

“Wisely Loving Your Neighbor”

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Jesus said, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And the lawyer said, “The Samaritan who showed mercy on the man who was attacked by thieves.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The word “charity” appears in more than 3000 passages in the Writings of the New Church. In hundreds of these passages the phrase “faith and charity” occurs. As you may know, if you seek the broadly understood meaning of charity you might find a definition such as:

Charity is the voluntary giving of help, typically in the form of money, to those in need. It’s a humanitarian act, often driven by compassion and a desire to make a positive impact on the lives of others.

For many people charity is an action. In the teachings for the New Church it is not an action. It is a heartfelt desire that good things happen for others. It is a motivation. To be real, this motivation must show itself in words and deeds when possible and useful. Again, as you have probably heard many times, it is actually the motivation or love that defines our words and deeds. Faith is an understanding of what is true and good and charity is the love that motivates us to say and do what is true and good.

The Old Testament has some powerful guidance on how true charity shows itself. In the lesson I read from Leviticus it states.

You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD. You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. (Leviticus 19:14-15)

Cursing the deaf or putting a stumbling block before the blind are examples of taking advantage of another person’s limitations and in making judgments a poor person nor a powerful person should get a special benefit.

Further examples of charity are shown in laws from Exodus:

If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. (Exodus 23:4-5)

All of these Old Testament laws were mostly interpreted by the ancient Israelites to mean how they were to treat other Israelites. People of other nations were a different matter. The ancient Jews were a people with many prejudices. There were many groups of people that they looked down on and despised. The Jews around Jerusalem even looked down on the Jews from the north of the country in Galilee. When a man first heard of Jesus of Nazareth, he said “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1: 46).

One of the groups that was particularly despised was the Samaritans. They were descendants of the people the Assyrians brought into the land to replace the ten tribes of Israel who had been carried off to captivity and lost to history. The Samaritans knew something of Old Testament law, but their worship centered on Mount Gerizim rather than the temple in Jerusalem. In one instance when Jesus and the disciples were not accepted at a Samaritan village as they journeyed toward Jerusalem, the disciples, James and John were so incensed at this rejection they ask Jesus if they should command fire to come down from heaven and destroy the village. Jesus strongly rebuked them for this suggestion, saying “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.

For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” (Luke 9:55-56)

Because of the prejudice against Samaritans it would have been very surprising to Jesus’ listeners that the hero of the Parable of the Good Samaritan was from this despised group.

The man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was a Jewish man. He was attacked by thieves and left nearly naked and half dead by the side of the road. The priest and the Levite, both associated with temple worship and supposed to have an allegiance to worship of God, looked at the man, would have clearly seen his state of need but passed by.

It was a Samaritan that saw the man and did so much to help him. Concerning this parable we are taught in the *Apocalypse Explained*:

The Lord says of the Samaritan, who as he journeyed saw in the road a man wounded by thieves, he poured oil and wine into his wounds, and then set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and told them to care for him (Luke 10:33-35).

In the spiritual sense these things are understood as follows. “The Samaritan” means the Gentiles that were in the good loves of charity towards the neighbor; “the man wounded by thieves” means those who are infested by evil spirits of hell, who are thieves because they injure and destroy a person’s spiritual life; the “oil and wine that the Samaritan poured into his wounds” mean spiritual things that heal a person, “oil” means good things, and “wine” true things; that “he set him on his own beast” signifies that the Samaritan did this according to his intelligence so far as he was able, “horse,” and likewise “beast of burden” signifying the intellect; that “he brought him to an inn and told them to care for him” means to bring to those that are well instructed in the doctrine of the church from the Word, and who are better able to heal him than one who is still in ignorance. Thus are these words understood in heaven, and from them it is evident that the Lord when He was in the world spoke by pure correspondences, thus for the world and for heaven at the same time. (*Apocalypse Explained* 375:42)

Each of us, no matter how deeply we think we understand what is true and good can recognize others who are suffering under some kind of spiritual attack. How can we wisely support them with word and deed, like the wine and oil the Samaritan used to treat the man’s wounds. We can do it to the best of our ability and if possible, we might help guide the person to someone who may have a greater ability to help than we do. The Lord calls us to live our lives by this kind of wise compassion.

An important part of this parable is that the Samaritan was not helping someone like himself. He had no relationship with the man and gives no indication that he would ever see him again. He did not expect any personal benefits from his actions.

A person can do good things for others and still be heading toward a home in hell. This is the meaning of this quotation from *True Christian Religion*.

People who love the world, however, love their neighbor on a worldly basis for a worldly benefit. People who love themselves love their neighbor in a selfish way for a selfish benefit. (*True Christian Religion* 411)

Prejudice is, of course, still an issue today. Think of all the groups of people who have been held in some contempt in the United States. Starting in the mid-19th century immigration waves of Irish experienced prejudice partially because they were Catholics and Jewish people were discriminated against into the 20th century. Italians and Eastern Europeans immigrated to our country in the late 19th and early 20th century and often were held in contempt. We know well the discrimination blacks and Hispanics have experienced as well as many others. Within the General Church there have been times when all those not part of the New Church were viewed with suspicion as potential sources of spiritual corruption.

The Good Samaritan was a perfect image of a person whose heart is moved by charity or a wise kindness. We are told that people of the Ancient Church:

. . . knew what charity was, namely the affection for serving others without any thought of reward; and what was meant by the neighbor to whom they were to exercise charity, namely all persons throughout the world, though each one had to be treated with discrimination. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3419:3)

Another passage that talks about charity done with discrimination is the following from the *Arcana Caelestia*.

. . . those who are governed by good that flows from charity, and from this by an affection for truth, exercise discrimination when performing all those deeds, for they dwell in light, and the light of truth has no other source than good, because the Lord flows in by way of good. They do not do good to the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers just because these are so termed, for they know that the good, whether poor or rich, are pre-eminently the neighbor; for by the good, good is done to others, and therefore insofar as they do good to good people they are doing it through them to others. They know also how to discriminate between one good and another, and so between one good person and another. They call the common good itself their neighbor to a higher degree, for within this neighbor the good of a greater number of people is seen. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2425:3)

The Lord wants all of us to have our eyes open to see others whose lives are in spiritual trouble like the man who fell among thieves in the parable. He wants us to have compassion for them and to help in so far as we are able. He wants us to know that it is not just the actions we do.

May each of us work to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves and recognize that someday we may be like the angels who love others more than themselves. AMEN.

Lessons: Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

And the lawyer said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Leviticus 19:13-18

'You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

'You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

True Christianity 411 (modified)

We read that we are to love the Lord God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27). To love our neighbor as ourselves means not despising our neighbors in comparison with ourselves. It means treating them justly and not judging them wrongfully. The law of charity pronounced and given by the Lord Himself is this:

Whatever you want people to do for you, do likewise for them. This is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31, 32)

This is how people who love heaven love their neighbor. People who love the world, however, love their neighbor on a worldly basis for a worldly benefit. People who love themselves love their neighbor in a selfish way for a selfish benefit.