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THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF AND THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LUKE 10:25-37)

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Popular volumes on modern pastoral counseling often appeal to the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself in support of their contention that self-love or a positive self-image is biblical and therefore Christian.[1] No doubt the NT gives the counselor every warrant to encourage those who have an unduly negative estimate of themselves to appreciate the value that the divine love places upon man. It is doubtful, however, whether Jesus' approval of the lawyer's quotation of Lev 19:18 in Luke 10:27 carries any exhortation to recognize one's self-worth.

Theologians have often grappled with the apparently unchristian exhortation to love oneself in Luke 10:27. John Kleinig suggests that the command to love our neighbor as ourself means "to include among *our* interests (in a non-self-regarding fashion) the interests of others."[2] Karl Barth is adamant that "if I love my neighbour, that is the judgement on my self-love and not its

[1]E.g., "'Love thy neighbor as thyself' implies that we show a regard for others that is conditioned by the feelings we have for ourselves. . . . We love others because we regard ourselves with positive self-esteem" (Maurice E. Wagner, *The Sensation of Being Somebody* [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1975], pp. 231-232). Bruce Narramore, commenting on Luke 10:27, says, "There is an intimate connection between our love for ourselves and our love and esteem for God and others. When we fail to love ourselves, all of our relationships suffer" (*You're Someone Special* [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1978], p. 119). James Dobson in a widely read manual declares that not only are we "permitted a reasonable expression of self-love," but that "love for others is impossible—until we experience a measure of self-respect" (*Hide or Seek*, rev. ed. [Old Tappan, N.J., 1979], pp. 185-186).

[2]John Kleinig, "Ayn Rand and Social Justice," *Interchange* 20 (1976): 215.

indirect justification."[3] However, Barth does concede that the text presupposes self-love, but he maintains that the command to love one's neighbor as oneself condemns this self-love and does not approve of it or exhort the transference of it to one's neighbor.[4]

The strong tradition in Christian thought that the double commandment of love to God and to one's neighbor as oneself includes a third command to love oneself has been challenged by a number of modern scholars besides Barth. Such scholars, though usually granting that Luke 10:27 presupposes self-love as the natural and sinful condition of man, maintain that the ὡς σεαυτόν (Luke 10:27) reverses or overcomes this self-love and does not affirm it.[5] This position, though theologically sound, stands in need of greater exegetical support.

The second commandment is given quite elliptically, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν (Luke 10:27b), and is attached to the future verb ἀγαπήσεις of the first commandment (vs. 27a). The common interpretation that urges that ὡς σεαυτόν demands a Christian self-love, presupposes the addition of ἀγαπᾷς to the text thus: ἀγαπήσεις . . . καὶ τὸν πλησίον ὡς [ἀγαπᾷς] σεαυτόν. This is the assumed Greek text behind the two widely disseminated paraphrases *The Living Bible* and the *Good News Bible*. The former translates, "And you must love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself." The latter renders Luke 10:27, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Another suggested translation is offered by J. D. M. Derrett[6] and independently also by myself,[7] that is, to render Luke 10:27b: "You shall love your neighbor as if he were yourself." This

[3]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, pt. 2: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 450.

[4]Ibid.

[5]See, e.g., Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London, 1954), pp. 100-101; R. Bultmann, *Jesus* (Tübingen, 1951), p. 100 (quoted in Nygren, p. 101); Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey (London, 1960), pp. 113-114.

[6]J. D. M. Derrett, "'Love Thy Neighbour as a Man Like Thyself'?" *ExpTim* 83 (1971): 55-56.

[7]"'Once again, Now, "Who is my Neighbour?"': A Comment," *EvQ* 49 (1977): 178-179.

translation is open to the objection[8] that syntactically the third person "he" cannot be related to the second person σεαυτόν. Derrett's and my suggestion does indeed assume an expanded Greek text something like ἀγαπήσεις . . . τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς [ὄντα] σεαυτόν, which is indeed difficult if not impossible Greek.

The governing verb is, or course, ἀγαπήσεις; and this no doubt should guide us in our expansion of the elliptical phrase in Luke 10:27b. The text would then read ἀγαπήσεις . . . καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς [ἀγαπῶν] σεαυτόν ("You shall love your neighbor as though you were loving yourself"). This is perfectly good Greek, and the use of ὡς to introduce a supposition clause is common enough in elliptical phrases in the NT[9]—for example, 2 Thess 2:2, μήτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν ("nor by letter as though it were coming from us"); Eph 5:22, ὡς τῷ Κυρίῳ ("as though you were obeying the Lord"); Eph 5:28, ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα ("as though they were loving their own bodies"); Eph 5:33, ὡς ἑαυτόν ("as though he were loving himself")[10]; Luke 15:19, ὡς ἕνα τῶν μισθίων σου ("as though you were treating one of your hired servants"); Rom 4:17, ὡς ὄντα ("as though they were"); Heb 13:3, ὡς συνδεδεμένοι ("as though you were a fellow prisoner").[11]

Which of the two translation possiblities for ὡς σεαυτόν in Luke 10:27—"as you love yourself" or "as though you were loving yourself"— is to be accepted, is made clear by the point of the parable itself (vss. 30-35). First, we must remind ourselves that although at initial glance there may not appear to be a great difference between these two alternatives, closer attention reveals a vast difference. Clearly, "as though you were loving yourself" assumes that no man hates his own flesh, that in treating the other as though treating himself he will act with compassion. Though it assumes this, it does not exhort it. The text does not urge a self-

[8]Made verbally by J. Lambrecht after the reading of a short paper on this point by me at the 35th General Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, Toronto, August, 1980.

[9]T. Muraoka, "The use of ΩΣ in the Greek Bible," *NovT* 7 (1964/65): 51-72, esp. 58-60.

[10]E.g., Muraoka, p. 60, says, "Not that one's own wife is *like* his body, but that she *is* his body."

[11]Further examples are cited in Derrett, p. 55.

love, but a selfless love of the other. The love here admonished is directed outward to the other, not inwardly to the self, not even in the first instant. Love is to be conditioned by the other, not the self. The translation "as you love yourself," however, unequivocally states the fact of self-love. But Jesus is not simply requiring the transference of one's self-love to the other, he is demanding a radical exchange of roles.

"As though you were loving yourself" demands, then, not simply the transference of a prior self-love, but the placing of oneself into the other's predicament before one acts towards him. Jesus is not here urging that we love our neighbor with the same love with which we love ourselves, but rather that we love our neighbor in such a way that we treat our neighbor as though we were acting towards ourself. The circle of self-love is not simply expanded; it is shattered.

It is just such a role reversal that the parable of the good Samaritan presents, and this leads us to examine the lawyer's question (vs. 29) and the frequently noted shift in meaning between it and Jesus' own interrogation in vs. 36.[12] Jesus gave an example of one *who* acted as neighbor, but the lawyer wished to know to *whom* he was to act as neighbor; Jesus spoke *subjectively* of one who *did* mercy, the lawyer asked *objectively* about who should *receive* mercy. The lawyer apparently could have walked away agreeing that he must show mercy as the Samaritan had done, but still muttering, "Yes, but to whom? that is the question."

The tension between the questions in Luke 10:29 ("Who is my neighbor?") and 10:36 ("Who was neighbor?") is considered so severe by many scholars that they treat Luke 10:25-28 as originally separate from 10:29-37.[13] A. Jülicher refers to "the deficient logic of the conversation."[14] However, the question, "Who is my friend

[12]According to M. D. Goulder, one must be a don to observe it, which is doubtful. See M. D. Goulder, "Characteristics of the Parables in the Several Gospels," *JTS* 19 (1968): 59; and further, see Eta Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, trans. John Sturdy (London, 1966), pp. 139-141, n. 14.

[13]E.g., R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford, 1968), p. 178.

[14]Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2d ed. (Tübingen, 1910), 2: 596—"die mangelhafte 'Logik der Rede.'"

(= neighbor)?" can be taken in two ways.[15] It can mean, "Whom am I to treat as a friend?" (which is what the lawyer intended), but equally it can mean, "Who treats me as a friend?" (which is clearly how Jesus took it).[16] The former is answered by listing those who qualify to be treated as a friend (e.g., Jews but not Samaritans); the latter permits the reply, "those who help you in your hour of need." By construing the lawyer's question in this way, Jesus makes him the recipient rather than the giver of aid; Jesus reverses the lawyer's role and makes him the one in need of help instead of the dispenser of aid.[17]

Thus, though Jesus does not answer the intended import of the question, he does give a perfectly valid answer to the verbal form of the enquiry. The lawyer is forced to become involved in the parable: he is slapped down bleeding beside the Jericho road, and it becomes no longer a question of who qualifies for his help but who will help *him*. This is a "twist" characteristic of Jesus' parables.[18]

Barth's pronouncement that your "neighbour is [your] fellow-man acting towards [you] as a benefactor"[19] is a legitimate comment, given the ambiguity of τίς ἐστίν μου πλησίον (i.e., "who is friend to me?" or "to whom am I to be a friend?"); but his term "fellow-man" tames the biting force conveyed by the fact that it is a Samaritan who is the benefactor. The bitter feud between the Samaritans and the Jews was basically a religious quarrel about

[15]This is true of both the English and the Greek, τὶς ἐστίν μου πλησίον.

[16]That Jesus in the Lukan dialogue takes the μου as "to me" (i.e., an objective genitive) is made clear by the verbally close parallel in vs. 36, τὶς . . . πλησίον . . . γεγονέναι τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος, where τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος is equivalent to μου in the earlier clause and means "to the one who fell" (i.e., an objective genitive).

[17]Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York, 1966), pp. 210-212. B. van Elderen, "Another Look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan," in *Saved By Hope*, ed. James I. Cook (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1978), pp. 115-116. Linnemann (p. 141, n. 14), denies this shift because the Aramaic equivalent for πλησίον is reciprocal; but the shift in the Greek form of the dialogue is due to Jesus taking the ambiguous μου in one sense while the lawyer intends another. The point does not turn on the meaning of πλησίον or the Aramaic behind it.

[18]L. Paul Trudinger, "Once Again, Now, 'Who is My Neighbour?,'" *EvQ* 48 (1976): 160.

[19]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 420.

priestly succession, hence hatred was most intense between the Sadducees and the Samaritans.[20] This observation heightens the enormity of Jesus' contrast between two members of the priestly order and a Samaritan.[21] As R. W. Funk notes, "The Samaritan is he who the victim does not, could not expect would help, indeed does not want help from."[22]

Jesus' patient Socratic questioning leads the lawyer himself to declare, even if somewhat indirectly, that a hated enemy is his neighbor. The steps are simple and compelling:

1. "Love your neighbor as though loving yourself" (vs. 27).
2. "Who is neighbor to me?" (vs. 29).[23]
3. "Who was neighbor to you when you were a victim?" (vs. 36).
4. "The Samaritan" (vs. 37a).[24]
5. "Then love Samaritans [enemies] as though you were loving yourself" (σὺ ποίει ὁμοίως) (vs. 37b).

The tension between vss. 25-28 and vss. 29-37 is by no means as severe as many imagine. The transfer of role indicated in ὡς σεαυτόν qualifies πλησίον in the first dialogue (vs. 27) and prepares the way for the situation in the second dialogue, where the lawyer is forced to play the role of the victim and from this perspective is himself obliged to pronounce the true meaning of πλησίον.

[20]Matthew Black, "The Parables as Allegory," *BJRL* 42 (1960): 286-287.

[21]A modern parallel would be to tell a northern Irish Presbyterian congregation about an Anglican and a Methodist who passed by a wounded Irish Presbyterian in contrast to a southern Irish Catholic who stopped to help him.

[22]Funk, p. 213. John Dominic Crossan penetratingly observes that "the story challenges the hearer to put together two impossible and contradictory words for the same person: 'Samaritan' (10:33) and 'neighbor' (10:36)" (*In Parables* [New York, 1973], p. 64).

[23]As Jesus in the Lukan dialogue construes τὶς ἐστίν μου πλησίον. The lawyer, as we have observed, asked, "How far am I to extend the list of those who qualify as recipients of my love?" "In what way and to what degree am I to discriminate between those whom I treat as friends and those whom I do not?"

[24]Van Elderen, p. 115.

True, "neighbor" is used in vs. 27 in a passive sense (one to whom help is offered) and this is also true of vs. 29 in the lawyer's intended meaning, whereas vs. 36 clearly has an active nuance (one who offers help). However, it should be noted that the total phrase in vs. 27 involves a transfer of role in which "neighbor" is not simply a passive object of one's love, but the loving of the other as oneself (i.e., not simply x ⟶ y but x ⟶ y = x). Further, vs. 29 is very close in verbal form to vs. 36[25] and can be construed quite legitimately in an active sense. There is not, then, a hopeless contradiction between the force of πλησίον in vss. 27, 29 and vs. 36.

The questions in vs. 29 and vs. 36 are not, therefore, in any verbal contradiction and give no basis for isolating the parable from the preceding dialogue with the lawyer (vss. 25-28). In fact, the parable of the Good Samaritan forms part of the second stage in the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer. In the first section, the lawyer asks Jesus a test question (vs. 25), no doubt expecting the stock answer (vs. 27), and thus giving himself the opportunity to startle Jesus with his clever objection (vs. 29). Jesus, however, avoids the trap and answers with a question (vs. 26), which forces the lawyer to reveal that he knew the usual answer (vs. 27). Having thus been maneuvered into answering his own question and thereby prevented from challenging Jesus if he had answered in the expected way, the lawyer, in order to regain prestige, opens up a new dialogue with his real test question (vs. 29). But in this second round, Jesus follows the pattern of his first encounter and leads the lawyer to the same conclusion. K. E. Bailey has set out the unity of the two parts of the dialogue very plainly:

Round One

Lawyer—Question 1	*"What* must I *do* to inherit *eternal life?"*
Jesus—Question 2	"What about the law?"
Lawyer—Answer 2	"Love God and your neighbor."
Jesus—Answer 1	*"Do this* and *live."*

[25]Ibid. Van Elderen sets it out nicely as follows:

Lawyer: *tis estin mou plēsion?*

Jesus: *tis gegonei tou empesontos plēsion?*

Round Two

Lawyer—Question 1	"Who is my neighbor?"
Jesus—The parable of the Good Samaritan	
Question 2	"Which of these three became a neighbor?"
Lawyer—Answer 2	"The one who showed mercy on him."
Jesus—Answer 1	"Do and keep on doing this."[26]

In the second dialogue the lawyer is compelled to abandon his citadel of smug liberality and to assume the place of one helped by an enemy. The Samaritan's compassion thus hammers home the lesson that to love your neighbor as if you were loving yourself demands even the placing of oneself in the enemy's lot before acting towards him.[27] The golden rule (Luke 6:31) includes enemies. "Love your neighbor as yourself" can no longer carry the corollary to "hate your enemies" (Matt 5:43). Jesus' parable makes it impossible ever again to make such a restriction; to love your neighbor means to do good to your enemies (Luke 6:27).

The lawyer made no protest that his question was unanswered; what he was left musing about was not the deficient logic of the speech, but what he would do if *he* met a wounded Samaritan.

[26]K. E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1976), p. 74.

[27]J. Piper, *"Love Your Enemies"* (Cambridge, Eng., 1979), p. 59.