised by the first question to direct the lawyer to the path to everlasting life.

All 'spiritual' roads do not lead to enlightenment or to heaven. There is only one route—the Law of Love (Lk 10.26-27; per Lev 19.18; Dt 6.5). The only way that we can demonstrate that we love God and our neighbour is by keeping God's commandments (Jn 14.15, 21). Therefore, the path to everlasting life is through obedience to the law. To reach heaven we must keep the whole law, as Jesus confirms in his answer to the lawyer (Lk 10.28). Paul also indicates that it is through obedience to the law that we obtain everlasting life (Rom 10.5; per Lev 18.5), and James reinforces this teaching (James 1.27; James 2.8, 10). It is an incontestable fact that we must keep the law in order to gain access to heaven

and only those who do keep it will be found there.

The lawyer did what all men do when they first come to understand what God requires. He began to tally his personal score against the law. His immediate question is, "Who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10.29). Our question is similar: "Okay, what laws must I keep?" In response, Jesus presents the parable of the man who fell into the hands of robbers. He tells us how three different men dealt with the situation (Lk 10.30-35). Two of them were educated Jews who had been thoroughly trained in detailed examples of how to live out the law. The third was a Samaritan who, even though he had access to the same OT Law in the books of Moses, was despised by the Jews as being a heretic and thus ceremonially unclean. In this parable Jesus condemns those who are self-righteous and exhibit a pompous profile. He also praises a liberality which is the fruit of a heart filled with compassion and that treats all men equitably (Lk 10.36-37). However, we err greatly if we think that Jesus is laying out the specific paving stones on the road to heaven.

The most important lesson derived from this story is not found in the parable itself, but in the final words of Jesus to the lawyer (Lk 10.37), "Go and do likewise." Jesus is telling the lawyer to treat all men as neighbours, even ones from an ethnic group that he is prejudiced against. But he is also telling him something of greater significance. He says go keep the *entire* Law, in all its fullness, with all its implications. The reason Jesus gives this parable is not to direct us to specific things that we must do to earn a place in heaven but, rather, to show us the impossibility of our keeping the law. He deliberately chose a conditional act of mercy that would be difficult for the lawyer, just as he told the rich young ruler to go and sell all his possessions (Lk 18.22), to illustrate the challenge facing all men—the impossibility of keeping the law.

What then are we to do? We are to keep the law in every detail, or we won't be given a place in heaven. But it can't be done! No mere man can do what God requires. So, we need to consider the necessary conditions for inheriting everlasting life: 1) We must come humbly to Jesus and say "Lord, I can't do it! I can't keep the law perfectly!" 2) We must believe in Jesus who kept the law perfectly on our behalf. As a social outcast from men, Jesus became *the* Good Samaritan by showing true compassion toward mankind who was perishing from mortal wounds at the side of the road of life. Out of his own resources he provided succour and salvation so that we can live.

Thus, a secondary application of this parable is that we are to act like Jesus. It is our duty to take responsibly and care for the lives of those whom we encounter who are in dire straits. We are not to abdicate responsibility (e.g., when we see a person needing emergency aid), assuming that someone else will act and call 911, but to show mercy.