

# Evangelism According to Jesus

## Week 3 – The Expert in the Law – Luke 10:25-37

### Scripture Reading: Mark 12:28-34

#### Introduction

Thus far in our study of evangelism according to Jesus we have looked at the cases of two women who I called the ultimate outsider and the obvious sinner

In the first case, the woman of Samaria was obviously saved while, in the case of the second, adulterous woman, the outcome regarding her salvation was uncertain

The two women, though, had a lot in common in that they were both outcasts from society and they knew it

This morning we are going to change things up a bit and consider the case of an expert of the Law

Our ESV Bible refers to him as a “lawyer” while the NIV refers to him as “an expert in the law” and the NET Bible gets really specific and calls him an “expert in *religious law*”

Plainly, this gentleman knew his Bible well – he was a very qualified Bible scholar

Quite a number of years ago, I decided to take some Bible classes through Trinity’s extension program

The classes were held at Elmbrook Church up in the Milwaukee suburb of Brookfield and, unlike my later online classes, these were traditional classes where the students and professor all gathered together in a classroom

And while taking those classes I noticed an interesting phenomenon

A student would raise his hand, it tended to be the guys who did this as I recall, and when they were called upon by the professor they would launch into a long-winded question that really wasn’t a question at all

What they were doing was attempting to show off how much they knew about whatever they were rambling on about And after they had prattled on for some minutes they would finally ask the professor what he thought of what they had just said – expecting the professor to praise him for his excellent knowledge and insight, of course

It would have been easy to become annoyed by these performances if not for the amusement I got in seeing the look that would come across the professor’s face as the questioning student droned on

It was clear the professor had stood and listened to more than one of those pseudo-questions in his career

Jesus was also regularly confronted with people who tried to “strut their stuff” in front of him or to challenge him during his earthly ministry

That was the case in our passage last week as the religious leaders tried to force Jesus into an intractable corner in the hope of embarrassing and discrediting him

And our lawyer this morning is also trying to test Jesus – not necessarily to discredit Jesus but simply to show Jesus how smart he was in the hope of proving his own sense of righteousness

There are many people in the world who try to do the same thing whenever the topic turns to the Bible

People who will seek to argue and dispute over some passage or idea to try to show their superior knowledge and so avoid having to face the reality of the gospel

And you will likely face one or more of these people as you seek to evangelize

So how Jesus handles this teacher of the law is instructive for us

**Luke 10:25-37** contains another familiar passage – the parable of the Good Samaritan and you have undoubtedly heard one or more sermons on the parable

But we won’t be considering the parable itself this morning in depth as we will instead be focusing on the evangelistic angle of Jesus’ encounter with the lawyer

If you are taking notes; Roman numeral one is **The Exchange** between Jesus and the lawyer, Roman numeral two is **The Purpose**, or what Jesus was trying to accomplish by his approach, and Roman numeral three will be **The Lessons** that we can apply to our evangelistic efforts to this type of person

Once again, as we saw last week, Jesus was teaching in a public setting when this “lawyer” or expert in the Law stood up to ask him a pointed question

This type of person loves the spotlight and we see this tactic often during Jesus’ ministry

And once again, we see that the lawyer asked the question to “put [Jesus] to the test”

There isn’t any pastor or evangelist who wouldn’t love to have someone stand up and ask this question

However, the Greek word translated here as “test” tells us that the question was insincere and meant for a purpose other than gathering information

It’s the same word that is used in **Matthew 4:7** and **Luke 4:17** when Jesus was being tempted by Satan and Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 6:16** saying, *“Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

And Paul used a form of the same word in **1Corinthians 10:9** when warning against idolatry saying, *“We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents”*

And in verse 29 of our passage [**Luke 10:29**] we see that the lawyer was seeking to “justify” himself which means he was seeking to prove that he was in a right relationship to God

But he was trying to do so through parsing words and designing loopholes that would allow him to be justified by his own sense of what was righteous

He was behaving something like former president Bill Clinton who centuries later tried to justify himself by arguing over what the meaning of the word “is” is

So let’s begin by looking at the whole exchange between this expert of Jewish Law and Jesus

## **I. The Exchange**

In verse 25 [**Luke 10:25**] we see **the lawyer’s first question** – *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*

Again, this could be a very good question if asked for the right reasons but, sadly, in this case it wasn’t

The lawyer meant to put Jesus to the test – he thoroughly believed he knew the way to eternal life and that he qualified for it and he simply wanted Jesus to confirm before everyone that his confidence was warranted

Now, if someone were to ask one of us that question we would be thrilled and we would most likely jump at the chance to walk them along the Romans Road and show them the way to be saved

But notice that Jesus doesn’t answer his question

Clearly Jesus saw through the man’s scheme and instead of giving him a straightforward answer, Jesus answered his question with a question of his own designed to allow the lawyer to show his knowledge

And in verse 26 [**Luke 10:26**] Jesus as much as said, *“You’re the expert; what does God’s Word teach is the way to inherit eternal life?”*

### **Talk about dangling a pork chop in front of a Pitbull!**

The lawyer could have at that moment recognized his error in approaching Jesus with such an arrogant attitude but he couldn’t resist the opportunity to demonstrate his superior Bible knowledge to everyone present

And in doing so, he revealed that he really wasn’t interested in how Jesus might have answered his question

But his answer that we find in verse 27 [**Luke 10:27**] is actually a very good one

In fact, it’s the exact answer that Jesus himself gave on another occasion when he was asked which was the most important commandment

## **The lawyer answered Jesus' question by saying –**

*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.*

In other words, the lawyer gave a perfect summary of what God's Law requires for one to have eternal life

And if any of us were able to keep the Law perfectly, we would indeed, at least theoretically, inherit eternal life

But we know that we can't keep the Law perfectly enough and that only Jesus was ever able to do so

Because God never intended for the Law to be any more than a description of how we should live and it has never been the prescription for reconciling us to God

But the answer that the lawyer gave was a great answer and it demonstrated his thorough knowledge of Scripture as he summarized the entirety of God's Law perfectly

Now you or I might be tempted to answer such a statement with a protest that the Law is unable to give eternal life and how God only meant the Law to point us to our need for a Savior much like I just said a minute ago

But that's not what Jesus did

The learned Bible scholar would have liked nothing better than to have entered into a discussion about the sufficiency and purpose of the Law – that was the very discussion he was looking to have so that he could show off his knowledge

Look at Jesus' response in verse 28 [**Luke 10:28**] – Jesus said, *“You have answered correctly; do this and you will live”*

Jesus implies that if the lawyer were to perfectly obey the two greatest commandments that summarize God's Law he would inherit eternal life

At this point the lawyer would have done well to have considered exactly what Jesus was saying

He should have taken inventory and thought about how well and fully he had loved God and whether he could honestly say that his love for his neighbor was equal to his love for himself

Had he done so, he would have come to the conclusion that no matter how strongly he intended to obey the Law; he had failed and he would have asked Jesus if there were anything that could be done about it

That's what he should have done but what he actually did was continue to try to get Jesus bogged down in a technical discussion where he could demonstrate his expertise by arguing about details so as to justify any failure on his part

So he asked Jesus, *“And who is my neighbor?”*

He wanted to get involved in a discussion about the boundaries of neighborhood and to analyze the word to find a loophole showing that to the degree that he might not have loved someone else they weren't his neighbor anyway

The lawyer obviously thought that he had the first great commandment about fully loving God down cold but he wasn't taking into account the truth found in **1John 4:20-21** which says –

*If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

But even if he had, he might well have wanted to define as narrowly as possible who exactly his brother was

**Because the point was he wanted to make his own personal standard the standard by which God would grant him eternal life**

But Jesus wasn't interested in getting into a pointless discussion with him concerning the lawyer's perceptions so he ignored the lawyer's challenge to an intellectual debate and he told him a story

A parable actually, about a traveler in need and those who came along and saw him in his time of need –two who passed him by and one who stopped to help him

## **A skilled story-teller can convey a great deal of profound truth in a simple story**

Abraham Lincoln was a master at telling stories like that

He often exasperated those who thought themselves to be intellectuals with his simple stories and they often thought Mr. Lincoln to be a bit of a dolt when he would lean back and begin one of them

But no one was better at conveying deep theological and moral truth in the guise of a simple story than Jesus and he did so often to the confusion and irritation of his critics

And Jesus told his disciples that he taught so often in parables because he wanted the message they contained to be understood only by those who had open hearts and minds – those who cared enough to ask for an explanation

I imagine the lawyer in our account was more than a little put off by the fact that Jesus refused to take the bait and play the theological game the lawyer was trying to engage him in

And the legal expert was probably puzzled when Jesus launched into a story that seemed to have no bearing on his questions about eternal life and who his neighbor was

And we might also wonder, why exactly Jesus didn't just answer the lawyer's question about how to inherit eternal life – a question that Jesus never does answer for him, by the way – and why he instead shared this parable

So let's look at that next as we consider Jesus' purpose for why he engaged with this lawyer as he did

## **II. The Purpose**

**Jesus answered as he did to reveal just how self-deceived and hypocritical the lawyer was**

The lawyer had easily and perhaps a bit arrogantly and without a great deal of self-awareness stated that God's Law required him to love God fully and to love his neighbor as he loved himself

With his answer he demonstrated without a doubt that he understood the letter of the Law so Jesus simply told him to go and do what he knew he should do

**I find it interesting that the lawyer appears to have had no personal doubt as to his love for God**

Apparently, he believed that he indeed loved God with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind which seem incredible

Who among us doesn't recognize how many times we've fallen short of this requirement even while taking part in a worship service let alone when out and about just living life?

Still, that requirement is an easy one to claim success in fulfilling because it's hard to prove otherwise

Loving God seems to be pretty hard to define and as long as a person is faithful at worship attendance and so forth it would be difficult to prove that someone's love for God falls short

But since the lawyer knew he didn't actually love everyone to the degree demanded by the Law, or perhaps didn't even love some people at all, he wanted argue the finer points of who his neighbor was so as to come to a very narrow definition and make his behavior acceptable under the Law

So he asked, "Who is my neighbor" hoping to get into a debate where he could, by force of intellect and rhetorical ability, come out on top and establish acceptable limits on who God commanded him to love and be justified

**The truth is, we all wish that God only commanded us to love those who we already care about**

As difficult as it is to love anyone as much as we love ourselves at least we like to imagine that we could possibly love our spouse, our other family members, our close friends, and maybe even the people next door enough to satisfy God

But "neighbor" is not defined by proximity or propensity as much as we might want that to be true

We don't like to admit it but when we read what God requires of us we all want to redefine and restrict his demands to make them at least somewhat more attainable

But Jesus' parable says that **we must love even the person we would naturally despise** if we know they have a need that we are in a position to fulfill

For the Jewish lawyer that meant he had to love a Samaritan just as in Jesus' parable a Samaritan loved a Jew  
That was a tall order because in the Jewish culture it was taught that while you were to love your neighbor, you also had the duty before God to hate your enemy – so everything depended on how you defined neighbor and enemy  
And Jesus came along and with his parable threw that thinking out the window  
Then Jesus showed that loving someone means more than just paying lip-service to them  
As he taught that **loving someone means sacrificing oneself for them** just as the Samaritan sacrificed his time, money, convenience and even put himself at risk of harm from the bandits as he did what was needed for his fellow traveler who was in need

With this teaching, Jesus very subtly but significantly turned the lawyer's question around from "who is my neighbor?" to "to whom are you acting as a neighbor?"

And that is the more pertinent question if you want to justify yourself on the basis of your actions

But the twist in the parable that made the Samaritan the hero would have been beyond shocking to any Jew and the thought that a Jew would be required to act as a neighbor to a Samaritan would have been scandalous

So when Jesus asked at the end of his parable [Luke 10:36] "*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*" the lawyer couldn't bring himself to say, "The Samaritan"

Instead he answered, "*The one who showed him mercy*" [Luke 10:37]

And Jesus finished their encounter by telling the lawyer, "*You go, and do likewise*"

### **In that moment the lawyer had to have begun to question his ability to live up to God's Law**

I would imagine he walked away with a bit of relief that his encounter with Jesus was over but also that he was a bit stunned by the realization that he didn't have the kind of love that Jesus was talking about

And so Jesus was content to allow the expert in the Law walk away with the seeds of doubt planted as to whether one can possibly justify themselves through following the Law

### **See, Jesus knew that not everyone who approached him was sincere and not everyone was ready to hear the gospel**

In the parable of the soils in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8 we see the seed of the gospel fall on four different types of soil and four different results

And the application from the parable is that some hearts aren't receptive to the gospel and the soil of those hearts needs to be worked and prepared if the seed of the gospel is to successfully take root and grow and bear fruit

Sadly, there are many people in the world who have a lot of Bible knowledge but who don't realize that knowing God's Word is not the same as submitting to God's Word and doing God's Word

It seems counter-intuitive but it is possible for some people to know too much about God's Word before salvation

Because knowledge can lead to pride and even to the person believing that they can find loopholes in God's demands that will force him to capitulate to them

The expert in the Law who approached Jesus thought that if he could only narrow the definitions enough and force God to use his grading scale that he could slip by

And Jesus knew that this man would need to be stripped of those ideas and come to a thorough understanding of his bankrupt condition before God if he were to ever see his need of a Savior

Jesus also knew that engaging with the man in an intellectual argument would only cause him to strive even harder to justify himself before God

So Jesus instead took the long view and he was content to send the lawyer away thinking about his shortcomings and what those shortcomings meant in light of justification before God

So, what lessons should we take from this account as we seek to evangelize the way Jesus did?

### **III. The Lessons**

**First, we need to recognize, as Jesus did, that not everyone who we come into contact with is ready for the gospel**

We need to take the long view and realize that evangelism can be a drawn out, slow process

Not everyone we engage with is going to be ready to hear the gospel and no matter how desperately we may want to share the good news of the Savior there are times when doing so would be premature and lead to rejection

Wisdom tells us that if we were to make all of our conversations with the non-Christians we know a presentation of the gospel complete with a call to respond to it we would lose our ability to talk to them at all in short order

But that doesn't mean we don't take steps to prepare the soil of their hearts so that they can be receptive to the gospel

And Jesus shows us how we can go about that – especially with people like the lawyer who believe they know enough to get by

**We need to understand where people are before we can show them the way to salvation**

I want you to notice that Jesus didn't tell the lawyer anything; he simply asked him the right questions

We need to learn to ask good questions that serve to reveal the true condition of a person's heart

As you read through the gospel accounts in the New Testament you will discover that asking questions was one of Jesus' primary forms of communication – especially with unbelievers

The Christian theologian, Francis Schaefer, used to say that if he had one hour to talk to a person he would spend 55 minutes asking them questions and listening carefully to their answers

Then he would spend the last 5 minutes trying to say something that would speak to their situation once he understood a little more about what was going on in their heart and mind

And I'd have to say there is a great deal of wisdom in Mr. Schaefer's approach

But, of course, Jesus didn't need to ask questions to know what was in the lawyer's heart and mind

He asked the questions so that the lawyer might begin to understand the condition of his own heart and mind and see just how much he fell short of obeying God's perfect standard and obtaining justification through his own efforts

**We need to make certain that our hearts are in the right place when we interact with unbelievers**

We can't set out to embarrass them or score points and even the right questions must be asked in the right way

Any questions we ask have to come from a place of genuine love and concern that desires to lead the person before us to the Lord – most people will recognize a "gotcha" question from a mile away and respond accordingly

So we must ask questions out of a sincere desire to learn more about them so that we might better be able to know what other questions to ask, what information to share – and when it's appropriate to share – and even when to leave them be and allow them to ponder the matter on their own

Because the right questions asked in the right way can reveal need to the unbeliever

Whereas a wrong approach might only serve to cause them to dig in their heels out of pride

**Sometimes all we can do is show people the reality of what God requires**

Many people, like the lawyer, need to see the truth of the Law before they're ready to hear the good news of the gospel

The lawyer had a great grasp of the Law on an intellectual level and because he had likely spent a great deal of his life studying the Scriptures

But he, like most people, didn't have a true understanding of what God's Law truly demands of us

As a result, we, like the lawyer, have very little real sense of the sin in our lives or how seriously God takes our sin

We read the command to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and we interpret that to mean that we can be generally fond of God for the most part or at least some of the time when nothing else interferes

How many of us can honestly say that nothing other than God ever has a piece of our heart?

How many of us can say that we physically exhaust ourselves only in the pursuit of loving God?

We all have to admit that we fall short of the level of love God demands no matter how much that might grieve us

Then, like the lawyer, we want to negotiate about who really is my neighbor and what it actually means to “love” them

And, like the lawyer, we think that by watering down God’s requirements we might make them more attainable and that in trying to obey our version we will be acceptable to God

Every person must, at some point, come face to face with the Law and fully grasp its uncompromising nature and then be told to go and keep that Law in order to inherit eternal life before we realize that such a command is impossible

The lawyer thought he was doing okay in the loving God department but he knew he might have a problem with the loving your neighbor thing so he set out to debate the issue so as to justify himself

But after meeting with Jesus he saw God’s Law was more stringent than he knew and he had a lot to think about but as he walked away he was closer to being ready to accept the gospel than at the start of his conversation with Jesus

**Lastly, and this may be in many ways the toughest part, we must be patient and give God time to work**

That presents us with a real challenge because we have to come to grips with the reality that salvation belongs to the Lord as it says in **Psalm 3:8**

We can become so accustomed to thinking that sealing the deal or getting someone to make a decision is up to us that we can forget that God is the one who saves and begin to think that salvation somehow depends on us

Look at what the apostle Paul wrote about this matter in **1Corinthians 3:5-9** –

*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.*

Every believer is a laborer in God’s field and God has given each of us a task to perform and it’s our responsibility to do so faithfully

Without a doubt, we must be discerning about what each person needs from us and nothing we see in this passage excuses us from presenting the gospel when it’s appropriate to do so

But there will be times when must recognize that a someone standing before us isn’t ready to hear the gospel

And the most appropriate thing we can do is to send them away without telling them how to inherit eternal life just as Jesus did with the lawyer

**Sometimes we just need to do what we can to get a person thinking in a different, better way that advances their journey toward the cross and then let them go their way trusting in the Lord to finish the job**

## Conclusion

Plainly, in the account before us there was no obvious, direct presentation of the gospel

Jesus didn't say anything about forgiveness or mercy or grace and how those things might be found

The expert in the Law came to Jesus with questions seeking to engage Jesus in a theological dispute and Jesus recognized that he was an insincere challenger

Remember, the lawyer didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah when he came to him with his question about inheriting eternal life – he only saw him as a teacher of considerable reputation who he could debate with

But, while Jesus didn't share what the lawyer wasn't ready for, that doesn't mean the gospel wasn't present

Jesus didn't treat the man as he deserved – Jesus treated him with kindness and mercy as he took the lawyer's questions seriously and graciously gave him serious answers

True, they may not have been the answers the lawyer sought but they were the answers he needed to hear and Jesus tailored them to the lawyer's specific situation and need

Jesus didn't call him out for his arrogance and self-justification; he spent time with him and demonstrated care for him and his concerns

Jesus sent the lawyer on his way with plenty to think about and I have to believe that the lawyer walked away secure in the knowledge that Jesus would take time for him again should he come back in the future

As we go out among the lost we may well find ourselves faced with someone like this lawyer who wants to debate with us over what they think they know of God's Word so as to demonstrate their superior knowledge

When faced with that situation we need to remain gracious and kind

We need to avoid the argument and ask questions to find out all we can about the individual's spiritual condition and see if there is some way that we can help the person see their need

We need to ask God to show us if there is some indirect way by which we can get them closer to the cross even though it may not be the time to make a direct presentation of the gospel

And then we need to leave them in God's capable hands trusting him with their salvation even as we continue to pray for them

Let's pray