

**On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

**26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”**

**27 He answered: “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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”**

**28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”**

**29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

**30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.**

**31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’**

**36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”**

**37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (NIV84)**

Theme: All you have to do is Love.

1. Love God with everything
2. Love your neighbors at all times.

“You can do anything you want to do, you can be anyone you want to be—if you put your mind to it and try your hardest.” That is the message many schools, experts, motivators and so on spread today. “All you have to do” You hear that phrase a lot. “All you have to do is this or that.”

Sadly, it’s also a phrase many use when it comes to salvation. The problem is that you could do this and that, but you can’t do it all—and you can’t do it all the time. You’re a sinner and try as you might you can’t save yourself. But that doesn’t stop people from trying. So, if you want to save yourself, all you have to do is love. Love God with all that you have and love your neighbors at all times.

Jesus was in the last year of his ministry when a expert in the law—a man who studied the Old Testament and knew it well, asked Jesus a question. **What must I do to inherit eternal life?** This was a preconceived question. He came to Jesus in order to test him. He wanted to see if Jesus would agree with the Jewish leaders of the time. This so-called expert in the law, along with other Jewish leaders, thought he knew the answer. They taught that if you obey certain laws you could save yourself. That if you did this and stayed away from that, you were good enough to get to heaven. And many of those laws didn’t come from God’s Word. Rather, they emphasized their own, man-made laws. So this expert in the law is asking Jesus—what are the laws I need to follow in order to gain for myself eternal life. It was a test to see if Jesus taught the same thing as the Jewish leaders.

That question is still asked today. What do I have to do to get to heaven? That’s what we think by nature. By nature we think that we must somehow contribute to our eternal life. We are told that we can be whatever we want, we can do whatever we want to do—as long as we put our mind to it and try hard enough. So why should heaven be any different? “I’ll just try hard. I’ll just do the right things. And eventually I can win for myself that ticket to heaven.”

And so we brag about ourselves and our accomplishments. “God must be pleased with me,” we assume. “I go to Church every Sunday, read my Bible regularly, and attend Bible Class. I give a lot to the Church, and volunteer my time. Generally, I am nice to others; and I’ve never committed any major crimes. Yes, God must be pleased with me, especially when he compares me to that person down the street.” We have the tendency to think that the more good we do the better chance we have of eternal life. Or that someone isn’t in heaven because he committed some crime, was always crabby, or didn’t treat people with

respect. By nature we think that eternal life depends on what we do. That is work righteousness.

But, to be honest, you could possibly earn your way to salvation. When the expert in the law asked Jesus that question, Jesus asked him, **What is written in the Law, how do you read it?** The expert quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and added some to it. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.** There it is—That’s all you have to do. In order to save yourself all you have to do is love God perfectly. Love him with everything you’ve got—all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And love him at all times.

This one command summarizes the first three commandments. If we love God we would always believe in him and obey him. That means we wouldn’t put anything ahead of him. God and his will would always take precedence in our lives. We would never use his name in an inappropriate way. We would never use his name to curse upon someone, as in exclamation, or to back up a lie. Rather we would use for his glory—to give him praises. If we always love God, we would worship him at every chance we have. We wouldn’t skip an opportunity to give him praise. We would do all we can to study his Word in Bible Class. We would make sure to set aside time each day to read his Word at home. That’s all you have to do. Love God perfectly and you will live.

I’m sure you know the problem. We can’t love God perfectly. No one ever has. And no one ever will. We were born as God’s enemies. By nature we don’t put him first in our lives. At times we may choose our own wants and desires instead of what God wants and desires. We choose ourselves, our jobs, families, hobbies, and so on instead of God. At times, on the outside, it may appear as if we chose God over the things of the world. But it may be that we obey him for selfish reasons or under compulsion, not out of love for God. Often we fail to follow his Word with the proper motivation. And so we fail to love God perfectly. And we can’t save ourselves.

In order to inherit eternal life, all you have to do is love—but not just love God, but also love your neighbor at all times.

The expert in the law knew this as well. That is why he also quoted Leviticus 19:18. **Love your neighbor as yourself.** That’s right, Jesus said, **do this and you will live.** Do this—love God your neighbor perfectly, and you will live. That’s all you have to do. The expert in the law knew the answer to his question already—he was, after all, an expert in the law and he was the one who quoted the passages. But he must have come to the realization that he didn’t always follow what the law said. He still wanted to save himself, however. So he asked Jesus—**and who is my neighbor.** Perhaps he was thinking, “I know I haven’t loved everyone, but I have loved those who live around me.” He wanted to limit the meaning of neighbor so that he could have a chance of saving himself.

In order to teach him what a neighbor is he told the story of the Good Samaritan. A man was walking on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This was a stretch of around 20 miles over mountains and through valleys. It was known as the “red or bloody way,” because of all the violence that happened on it. As this man was traveling he was robbed, striped, beaten, and left half-dead. Some time later a priest came down the same road. He was a man of God—he worked in the temple, offering sacrifices and praying to God on behalf of the people. You would think he would stop and help someone in need. But not only didn’t he stop, he passed by on the other side of the road. Then a Levite came. He too worked in the temple. You can think of them as assistants to the priests. Again you would think that since he worked in the temple, he would stop and help out them man. But he didn’t. In fact, like the priest, he did the opposite of helping him out. He didn’t even check to see if he was ok. Then came a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans didn’t get along. As a whole, the Jews hated Samaritans because they weren’t fully Jews and because they didn’t follow all of God’s law. John tells us in his gospel, **Jews do not associate with Samaritans.** Jews didn’t consider Samaritans as their neighbors. But when that Samaritan saw the man he stopped. And he bandaged up the wounds. He took him to an inn and took care of them. The next day he had to go, but he give the innkeeper some money to take care of him. And he promised to pay any extra expenses the inn keeper could have.

Jesus told this story to point out that everyone is your neighbor. Everyone—even your enemies. Even those who hate you and want nothing to do with you. Those who mistreat you, call you names, who may even harm you physically—they are your neighbors. It's not just your friend who lives next door. But your neighbor is the old guy who complained that your fence is falling down, or your co-worker who sabotaged all your hard work, or the Muslim on the other side of the earth whose only desire is to do harm to you and all other Christians. Everyone is your neighbor.

And we ought to show love to everyone. As Jesus told the expert in the law, **go and do likewise**. Go and show love to everyone at all times, no matter who they are or what they have done to you. To love your neighbor as yourself means to keep the second table of the 10 commandments, that is, commandments 4-10. Whenever you fail to honor someone in authority, do bodily harm to someone, lust after someone, steal from them, lie about him, covet their spouse, their home and possessions you fail to love your neighbor. And it's not just through your actions that we commit these sins, but also through your words and thoughts. Any unkind words or any lustful thought is a sin and you have failed to love your neighbor. We aren't like the Good Samaritan—we haven't always loved our neighbor. And so we can't save ourselves.

We don't know if this expert in the law ever recognized his sin. We don't know if he ever repented and realized he can't save himself. But if he would have repented Jesus would have reminded him of his love and mercy. He would have told him that he came down to this earth to live a perfect life that we could not. Not once did he fail to obey God's commands. He always loved God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. He also loved his neighbor—all people. We see the perfect example of that when Jesus obeyed his Father's will and gave up his life on the cross. But not before taking our sins upon himself, suffering the punishment of eternal damnation in the place of his enemies. On that cross he showed love those who were killing him as he prayed, **Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing**. Yes this is the love that Christ showed to all people. As we read in 1 John 4, **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins**.

And not only did Jesus take away our sins, but he also gave us his perfection. So Jesus would have assured him that all his sins were forgiven. He would have urged him to turn from his evil ways, obey God, and trust in him for forgiveness. Jesus also would have assured him that our salvation does not depend on what we do. For we can never do enough to please God. But rather it depends solely on what Christ has done for us already. And it is through God-given faith that we receive the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life—already won for us. As Paul puts it so succinctly in Romans 3:28, **we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law**.

All you have to do to be saved is to love God and all people perfectly. “You can do anything and be anyone you want to be...” I don't think so. It is impossible for us sinners to love perfectly. So if we were to be saved on the basis of our love for God and others, we would all suffer forever in hell. But it's not up to us. It's up to Christ, who has loved perfectly. And so we are forgiven and given eternal life. And that is our motivation to love God and others. Amen.