

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EUTHANASIA DEBATE

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On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, "'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.' But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Few stories in the Bible have attracted the attention of the general public more than the story of the Good Samaritan. It has worked its way into our common talk, when we request of others to be "Good Samaritans," and even into the laws of some states, where one has

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¹ Luke 10:25-37 (New International Version).

exemption from tort liability in helping injured persons unless gross negligence is involved.² Even as we implore people to be Good Samaritans, we find in our experience that we and others often do not reach this lofty goal. Certainly in interpersonal relationships we fail, but these are not life and death situations generally, as is the case of the original parable given by Jesus, nor in the case of the life and death subjects of our day, such as abortion and euthanasia. In the Good Samaritan parable the Master paints a scenario in which the balance was tilted against a beaten and helpless Jewish man who had taken the dangerous trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. In similar fashion today, there are individuals who find themselves hanging between life and death, and the ethic of Jesus poses for us a similar question that Jesus posed to the lawyer in Israel almost two thousand years ago. Persons who are sick, in pain, and often dying are treated with no more sympathy today than the priest and the Levite gave to the man on the Jericho road. Yes, they may have felt something inside, a tinge of guilt, but desired not to be bothered by this man's pain and the inconvenience he would cause them. Some wanting to promote euthanasia speak in caring, humanitarian terms but fail to make the sacrifice of the Samaritan in Jesus' story, who gave comfort, health, and even life to a dying person whom God brought to him that day. The lawyer who asked Jesus concerning the identity of his neighbor places each of us before the teacher who loves, gives succor and life, and bids each of us to do the same.

THE SETTING AND LITERARY NATURE OF THE PARABLE

In Luke 10:25-11:13, the evangelist Luke sets forth the characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ. He does so by means of three separate incidents, but all containing the motif of true discipleship. The first incident concerns the questioning by a lawyer, who is not his disciple but does not appear openly hostile to the Lord. The conversation leads to the conclusion that a disciple of Christ must follow two commandments in the law to inherit eternal life. The emphasis in this account is on the second commandment, to love one's neighbor.³ The second incident encourages Jesus' disciples to obey the teachings given by him.⁴ The third account is Christ's teaching on prayer in response to the disciples' request for instruction in how to pray.⁵ Thus the three

² See Paul B. Rasor, *A Law Teacher Looks at the Good Samaritan Story*, 31 WASHBURN L. J. 71 (1991); Robert A. Mason, Note, *Good Samaritan Laws--Legal Disarray: An Update*, 38 MERCER L. REV. 1439 (1987).

³ Luke 10:25-37.

⁴ Id. at 10:38-42.

⁵ Id. at 11:1-13.

accounts present instruction on one's relationship to neighbors, to Jesus, and to God, respectively.⁶

THE PROBLEM OF COHESIVENESS IN LUKE 10:25-37

Is the Good Samaritan Parable an Appendix?

The story of the lawyer's question about eternal life and the parable of the Good Samaritan is viewed by some scholars as being disjointed, reflective of a later redaction.⁷ A major reason why this is seen to be the case is the relationship of this narrative to Mark 12:28-34, upon which the Lucan account is considered to be dependent. Both accounts have Jesus in a conversation with a lawyer in which the two major commandments are given. In Mark's gospel Jesus offers the summary of the law from Deuteronomy⁸ and Leviticus,⁹ with which the lawyers agree, whereas in the Lucan narrative the lawyer cites the Old Testament passages, with Jesus confirming that obedience to these commandments brings life.

Though there are similarities between the texts, there are important reasons why Luke has probably not borrowed from Mark, though he may have been familiar with Mark's rendition. In Mark's account the lawyer asks of Christ the "first commandment of all,"¹⁰ while in Luke the lawyer asks the more practical question "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"¹¹ The Marcan account begins with the Shema, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one,"¹² but in Luke the Shema is omitted.

⁶ I. HOWARD MARSHALL, *THE GOSPEL OF LUKE* 439 (1978).

⁷ See E. KLOSTERMANN, *DAS LUKASEVANGELIUM HNADKOMMENTAR ZUM NT 118* (1929); J. SCHMID, *DAS EVANGELIUM NACH LUKAS, REGENSBURGER NT 190* (1960); E. EARLE ELLIS, *THE GOSPEL OF LUKE 158* (1974); Marshall says, however, that this view does not explain some important factors:

First, there are a number of contacts between Mt. and Lk . which strongly suggest that Matthew knew a recension of the story also familiar to Luke. Second, these and some other features are hard to explain as being due to Lucan redaction of Mk.; cf. especially the phrase *pos augiuuoskeis* and the wording of the second commandment. These two factors make it likely that Luke was following an independent version of the story which was also known to Matthew . It is possible that this version was in Q but we cannot be certain.

MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 441.

⁸ "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Deuteronomy 6:5 (New International Version).

⁹ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD." Leviticus 9:18 (New International Version).

¹⁰ Mark 12:28.

¹¹ Luke 10:25 (New International Version).

¹² Mark 12:29.

If Luke has not borrowed his story from Mark, is the account an independent account of the same incident, or were there two similar occurrences? Certainly it is possible that all three gospel writers developed their accounts from one basic story, but it may be better to understand the stories as reflecting different incidents. We should not suppose that the gospel writers were restricted only to single sermons of Jesus in developing their gospels. As T.W. Manson once said, "Great teachers constantly repeat themselves."¹³ The gospel writers, then, may have chosen a different episode of a similar teaching for their own accounts. Marshall says,

The sort of question raised by the lawyer was one that could arise frequently, especially since we know that it was asked in rabbinic circles; Manson makes the point that there is nothing surprising about the lawyer repeating what he already knew to be the answer of Jesus himself to the question in order to put his own counter-question regarding the scope of neighbourliness.¹⁴

Howard Marshall concludes his discussion by arguing for the unity of the lawyer's question and the parabolic tale. He says that they "manifestly belong together in the mind of Luke; although the latter appears to follow as a kind of appendix, it is integral to the pericope and forms the climax."¹⁵ When one reads the two accounts together, it is difficult to imagine a better contextual setting for the parable than what we observe in the text handed down to us. Even though these two pericopae form an integral whole, the story of the lawyer and Jesus, as Marshall indicates, does not simply introduce the parable but has its own significance because it poses the issue regarding how one may inherit eternal life. In answering this, it also answers the matter in a thoroughly Jewish way in citing the two commandments of loving God and one's neighbor.¹⁶

Luke's Emphasis on the Social Implications of the Gospel

Luke's gospel, more than any other, presents the social dimensions to the gospel. In his account of Jesus, he presents Christ's concern for weak persons, for women, for outcasts. For example, the gospel gives special place to women. Mary, the mother of Jesus, has her story told in Luke 1:26-56, and possibly her genealogy is what is recorded in Luke 3:23-38. An elaborate account of the "sinful" woman is given in Luke 7:36-50. It is Luke who records the contrasting models of Mary and Martha, where Mary is commended for listening to his teaching rather

¹³ T.W. MANSON, *THE SAYINGS OF JESUS* 259-61 (1949).

¹⁴ MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 441.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 440.

¹⁶ *Id.*

than busying herself with cooking and cleaning.¹⁷ Luke, as a physician, also gives special attention to the weak and infirm, often in great detail, in contrast to the rest of the evangelists.

This story also illustrates this emphasis. Through the conjunction of the two commandments found in this conjoined story, Luke is able to present the dual responsibilities that adhere to following Jesus, the commitment to God in the first commandment and concern for others in the second commandment.

The Relationship of the Lawyer's Question to Jesus' Lesson in the Parable

Though some scholars believe the story of the lawyer's question and the parable of the Good Samaritan are disjunctive, I have already argued earlier that they fit together well. By giving the parable, Jesus provides a practical expression to the lawyer's proper response to the full essence of the law found in the two commandments of loving God and then loving one's neighbor as oneself.

Let us look at the relationship of the two commandments and then determine in what sense the parable illustrates one or both of these commandments. First, are there really two commandments, or do they in reality merge into each other? In other words, are the love of God and the love for one's neighbor one and the same thing? Does love for God equate with love for one's neighbor? Moreover, is love for God the only motive for love of neighbor? Still yet, has loving one's neighbor become the same thing as loving God, so that love for one's neighbor becomes a substitute for loving God? Gunther Bornkamm speaks negatively to such a proposition:

Are the love of God and the love of our neighbour one and the same thing? Surely not. That would mean eliminating the barrier between God and man which is in fact immovable. Whoever considers both commandments in this sense to be identical knows nothing of God's sovereign rights, and will very soon make God into a mere term and cipher, which one will soon manage to do without. In Jesus' preaching, love for God consistently takes precedence. This is made abundantly clear in the entire teaching on the reign of God, and in the call to obedience to his sovereign will. 'No one can serve two masters' (Mt. vi. 24)--this law cannot be repealed, not even by our duty to our neighbour.¹⁸

The whole idea of somehow loving our neighbor without recognizing love for God is a humanitarian dream. Just as we are unable to love God without at the same time loving our neighbors, we are also incapable of

¹⁷ See Luke 10:38-42.

¹⁸ GUNTHER BORNKAMM, JESUS OF NAZARETH 110 (Irene McLuskey et al., trans., Harper & Row 1960) (1956).

loving our neighbors without also loving God first. Love for God must have priority in our lives. This is because the union with Christ by faith is that which gives us the ability to love others.¹⁹

As Karl Barth rightly said,

In Jesus Christ, true God and true man rests our hope for a real humanity. Not by ourselves, but insofar as we are members of the Body of Christ--and thus only--as we are men according to God. In order to avoid the misfortune of mankind's being lost because it does not fulfill the meaning of its creation, in order to be man, in order to fulfill the true humanism, then we must believe in Jesus Christ. There is no humanism without the Gospel.²⁰

Secondly, having discussed the view that one could love God simply by loving a neighbor, the further issue remains as to whether one may, conversely, love a neighbor as a means of loving God. A person who does so responds only to the needs of others based on an attempt to please God or to receive some reward, rather than sincerely responding to the needs of one's neighbor. Bornkamm has said that "[a] love which in this sense does not really love the other person for his own sake but only for the sake of God is not real love."²¹ The story of the Good Samaritan provides an opportunity to evaluate this sense of love. The Samaritan of the story gives no indication that he responds out of love for God rather than out of love for the neighbor. Speaking of the manner in which the story was told, Bornkamm remarks,

This is told with the greatest care: he binds up his wounds, he alleviates his pain, sets the sick man on his beast, brings him to the inn, puts him into the inn-keeper's care the next day, pays the initial expenses and promises to be responsible for any further expenses incurred when he comes again. Note how simply and without sentimentality the Samaritan is described: the shrewd merchant, practical and careful with his means and money, who does nothing that is not necessary at the time. In all this there is no parade at all of 'religion.' What he does is aimed at the sufferer without side glances at God.²²

Is such an approach to caring appropriate to followers of Jesus? Such may be the case in reflection on the judgment of Christ to come. Those who were rewarded for their works of mercy toward others were unaware of this service being a service to Christ, unlike those, impliedly, who would have served had they known it was service to Christ. Note the passage in Matthew 25:31-46:

¹⁹ ROBERT L. SHORT, *THE PARABLES OF PEANUTS* 219 (1968).

²⁰ Karl Barth, source unknown. This was provided to the publishers but it was misplaced.

²¹ BORNKAMM, *supra* note 18, at 110.

²² *Id.*

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

In this statement of judgment, those who were rewarded were responding to those in need without regard to reception of rewards or as another way to love God. The cursed, on the other hand, used their ignorance of Christ's presence in these "neighbors" as a basis for their actions. Certainly, they reasoned, they would have loved their neighbor if in doing so it would have been as a way to meet Christ himself. The lesson, then, is that love for a neighbor cannot be an indirect love as a way to meet Christ; we must love people because of who they are.²³

If the meaning of the two commandments is not blending the love of God into the love of our neighbor, or the love of our neighbor does not fuse with the love for God, then what is the meaning of the double commandment of love? Bornkamm says,

Clearly the inseparable unity into which Jesus brings them has its reason and meaning not in the similarity of those towards whom this

²³ "A Christian man lives not in himself but in Christ and his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love; by faith he is caught up beyond himself into God, by love he sinks down beneath himself into his neighbor." PAUL RAMSEY, BASIC CHRISTIAN ETHICS 101 (1954) (*quoting* Martin Luther, Treatise on Christian Liberty, in WORKS II 342 (n.d.)).

love is directed, but in the nature of this love itself. It is in Jesus' own words the renunciation of self-love, the willingness for and the act of surrender there where you actually are, or, which is the same, where your neighbour is, who is waiting for you. In this way and no other God's call comes to us, and in this way the love of God and the love of our neighbour become one. Surrender to God now no longer means a retreat of the soul into a paradise of spirituality and the dissolution of selfhood in adoration and meditation, but a waiting and preparedness for the call of God, who calls to us in the person of our neighbour. In this sense the love of our neighbour is the test of our love of God.²⁴

In this regard, we come to understand the meaning of love and the nature of a neighbor in the parable and the question and answer that gave rise to the parable. First, love must be more than mere humanitarianism, a general concern for persons. Such general concerns translate into meaningful action not much different from the value, following our mother's advice, of eating everything on our plates since people in other parts of the world are starving. Obviously our eating or not has no meaningful impact on whether people in other parts of the globe starve or not. Likewise, general statements of sympathy have no impact on the needs of others. In James' epistle we find the tour de force to such sophistry: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."²⁵

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, provides a helpful illustration of the difference between loving in general and loving in particular: a "lady of little faith" who proclaimed pretentiously that she had such love for humanity that she frequently dreamed of surrendering everything for mankind. Father Zossima commended her dreams reservedly and then said, "Sometime, unawares, you may do a good deed in reality."²⁶ Whereas the priest and Levite might have "talked a good game," to speak in the vernacular, the Good Samaritan put into practice his love. Loving in particular stands in stark contrast with loving mankind in general.

"The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular. In my dream," he said, "I have often come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually have faced crucifixion if it had been suddenly necessary; and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with any one for two days

²⁴ BORNKAMM, *supra* note 18, at 111.

²⁵ James 2:15-17 (New International Version).

²⁶ RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 95 (*quoting* FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY, *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* 56 (Modern Library Giant n.d.)).

together, as I know by experience. As soon as any one is near me, his personality disturbs my self-complacency and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men: one because he's too long over his dinner; another because he has a cold and keeps on blowing his nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it always happened that the more I detest men individually, the more ardent becomes my love for humanity.' I could never understand how one can love one's neighbors. It's just one's neighbors, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love those at a distance. For any one to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone. Beggars, especially genteel beggars, ought never to show themselves, but to ask for charity through the newspaper. One can love one's neighbors in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible.²⁷

Ramsey comments about this love for men in general that it is "merely a bifocal 'self-regarding concern for others,' a selfish sociability, while love for neighbor for his own sake insists upon a single-minded orientation of a man's primary intention toward this individual neighbor with all his concrete needs."²⁸ Such concreteness is conspicuous in the portrayals of Christ. His illustrations of love are always concrete; in the words of White,

[T]he cup of water where water was not always plentiful; visiting the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the under-nourished, befriending the ill-deserving prisoner; forgiving the offender, doing good, giving, lending without expectation of return; returning good for evil, prayers for cursing, gentleness for all ill-treatment. The ministry of Jesus is the enduring object-lesson in Christian love--His time, His sympathy, His unwearying service, ever at the command of the outcast, the helpless, the repulsive, the unvalued, the sinful, the blind and lame and leprous; His friendship toward sinners; His unfailing courtesy; His adaptation of His teaching to the comprehension of His hearers; His patience with the disciples; His resolute refusal to meet His enemies with their own weapons; His unembittered, undefeated good will in severest rejection and extreme torture; His ability to love to the uttermost and to the end. And we are to love one another as He has loved us.²⁹

The command to love with its accompanying surrender and sacrifice of self is clear, but the question still looms as to the recognition of the neighbor. This is the very question that the lawyer poses to Jesus. The Old Testament commandment of love for God was at the heart of the Jewish faith, requiring an undivided loyalty to him. The second commandment (elided in Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, to be in unity with the first commandment), bound the believing Hebrew to love not

²⁷ Id. at 95 (citing DOSTOYEVSKY, *supra* note 26, at 245-46).

²⁸ Id. at 95.

²⁹ R.E.O. WHITE, BIBLICAL ETHICS 83 (1979).

only the fellow Hebrew but the strangers among them: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."³⁰ Carl F.H. Henry says, "Strangers were to be loved as though they were covenant-members, but they were prohibited from sharing in the covenant until they obeyed its demands."³¹ In fact, the Septuagint (LXX) used *ho plesion sou* meaning "anyone around you."³² Marshall comments concerning this usage,

The Jews interpreted this in terms of members of the same people and religious community, fellow-Jews (cf. Mt. 5:43-48). There was a tendency on the part of the Pharisees to exclude the ordinary people from the definition, and Qumran community excluded those whom they termed 'the sons of darkness'. In Lv. 19:34 (cf. Dt. 10:19) the same obligation of love is extended to the *ger*, the resident alien, but Jewish usage excluded Samaritans and foreigners from this category. The Greek term admitted of a wider meaning, but in the present context the Jewish usage is decisive; this is how the lawyer could be expected to understand the phrase.³³

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' time went beyond this attitude. They distinguished between neighbor and enemy. A rabbinical saying ruled that heretics, informers, and renegades "should be pushed (into the ditch) and not pulled out,"³⁴ and a widespread saying in Israel exempted one's enemies from one's duty to love others: "You shall love your fellow-countryman; but you need not love your enemy."³⁵ Even Philo said, "The Jew must first show love to his fellow Israelite: he stands at the center; round him are proselytes and resident aliens; then follow enemies, slaves, beasts, and plants in ever-widening circles until at last we arrive at the love of all creation."³⁶ Jesus' teaching regarding love for enemies³⁷ is a "rebuke," says Henry, "to this degeneration of the spirit of revealed ethics into a political morality comparable to that of the Gentiles."³⁸

Unlike those around him, Jesus demanded a love toward strangers and even those considered enemies. Søren Kierkegaard emphasizes that this love is from the revelation of Scripture. He continues that "no poet

³⁰ Leviticus 19:33-34 (New International Version).

³¹ CARL F.H. HENRY, CHRISTIAN PERSONAL ETHICS 226 (1957).

³² Id. at 226; see also MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 444.

³³ MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 444.

³⁴ JOACHIM JEREMIAS, THE PARABLES OF JESUS 202-03 (S.H. Hooke trans., Charles Scribner's Sons 1963)(1962) (*quoting* b. 'A.Z. 26a (Bar.)).

³⁵ Id. at 203; see also Matthew 5:43.

³⁶ HENRY, *supra* note 31, at 227 (*quoting* PHILO, DE VIRTUT).

³⁷ Matthew 5:43-48.

³⁸ HENRY, *supra* note 31, at 227.

has ever sung about loving one's neighbor, any more than he has sung about loving him 'as one's self.'³⁹ This Christian love *agape*, equivalent to the Hebrew *chesed* does not choose who is stranger, enemy, or friend. None of these are loved because they add to or subtract from us; they are loved because they are human beings in the imago Dei. Ramsey elucidates:

Never is it said that 'neighbor' includes 'enemy' among those who ought to be loved because they are human beings, but rather that love for another for his own sake, neighborly love in the Christian sense, discovers the neighbor in every man it meets and as such has never yet met a friend or an enemy. Christian love does not mean discovering the essentially human underneath differences; it means detecting the neighbor underneath friendliness or hostility or any other qualities in which the agent takes special interest.⁴⁰

The words of Jesus, in which he chides them for merely loving friends, ring clear in light of disinterested love:⁴¹

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.⁴²

Ramsey amplifies this teaching of Jesus when he says that a Christian "does not love his enemy for being his enemy any more than he loves his friend merely for being his friend: in either case he loves his neighbor, in spite of his hostility or, what may be just as much a hindrance, in spite of his friendship. Love for enemy simply provides a crucial test for the presence or absence of regard for the neighbor for his own sake."⁴³

Ramsey, continuing, enlightens this emphasis:

³⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, source unknown. This was provided to the publishers but it was misplaced.

⁴⁰ RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 94.

⁴¹ In Thornton Wilder's *Julius Caesar* we find the opposite, the desire for disinterested hate: "Would it not be a wonderful discovery to find that I am hated to the death by a man whose hatred is disinterested? It is rare enough to find a disinterested love; so far among those that hate me I have uncovered nothing beyond the promptings of envy, of self-advancing ambition, or of self-consoling destructiveness. It is many years since I have felt directed toward me a disinterested hatred. Day by day I scan my enemies looking with eager hope for the man who hates me 'for myself' or even 'for Rome.'" RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 96 (*quoting* THORNTON WILDER, *THE IDES OF MARCH* 113, 218 (1948)).

⁴² Matthew 5:43-48; *see also* Luke 6:27, 32, 35 (New International Version).

⁴³ RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 99.

Properly understood in the same sense, loving one's enemy is no more difficult than loving one's friend or the man next door with Christian love. Instances in which an enemy is excepted from neighbor-love and hated on account of his hostility are really no more unusual than excepting a friend from neighbor-love and loving him merely on account of his friendliness. In the case of a friendly neighbor it is possible in loving him to love only his friendliness toward us in return. Then he is not loved for his own sake. He is loved for the sake of his friendliness, for the sake of the benefits to be gained from reciprocal friendship. Thus, very often, love for a friend shows up as 'enlightened selfishness,' which is a very good thing, indeed, in comparison with crude selfishness, but still quite different from Christian love for neighbor.⁴⁴

Who, then, is my neighbor? This is the burning question that the lawyer poses to Jesus, thinking that he has escaped the Teacher's grasp. Kierkegaard poignantly observes that the teaching of Jesus leaves no doubt of who the neighbor is, either for the lawyer of the story or for all of us. It is now forever impossible to be mistaken about the neighbor's identity: "You can never confuse him with another man, for all men are the neighbor. If you confuse another man with your neighbor, then in the last analysis there is no mistake, for the other man is also your neighbor."⁴⁵ The ultimate Christian teaching, then, is found in the admonition of the writer of Hebrews that the Christian is to do "good unto all men."⁴⁶

HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH THE INTERPRETATION

OF THE PARABLE?

The Allegorical Method

Especially due to the influence of Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen, for centuries the parables were treated by much of the church as allegories in which each term stood as a cryptogram for an idea. A person was required to decode the parable term by term. Probably the most famous example of this approach is Augustine's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; Adam himself is meant;

⁴⁴ Id. at 96.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *supra* note 39.

⁴⁶ Hebrews 13:16 (King James Version).

Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell;
 Jericho means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies.
 Thieves are the devil and his angels.
 Who stripped him, namely, of his immortality;
 and beat him, by persuading him to sin;
 and left him half-dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-dead.
 The priest and Levite who saw him and passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament, which could profit nothing for salvation.
 Samaritan means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name.
 The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin.
 Oil is the comfort of good hope;
 Wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit.
 The beast is the flesh in which He deigned to come to us.
 The being set upon the beast is belief in the incarnation of Christ.
 The inn is the Church, where travellers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed after pilgrimage.
 The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord.
 The two pence are either the precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come.
 The innkeeper is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him 'to live by the Gospel.'⁴⁷

The Typical Method

The approach of Augustine is easily dismissed by the modern mind not easily affected by allegorical thought, but the temptation to consider the parable of the Good Samaritan as a type of Christ and redemption is not so easily dismissed. Rather than taking the parable at face value, it is attractive to see in the parable the person of Jesus and the redemption he brought to the world. John Martin exemplifies this approach when he speaks of two levels of meaning in the parable. The first level is the "plain teaching that a person, like the Samaritan, should help others in need."⁴⁸ Martin continues regarding the second level:

⁴⁷ C.H. DODD, *THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM 1-2* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 2d ed. 1961) (*quoting* ST. AUGUSTINE, *QUAESTIONES EVANGELIORUM* II 19).

⁴⁸ John Martin, Luke, in *THE BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY* 233 (John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck eds., 1983).

However, in the context of the rejection of Jesus, it should also be noted in this parable that the Jewish religious leaders rejected the man who fell among the robbers. A Samaritan, an outcast, was the only one who helped the man. Jesus was like the Samaritan. He was the outcast One, who was willing to seek and to save people who were perishing. He was directly opposed to the religious establishment. The theme is reminiscent of Jesus' words to the Pharisees (7:44-50). The theme of Jesus' going to those who needed Him became more and more evident.⁴⁹

The typical approach, though not totally abandoning the plain meaning of the passage, still commits the error of placing into the text something not immediately evident in the teaching itself or even implied by Jesus. Using this technique leaves one with the question why not to see other possible types of Jesus in the parable or even other types for other persons and events in the parable. For example, why would Jesus not be a type of the beaten and robbed man? He was taken advantage of by religious leaders, finally even put to death.

The Literal Method

The most natural way to interpret the parable is literally. This is not meant to disparage the figurative nature of parables but to recognize that parables are given to teach, at most, a few truths, but those truths should relate to the contextual setting of the parable and the theological development of the gospel writer. Here the issue relates to the specific question of the lawyer, "Who is my neighbor?" so the emphasis of the parable should be to elucidate that point.

THE INTERPRETATION OF LUKE 10:25-37

Good Questions with Bad Motives--Luke 10:25

What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life? In Luke 10:25-37, the gospel writer presents Jesus before a crowd of listeners hanging on his every word. From this crowd comes a lawyer, an expert in the laws of Israel and Moses. The man addresses Jesus as Teacher, someone who had the position of authority in presenting the revelation of God to his people of Israel. As a Teacher of Israel, a rabbi, the man from Galilee had awesome responsibility to set forth what the lawgiver Moses and the subsequent prophets had revealed about God's will for his people.

⁴⁹ Id. at 234.

The lawyer could have asked Jesus many questions, questions that many other lawyers and religious leaders had asked Jesus before to find fault. Many of their questions related to transient and temporary issues, often matters of secondary importance. On one occasion the Pharisees questioned him, and his disciples, as to why they did not properly honor the Sabbath.⁵⁰ Whereas in the records of Matthew 12:1-8 and Luke 6:1-5 the purpose of the account's inclusion was to emphasize the lordship of Christ over the Sabbath--after all, as the Creator of all things, Jesus created the Sabbath--in Mark, Jesus used the question to teach that people were more important than the observance of religious rituals. In fact, he says that God actually created these activities for the benefit of humans: "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'"⁵¹ At another time he was asked to arbitrate regarding a theological debate between the Sadducees and the Pharisees on the resurrection. Certainly the issue of resurrection was important, but the manner of the discussion moved from intelligent theological concerns to absurd logic.⁵²

Here, however, we have a lawyer asking the pivotal question for all humanity, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This question was asked by others of Jesus,⁵³ but only here does Christ take this eternal question and seemingly tie it to temporal matters. One's vertical relationship to God is the most important matter that a human must confront.⁵⁴ Though this expert in the law posed the question of participation in God's future kingdom, the text indicates that he did not do so sincerely; he asked the question to "test" Jesus. It is not clear how this question may be compared with others asked by lawyers and religious leaders who sought to position Jesus in conflict with either Rome, the people, or religious leaders, or with a tricky theological issue that the rabbis had been debating for years. This question, as already noted, was the right question to ask, and it was properly addressed to the one person who could answer it, the giver of life himself.

⁵⁰ Luke 6:1-11.

⁵¹ Mark 2:27 (New International Version); the statement by Jesus in Mark 2:27 had a similar parallel in Jewish sayings but with an entirely different meaning. Paul Ramsey comments, "The verbally parallel statement which may be cited from a number of rabbis, 'The sabbath is given for you and not you for the sabbath,' had, coming from their mouths, an absolutely different meaning. It meant: the sabbath is given for you to keep, in order that you and your servants and domestic animals may have rest." RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 63.

⁵² Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40.

⁵³ Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23; *see* John 3:1-15.

⁵⁴ Rabbi Eliezer (ca. AD 90) was asked by his students, "Rabbi, teach us the ways of life so that by them we may attain to the life of the future world." MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 442 (*quoting* b Ber. 28b; SB I, 808).

Whatever the reason for the particular question, the matter of motives is central to the asking of the question. Here this legal scholar from the outset was not really interested in the answer Jesus gave. When Jesus responded to his answer in verse 28, the lawyer who sought to put the Lord on the witness stand found himself uneasy with the implications of the answer. He sought to justify himself.

Jesus' answer to this lawyer indicates that he considered a way of life as important but does not require the concept of salvation by works. Marshall says, "Just as in Jn. 6:28f. the 'work' required is faith, so here it is love, an inner disposition, not an outward qualification."⁵⁵ Moreover, one need understand the request to be for blessings in the future kingdom of God rather than justification per se. The perspective of "inheritance" speaks of obtaining this blessing.

We Have Our Questions Too! The problem of how to find eternal life is one that each of us must face, but there are other questions too that must be addressed in this life. There were many other major questions that a sincere seeker could have asked Jesus. Establishing a vertical relationship with God is primary and logically correct for a true disciple of the Lord, but it is the wrong place to stop. Jesus took the young lawyer to the next level of discussion, namely, the horizontal dimensions of life. There is an old adage that we are not to be so heavenly-minded that we are of no earthly good. God wants people to challenge him to the hard questions of life. He does not turn aside the inquirer or even the doubter. Too many people are willing to go through life and never really penetrate the superficial, to seek the satisfying answers of the deeper knowledge of the world around us. The "enquirer's theological knowledge is of no avail if his life is not governed by love to God and his 'friend.'"⁵⁶

What Are Our Motives? There are many difficult questions on life and death about which we wonder. How do we balance the life of the unborn child against the concerns of a pregnant woman? When do we cease providing treatment for a terminally ill or comatose patient? These are matters that we have deep feelings on. Foremost, however, in our research and activities must be proper motive. This is a major concern. Are our actions honorable and ethical? Do they come from the desire to be honest with facts, to look outside our own selfish desires? Are they within the framework of treating other persons as being in the image of God and worthy in themselves of our concern? Too often our motives are suspect.

Good Answers with Inadequate Application--Luke 10:26-28

⁵⁵ MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 442.

⁵⁶ JEREMIAS, *supra* note 34, at 202.

A Theologically Correct Answer Is Offered. The lawyer in this story knew the law. Whether he had heard Jesus speak these words or whether he had drawn the proper conclusions from his study of Deuteronomy 6:5⁵⁷ and Leviticus 19:18⁵⁸ is unknown. We need to note here that Jesus' concern is the written words of God in the Old Testament rather than the oral traditions of the rabbis. The rabbis, when confronted by similar ideas, drove the students to the commentaries on the Scripture, whereas Jesus sent them to the revelation of God. The rabbis sought to deal with all the commandments without placing any one above the other, whereas Jesus views these commandments to be the completion and fullness of the law:

Jesus stands entirely outside the evolution of Jewish legalism for the reason that he taught not simply the superiority of love for God and for the neighbor over any other commandment; what is more, he taught that these commands were infinitely superior to all the rest . Man's obligation arose out of these two commandments alone, there could be no conflict with other parts of Torah, this was for him the whole law of God.⁵⁹

When confronted with the issue posed by the lawyer, he posed a retort that forced a solution to life in the attitude of love required by the author of love.

Sometimes We Fail to Do What Is Right Because We Do Not Have Our Theology Straight: This Is Ignorance. The lawyer provided the correct answer to the quizzing of Jesus. He had no excuse for his lack of proper understanding of the demands of God expressed in the law. Had he considered the ramifications of God's commandments, he would not have needed the further lesson provided in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The failure of most modern medicine and law in the matter of ethics is that there is no real basis for ethics. If there are right and wrong, good and evil, the knowledge of these absolutes resides outside humanity, and they stand as objective realities whether a person recognizes or honors them. On the other hand, if truth and ethics are relative and reside only within the subjective opinion of each person, then there can never be a final answer to our concerns of abortion, euthanasia, or other medical or social ethics matters. If there are no absolutes, then all ethics are defined in the subjective opinions of each of us; and if rules are established, it is merely a matter of transient contemporary consensus or force, which changes with the power structure.

⁵⁷ See *supra* note 8.

⁵⁸ See *supra* note 9.

⁵⁹ RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 65.

Our greatest ally to gain the high moral ground in this or any other ethical debate is to refuse to let the flag of absolute reality be lowered, despite ridicule or pressure of other sorts. Eventually the foolishness of religionless ethics and morals will be unable to stand against this epistemological bulwark.

Sometimes We Fail to Do What Is Right in Spite of Having Good Theology: This Is Slothfulness, If Not Rebellion. The lawyer really had the proper answer and ethical response in his grasp. His theology was good, but he chose to avoid the implications of his doctrine. When finally he was forced to admit the Samaritan's righteous acts toward the wounded Jewish man, in contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, he still could not bring himself to say "the Samaritan" but instead "he who showed mercy."⁶⁰

Improper Responses to God's Direction

The Lawyer Sought to Alleviate His Guilt. The text says that on receiving the response by Jesus on how to live--a response demanding action on his part--the lawyer sought to "justify himself":

The lawyer is depicted as wishing to justify his earlier question and regain the initiative after the command which he has just received. He looks rather foolish having asked a question to which he himself has been forced to give the answer; Jesus has said in effect, 'You have no need to ask me the question about eternal life; as a lawyer you know the answer. All you have to do is practise what you preach.' So he professes inability to practise the law until its meaning has been clarified.⁶¹

Confronted with the obvious responsibility to contextualize his theology, to move beyond orthodoxy to orthopraxy, the lawyer feigned ignorance. He would be more than willing to practice the law he claimed to honor if only he could figure out who his neighbor was.

What Are Our Attempts? Most of us have become aware of the issues relating to life and death, but the ultimate question is not what we know or believe but what we are doing in real terms to rescue people who are being unjustly treated by the legal, medical, and popular cultures. Those who do not fit the current image of worthiness--read inadequate quality of life--are simply relegated to a status less than full persons. We must never let ourselves think or act in these terms. Even those of us who are pro-life may err in this area of equity and dignity for all persons, judging persons because of their utility rather than simply because they are in the image of God.

⁶⁰ Luke 10:37 (New International Version).

⁶¹ MARSHALL, *supra* note 6, at 447.

God's Teaching on Fulfilling the Second Table of the Law: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Christ Poses a Politically Incorrect Example. Jesus poses the story of the Jewish man robbed and left for dead. First the priest comes by and second the Levite. Popular stories of the time would include a third person of a triad, and the crowds would expect an Israelite layman, setting forth an anti-clerical point.⁶² Jesus' mention of a Samaritan would have been totally unexpected and no doubt caused inner conflict for the Jewish listener. In the Greek text there is a clear grammatical contrast between the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan, since "Samaritan" occurs in the emphatic position of the sentence (v. 33).⁶³ As much as the Israelites would have been willing for Christ to poke fun or bring into disrepute the self-righteous temple leaders, making a Samaritan the hero of a story was unacceptable or politically incorrect. Christ, however, was not attempting to win laurels from the people or the lawyer but to cause them to confront the truth and the implications of that truth for their daily living.

Hesitation in stating the truth in an agnostic society is unworthy of one who seeks to be a follower of the great Teacher.

Helping People When They Make Bad Decisions. The wounded man in the parable was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. There was a drop of thirty-three hundred feet in elevation over the course of only seventeen miles, and this road was well known for treacherous bandits. In view of this the Roman army patrolled the road. One could say that the man brought his calamity on himself. The road was not well traveled, and a person might have to wait a considerable time for help to come by.⁶⁴

The Sometimes Failure of Religiously Motivated People. The fact that the first two persons who came across this unfortunate man on the road were religious leaders is no accident. These are the persons who one would expect would be the first to come to the aid of the weak and injured. Sad to say, as many of us have experienced in our own attempts to publicize our ethical concerns in society, the clergy often are the greatest obstacles we encounter. For some reason many in the clergy mistakenly believe that social issues are inferior to the loftier goals they seek to preach. This dichotomy of secular and sacred, the eternal and now, smacks of a gnostic element in the church which believes that God

⁶² JEREMIAS, *supra* note 34, at 204 (quoting B.T.D. SMITH, THE PARABLES OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS 180 (1937)).

⁶³ Luke 10:33.

⁶⁴ The Greek text uses the word *sugkuria*, which means "coincidence" or "chance."

is unconcerned with the current problems of life. It is little more than the "be warm, be filled" response condemned in the New Testament.

Some believe that concerning ourselves with so-called worldly problems distracts us from spiritual issues or causes us to lose an anticipation of the Lord's return. Yet we observe in the life of Jesus the incarnation of God in its fullness. God has made himself near to us and given us an example of love to follow, the person of Jesus. Believers are called to sacrifice and service, not to large congregations and successful programs.

The church would do well to be willing to fly in the face of the culture to uphold the needy and rejected if she would follow her Lord. And this attitude does not depend on considerations of race, creed, religion, or particular beliefs.

Doing Good Requires Sacrifice. The Good Samaritan stopped to help the Jewish man on the road. The text says his immediate response was compassion.⁶⁵ Pride causes both the infirm and the potential helper to turn aside from the work of God. To be helped and to help require the parties to serve one another.

The Samaritan did not hesitate in using up his wealth and possessions to come to the aid of the wounded man. Whereas the religious leaders saw their spiritual duties to take priority over helping the man in need, the Samaritan surrendered all that he had for the benefit of a person he had never met. He probably tore his headdress for a bandage, poured oil to mollify the wounds, and used wine for disinfectant. He put the man on his donkey and took him to an inn. The Samaritan gave two denarii to the innkeeper for the room and board of the injured Jew.⁶⁶ The costs of a day's board would be about one-twelfth of a denarius, so we may see that he did not leave the man stranded. He also promised to provide more money if necessary when he made his return trip.⁶⁷

One sees in this story a person who went far beyond talk to the performance of deeds.

Christ Frames the Question Correctly: Who Will Be a Neighbor?

The All-Important "I Will." Christ's question to the lawyer at the end of his parable turned the question of the lawyer on its head. The lawyer said that if he could only recognize his neighbor he would be

⁶⁵ Luke 10:33.

⁶⁶ Id., 10:35.

⁶⁷ Luke 10:35.

willing to fulfill the law of God.⁶⁸ Jesus never addresses this question. Note Jesus does not ask at the end, "Which of these three, do you think, knew best who his neighbor was?" Instead he asked who proved to be a neighbor.⁶⁹ One does not need to define who is a neighbor. One needs to be a neighbor.

Ramsey sets forth the sense of the meaning of the parable:

This parable tells us something about neighbor-love, nothing about the neighbor. What the parable does is to demand that the questioner revise entirely his point of view, reformulating the question first asked so as to require neighborliness of himself rather than anything of his neighbor. A shift is made from defining the qualities of the man who rightfully ought to be loved to the specific demand that the questioner himself become a neighbor. The parable actually shows the nature and meaning of Christian love which alone of all ethical standpoints discovers the neighbor because it alone begins with neighborly love and not with discriminating between worthy and unworthy people according to the qualities they possess. Perhaps it would be better to forgo using the expression 'love for neighbor,' which puts the emphasis on who the neighbor is, and use instead 'neighbor-love' or 'neighborly love,' expressions which have the advantage of stressing what love ought to be.⁷⁰

The Importance of Openness. The Jewish lawyer had difficulty in transcending racial barriers in responding to Jesus' call for a response. Jesus, on the other hand, called for the irrelevancy of racial considerations, demonstrating that the giving and receiving of mercy transcends national and racial barriers.

Christ's Short But Unequivocal Command: Go and Do the Same as the Good Samaritan

The command of Jesus is clear and unequivocal: "Go and do likewise."⁷¹ The problem of the lawyer, and usually of us, is not whether we know what to do but whether we are willing to do what we know.

QUESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS THAT ARISE FROM THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN ON THE MATTER OF EUTHANASIA

I believe that there are several crucial questions for each of us to answer in this debate, and there are a number of principles and implications that one may derive from the parable. A careful

⁶⁸ Luke 25:29.

⁶⁹ Luke 25:36.

⁷⁰ RAMSEY, *supra* note 23, at 93.

⁷¹ Luke 25:37 (New International Version).

examination of the discussion between Christ and the lawyer and the parable of the Good Samaritan answers many of these questions.

Questions for Pro-life Persons to Consider on Euthanasia

Does Anyone Have the Moral Right to Participate in Active Euthanasia? From the discussion of the lawyer and Jesus in Luke 10:25 we can draw some implications to answer this question. To participate in active euthanasia is failure to love God and to love neighbor. Love of God is not merely an affirmation that he exists but a commitment to obey his commands, live in fellowship with him, and recognize his uniqueness as our Creator and Savior. Active euthanasia is failing to recognize the uniqueness of God as the giver of life and presuming the right to end life. How can we truly love God and yet desire to usurp his authority and right as the giver of life?

Should an Individual, for Humanitarian Reasons, Be Able to End Suffering by Any Means Necessary? At first glance one of the strongest arguments for the "right" of euthanasia is a call to humanitarianism in the face of unending pain. Although alleviating pain is essential to the parable, the context is given of loving God and loving our neighbor. Therefore humanitarianism not founded in loving God and loving neighbor can only be founded in egoistic or utilitarian principles. Social, medical, and legal matters should not be divorced from a theological base if they are to have any reasonable legitimacy or moral force. The utilitarian arguments of our day provide little capacity to support and defend the weak persons among us. The attempt to do this has left the discussion of life and death issues in a sea of nebulosity and relativity. In regards to the matter of ending life, the primal issue must be the fact that all humans have been created in the image of God. It is the fact of being equally created in the image of God that motivates the Samaritan to action.

Are There Not, in Fact, Some People Who Have No Quality of Life, and Therefore Ending Their Lives Would Be Acts of Mercy? This question arises from the false assumption that man's ability substantiates his right and responsibility to life. The idea of the quality of life is foreign to the parable of the Good Samaritan. In fact there is no mention of age, social standing, intellect, or race of the man who is beaten by the robbers. The beaten man's quality of life is not a factor in the mind of the Samaritan. The only determining factor for the Samaritan is that a human life, equal to his own, is at stake. If the Samaritan's pity had been motivated by humanitarian mercy based on utilitarian principles, then he would have needed to ascertain the wounded man's usefulness in society versus the risk involved in helping this man or the need to

help more useful people with his finances. If the euthanasia debate is decided along utilitarian lines, the question of euthanasia will become one of a person's social usefulness. The atrocities for all minorities under this system will be far removed from the original question of mercy for those "lacking quality of life."

Implications for the Euthanasia Debate

There are several implications that arise from the teaching of Jesus in Luke 10:25-37.

We Must Never Separate Ultimate Theological Questions from Practical Realities of Everyday Life. The lawyer was concerned with the future blessings of God, which was certainly appropriate, but Jesus sought to drive him to an awareness of his current responsibilities in this life. Theological questions, then, need practical applications.

When Dealing with the Helpless, the "Samaritan" Is Seen as the Morally Superior Person. Though the priest and Levite had the public position of moral duty, it is the despised among the people who stood forth with moral action. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is correct when he argues that the strong man is the one who is ready to risk his life for a lesser man, and the sound man for the sick.⁷² He continues that the "idea of destroying a life which has lost its social usefulness is one which springs from weakness, not from strength."⁷³

Humans Can Always Find Excuses for Failure to Do the Will of God. Had the Samaritan left the wounded man on the road, as did the priest and the Levite, he would never have served as such an example for us of the love of God. He could have argued that the man was probably dead and after all he was in a hurry. He could have said that it was too expensive to take care of the person. He could have rationalized as a Samaritan that Jews were his enemies and the person was not worthy of his help. He could have said that his chances of life were meager and that he should simply let him die rather than seek to prolong his life. He could have declared it was an act of mercy to allow him to die rather than prolong his agony. He could have absolved himself in spite of the clear teaching of Jesus.

Our Prejudices Can Get in the Way of Our Doing the Work of God. Issues of race, sex, disability, incapacity, position in society are illegitimate walls that separate us from fulfilling our duties to one another. When we fail to see each person as being our neighbor simply because of some perceived deficiency, we err in not seeing the image of

⁷² FN72. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, ETHICS (1955).

⁷³ FN73. Id.

God that person shares in common with us. Helmut Thielicke said that it is not only this act of creation that gives each person worth, but that Christ has bought each person with a price and bestowed on him or her an "alien dignity."⁷⁴ This dignity asserts itself at the very point that a person's value is questioned, where "his functional value is no longer listed on society's stock market and he is perhaps declared to be 'unfit to live.'"⁷⁵

We Cannot Wait, Nor Count, on Our Religious or Legal Leaders to Lead the Way in This Battle Nor Forge the Weapons. The Samaritan was not the example of the parable because of brilliance, leadership qualities, prestige, or influence. He was the hero because he had compassion and responded without hesitation to the situation that God placed before him with the resources that God gave him. He was not trying to save the world; he tried to save the particular person that God called him to. On the other hand, we don't want to minimize the value of a moral or religious leader who is willing to place others above himself.

A good example of such a leader is Clemens Count von Galen, bishop of Munster, during the horrors of the Third Reich. Quoting at length from the account in *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* by Robert Jay Lifton:

The most ringing Catholic protest against 'euthanasia' was the famous sermon of Clemens Count von Galen, then bishop of Munster. It was given on 3 August 1941, just four Sundays after the highly significant pastoral letter of German bishops had been read from every Catholic pulpit in the country; the letter reaffirmed 'obligations of conscience' at opposing the taking of 'innocent' life, 'even if it were to cost us our [own] lives.' The first part of Galen's sermon explored the Biblical theme of how 'Jesus, the Son of God, wept,' how even God wept 'because of stupidity, injustice and because of the disaster which came about as a result.' Then, after declaring, 'It is a terrible, unjust and catastrophic thing when man opposes his will to the will of God,' Galen quoted the pastoral letter of 6 July and made clear that the 'catastrophic thing' he had in mind was the killing of innocent mental patients and 'a doctrine which authorizes the violent death of invalids and elderly people.'

He further declared that he himself had 'filed formal charges' with police and legal authorities in Munster over deportations from a nearby institution. He went on in words that every farmer and laborer could understand:

⁷⁴ HELMUT THIELICKE, 3 *THEOLOGICAL ETHICS: SEX 231* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1979) (1975).

⁷⁵ *Id.*

It is said of these patients: They are like an old machine which no longer runs, like an old horse which is hopelessly paralyzed, like a cow which no longer gives milk.

What do we do with a machine of this kind? We put it in the junkyard. What do we do with a paralyzed horse? No, I do not wish to push the comparison to the end. We are not talking here about a machine, a horse, nor a cow. No, we are talking about men and women, our compatriots, our brothers and sisters. Poor unproductive people if you wish, but does this mean that they have lost their right to live?⁷⁶

He continues his denunciation of the Nazi regime, speaking of divine justice on those who blaspheme the faith by persecuting clergy and "sending innocent people to their death."⁷⁷

He asked that such people (who could only be the Nazi authorities) be ostracized and left to their divine retribution:

We wish to withdraw ourselves and our faithful from their influence, so that we may not be contaminated by their thinking and their ungodly behavior, so that we may not participate and share with them in the punishment which a just God should and will pronounce upon all those who do not wish what God wishes!⁷⁸

Knowing Theology Is Not the Same as Doing Theology. Certainly we must know what is right to do and the reasons for the rightness of our beliefs, but we must make efforts that go beyond belief. A faith that has no works is a dead faith.⁷⁹

The Way That Jesus Dealt with the Lawyer and the People Listening to the Parable Indicates That We Need to Frame the Questions, the Issues, Rather Than Letting Other People Define Them. Often, those who seek to restrain the rise and tragedy of sin and its effects are like the little boy sticking his finger in the dike, futilely trying to keep the onrush of the sea from bursting in on him and his friends. Because of this, the challengers, like the sea, are able to find any number of places to charge in. We must be diligent, then, to set the debate, to establish the agenda, to herald the call to responsibility, and to define what the real issues are in the fight for life. We must take the offensive whenever we can.

Christians, Especially, Possess Great Opportunities and Have the Ability to Live the Teachings of Christ in Front of Others. We have been called to an active seeking out of opportunities to sacrifice ourselves for others. There will be no better opportunity than the care of elderly and dying persons. It is not enough to fight against euthanasia; we must also

⁷⁶ ROBERT JAY LIFTON, *THE NAZI DOCTORS: MEDICAL KILLING AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GENOCIDE* 93-94 (1986).

⁷⁷ *Id.* at 94.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ James 2:17.

be involved in the providing of care for our "dying neighbors." If we do not actually move to caring for people, we will be similar to the priest and the Levite in the parable.

There Are Responsibilities on Our Part to Provide Pain Management. A person should see his or her role as one of comforting, including the limiting or eliminating of pain. The Samaritan was willing and able to go to extreme measures to bring comfort to the wounded man. We should be equally willing to bring comfort that still respects the dignity of being created in the image of God.

The Samaritan Was Also Willing to Provide the Necessary Financial Provision to Bring Comfort to the Wounded Man. In the near future in this country, economics will play an important role in the discussion of euthanasia. Will believers be willing to provide financial resources when individuals have lost their "usefulness to society"? The desire of some to eliminate the "unproductive elements" of society will provide new and vivid opportunities for believers to prove who is a neighbor.