

The Day That Jesus Lied?

by David Servant

Jesus' words to the lawyer about inheriting eternal life are not contradictory to the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, but rather emphasize the importance of repentance and obedience in loving God and loving others.

Scripture: Luke 10:25

Topics: "Loving God", "Faith And Works"

Description

David Servant preaches on the importance of loving God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves, as highlighted by Jesus as the two greatest commandments that encapsulate all others. He delves into a passage in Luke where Jesus affirms the lawyer's answer about inheriting eternal life by loving God and neighbors, emphasizing the grace and faith required for salvation. David explores the concept that true faith is active and produces deeds of love, challenging believers to examine if they truly love their neighbors as themselves. He concludes by stressing the importance of repentance, obedience, and maintaining a high standard of holiness in following Christ.

Transcript

It is always pure joy to discover more people who are focusing on the substance of what following Jesus is supposed to be all about--loving God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. These two commandments are what Jesus said are most important and what encapsulate all the rest (see Matt. 22:36-40). Being a Christian is all about love-relationships, lived out in self-denying servanthood towards God and others. There is no truth that is so simple yet so profound. People who respond to the gospel become lovers. As we will explore in this month's e-teaching, the two greatest commandments are inextricably linked to salvation itself. So we begin with a portion of Scripture that has had many of us scratching our heads.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that Jesus was once "put to the test" by a man who was an expert in the Law of Moses, a lawyer, as they were called. He asked, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Convinced that he knew the answer to his question, the lawyer wanted to see if Jesus would answer correctly.

Not one to be tested by those whom He had created, Jesus reversed the test by throwing the lawyer's question right back at him: "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" (Luke 10:26).

Jesus obviously believed that the answer to the lawyer's question could be found in the Law of Moses, which shouldn't surprise us. Why would God hide the truth about the most important issue of life and eternity? Surely we would expect that within the pages of the Old Testament--God's only written revelation for a period of at least 4,000 years--one could find out how to inherit eternal life. One would even expect that it would be obvious and repeated.

The lawyer answered Jesus, "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" (Luke 10:27).

What an answer! Was it correct?

Without reservation or hesitation, Jesus replied, "You have answered correctly" (Luke 10:28a). And lest anyone misunderstand, Jesus restated His affirmation even more pointedly by immediately declaring, "Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28b). That is, "Keep the two greatest commandments that you've just quoted, and you will inherit eternal life."

So we have a problem. What Jesus affirmed was a correct answer would be considered to be an incorrect answer by many of us, because Scripture also tells us that salvation is by grace through faith. In fact, certain witnessing formulas that we employ are based entirely on correcting people who think (as did that particular lawyer and Jesus) that eternal life is inherited by keeping the two greatest commandments.

So did Jesus tell a lie that day? Or should we reconsider some of our witnessing formulas, not to mention our most fundamental understanding of the gospel, when they so clearly contradict the plain teaching of Jesus?

A number of strained interpretations have been offered that endeavor to harmonize the concept of salvation by grace through faith with what Jesus so plainly told the lawyer (interpretations that I don't have the space in this article to explain or refute). The only interpretation that is not strained, however, is that Jesus was indeed endorsing a salvation that is by grace through faith, yet a grace and faith that are unfortunately foreign to many of us.

First, how was grace a component of Jesus' words to the lawyer concerning the way to inherit eternal life? As the story progresses and the lawyer tries to "justify himself" (Luke 10:29), it becomes quite obvious that he had not been loving his neighbor as himself. Yet Jesus never said to him, "There is no hope for you, my friend, because you have not been keeping the second greatest commandment." No, Jesus said, "Do this and you will live." That is, the lawyer could begin doing what he had not been doing and live. And the last thing Jesus said to him--"Go and do the same"--offered him the same gracious hope. Thus grace was an essential component of the salvation that was being offered. The lawyer needed to be forgiven for not keeping the second greatest commandment up until that time if he hoped to inherit eternal life. Thus he could not save himself--he needed grace to be saved. (And even if he truly repented in his heart, chances are he would need some grace in the future as well, since "we all stumble in many ways" [Jas. 3:2]. And it goes without saying that such saving grace is extended only because of Jesus' payment on the cross. There is not a single person in all of history who has been saved apart from grace, a grace that was made possible by Jesus' sacrifice.)

The grace of salvation is not a grace that gives license to sin, but a grace that gives opportunity to repent of sin, be forgiven, and walk in obedience. That is a key component of the gospel, which is why Jesus commanded His disciples to preach "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" in His name (Luke 24:47).

Forgiveness is granted to people who repent. That is the grace that God has always offered:

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Is. 55:7).

And how was faith a component of Jesus' words to the lawyer about the way to inherit eternal life? Simply stated, people who believe in God or Jesus obey their commandments. As James chided those with dead faith, "Show me your faith without your works [something that is impossible to do] and I'll show you my faith by my works" (Jas. 2:18). The obedient believe and the believers obey. More precisely, they show their faith by their works of love, just as Paul wrote of "faith working through love" (see Gal. 5:6). Faith is not passive, but active, working, doing deeds of love.

All of this is to say that those who don't love their neighbors are those who don't believe in Jesus, even if they think they do. This does not mean that we begin our walk of faith being perfect in love. As faith increases, so does love (for proof, see 2 Thes. 1:3). But true faith always produces some degree of love.

This being so, we seriously ought to consider if we are among those who love our neighbors--as if eternity depended on it. The lawyer who tested Jesus that day knew that he must keep the second greatest commandment in order to inherit eternal life, yet he was clearly falling short. He was deceiving himself, justifying his lack of love by means of a narrow definition of the word "neighbor."

The Story Continues

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

Jesus then told the story of a man who was stripped, beaten, robbed and left half-dead on the road to Jericho. Two religious men, a priest and a Levite, who could both quote the second greatest commandment, walked by the half-dead man on the other side of the road. As their hearts condemned them, they justified their lack of compassion by some means. Perhaps the dying man didn't fit their definition of a neighbor, which may have been the same definition used by the lawyer.

Then came a Samaritan--a pagan by Jewish standards and a member of a hated race (see John 4:9; 8:48)--and one who may not have been able to quote the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. Unlike the two uncompassionate Jews, he followed his conscience, loving his neighbor. He bandaged up the wounds of that neighbor and paid for his convalescence. It cost him time and money.

At this point in His story, Jesus asked the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" (Luke 10:36). Obeying the second greatest commandment has nothing to do with determining who is one's neighbor. Rather, it has everything to do with being a neighbor to everyone.

The lawyer rightly responded: "The one who showed mercy toward him" (Luke 10:37).

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." Jesus' story certainly doesn't leave us with the impression that the priest and Levite represented people on the road to heaven.

Note that Jesus used a non-Jew to serve as an example of someone who loved his neighbor as himself, and He used two well-versed Jewish Bible scholars as examples of those who didn't. If He were telling the same story today in our culture, I wonder whom He might use as characters in His story to try to shock us

out of religious deception? I could suggest many possibilities of virtuous people who could serve in place of the good Samaritan, but I'm fearful of the hate mail I might receive from some of God's loving people. But to replace the priest and Levite, how about an evangelical pastor and a TV evangelist?

Jesus' story becomes potentially even more shocking if we entertain the idea that He intended for us to believe that the Samaritan man was on his way to heaven, having repented and now following his conscience, loving God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, yet lacking much of what most Jews (and professing Christians) think is their ticket to heaven (such as their baptism, church attendance, tithing, Bible knowledge, dead faith and so on). Perhaps that would be reading too much into Jesus' story. Yet the fact remains that Jesus told a Jewish lawyer, a man who was seeking eternal life and who knew He must keep the two greatest commandments, to imitate a non-Jewish Samaritan. Paul certainly believed that Gentiles sometimes follow their God-given consciences, instinctively doing what they do not realize the Law of Moses commands (see Rom. 2:14-16). When they love their neighbors as themselves, they are worthy of imitation.

An Important Ramification

With all of this in mind, it should help us in our quest to evangelize the world and our neighbors. Foremost, we should make sure that we are working with God and not against Him as we evangelize. When we speak to an unsaved person, we should not forget that God has been convicting that person of his sin by means of his conscience since his childhood. That is, God has been calling him to repentance, to turn from his selfishness, to begin loving God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. Thus, we should not offer him a gospel that contradicts the message God has been sending him all of his life. If we tell him that God will forgive him without mentioning his need for repentance, we are actually working against God and working for the devil, helping to deceive a guilty sinner.

Too often we tell people only half-truths. We tell them how salvation is given by God's grace and received by faith--both true. But we leave them with the impression that because of those things, God requires nothing from them. But that is not true according to what Jesus said to the lawyer seeking eternal life--and according to hundreds of other scriptures. We must explain that grace is not a license to sin and that true believers obey.

What we should tell people is something like this: "You feel guilty because God is calling you to repent, and He has been doing that by means of your conscience all of your life. By His grace, He has withheld His wrath, and He is now graciously offering you forgiveness, deliverance from your captivity to sin, a new heart, adoption, eternal life and much more--if you will repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. That means loving God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself."

Maintaining Christ's Standard

Practically every religion in the world has some set standards of holiness one must keep in order to gain divine acceptance or favor, as well as reward rather than punishment in the next life. This is because everyone intuitively knows that divine acceptance, favor and reward are granted to those who obey--because that is a truth their God-given consciences have been telling them all their lives. This Paul indisputably affirmed (see Rom. 2:5-16). Again, God is calling all people to repentance, the same thing we are supposed to be doing in the proclamation of the gospel (see Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

Like the lawyer who tested Jesus, religious people of all faiths generally suppress the voice of their consciences by means of some self-deception that is fortified by following a few rituals or maintaining slightly higher moral ground than decadent culture. Consequently, they fall far short of doing what God actually requires, coming nowhere close to loving Him with all their hearts or their neighbor as themselves. How tragic it is when the message proclaimed (and lived) by professing Christians--a promise of God's acceptance apart from any holiness--lowers the standard beneath even that of false religions! Followers of false religions often reject the "Christian" message wholesale for that very reason, intuitively knowing that such a low standard cannot possibly be representative of the truth. Their God-given consciences testify that such a "gospel" cannot be from God. Yet tragically, many who love the darkness embrace the false grace being propagated today, drawn into the deadly deception believed by the goats of whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 25:31-46.

Never forget this! The gospel is not supposed to be champagne for the conscience, numbing it and putting it to sleep. Rather, the gospel is continual coffee for the conscience, waking it up and keeping it stimulated.

Jesus didn't lie to the lawyer. The people who are inheriting eternal life are those who have repented, and now love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves.

He who does not love abides in death....Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love (1 John 3:14; 4:7-8).

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful [unloving or selfish] way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way [the way of eternal life] (Ps. 139:23-24).

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