

Here are two loaded sentences for us to apply our minds to.

There is a pivotal relationship between our view of justification and our practice of justice. There is enormous value in exploring this relationship because it reveals the greatest determining factor of neighboring well.

If we want the rest of this message to make sense, we should slow down to make sure we are clear about what these words mean. Justification and justice both have multiple definitions. Here are the Biblical definitions I am intending when I talk about the relationship between justification and justice.

Justification- Being made just. Being saved. Being declared righteous in the sight of God.

Justice- Behaving in a just way. Doing the right thing. Treating people right.

The relationship I am talking about is between our understanding of how we are saved and the way we treat people. Our ability to neighbor well is fundamentally influenced by what we believe about salvation.

The parable of the good Samaritan requires us to explore this relationship between justification and justice because it ends with justice and begins with justification. Jesus' final question to the lawyer was about justice, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (v.36). The lawyer's initial question to Jesus was about justification, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v.25). Between these two questions is a dialogue that displays this relationship and reveals the greatest determining factor of neighboring well.

This message might mess with your image of the Good Samaritan parable. The common telling of the parable does not highlight that the conversation begins with a question about justification. The Good Samaritan is about much more than random acts of kindness to a stranger. It is not primarily about how to do justice, but how to be justified. It is not primarily about a social gospel but a saving gospel. Neighboring is well the fruit of a life rooted in the gospel.

I did a study of all the verses in the Bible that use the word "neighbor." Most of them have to do with treating people with justice (Exodus 22:7-14, Leviticus 19:13-18; Jeremiah 7:4-7; 9:8; 34:15-17; Zechariah 8:14-17). Justice is the desired outcome in neighboring well. But it starts in the gospel.

As we follow the conversation of Jesus and the lawyer, we will see two different views of justification and the vastly different kinds of justice each view produces.

Self-Justification

The lawyer presents a wrong understanding of justification. He did not get it. There is a theme of not getting it in Luke 10. Just before the lawyer asked his question Jesus had turned to his disciples and said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and

to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (vv.23-24). There was something important that a whole lot of people were not getting. Just before that Jesus thanked the Father that he had, “hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.” What was it that some got, and others did not?

One example that clarifies two different mindsets comes just before this verse when the seventy-two missionaries return from the task Jesus assigned to them. They were excited about their experience. That’s when Jesus cautioned, “do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (v. 20). Oh, there it is. One mindset is focused on what self can do, subject demons. The other is focused on what Christ has done for us, write our names in heaven. This is what the disciples’ blessed eyes saw that others didn’t get.

The lawyer was one of those who was focused on what self can do and not on what Christ had done for him. His question reveals a theology of self-justification, “what must I do to be saved?” He was not looking to the grace of Christ for salvation but to his own performance.

At this point in the story, I want Jesus to set the lawyer straight. To begin with, the man is testing Jesus. Then he asks a theologically destructive question. I want Jesus to tell him about grace and rebuke his self-righteousness. But Jesus doesn’t do it. He could have won the argument, but he would have missed the opportunity. So, Jesus stayed on the topic of self-justification. He essentially said, “Tell me more?” when he asked, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (v.26).

“Again Jesus refused to be drawn into controversy. He did not denounce the bigotry of those who were watching to condemn Him. But by a simple story He held up before His hearers such a picture of the outflowing of heaven-born love as touched all hearts, and drew from the lawyer a confession of the truth.

The way to dispel darkness is to admit light. The best way to deal with error is to present truth. It is the revelation of God’s love that makes manifest the deformity and sin of the heart centered in self.” Desire of Ages. Page 498

The man expected a controversial answer from Jesus. He did not expect Jesus to refer to the law. But Jesus is pro-law. He wants us to live in line with his commands because he wants the best for us. There is a law answer to the man’s question. The man knew it. His answer, that Jesus affirmed as correct, was, “You shall 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 your neighbor as yourself.” (v.27). What a human must do to inherit eternal life is perfectly keep the law which is summarized by perfectly loving God and others. The trouble is that nobody has ever done it and nobody ever will. Obedience to the law is a way of life in Christ but not the way to life in Christ.

The lawyer intended to trap Jesus with his question but now Jesus had trapped him his own answer. It is ok to be trapped by Jesus. He loves you. After the man admitted that

perfect law keeping is what he must do to inherit eternal life Jesus said, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” Those first words about being correct might have felt good to the man. Those next words about doing it should have felt devastating to the man. At this point the man had an opportunity to confess that he could not do it and would not live. To which Jesus would have replied something like, “You have answered correctly. Let me tell you about the saving grace of God...”

The parable was another opportunity for the man to abandon his ideas of self-justification. Jesus designed the story to crush the man’s self-righteousness. The extravagant and perfect love shown by the Samaritan to a stranger was too high of a standard for the lawyer to measure up to. Jesus aimed to convict the man of his inability to earn salvation when he concluded the parable with the words, “You go, and do likewise.”

Christ’s Justification

Christ engineered the conversation to be an opportunity to tell the man of another kind of justification. If the man would have been crushed by the unobtainable demand placed upon him, he would have been in a position to receive the incredible grace Christ had to offer him.

Christ’s justification is portrayed within the parable. The parable teaches different lessons in each of the different characters. There is a Levite, a priest, an inn keeper... The lawyer wished to identify with the perfection of the Good Samaritan. Jesus wished the lawyer would identify with the hopelessness of the dying man. If we want to be like the man who stopped to help, we must first admit that we are the man who desperately needs help.

Jesus intends for the listener to identify with the dying man. He didn’t give the man a name, so we can give him ours. He didn’t give him an ethnicity, so we can insert ours. He didn’t give him a title or job description. The only description Jesus gives is that he was robbed, beaten, and left for dead. That is a description every human being can spiritually identify with. The only thing we know about the man is the biggest problem we know about ourselves. We are helpless unless someone comes to our rescue. That man couldn’t do anything to save himself.

Jesus is the ultimate Good Samaritan. He came to us. He put himself in harm’s way. He cared for our wounds and brought us to a safe place. This is justification by grace.

In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus gave a picture of Himself and His mission. Man had been deceived, bruised, robbed, and ruined by Satan, and left to perish; but the Saviour had compassion on our helpless condition. He left His glory, to come to our rescue. He found us ready to die, and He undertook our case. He healed our wounds. He covered us with His robe of righteousness. He opened to us a refuge of safety, and made complete provision for us at His own charges. He died to redeem us. Pointing to His own example, He says to His followers, "These things I command you, that ye love

one another." "As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 15:17; 13:34. Desire of Ages 503-504

This is foundational to neighboring well. We are looking for the relationship between our view of justification and our practice of justice. We have seen these two views of justification, now notice the kind of justice each one produces.

The Justice that Flows from Self Justification

We don't know how the lawyer was impacted by the parable. But we do read how he responded to Christ just before the parable. His response reveals a major truth in the relationship between justification and justice.

Verse twenty-nine says, "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

Self-justification diminishes our justice to others.

Since he could not justify himself with the standard of perfect love, he had to lower the standard. His immediate response to seeing how he fell short was to narrow the scope of loving his neighbor. In asking, "And who is my neighbor?" the lawyer attempted to justify his insufficiencies by establishing a limited definition of who his neighbor was so he could be justified in not loving most people.

Self-righteousness kills neighboring well. We've seen it. We've done it. When we are focused on justifying ourselves, we find all kinds of reasons why other people don't deserve our kindness. I am justified in not giving to the poor because they just will use it on drugs. I am justified in shaming my wife because her behavior is out of control. I am justified in ignoring the oppressed because they are not my neighbor.

When it is about justifying self, we find all kinds of qualifiers and exceptions to "neighboring well" without loving our neighbor.

With all these lessons the priest and the Levite were familiar, but they had not brought them into practical life. Trained in the school of national bigotry, they had become selfish, narrow, and exclusive. Desire of Ages 500

The lesson is no less needed in the world today than when it fell from the lips of Jesus. Selfishness and cold formality have well-nigh extinguished the fire of love, and dispelled the graces that should make fragrant the character. Many who profess His name have lost sight of the fact that Christians are to represent Christ. Unless there is practical self-sacrifice for the good of others, in the family circle, in the neighborhood, in the church, and wherever we may be, then whatever our profession, we are not Christians. Desire of Ages 504

Here is the relationship, self-justification diminishes our justice to others.

The Justice that Flows from Christ's Justification

Christ's justification does the opposite.

While self-justification diminishes our justice to others, Christ's justification motivates our justice to others. It inspires us to love others and sets us free to do it.

There are two great motivators: morality and grace. We are motivated to do something because it is the right thing to do. We are more deeply motivated to do something when we are full of gratitude for what has been done for us. When justice is about earning salvation, we do it with a toxic self-focus. When it is about responding to God's grace, we do it with overflowing gratitude.

At the beginning of this message, I shared those two loaded sentences.

There is a pivotal relationship between our view of justification and our practice of justice. There is enormous value in exploring this relationship because it reveals the greatest determining factor of neighboring well.

That greatest determining factor for neighboring well is experiencing the grace of Jesus. It is possible to be a good neighbor and not be born again. People do it. People who have not had a personal experience with God's love can sign up for community service or give to the poor. But never at the level modeled by the Good Samaritan. The unconverted heart cannot love their neighbor as itself. The Gospel opens a whole new arena of neighboring well. We want to neighbor well as individuals and as a church community. Being swept up in the goodness of God toward us is what will have the greatest impact on our neighboring well experience. What has Christ done for you? How have you been loved when you were dying by the side of the road. Dwell on that until you overflow with gratitude and cannot hold back the desire to extend the love to your neighbor that you have experienced from Christ.

The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbor. Desire of Ages 54