

*Luke 10:25,29 Just then, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ...<sup>29</sup>But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

“*What must I do to be saved*” is natural man’s universal question. Yet in our devotions this week, we will see that natural man has a universal downfall. As a result, natural man has only one hope.

The expert in the law, whom we meet at the beginning of our lesson, was someone well acquainted with Scripture. By those around him he was considered to be an authority in interpreting and teaching the Law of Moses. He considered himself to be a good, pious, and upstanding man who would one day enter the gates of heaven on the basis of his good works.

So it was not so much a desire to receive an answer from Jesus, but rather to dare Jesus to find fault with him that led this man to ask natural man’s universal question, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Of course, this question is nothing new. It comes from mankind’s natural heart and is the result of spiritual blindness and arrogance and has played itself out like a broken record down through the centuries.

So, I ask you, are you a human being? The reason I ask such a strange question is this - as a human being we are by nature like this expert in the law. Our sinful nature – that evil, wicked self that is part of us from the day we are conceived to the moment of our death – likes to think like this man. It likes to think that we can gain salvation by doing something. That idea is called work-righteousness, and such an idea is completely condemned in the Bible.

1. Why did the expert in the law come to Jesus with his question?
2. What is work-righteousness?
3. Why is the question “What must I do to be saved?” natural man’s universal question?

**Prayer:** *Jesus, you are the true God and eternal life. When I read God’s Word, let me hear your voice and know your grace and live in peace. Amen.*

Work-righteousness is the natural religion of all mankind. Just think of all the religions of the world. Apart from Christianity, they all impose a code of conduct which a person must follow in order to soothe God's anger and earn his favor. The thought of work-righteousness is this, do the right sort of work and one can become a child of God and heir of heaven. It is because of this natural religion of mankind that the universal question of mankind is asked – "*What must **I** do to be saved.*" And, it is because of this natural religion of mankind that the Gospel of Jesus is does not appeal to people by nature.

You see, the message of Jesus does not speak of mankind's work and what they can do, but rather of what God has already done. It completely takes what we do out of the picture. And that hurts our pride. It's a blow to our ego. But God's Word states, **"Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6)**. Without faith in Christ, it is impossible to do anything that God will call good, and it is impossible to enter heaven. And that is natural man's downfall.

1. Doesn't the concept of human sin and the impossibility to please God without faith damage self-esteem?
2. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the Apostle Paul writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." That's similar to what we read in our devotion today. Why is the gospel foolishness to an unbeliever?
3. How is it fair to say that a believer and an unbeliever can carry out the same outward act of kindness or compassion and for one it would be a good work and for another it would not be?

**Prayer:** *Lord, we praise you for your love that sought us when we sought you not. In your grace, keep us ever faithful to you. Amen.*

*Luke 10:25-28 “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup>“What is written in the law?” he asked him. “What do you read there?”*

<sup>27</sup>He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup>He said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live."

The expert who came to Jesus was well versed in the Old Testament Law. So Jesus, in response to the man's question, simply asked him what the law said concerning the way to salvation. The expert quickly responded, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself."** Jesus acknowledged the correctness of the answer.

Indeed, the first table of the law – that is the first three commandments – requires perfect love for God. The second table – that is commandments four through ten – requires perfect love for our neighbor. But knowing this is one thing. Doing it is another. Jesus reminded the expert of this when he said, **“Do this, and you will live.”**

In other words Jesus was saying, “You have the right pattern before you. Now, fit yourself - your every word, thought, and deed into that pattern and indeed you will have eternal life. But make no mistake, not one single slip, for work is work, and the Law does not tolerate a single misstep.” **“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10).**

It is here that the foolishness and stupidity and damning nature of work-righteousness becomes unmistakably evident. It is here we see natural man's universal downfall. It is not in the recitation of the demands of the law, but in one's attempt to meet those demands, that heaven is lost. For tell me, have you successfully kept every one. Without a mistake? Without one slip?

1. Why did Jesus point the expert to the law? Why didn't Jesus just tell him to believe in him for the forgiveness of sins?
2. What is meant by the first table of the law? What is meant by the second table of the law?
3. Agree or disagree: If one kept the law of God perfectly they would be saved. *(what's the problem though)*

**Prayer:** Lord God, the devil threatens to devour us. Defend us from his lies, that we may stand firm on your Word and cling to Christ alone. Amen.

Have you always taken God seriously? Have you loved God with all your reasoning abilities so that there is never a question in your mind or a doubt about anything at all in his word? Have we loved God so that it never occurs to us to want anything other than what God promises and provides? Have we loved God with all our emotions so that our one overriding pleasure is to hear his Word and always long for nothing else than to keep it?

Can you think of a day when that described your inner life? How about an hour? Perhaps a minute? But that's the first and most important commandment. If we can't keep that one, what hope is there that we could ever keep the rest.

How true God's Word is, **"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20)**. How we are reminded, **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)**. Each of us must confess, **"I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18)**. Even common sense tells us this, for there is not a single person in this room who can honestly say to me, to another, or even to themselves that they have never sinned. And this is critical, because the soul who sins is the one that deserves to spend eternity in hell.

Yet have you ever noticed, even after all this our sinful nature is not willing to concede this truth to God. Just look at the reaction of the expert in the law, **“want[ing] to justify himself...he asked...‘And who is my neighbor?’”** The question in and of itself is wrong. It implies that there are some people he didn’t need to love, people whom he could rightly ignore or even hate. By modifying God’s law he thought he could argue that he had carried out these commands. Regrettably, the expert in the law spoke not only for himself, but for us as well.

1. Consider/discuss the four questions the first paragraph presents to you. Consider/discuss how they expose your sinfulness. Take time to repent and ask God for forgiveness.
2. Why is the question “Who is my neighbor” in and of itself wrong?
3. What is the answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor”?

**Prayer:** Thank you for never giving up on me, Lord. Amen.

Regrettably, the expert in the law spoke not only for himself, but for us as well.

We too are full of such excuses, aren't we? God, you can't mean that included in the definition of a neighbor is that mass shooter? God, you can't really mean that I am to love the one who bullies me in school? God you can't expect me to be helpful and kind to the one who turns my life upside down. You can't possibly mean to say that when I see such a person in need and whom I can help that I am actually to help? Yet, that is the requirement of the law, and to not do it is sin.

And it doesn't stop there either, does it? The excuses continue. God, you are demanding too much we say. So shamelessly we tell him he'll have to be content with our best and he had better accept it as good enough. God, you can't expect me to help someone in need at my expense, or to put myself in danger. And so like this expert in the law we try to adjust the commands of God to fit our lives rather than matching our lives to fit God's commands. But the Parable of the Good Samaritan is clear and has no need for special interpretation.

No doubt, the Levite and Priest also had their excuses. Perhaps they thought the injured man couldn't possibly be their neighbor and didn't think he deserved their help. Maybe they were afraid the robbers might still be nearby and they might be the next victim. Perhaps they even reasoned, "The man is almost dead what good can I do." But they were wrong, and even the expert in the law had to agree that they were not the neighbor that God demanded and the Samaritan was.

Instead of making excuses, the Samaritan reflected the attitude which asks, “Whose neighbor can I be?” And all the details Jesus provides paint that picture. First, he cared for the wounded man on the spot. Then, walking so the wounded man could ride, he took him to the inn and cared for him; selflessly giving up two days of his own wages to provide for his future care.

1. How is it possible to love our neighbor who does evil to us and others?
2. By yourself/as a group come up with two concrete examples of times you have tried “to adjust the commands of God to fit our lives rather than matching our lives to fit God’s commands.” Take time to lay those sins at Jesus’ feet in repentance.
3. What is the difference between the question, “Who is my neighbor?” and “Whose neighbor can I be?”

**Prayer:** *Glory be to Jesus, who in bitter pains – poured for me the lifeblood from his sacred veins. Amen.*

Having been shown what it truly means to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind – and to love one's neighbor as himself – Jesus tells the expert in the law to go and do likewise. But understand this properly. Jesus wasn't saying if you go and do that from now on you will earn eternal life.

No, this was a command meant to make the expert aware of his own grievous shortcomings. Jesus had shown that the expert had not kept the law. Therefore, his past sins condemned him, and no matter how much and how well he kept the Law in the future, it could not make up or erase his past sins.

Jesus' parable and his command to go and do likewise make us aware our grievous shortcomings as well. We have not kept the law. Therefore our past sins condemn us, and no matter how much and how well we keep the law in the future we will not make up for any of our past sins.

Realizing this, we must admit that there is only one hope for our salvation. That hope must be found outside of ourselves, outside of our efforts. That hope can only be found in Jesus. In our desperate and helpless situation he stopped at nothing to help us. Not the thought of coming into this sin infested world. Not the ongoing battle against the devil. Not the reality of being rejected by his very own Father. Not even death itself. So he laid down his life to rescue us from eternal death, win our forgiveness and to give us eternal life.

1. A good rule when interpreting parables is to look for one main point only. What is the main point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is it okay to bring out another application to this parable?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the answer to the sermon theme question – what must I do to be saved?

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, use our study of your Word to keep us standing firm in your free salvation. Amen.*

After Adam's fall into sin, the whole human race lay spiritually dead. The Law could do nothing but diagnose our condition as hopeless, and sentence us to hell. But then Jesus came. The perfect requirements of the law were met as he placed himself under the law and kept it perfectly on our behalf. He paid the price of our redemption as he suffered the punishment for our sins with his innocent death on the cross for all men. And with that righteousness God has covered all our sins. It is this perfect righteousness of Christ which the Christian has by faith, and enables us to present ourselves before the throne of God as the basis for our entrance into eternal life. In and through Christ alone we can be saved.

Knowing and believing and receiving this love and compassion of the Father in Jesus is the only way to gain a heart that is devoted to loving and serving others rather than ourselves. Only when we have been touched by the good news of forgiveness can we begin to love the Lord with our whole heart –and love our neighbor as ourselves. Only when we have been touched by the good news of forgiveness can we be filled with an attitude that asks, "Whose neighbor can I be?"

The Parable of the Good Samaritan leads us first to our knees in repentance, admitting that we have been like the expert in the law. We have sought to justify ourselves before God with our works, and when that didn't work, to justify ourselves by adjusting his law. Lord, have mercy on us and forgive us for your Son's sake. Then this parable leads us to see Jesus as the perfect "Samaritan," the one who loved us perfectly. He came to serve us, to live for us, to die for us. In him we see what HAS BEEN DONE to save us. Now our hearts are moved from self-centeredness to a selfless love and compassion to all whose needs are evident to us and to whom we can be of help. Amen.

1. In what way has Jesus fulfilled the law?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Agree or disagree: Even the believer's best works are tainted with sin.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Agree or disagree: God accepts the believer's imperfect works as perfectly pleasing in his sight for Jesus' sake.

**Prayer:** Lord, work in us daily repentance that produces obedience. With your power working in us, keep us from failing. Amen.

ANSWER PAGES

PAGE 1

1. Why did the expert in the law come to Jesus with his question? It doesn't appear that it was so he could receive a true answer from Jesus. Rather, it would appear that he came daring Jesus to find some fault in his life. He wanted to test Jesus and to justify himself. Perhaps the expert thought that if Jesus confirmed the expert's way of thinking, than he would feel more confident in his salvation.
2. What is work-righteousness? The idea of trying to earn righteousness before God by one's own works.
3. Why is the question "What must I do to be saved?" natural man's universal question? Because by nature – because of the sinful nature with which we are born – we are spiritually blind. Being spiritually blind, we don't know the answer. We think that the answer has to do with doing something. Yet, someone who places their hopes on what they have done still finds themselves unsure, so they still find themselves asking this question.

PAGE 2

1. Doesn't the concept of human sin and the impossibility to please God without faith damage self-esteem? If "self-esteem" means "trust in one's own innate goodness and abilities," then God indeed desires not just to damage but to destroy such self-esteem. God says through Jeremiah the prophet, "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord" (17:5). Solomon also said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

By trusting in human power and not in God's power and grace we place ourselves under God's curse. This is the proud opposite of humble faith in God. But of course that is not the Bible's only message. Human self-esteem builds on the love God has for flawed, sinful humans. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God says of each of us, "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). In the water of our baptisms, we received new identities when we were connected to Jesus Christ. Ever since our baptisms, we have enjoyed the status of being holy, righteous, dearly loved children of God.

To build our concept of self-esteem in ourselves is a formula for eternal failure. Such self-esteem is a proud fraud and a deception that God's law seeks to burst. But God doesn't knock down our pride in order to see us grovel. He desires that we see ourselves for what we are so that he might lift us up far higher than any self-help program ever could. He desires in his gospel to lift us up forever to the exalted status of his holy children and heirs of eternal life.

2. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the Apostle Paul writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." That's similar to what we read in our devotion today. Why is the gospel foolishness to an unbeliever? The good news of Christ is foolishness to an unbeliever chiefly because of "the offense of the cross" (Galatians 5:11). The Scriptures proclaim that every human is conceived and born as a sinner who is hostile to God. The Scriptures also proclaim that the only way for any human to be saved is through the suffering and death of Jesus. Natural human pride ridicules such teachings as foolishness because it desires to claim some human contribution toward its status before God. Consider how every other "religion" other than true Christianity is based on the teaching that in some way we can make ourselves acceptable – at times with great effort and expense – to whoever god is. Unbelievers reject the gospel as foolishness because it calls all reliance on human goodness useless. Christ has done everything necessary for salvation.

There are also other reasons human sinful nature rejects the gospel as foolishness. Every miracle of the gospel appears to be foolishness. Human logic and thought consider God's miracles foolish, such as the Son of God taking on a real human nature, Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit. The miracles of the Holy Spirit using plain water in Baptism or bread and wine in the Lord's Supper to work wonderful blessings of grace do not make sense to unbelievers. How thankful we are that "the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

3. How is it fair to say that a believer and an unbeliever can carry out the same outward act of kindness or compassion and for one it would be a good work and for another it would not be? Before God the forgiveness of sins is most important. He sent his Son, Jesus, to cleanse us of all sin. A believer's works are cleansed of every stain of sin through Jesus (1 John 1:7). An unbeliever has no forgiveness, because he or she has not received God's forgiveness by faith in Jesus. Works produced by believers and unbelievers may be very similar on the outside, but the believer's acts come from a heart and a mind that know Jesus and his forgiveness. What delights God are hearts that render service to him or to a fellow human being because they are moved by his love and reflect his grace. Without faith in Jesus the motives of the heart behind outwardly good actions have no sense of



serving Jesus. Even when the works are motivated by a sincere desire to help others, we abide by the verdict of Jesus. He said that apart from him we “can do nothing” (John 15:5).

PAGE 3

1. Why did Jesus point the expert to the law? Why didn't Jesus just tell him to believe in him for the forgiveness of sins? Jesus pointed him to the law to show him he hadn't kept it. The man needed to see this before he would be able to look outside and away from himself to Jesus, the Savior he needed and the Savior who would do everything for him.
2. What is meant by the first table of the law? What is meant by the second table of the law? The first table of the law refers to the first three commandments. These commandments speak of our personal relationship with God. The second table of the law refers to commandments 4-10. These commandments address specific aspects of our relationships with others.

It is worthwhile to note that when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, he did not assign numbers to individual commandments. Martin Luther, the author of the Small Catechism, chose to keep the numbering used by the ancient church and the church of his day. Others have numbered the commandments in a different way, keeping the number at ten but changing the way they are numbered. There is not anything wrong with that.

3. Agree or disagree: If one kept the law of God perfectly they would be saved. *(what's the problem though)* The thing to keep in mind with this question, however, is that the law must be kept perfectly. Not one single slip-up, mistake, or anything like that. The problem is, we can't do that. Not only do we commit sins, but we are born with a sinful nature that already makes us guilty. So, while the statement is true, it is an impossibility for us to do.

PAGE 4

1. Consider/discuss the four questions the first paragraph presents to you. Consider/discuss how they expose your sinfulness. Take time to repent and ask God for forgiveness. These are the hard questions. They take time and painful self-reflection. But already with the first question, we see that we haven't always taken God seriously. If we did, we wouldn't be so quick to run headlong into sin. We look at the next set of questions and our sin is exposed even more. God have mercy on me, a sinner. If not for him, there would be no chance for salvation.
2. Why is the question “Who is my neighbor” in and of itself wrong? As the sermon devotion states, it implies as if there are some people who are not our neighbor. It implies that there might be times that we might be able to ignore or hate someone. Think about how easily this creeps into our way of thinking. Do we consider the mass shooter our neighbor? Do we consider the bully in school as our neighbor? Do we consider the coworker who is deceptively working up the ranks for a position you are more qualified for as a neighbor? Do we consider the parent who makes watching or teaching their child miserable as a neighbor? Often times we would like to modify Jesus' words so that these wouldn't fall into the category of being our neighbor. But they are our neighbor!
3. What is the answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor”? The “simple” answer is everyone. And it is true. But to help refine this thought so it doesn't become vague and aimless, a good way to define neighbor is: a person who is near you, who is in need, and whom you are in a position to help. This includes many people, and will also include those who might be across the world as well, when we hear of their need and are in a position to help.

PAGE 5

1. How is it possible to love our neighbor who does evil to us and others? The answer is to be filled with Christ's love for us found in his word. We cannot be offering to others what we ourselves are not receiving. The power of God's love for us in Jesus Christ works in us both the desire and the power to carry out good works in our lives. Whenever we hear or remember the gospel of Jesus in Word and sacrament, we are filled both with a desire to live a thankful life and the power to do so.
2. By yourself/as a group come up with two concrete examples of times you have tried “to adjust the commands of God to fit our lives rather than matching our lives to fit God's commands.” Take time to lay those sins at Jesus' feet in repentance. Your answers will vary. If you are having a tough time coming up with some answers/thoughts, perhaps these thoughts can prime the pump. Do you ever try to adjust God's commands when it comes to what you say about other people...people in governmental authority? How about adjusting his commands when it comes to worship/devotion? How about adjusting God's commands when it comes to what entertainment you participate in/watch?
3. What is the difference between the question, “Who is my neighbor?” and “Whose neighbor can I be?” The first one looks for an out. It suggests that some people might not be one's neighbor. The second one recognizes all are my neighbor, and is actively looking for ways to serve them. The second is the question we want to be asking as we live our Christian lives.

PAGE 6

1. A good rule when interpreting parables is to look for one main point only. What is the main point of the Parable of the Good Samaritan? The main point is brought out as Jesus gives the command, “Go and do likewise.” His point isn’t that the man could go and work his way into heaven. No, it was meant to make the expert aware of his own grievous shortcomings. Jesus had shown that the expert had not kept the law. Therefore, his past sins condemned him, and he needed to look outside himself. He wanted the expert in the law to realize he was on the wrong track if he thought he could secure eternal life by what he did.
2. Is it okay to bring out another application to this parable? Yes, we can bring out the application that Jesus wants us to be looking to be a good neighbor to everyone, even our enemies. But we need to be careful that doesn’t become the main point of the parable and all that one takes away from it. If that is the case, a person may see this parable as nothing more than “do to others what you want them to do to you.” That’s not the main point!
3. What is the answer to the sermon theme question – what must I do to be saved? The answer is we can do nothing. Jesus has done it all. It is through faith in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection that we are saved.

PAGE 7

1. In what way has Jesus fulfilled the law? Our holy and perfect Creator has every right to expect us to be what he created us to be. Human beings were created in his image, holy and perfect. God’s law demands perfect love for both God and our neighbors. That is precisely how Jesus summed up what God’s law justly asks of us: “One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:35-39).  
 Sadly, all of that is completely out of reach for every one of us. We were born with a sinful nature that was dead in sin and hostile to God, and we have daily proven countless times that we are far from perfect.  
 But Jesus has fulfilled God’s law as our substitute. He willingly placed himself under the same law we break. Throughout his 33 years of earthly life, he never once failed to offer perfect love to his heavenly Father and perfect love to everyone else as well. Jesus could boldly say even to his enemies, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46).  
 The righteous life of Jesus perfectly fulfilled every demand of God’s law. In addition, Jesus took our place and paid the penalty we deserve for our failure to do as God requires. He is our full and complete substitute. In other words, just as his death paid for our sins against God’s law, so also his life gave us his record of keeping the demands of the law. When we believe in what Jesus did, we receive the benefits of his work. As God looks at us, he sees his Son’s perfect obedience and counts us as those who have met every demand of his law. Perhaps nowhere is that more simply summed up than in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
2. Agree or disagree: Even the believer’s best works are tainted with sin. While this is true, the Bible also teaches that our good works are pleasing in God’s sight because even their imperfections stand under the forgiving grace of Christ. Again and again the Bible encourages us to live active Christian lives of service to God and others. But that does not take away the fact that the Bible teaches, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). If such is the confession of the prophet Isaiah and the people of God of Isaiah’s day, can anything less be said about us? This biblical teaching that our good works are tainted by sin is an antidote to our tendency to take pride in our efforts as if they somehow put us in a better relationship with God.
3. Agree or disagree: God accepts the believer’s imperfect works as perfectly pleasing in his sight for Jesus’ sake. When Jesus speaks about the sheep, or believers, on his right on judgment day, he commends them for the evidence of their faith (Matthew 25:31ff). He makes no comments about any of their sins or even the imperfections of those very fruits of faith. The imperfections and all the rest of their sins have already been forgiven. They are removed from them “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). Since all sin is forgiven and paid for in the life and death of Jesus, all that is left for God to see in our goods works is their good.