

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee

Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee - posted by TrueWitness, on: 2009/8/18 10:12

This story is one of the most common and familiar stories in the church. It would be good for us to read it together: "Jesus, taking up the question, said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who having both stripped him and beat him, went away, leaving him half dead. And by coincidence a certain priest was going down on that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. And likewise also a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the opposite side. But a certain Samaritan, who was journeying, came upon him; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion; and he came to him and bound up his wounds and poured oil and wine on them. And placing him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn and took care of him. And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, Take care of him; and whatever you spend in addition to this, when I return, I will repay you. Which of these three, does it seem to you, has become a neighbor to him who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

The lawyer asked the Lord, "Who is my neighbor?" After the Lord told him this story, He replied to the lawyer with a question, "Which of these three, does it seem to you, has become a neighbor to him who fell into the hands of the robbers?" If you listen carefully to this word, you will realize that the Lord is telling the lawyer that he was the one who fell into the hands of the robbers.

Many today apply this passage incorrectly. They think that the Lord Jesus wants us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Whether it is the Bible schools, the Sunday schools, or the Sunday pulpits, they all tell people that one has to be a good Samaritan. You have to love your neighbors, to show mercy to them, and to help them. To them, who is the neighbor? It is the one who was wounded by the robbers. And who are we? We are the good Samaritan. But this is exactly the opposite of what the Lord Jesus was saying. What the Lord meant was that we are the ones wounded by the robbers. Who then is our neighbor? Our neighbor is the good Samaritan. We think that we are the good Samaritan. We can move. We can walk. When we see those bound by sin, we are able to help them. But the Lord Jesus said that we are not the good Samaritan. Rather, we need the good Samaritan. We are the man wounded by robbers on the journey. We are those who are waiting to die. We do not have any good works. Who is our neighbor? He is the good Samaritan. What is it to love our neighbor as ourselves? It does not say that we have to love others as ourselves. It means that we have to love the Savior as ourselves. It does not mean that we must first love others before we can inherit eternal life. Rather, it means that if we love the Savior, the Samaritan, we will surely have eternal life.

The problem today is that man continually thinks of works. When he reads Luke 10, he says to himself: "Someone is wounded. Someone is dying. If I care for him and love him, I will be a good Samaritan, and I will have eternal life." We think that when we help others, we will inherit eternal life. But the Lord Jesus said if you allow someone to help you, you will have eternal life. None among us is qualified to be the good Samaritan. Thank the Lord, we do not have to be the good Samaritan. We have a good Samaritan already. This Samaritan, who formerly had no dealings with us, has now come. He has died and has solved the problem of our sins. He is now resurrected, and He has given us a new life. This One has bound up our wounds. He has given us redemption. He is helping us and is bringing us to heaven, that God would accept us and care for us.

Finally, we have verse 37: "And he said, The one who showed mercy to him." This time the lawyer answered correctly. He answered that it is the One who showed mercy to him. The One who shows mercy to me is my neighbor. My neighbor is the Samaritan who stopped to bind up my wounds with the oil and the wine, who put me on the beast and brought me to the inn. My friends, the whole question is not to be the neighbor of someone else. Rather, it is the One who showed mercy to you becoming your neighbor.

The Lord Jesus said, "Go, and you do likewise." This word confuses many people. They think that the Lord is telling us to help others. But what this word means is that your neighbor is the good Samaritan. Therefore you should accept Him as your Savior. Since your neighbor is the good Samaritan, you must be the one wounded by the robbers. This shows us that while we were lying there, He came and saved us. Never say that we can do anything ourselves. Never say that we have the way. He is showing us that we have to let Him do everything. We have to let Him pour the oil and the wine on our wounds. We have to let Him bind up our wounds. We have to let Him put us up on the beast and bring us to the inn. We have to let Him do the work of taking care of us. We have to be like the one wounded. We do not have to be like the Samaritan. Man's greatest failure is to think that he should do something. Man always wants to be his own savior. He al

ways wants to save others. But God has not appointed us to be the savior. God says that we are the ones to be saved.

Re: Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee, on: 2009/8/18 15:02

This interpretation doesn't seem to jive with other similar commands by Christ. There is a clear difference between 'God' and neighbor in

Mark 12:29

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

God and neighbor are mutually exclusive here.

Scripture is clear that if we 'help the least of these' we are helping Him. The problem I see today is that cheap grace of the mainstream church says: "by faith ask Jesus into your heart" and live the rest of your life the way you want. Many unsaved believe that works will bring eternal life but many of the 'faith' camp would rather prosper than give or help. It's all about them. I think the two priests are a type for our church today.... like the man Lazarus who ignored the helpless man at the front door. To me, those who believe that salvation is through works are ignorant of salvation in their works... where as the so called 'saved' church is just lazy and apathetic in the revelation of works being a 'fruit of the Spirit'. The priests, by profession and character, were supposedly 'Godly men' who represented the church at the time. If the wounded man was the church then what was symbolic about the priests???

Scripture says that love will grow cold in the last days and I think the two priests represented that love gone cold. As a church we can't do anything of ourselves and we do need Jesus to be our 'all in all'. But I don't see scripture in the same way Nee does in this scenario.

Re: , on: 2009/8/18 15:13

I think this is an unusual interpretation of this parable. I am not sure that Nee would be dogmatic about it. It certainly strikes a blow to legalism and to those who believe that they can in any way be sanctified by works. Maybe this was what Nee had in mind when he wrote this? I do agree with Nee, it is offensive to most people to be the recipient of help rather than the giver of help. Pride is a roaring lion seeking to devour where it can.....Frank

Re: Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee - posted by Koheleth, on: 2009/8/18 16:33

I really like this telling by Nee and I think in turning the sense around he makes some great points, but I still think the primary interpretation is "go and do likewise" meaning like the Samaritan.

Re: Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2009/8/19 9:48

I find this interpretation very disturbing. The reason is that Nee is twisting the entire story to mean something Jesus was not saying. It is an inverted method of interpretation, if you want to call it that. What it does is it will intimidate others from reading the scriptures because they will think they do NOT know how to interpret it correctly and so one needs learned scholars to interpret the WORD for you. NOT SO! When God spoke to people, he spoke clearly and said exactly what he meant and there was never a lack of understanding or any hidden meanings. One does not need a skilled scholar to understand God's word. So, to me this method of interpretation is very dangerous.

I have told one of our pastors that "you preachers sure have a knack of confusing, complicating the simplest thing." He admitted this to be true. This is a prime example of one doing just that.

My thoughts,
ginnyrose

Re: Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee - posted by Christinyou (), on: 2009/8/19 13:27

Watchman Nee is not the only one.

Gaebelein's Annotated Bible

Verses 25-37. The lawyer's question leads to the utterance of the parable of the good Samaritan, to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The parable answers the question fully, but it also contains the most blessed Gospel truths. Jerusalem is the city of God; Jericho represents the world. The traveller is the type of humanity. Man has fallen in the awful road which leads down, fallen among thieves, naked, wounded, helpless and hopeless. The failure of the Priest and the scribe to help illustrates the inability of the law and the ordinances to save man out of his deplorable condition. The good Samaritan is the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to the place where the lost are and He alone could have compassion on him. The wine typifies His precious blood He shed to save us. The oil is the type of the Holy Spirit, who applies the blood. He takes care of fallen man found by Him. The inn is typical of the church, where the Lord through His Spirit cares for His own. The two pence are not typical of "two sacraments" but speak of the reward, which those receive, who, under the Holy Spirit, care for souls. The promised coming again with a greater reward offered is the Second Coming of our Lord. The Gospel of the Manhood records this parable exclusively. end;

"Go and do likewise"

Tell all that Jesus is the Good Samaritan and will bind up our lethal wounds if left untreated.
Do you believe, "Whom do you say that I am"

In Christ: Phillip

Re: - posted by Koheleth, on: 2009/8/19 17:23

Ginny and Philip, I did not find Nee's spiritualization of the passage to be wrong, as long as no one would insist it is the primary application of the passage. Most people interpret some the parables of Matthew 13 in the opposite way I tend to think Jesus intended them. In either case, I have found both flows of thought edifying. But, anyone who would say the primary application of the Good Samaritan is that we are the beaten man and Jesus is the Samaritan has had too much secondary.

Re: Who is my neighbor? by Watchman Nee - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2009/8/19 18:57

I also think the logic of Nee's reasoning is seriously flawed:

Quote:

-----"Someone is wounded. Someone is dying. If I care for him and love him, I will be a good Samaritan, and I will have eternal life."

The lawyer asked Jesus what He can do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' reply was "what is written in the law? how readest thou?" Luke 10:26.

The lawyer said "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself." Luke 10:27.

If these principles are operating in the life of the believer he will not be thinking that his good deeds will earn him eternal life because he will know where his salvation comes from. He will not be given to idolatry. He will follow the Lamb where soever He goeth and that will include helping the guy in the ditch which this fine rich lawyer was prone to leave alone. And who knows? Maybe this lawyer was the fellow who actually did see this guy in the ditch and he walked on by...

This inverted method of interpretation is the method used by liberals to dismiss plain teaching of the WORD and we all lament where those folks are. They twist and ignore plain scripture to suit their own fanciful schemes. They will declare that Jesus or Paul did not mean it this way, or that but another way. They can confuse you to no end. And that is what spiritualizing does. While Nee's interpretation does no violence to Biblical principles, it is the method Nee used to arrive at his interpretation of this scripture that is so very dangerous.

Folks also use this method to interpret Revelation and it has spooked folks from delving into the book to see what it can teach us. As result of this, many have lost a blessing because they think they cannot understand the vision that was given to John because even the experts will argue and debate about it. And they know more then we do, don't they?

We cannot allow this inverted method of Biblical interpretation to teach us how we approach the WORD. This is my primary concern.

ginnyrose

Re: , on: 2009/8/19 20:16

Hi Ginnyrose, I think you are being a wee bit tough on Nee :) I am pretty sure he was not a Liberal trying to twist the Words of Scripture :) You may not like his interpretation, but it is pretty plain to see what he is driving at, even if he is using the wrong vehicle :)

I am not so sure either that the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus are plain enough that everyone could understand them, even his disciples did not understand His parables and He had to explain them to them. Now, what I would say is that all those who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, will have the Scriptures opened up to them, He will illuminate them, He will lead us and guide us into all Truth, no doubt. There is no doubt that we cannot earn our salvation, neither can we earn our sanctification, which is maybe what he is driving at. And, there is no doubt that we could identify with the man beaten and left for dead, for Spiritually, we too were dead by the roadside when Jesus came into the Highways and byways. He did rescue us from eternal death and He did bind up our wounds, He did pay the price. I still agree with you though that using that parable to convey that message is a bit of a stretch.....Frank

Re: - posted by White_Stone (), on: 2009/8/19 21:41

Hello Frank,

Quote:

-----even his disciples did not understand His parables and He had to explain them to them.

Isn't it possible that their needing to have the parables explained to them was for our benefit, too? Although I do believe He said the peoples eyes and ears were blocked from understanding to fulfill God's purpose.

Kind regards,
white stone

Re: , on: 2009/8/19 22:11

Good point White-Stone, there is a reason for everything. Its interesting though that we had this kind of discussion on another thread about the difference between revelation and illumination. Tozer made the point that God's Word was revelation and that was objective Truth, yet to understand the Scriptures it takes illumination by the Holy Spirit. Love you guys..brother Frank

Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2009/8/20 5:45

I think BOTH 'Nee's' and the 'traditional' interpretation are valid. At first I thought Nee was distorting the plain meaning of the parable, but on reflection I realise that although the plain meaning is that we should be the good Samaritan and love our neighbour, we do so by following the perfect example of our Lord Jesus who loved us who were broken and in great need. 'We love, because He first loved us'. When you think about it all scripture points to the fact that we should be like our Lord Jesus Christ. 'As Christ is, so are we in this world'; 'Be imitators of God', etc.

So we can see in this parable the truth of the redemption story as described by earlier poster and ALSO be challenged 'to do likewise' and be the representation of Jesus Christ to a needy world. This is the great challenge of the Christian walk, not only did Jesus preach the Good News, He also was (and is) the provision of that Good News.

Every Blessing...

Re: - posted by TrueWitness, on: 2009/8/20 9:21

ginnyrose wrote:

Quote:
-----I also think the logic of Nee's reasoning is seriously flawed: Quote: "Someone is wounded. Someone is dying. If I care for him and love him, I will be a good Samaritan, and I will have eternal life."

But look at the sentence he wrote immediately before the ones you quoted:

Quote:
-----The problem today is that man continually thinks of works. When he reads Luke 10, he says to himself: "Someone is wounded. Someone is dying. If I care for him and love him, I will be a good Samaritan, and I will have eternal life." We think that when we help others, we will inherit eternal life.

You see that Nee is pointing out that people who think like that are wrong in their thinking. Instead of Nee advocating the position you claim he is in your quote, he is actually opposed to that type of thinking.

The more I think about Nee's interpretation of this parable, the more I discount it being the main intent of the teaching. Who if they were beaten and left for dead in the road needs to be told to love someone who comes by and helps them? Wouldn't that be a natural reaction? But then we come to verses 36 and 37:

Quote:
-----"Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

So here we see that in this parable the neighbor is the good Samaritan. So does the command "go and do likewise" mean love the neighbor (those who show us mercy) or does it mean be a neighbor (show kindness to those in need)? I lean toward the be a neighbor more than the other.

Re: , on: 2009/8/20 10:19

..."Many today apply this passage incorrectly. They think that the Lord Jesus wants us to love our neighbor as ourself. Whether it is the Bible schools, the Sunday schools, or the Sunday pulpits, they all tell people that one has to be a good Samaritan. You have to love your neighbors, to show mercy to them, and to help them. To them, who is the neighbor? It is the one who was wounded by the robbers. And who are we? We are the good Samaritan. But this is exactly the opposite of what the Lord Jesus was saying. What the Lord meant was that we are the ones wounded by the robbers. Who then is our neighbor? Our neighbor is the good Samaritan."... Nee

I don't think anyone is being overly hard on Nee here given that Nee is the one who said that this passage is being interpreted incorrectly throughout history as if his is the only one that is valid. He goes to great length to say 'many' are 'incorrect' in their original interpretation as it looks on the surface. He doesn't seem to leave room for any other interpretation but his own. When someone implies this, I immediately give pause.

Luke 10: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."
Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

I believe that the Samaritan was 'being a neighbor' to the man who fell into the hands of robbers, but the original question posed was WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?? I don't think Jesus was saying our neighbor is the Samaritan so 'go and do likewise' to people like just like him. Did the Samaritan need help?? The Samaritan was being a neighbor to his neighbor. Jesus, as He consistently demonstrated throughout Scripture, was preaching mercy and love to those in need. Our neighbors are those in need and we must be a neighbor (like the Samaritan) to those who are in need. Christians do not pass by. Teachers of the law may pass by, scholars may pass by, men of outward virtue may pass by... but not those who follow Christ. To me (that is in my opinion), this is not some mystical passage like the meaning of 'foreknew' and 'predestined', it is a simple passage about the love of God and how this must be represented by those who claim to know Him.

..."The Lord Jesus said, "Go, and you do likewise." This word confuses many people. They think that the Lord is telling us to help others. But what this word means is that your neighbor is the good Samaritan. Therefore you should accept Him as your Savior. Since your neighbor is the good Samaritan, you must be the one wounded by the robbers. They think that the Lord is telling us to help others. But what this word means is that your neighbor is the good Samaritan."....
Nee

This just doesn't make sense to me. We are supposed to be the wounded man but Jesus says to go and do likewise. "Go" as in an action verb is the term Jesus uses. So we have two options: Go and help those in need and be a neighbor to your neighbor OR go and accept Jesus as our neighbor when life beats us up. The latter doesn't jive to me in the context of 'go and do'. How can we go and do likewise as a command from Jesus to be a victim so our neighbor can help? To say that Jesus is saying that we 'should accept Him as the Savior and neighbor when times are tough' doesn't seem consistent with 'go and do likewise' as an action command moving forward. Also, Nee implies that the neighbor and Jesus are one and the same. But Scripture in Matthew, Mark, and Luke does not see it this way.

Again in the context of the Bible we see in Matthew 19:19, Matt 22:37-42 along with Mark and Luke suggesting that God and neighbor are used as mutually exclusive as 'God with all your heart, mind and strength' AND 'love your neighbor as yourself' are two separate people.

Matt 22

37Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**"

Since the only other passage I can find that uses similar language like 'love your neighbor' is in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke then I rely on this for some context. Jesus does not describe Himself as the neighbor here, and since He and the Father are one, then the neighbor is someone other than them. I can't neglect this context of 'neighbor' in light of Nee's interpretation. Love God, love your neighbor are said to be the two greatest commandments. The bible is peppered with the saints helping others to glorify God. Jesus, Paul, Peter, John all discuss doing good, loving others, doing the work of an evangelist, and glorifying God by the fruit bearing of the Spirit.... and this is the hallmark of ministering the love of God to a lost and dying world. So why couldn't the Samaritan be us?? Why couldn't his deed by the fruit of the Spirit in helping someone in need glorify God???

Some may say 'well it could be seen that way and many people have'. If you would say this then you would stop short of saying that this is an incorrect interpretation and those who view it this way are 'confused'. Nee doesn't do that here. He says the obvious interpretation is wrong. To me that's a problem no matter who is giving their opinion in interpretation.

I agree with Nee that many may take this as 'works related' unto salvation but this wouldn't be the only passage that people have done this.

Re: , on: 2009/8/20 11:36

I think Dave says it very well. Ginnyrose , I believe, knows it was tongue in cheek , when I said she was being too hard on Nee, hence the smiley face :) Interpretations should be challenged. Its good berean work. And I think we should always start from a position of love and trying to understand what another brother is saying, especially if he has dedicated his whole life to Jesus. I remember asking a good older brother to read "The Cost of Discipleship," by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was very against him, but I persuaded him to read the book. He was greatly blessed by it. There is a tendency nowadays, not on sermonindex of course :) , to take a statement or a disagreement and then throw the baby out with the bathwater. Lets imagine that Nee is completely wrong on his interpretation of this parable, which is very possible. Would that make him a Liberal who was trying to twist the Scriptures, or would it simply make him a Christian who did not have a perfect theology and understanding of the Scriptures? I think it is important to take the totality of a man's life and walk to sum him up.....Frank

Re: , on: 2009/8/20 11:50

"I think Dave says it very well. Ginnyrose , I believe, knows it was tongue in cheek , when I said she was being too hard on Nee, hence the smiley face :) "appolous

Hi appolous. Okay that makes more sense. I must have missed that whole thing. Sorry about that sir.

cc-

Re: , on: 2009/8/20 12:05

"Lets imagine that Nee is completely wrong on his interpretation of this parable, which is very possible. Would that make him a Liberal who was trying to twist the Scriptures, or would it simply make him a Christian who did not have a perfect theology and understanding of the Scriptures? I think it is important to take the totality of a man's life and walk to sum him up" appolous

I agree with you, I was trying to challenge the interpretation more than the man himself. When I said that I give pause to those who claim an interpretation is incorrect and there's is correct, I didn't mean to dismiss Nee altogether. I believe Nee to be a great man of God. I just didn't agree with the presumption that another interpretation was incorrect in this particular passage. I can see this being said in something more obscure in it's dialogue like 'predestination' as there are several views. But I just think it was a stretch for him to call the other view unequivocally incorrect.

Re: , on: 2009/8/20 14:15

Hi CC, I agree with you brother, its always very bold to make that kind of statement, and its not something I would do myself. And I think that you did a good job challenging the position that Nee took. I think I still tend to come down on Dave's position, while acknowledging the "all others are incorrect," is a very emphatic statement and certainly one that was always going to be challenged.....Frank