

was all in the purpose of God, of course, that they should do so, for He had a special purpose with the child to make him the greatest prophet next to the Lord Jesus Christ that the nation of Israel

would ever have. How Amram and Jochebed, in an astonishing act of faith (Heb. 11:23), accomplished their plan, as recorded by their illustrious son, will be our next consideration.

(To be continued)

## Who is my neighbour?

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*It is well known that the Bible commands us to love our neighbour, but how do we carry that out? Bible teaching is that this is much more than responding to appeals for help, and involves our whole attitude to others, inside and outside the household, in particular bringing the gospel into people's lives.*

**T**HE EXPRESSION 'global village' is used today to describe the world we live in. Modern communications make it possible for news and information concerning events happening in far-flung corners of the world to be received, not just in hours or minutes, but almost instantaneously. In 1805 it took three weeks for the news of Nelson's victory at Trafalgar, and details of the casualties, to be brought to London. Now we can watch the effects of Hurricane Katrina unfolding before us on our televisions, and see the carnage wreaked by car bombs in Baghdad moments after they exploded.

No longer do we have the runner, fleet of foot, suffering from fatigue, or the rider needing fresh mounts. No longer do we hear the telegraph operator clicking away in Morse Code for another to translate the message and carry it by hand to the intended recipient. Through the lens of the camera, the click of the computer key and the marvels of satellite technology, countries that previously were just names on maps appear in our living rooms; we view their inhabitants stranded in floods, recovering from earthquakes, shot dead in the street, massed in political rallies in city squares, or ravaged by famine; and all of them demanding that we take notice.

It does not stop there. As you walk down your local High Street, earnest young people with their distinctive tops assail you with requests to sign up Direct Debits for "just a few pounds a month sir/madam—only thirty pence a day, surely you can afford that", to help children in Africa, or

Dr Barnardo's, or Eastern European orphans, or endangered species of animals.

### **"Let us not be weary in well doing"**

Just how should the disciple of Christ react and respond to this avalanche of information, highlighting the desperate plight of this planet and those that live on it? The injunction of Scripture is quite clear: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9,10).

But are all those people suffering persecution or the traumas of natural disasters thousands of miles away our neighbours? Is there a limit to what we are expected to give? Can we draw a boundary line somewhere on the map and say thus far and no further? How should we divide the aid we give between brethren and sisters and the 'neighbour' in the world? We may think that for previous generations, and for those alive when these words of Scripture were penned, making decisions about 'doing good' was more simple than it is for us. They simply would not know about events beyond a certain distance, and helping neighbours would relate to those who lived in their immediate area. Nor did our forefathers have electronic banking systems able to transfer funds from bank cards or credit cards to aid organisations situated in different locations around the country or the world.

As a community we have a number of organisations that cater for those in need, both inside the household of faith and outside it. We have the Meal-A-Day Fund, the Samaritan Fund, Africrafts, CBM Welfare, CBM Project Aid, Christadelphian Save the Children, Christadelphian Care Homes, Jewish Clothing Relief, Shunem Home India, Leper Project India and others. Is giving money to these organisations fulfilling our responsibility to love our neighbour?



There are those among us who say that our community lacks a 'social conscience'; our Christianity should be seen in our compassion and aid to the suffering people of this world. But who is to say to what degree we must respond? Should we sell all that we have and give it to the poor? Should we take a tenth or some other figure and devote it to good causes? Is giving time to work unpaid for a charity or a hospice to be taken into account as loving our neighbour? As the judgements of God on a godless world continue to increase, and the inhumanity of men and women towards each other increases in scale, how are we to respond?

**The Good Samaritan**

Some will say the answer can be found in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable comes in response to two questions: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?", and, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Lk. 10:25,26). The first came from a lawyer, described in the narrative as someone who "stood up, and tempted him". The second came from Jesus in response to the lawyer's question. The lawyer wanted to know how to inherit eternal life, and Jesus caused

him to show that God has revealed the answer in the Law, that is, wholeheartedly loving God and loving one's neighbour. The lawyer, just like us centuries later, though, wants this question of the "neighbour" defined more clearly, hence the parable.

The Good Samaritan is representative of Christ, and the man who fell among thieves represents sin-stricken men and women. Christ has compassion, binds up the wounds, pays the price and promises to return to ensure the health of the one he has saved. Christ is the neighbour, the one who understood the spirit of the Law, that both Jew and Gentile were included in God's plan of salvation, whereas those representing the Law (the priest) and sacrifice (the Levite), and who should have known and understood the spirit of God's commandments, passed by on the other side. The one despised (the Samaritan in the parable) is the one who fulfils the royal law (Jas. 2:8). By invoking a Samaritan, Jesus shows that the exclusive attitude of the Jews and their adherence to the 'letter of the law', both in the past and in his day, meant they were not fulfilling the command of God to love their neighbour.

In this parable, then, the principle of loving God and loving Christ (the neighbour who has

so helped us) is clearly taught, and the instruction is given, "Go, and do thou likewise" (Lk. 10:37). Whereas on the surface this may appear to involve good works of a material nature, when we consider the significance of the parable, as explained above, it clearly refers to preaching the gospel of salvation to all men and women. We will come back to this incident at the end of this article, but there is also another scripture often quoted in discussion of how we fulfil this obligation of loving our neighbour.

### **The sheep and the goats**

In Matthew 25:31-46 we have an account of Christ carrying out judgement, with the reward of inheriting the Kingdom apparently earned by good works. The illustrations given—removing hunger and thirst, extending hospitality, clothing the naked and visiting the sick and those in prison—appear to place a responsibility on a disciple to engage in this type of activity.

There are two points to be made in relation to this. Firstly, the context of this parable is to do with the household of faith, the saints. It starts in 24:31 with the gathering of the elect, and goes on to highlight the responsibilities of the servants of the master, and their need to be watchful in regard to their duties in the household. In chapter 25 we see Christ illustrating the responsibilities of the disciples through the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and the parable of the servants of the master given tasks while the master is away, and then finally comes the judgement of the sheep and the goats. The expression, "the least of these my brethren" (v. 40), clearly indicates that Christ is referring to our brethren and sisters in the household of faith.

At the start of Matthew 24 we see that all these words of Jesus were spoken privately by him to his disciples, which again lends emphasis to the fact that these are matters relating to brethren and sisters in the household of faith. There can be no doubt that Scripture shows us very clearly that we have a responsibility to our brethren and sisters in relation to good works of a material nature.

Secondly, it is possible to see in all the activities referred to in 25:31-46 their spiritual counterpart. There are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those who are without hope in the world who can be brought into the family of God, those who are naked in the sight of God and need to be clothed with robes of righteousness, those stricken with sin and imprisoned by sin and death.

In Luke 4:16-20 Jesus quotes from the prophet Isaiah in relation to his work, and speaks of preaching "deliverance to the captives", "[setting] at liberty them that are bruised", "[preaching] the gospel to the poor" and "[preaching] the acceptable year of the Lord". There is also the expression, "recovering of sight to the blind". He did this literally on occasions, but it is obvious that the power of such a statement lies in the blindness of Israel as a nation and the work of Christ to remedy this.

### **"The royal law"**

There can be no argument that Scripture clearly shows that loving our neighbour is a vital aspect of discipleship. Of this commandment, and that to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, Jesus says, "There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mk. 12:28-34). Returning to Luke 10, when the lawyer who tempted Christ answered his question as to what the Law said, he quoted from Leviticus 19:18. A look at the marginal references in that verse shows that the expression "love thy neighbour" occurs in the New Testament on at least seven occasions.

When Paul uses it in Galatians 5:14 it is in the context of relationships between brethren and sisters, as is the case when it appears in James 2:8. Neither of these two references has anything to do with giving material aid; rather they are about attitudes of mind, and the behaviour that flows from those attitudes. The use in Romans 13:9 is to teach us how to behave towards people around us in the world and towards rulers set over the nations. Living peaceably with our neighbours, accepting unjust as well as just rulers, paying our taxes and respecting others are all ways of fulfilling the command to love our neighbour.

James refers to this command to love our neighbour as "the royal law", and looking at the whole of Leviticus 19 we can see why. The chapter is devoted mainly to outlining how we should behave towards one another, and, whilst there are some points relating to material giving, most of it deals with relationships as we live our normal daily lives (see chart opposite). It starts in the immediate family with the honouring of parents, and goes through to the responsibility of not ignoring the sinful behaviour of neighbours, but disassociating ourselves from it.

### **Good works cause God to be glorified**

The Apostle Peter shows in 1 Peter 2:11,12 that "abstain[ing] from fleshly lusts" is a way of mani-

### The duties of a neighbour in Leviticus 19

- Reverence parents (v. 3)
- Do not get involved with idol worship (v. 4)
- Do not wholly reap the corners of your fields (v. 9)
- Do not collect all the fruit off the vine (v. 10)
- Do not steal (v. 11)
- Do not deal falsely or lie to one another (v. 11)
- Do not defraud or rob your neighbour (v. 13)
- Do not hold back the wages of your servants to the last minute (v. 13)
- Do not curse the deaf or trip up the blind (v. 14)
- Do not show partiality in respect of rich or poor; treat all the same (v. 15)
- Do not gossip or tell tales about your neighbour (v. 16)
- Do not be a false witness against your neighbour (v. 16)
- Do not hate your neighbour in your heart while pretending otherwise in your actions (v. 17)
- Do not ignore sinful actions by your neighbours, but distance yourself from them (v. 17)
- Do not exact vengeance or bear grudges (v. 18)

festing good works and living the true Christian life, which in turn will bring others to glorify God because of our example. This is, of course, what Christ achieved in being the “neighbour” that he might save his people from their sins. Such an instruction, to “abstain from fleshly lusts”, would appear to summarise the list from Leviticus 19, because that chapter highlights the weakness and sinfulness of human nature and is relevant in every age.

By striving to be in the image of the Creator, men and women glorify God and draw others to Him. Our love for God is seen, therefore, in the way we love our neighbour; you cannot have one without the other. So where does that leave us in relation to the question we started out with, “Who is my neighbour?”. The word translated ‘neighbour’ in the Hebrew carries the meaning of someone you associate with, and in the Greek

someone close by. The Scripture teaches that Christ is our neighbour, and that our brothers and sisters are also our neighbours, as are the people we come into contact with day by day. Christ, in the way he thought, spoke and behaved to those around him, fulfilled all that Leviticus 19 demanded.

To emphasise the material needs of the suffering people of this world above and before the other aspects of this subject, to make our involvement with such activities some sort of test as to whether we truly understand the gospel, is clearly wrong. This will in time lead to a social gospel like the churches’ around us, whose views reflect the humanist approach to religion that is so prevalent in the world today. The purpose of loving our neighbour is to bring glory to God, not to praise the work of men. We should not allow the emotion of giving for some major disaster to cloak our failure to respond fully to the royal law in all its aspects.

#### Giving cheerfully

Paul advises us in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that “God loveth a cheerful giver”. The context is that of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. The opening verse of the chapter speaks of “ministering to the saints”. However, in verse 13 Paul refers to the fact that the Corinthian brethren and sisters were also generous in their help to the unbelievers as well. Having compassion on those in need around us must be part of our discipleship. Our individual consciences will determine if and to what level we should respond to any of the many appeals we receive. We remember that Cornelius, whose story is found in Acts 10, is described as “a devout man, and one that feared God . . . which gave much alms to the people”. When the angel appeared to him, the message was, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God” (vv. 2-4). May that be true for all of us.

*“For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deut. 15:11).*

*“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father Which is in heaven . . . But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father Which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly” (Mt. 6:1-4).*