




  
**Sunday School Lesson**  
**Luke 10:25-37**  
 by Lorin L. Cranford  
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**The Good Samaritan**



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This final lesson on the “Taking Care of Business” series is drawn from both Micah and Luke with an emphasis on social justice. But again the treatment of the New Testament passage borders on an illegitimate proof-texting method of scripture interpretation through lifting only one small segment out of the nature literary unit of the parable. Consequently, we will focus attention on the parable itself as a natural literary unit, and bring in the Micah passage as supplementary to the New Testament passage when appropriate.

**I. Context**

In the usual manner, we will take a look at both the historical and literary settings for this passage from Luke’s gospel narrative.

**a. Historical**

Regarding the compositional history of the Gospel of Luke, let me summarize [again](#) a lot of Lukan scholarship by the following. William Beard in the *Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach online) summarizes the basic issue this way:

“According to tradition this gospel was written by Luke, ‘the beloved physician’ and travel companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Actually the tradition is not very old. It appears first in the writings of Irenaeus, who was a theologian living in Gaul during the latter part of the 2nd cent. The Muratorian fragment (ca. A.D. 200), a document which presents an official list of Christian scriptures, supports the same conclusion.”

With the acceptance of this early church tradition -- although not all do and since the gospel itself makes no effort internally to identify its author -- then the issue becomes trying to locate a setting for the writing of this gospel. Again Bill Beard summarizes quite effectively these questions:

“The exact date and place of the writing of this gospel cannot be ascertained. Since the author uses Mark as a source and since he seems to have accurate knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (19:41-44; 21:20-24; see pp. 1029-31) he evidently wrote after A.D. 70. He must have written before 140, when his gospel was included in the canon of the heretic Marcion. Since the situation of the church reflected in the gospel fits well the political situation of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96), a date from about 85 to 95 is most likely.

According to one tradition Luke wrote his histories in Rome. Another locates his writing in Greece. Since there is a correlative tradition that the evangelist died in one of the Greek provinces, this latter tradition has better support. Any of these locations assumes the traditional authorship and bears the same burdens. Perhaps all we can say is that the gospel was written from some locale where Greek was the primary language and where cultured readers like Theophilus (1:3) would be at home.”

According to [Luke 1:1-4](#), this gospel -- and subsequently the book of Acts (cf. Acts 1:1) -- were dedicated to a Theophilus who as a patron supported the cost of producing these documents as well as the making of copies of them for distribution to various Christian communities in the late first century world. Evidently [Theophilus](#) was a wealthy Roman who had become a Christian and wanted to contribute to the

spread of Christianity by supporting Luke's writing of these two documents. The gospel preface ([Lk 1:4](#)) suggests the purpose of the document was "so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts together stand as a two volume testimony of the beginning of the Christian religion with its founder, Jesus Christ, and the first three decades of the beginning of this movement in its spread from Jerusalem to Rome from AD 30 to AD 61. The author was closely associated with the apostle Paul. For the gospel account Luke made use of a variety of sources, as he indicated in [Lk 1:1-3](#), since he was not personally present with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Modern scholarship generally concludes that among these sources are the gospels of Mark and perhaps also Matthew, although more likely the material in Luke, that is also found in Matthew, may very well be drawn from a common, unknown source. That is generally called the Q document from the German word Quelle meaning source. Thus with at least Mark and Q in front of him, along with notes from interviews with various people around the earthly Jesus, Luke set out to tell his story of Jesus in a way that would enhance understanding of the enormous significance of this Jewish carpenter from the little village of Nazareth in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee. As best as we can determine, this happened sometime in the 70s or perhaps early 80s of the first Christian century, possibly while Luke was living in Rome.

The internal history of [Lk. 10:25-37](#) has two levels of importance: (1) the locational setting when Jesus told this parable, and (2) the locational setting of the parable itself. Regarding (1), Jesus was in the period of ministry after the time in Galilee and before the final passion week in Jerusalem, as is illustrated in my [Summary Life of Christ](#) listing at Cranfordville.com. Luke 9:51-56 signaled the beginning of the trip southward from Galilee to Judea. Luke 9:57 marks the beginning of this journey. See the listing below from [Luke's gospel](#) for details:

67. Conversation with would-be follower 9:57-62
68. Seventy sent out 10:1-16
69. Seventy returned 10:17-20
70. Jesus' thanksgiving 10:21-24
- 71. Parable of the Good Samaritan 10:25-37**
72. Visit to Martha and Mary 10:38-42
73. Teaching on prayer 11:1-13
74. Beelzebub accusation 11:14-26
75. True blessedness 11:27-28
76. Demand for a sign 11:29-32
77. Light and darkness 11:33-36
78. Denouncing the Pharisees 11:37-54
79. Fearless confession 12:1-12
80. Parable of the rich fool 12:13-21
81. Earthly possessions and Heavenly treasure 12:22-34
82. Watching for the return of the Son of Man 12:35-48
83. The coming crisis 12:49-59
84. Need for repentance 13:1-9
85. Crippled woman healed 13:10-17
86. Parable of the mustard seed 13:18-19
87. Parable of the leaven 13:20-21

See the next page for a map of Jesus' pattern of ministry. According to Luke, he and the twelve were traveling through the Roman province of Samaria on their way to Bethany just outside Jerusalem in the province of Judea when this episode took place. Although it is not certain, the likelihood is that Jesus was somewhere in Judea when the Jewish lawyer asked him the question about inheriting eternal life, since devout Jews would avoid traveling in Samaria at all costs.

The locational setting for the parable story is a trip from Jerusalem eastward down to the town of [Jericho](#) toward the Jordan River. As is described in the somewhat outdated [Easton's Bible Dictionary](#) online,

"In New Testament times Jericho stood some distance to the southeast of the ancient one, and near the opening of the valley of Achor. It was a rich and flourishing town, having a considerable trade, and celebrated for the palm trees

which adorned the plain around. It was visited by our Lord on his last journey to Jerusalem. Here he gave sight to two blind men (Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52), and brought salvation to the house of Zacchaeus the publican (Luke 19:2-10)."

The [Roman Catholic online Encyclopedia listing](#) for Jericho has more details:

"The ancient Jericho, near the spring, had entirely disappeared when Herod founded a new Jericho towards the point where the brook of the Kelt and the Jerusalem road emerge from the mountains. Protected by the fort of Cypros, it possessed royal palaces, vast reservoirs, a hippodrome, and an amphitheatre (Josephus, "Bell. Jud.", I, xxi, 14; xxxiii, 6, 8; "Antiq. Jud.", XVI, v, 2). Herod died there: his son Archelaus further embellished the palaces and caused new aqueducts to be built to bring water to the palm gardens (Antiq. Jud., XVII, xiii, 1)."

The parable story then takes place on this road from Jerusalem to Jericho. This involved traveling through mountains in a steep descent from over 5,000 feet above sea level (Jerusalem) to over 500 feet below sea level (Jericho) in less than fifteen miles.

### b. Literary

The literary setting of Lk. 10:25-37 is related to the above historical setting. This episode is narrated by Luke in the early part of what has often been called the [Later Judean-Perean ministry](#) of Jesus, that took place between the length ministry in the northern part of Palestine, Galilee, and the final week of activity leading up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem. The passage is a part of Luke's so-called Travel Log Narrative (9:51-19:27). Luke devotes some 35% of his gospel account to this period of ministry, along with John giving 28% in his gospel. But Mark (8%) and Matthew (6%) devote very little space to describing this period of ministry. For more details see my [Life of Christ: Lecture Notes](#) page at Cranfordville.com. Although Luke and John devote significant space to describing this period of ministry, at no place do they describe the same event. The vast majority of materials found in Luke are unique to Luke's gospel account. The parable of the Good Samaritan that we are studying is one such instance.

The literary genre, that is, literary form, of the majority of this passage, 10:25-37, is a parable. This type of scripture text needs to be interpreted following the standard rules of interpretation. But the distinctive parable form necessitates some additional procedures, if a correct understanding of the parable is to be



achieved. These are discussed at length in my [“Exegeting Parables”](#) page at Cranfordville.com, and will be followed in the study of the parable in the text.

The passage as a whole is a dialogical narrative text. That is, a depiction is given of two individuals talking with one another, and thus, the narrative jumps back and forth in conversation between these two individuals. In this instance, the two individuals are Jesus and a Jewish lawyer. In analyzing the verses, one can detect eight pieces of conversation, playing off initially of the lawyer’s question: [“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”](#) The parable of the Good Samaritan comes as exchange number six and contains the greatest detail. Awareness of this literary structure is important to the interpretation process.

## II. Message

The above mentioned exchanges of conversation between Jesus and the lawyer most naturally fall into two groupings: (1) the question about eternal life (vv. 25-28), and (2) the question about neighbor (vv. 29-37).

### a. Eternal Life, vv. 25-28

#### Greek NT

<10:25> Καὶ ἰδοὺ νομικός τις ἀνέστη ἐκπειράζων αὐτὸν λέγων, Διδάσκαλε τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω; <10:26> ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τί γέγραπται; πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις; <10:27> ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης [τῆς] καρδίας σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἰσχυΐ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. <10:28> εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ, Ὁρθῶς ἀπεκρίθης· τοῦτο ποιεὶ καὶ ζήσῃ.

#### NASB

25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "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." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."

#### NRSV

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27 He answered, "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." 28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

#### NLT

25 One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?" 26 Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" 27 The man answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!"

#### Notes:

Several things surface upon careful study of these verses. First, the motivation of the lawyer. Perhaps some background on being a Jewish lawyer in the first century is important. The article, "Lawyer," by Pierson Parker in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (iPreach) has some helpful background:

[νομικός, from νόμος, law]. One learned in the law, specifically in the law of Moses.

The Greek term occurs six times in Luke, twice in Titus, once in Matthew, but nowhere else in the NT (cf. IV Macc. 5:4). At Tit. 3:9 it is an adjective, describing those preoccupied in legalistic discussions (see TEACHER). In vs. 13 it refers to Zenas, who is otherwise unknown. It is evident from the context that he was on some urgent mission, but there is no way of telling whether the law in which he was engaged was Hebrew, Greek, or Roman.

At Matt. 22:35; Mark 12:28, the term is equivalent to "scribes" (see SCRIBE). Luke may have preferred "lawyer" to "scribe" as being more familiar to Gentile readers. Interestingly enough, however, he never has νομικός in passages drawn from Mark or Q.

Except at Luke 10:25 (which may be Luke's substitute for Mark 12:28 ff), the word always has a bad sense in the Third Gospel. Lawyers are among those who oppose Jesus' sabbath healings (Luke 14:3). They have rejected

John the Baptist and, in so doing, rejected the purpose of God (7:30). They neglect justice, place unbearable burdens on their fellow men, and then refuse to help them (11:45-46). They refuse sound knowledge and hinder those who seek it (11:52). Most of these accusations are on Jesus' own lips, and in one case (11:45) a lawyer complains that Jesus is insulting them (ὕβριζεις). Rarely elsewhere does Luke wax so polemical as this—though he often blames Jews, rather than Romans, for the sufferings of Jesus and his followers.

Their training was in interpreting the Law of Moses and included criminal, civil and religious law. Thus the religious nature of the lawyer's question is not unusual, since it was a commonly debated question among the Pharisees of the first century. The intention behind his question was "to test Jesus" (ἐκπειράζων αὐτόν). Additionally, a less than honest motive is further suggested by his subsequent response to Jesus in verse 29: "wanting to justify himself" (θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτόν). Thus the question to Jesus was a hostile question, more than it was an honest question. The intent was to put Jesus on the spot and possibly engage him in a debate over how to be saved.

The question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;), was countered by Jesus' questions, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (Ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τί γέγραπται; πῶς ἀναγινώσκεις;). Jesus pointed the expert in the Law to that very law for the answer.

Robert Tannehill in the volume on Luke in the *Abingdon New Testament Commentary* has some helpful insights about the lawyer's question:

The lawyer's question (v. 25) is an important one, for it concerns sharing the ultimate blessings of God's kingdom. Jesus believes the answer can be found in the law; therefore, the lawyer can answer his own question. The lawyer answers so well that Jesus only needs to agree. Thus the first part of the dialogue emphasizes the common ground between Jesus and this Jewish lawyer. There is agreement on these central matters: that love of God and neighbor is the core of the law and that living in this way will bring eternal life. In 18:18-23 Jesus, in discussion with a Jewish "ruler," proceeds in the same way. The common ground in central commandments of the law is first established before introducing something that is distinctive. (On 10:25-37 and 18:18-23 as variations of a single "type-scene," see Tannehill 1986, 170-71.)

The lawyer's answer revealed genuine insight into the two essential elements of the divine law given on Mt. Sinai and taken from [Deut. 6:5](#) ("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 [Leviticus 19:18](#) ("and your neighbor as yourself"). These verses, linked together, underscore the so-called vertical-horizontal nature of both Jewish and Christian religious orientation. Both Judaism and then Christianity link love for God with love for other people and set them forth as foundational to genuine religious commitment. The [Decalogue](#), the [Ten Commandments](#), is structured around this two fold dimension, as are also [the beatitudes](#) of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus acknowledges the lawyer's correct answer by his response: "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live" (Ὁρθῶς ἀπεκρίθης· τοῦτο ποίει καὶ ζήσῃ). That should have concluded the conversation, but it didn't. The following narrative segment underscores that a fundamentally different interpretation of these two Old Testament passages existed between Jesus and the lawyer. For the lawyer, love for both God and others was to be understood within the framework of the Pharisaical legalism of that day. Inheriting eternal life was a matter of piling up sufficient good deeds to counterbalance one's sinful actions so as to establish the necessary righteousness for divine acceptance. Jesus' interpretation of those foundational principles ([Deut. 6:5](#) = Mt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27; [Lev. 19:18](#) = Mt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10:27) sought to go back to the natural meaning of the commandments without the legalism being attached to the interpretation.

What is the connection of these verses to us today? Quite obviously they stand as critically important to a correct understanding of the teaching of Jesus. Jesus wasn't unaware of the motives of the lawyer, but he didn't dismiss the man out of hand and move on to others with sincere interest. Very carefully he pointed the lawyer to the authoritative text of the Old Testament as the source of the answer to Jesus' questions to the lawyer. By getting these fundamental issues on the table, there would be the possibility of reaching this individual and getting a sincere commitment out of him. The common ground between them would be treated first. Then their differences could be dealt with in a more helpful manner.

There is here an example by our Lord for us in trying to help others come to a genuine faith commitment to the Lord. Find the common ground first, and it can serve as a basis of discussion. Also, the nature of the differences will stand in sharper focus with this common belief in the background.

Also from this passage we glean some of the fundamental teaching of Jesus about the nature of

authentic devotion to God. There can be no separating a claim to love God from the practice of loving other people. The vertical-horizontal (God-man) axis of Christian faith is central. Our love for God, if it is real, will naturally flow into a love for others, since our God loves them passionately as well.

## b. Being a Neighbor, vv. 29-37

### Greek NT

<10:29> ὁ δὲ θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν, Καὶ τίς ἐστὶν μου πλησίον; <10:30> ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Ἄνθρωπός τις κατέβαινε ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ εἰς Ἱεριχῶν καὶ λησταῖς περιέπεσαν, οἱ καὶ ἐκδύσαντες αὐτὸν καὶ πληγὰς ἐπιθέντες ἀπῆλθον ἀφέντες ἡμιθανῆ. <10:31> κατὰ συγκυρίαν δὲ ἱερεὺς τις κατέβαινε ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκεῖνῃ καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν. <10:32> ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Λευίτης [γενόμενος] κατὰ τὸν τόπον ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν. <10:33> Σαμαρίτης δὲ τις ὁδεύων ἦλθεν κατ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἰδὼν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη <10:34> καὶ προσελθὼν κατέδησεν τὰ τραύματα αὐτοῦ ἐπιχέων ἔλαιον καὶ οἶνον, ἐπιβιάσας δὲ αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ ἴδιον κτῆνος ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν εἰς πανδοχεῖον καὶ ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ. <10:35> καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον ἐκβαλὼν ἔδωκεν δύο δηνάρια τῷ πανδοχεῖ καὶ εἶπεν, Ἐπιμελήθητι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὅ τι ἂν προσδαπανήσης ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαί με ἀποδώσω σοι. <10:36> τίς τούτων τῶν τριῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος εἰς τοὺς ληστές; <10:37> ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος μετ' αὐτοῦ. εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Πορεύου καὶ σὺ ποιεῖ ὁμοίως.

### NASB

29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

### NRSV

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

### NLT

29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied with an illustration: "A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. 31 "By chance a Jewish priest came along; but when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. 33 "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt deep pity. 34 Kneeling beside him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two pieces of silver and told him to take care of the man. 'If his bill runs higher than that,' he said, 'I'll pay the difference the next time I am here.' 36 "Now which of these three would you say was



Jericho panorama from Cypros

a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. 37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

#### Notes:

The second segment of this pericope, vv. 29-37, is launched by another question from the lawyer to Jesus: "And who is my neighbor?" (Καὶ τίς ἐστὶν μου πλησίον;). The self-serving nature of his question is set up by Luke with the introductory phrase "wanting to justify himself" (θέλων δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν). Evidently, at this point he sensed the different view of these OT texts that Jesus had and wanted to engage Jesus in a religious debate over the definition of neighbor. For him it clearly meant only fellow Torah devout Jews. I suspect he was certain that Jesus didn't understand neighbor that way. Jesus' prior ministry in Galilee had clearly demonstrated a different definition of neighbor.

Instead of answering the lawyer's question directly, Jesus told him a story in a Narrative category parable over against either a Parabolic Saying or Simple Parable category (see 2. c) in [Exegeting Parables](#) for more details). Thus it is longer and more involved in developing a short story. Typically this makes for easier and more certain interpretation of a parable. But in the history of interpretation, these kinds of parables have been often abused through an allegorical method of interpretation in which every narrative detail is seen as symbolic of something later on in church experience long after Jesus' day. St. Augustine thus saw the inn as the church; the victim as the sinner being saved by the church, but the Good Samaritan was Jesus and the two Jewish men suggested the worthlessness of both Judaism and paganism. Such an interpretation clearly misses the point of this story.

This story falls in the Contrast Parables group (see 4. c) in [Exegeting Parables](#) for more details). Thus, the nature of the story is to force an unexpected conclusion that stands in tension with the viewpoint typically held by the listener/reader. As a tactic of persuasion it has great power. The "surprise" ending of this parable forced the lawyer to admit to Jesus' interpretation of neighbor, against his own definition. The various life settings of the parable (*Sitz im Leben*) moves from the original setting (*Sitz im Leben Jesu*) where the parable is redefining neighbor away from the lawyer's Pharisaical definition. The interpretative understanding and application of this parable to Luke's original targeted audience (*Sitz im Leben Kirche*) is very likely pointing toward the inadequacy of Jewish legalism to the teachings of Jesus as the most legitimate understanding of the OT Law (see 3. in [Exegeting Parables](#) for more details). The mid-first century Christian community that Luke was addressing wrestled with the genuineness of this religious movement established by Jesus. Both converted Jews and Gentiles would have found things easier to define loving neighbor inside the limitations traditionally imposed by Jewish interpretation of Lev. 19:18. Luke makes a strong point that even at the outside, Jesus rejected such limitations, and thus his followers must do the same. For us today this would suggest that loving others cannot be defined either legalistically or with exclusion of "others" who happen not to be lovable.

All this leads to the discovery of the central point of the parable (the *tertium comparationis*; see 1. in [Exegeting Parables](#) for more details). That is, where does the "earthly story" told by Jesus intersect a religious principle? The intersecting point has several dynamics embedded in it. First, neighbor is redefined away from a certain person (one who lives close by) to an opportunity for ministry to another human being. The Samaritan and the victimized Jew would not have been considered "neighbors" by any stretch of the imagination in first century Judaism. Secondly, neighbor must be understood as one who stands in need and thus racial, social, economic etc. barriers imposed by society and/or religion cannot be allowed to stand in the way of ministry. Thirdly, when religion allows narrow definitions of neighbor, that religion is bad religion, not authentic devotion to God. Our interpretation of scripture must not turn scripture into a justification for elitism and pietistic superiority. Fourthly, we need to be cautious about feeling that our religion is the only one that can truly serve God. The Samaritan had a religious viewpoint that prompted him

to genuine ministry, while the Jewish legalism of the two passersby caused them to miss the mark in pleasing God.

In trying to apply this parable to today's world, I have quoted from Clarence Jordan's *Cotton Patch Version* of Luke 10:25-37. Jordan was a powerful voice for social justice among Southern Baptists in the 1940s through the 1970s, and he lived out basic Christian values through the Koinonia Farm that he established outside Americus, GA, in the 1940s. His work continues today as [Koinonia Partners](#). Here is his interpretative paraphrase of Lu. 10:25-37 recast in a 1950s Georgia setting.

### Cotton Patch Version

One day a teacher of an adult Bible class got up and tested him with this question: "Doctor, what does one do to be saved?"

Jesus replied, "What does the Bible say? How do you interpret it?"

The teacher answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your physical strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

"That is correct," answered Jesus. "Make a habit of this and you'll be saved."

But the Sunday school teacher, trying to save face, asked, "But ... er ... but ... just who is my neighbor?"

Then Jesus laid into him and said, "A man was going from Atlanta to Albany and some gangsters held him up. When they had robbed him of his wallet and brand-new suit, they beat him up and drove off in his car, leaving him unconscious on the shoulder of the highway.

"Now it just so happened that a white preacher was going down that same highway. 'When he saw the fellow, he stepped on the gas and went scooting by.

"Shortly afterwards a white Gospel song leader came down the road, and when he saw what had happened, he too stepped on the gas.

"Then a black man traveling that way came upon the fellow, and what he saw moved him to tears. He stopped and bound up his wounds as best he could, drew some water from his water-jug to wipe away the blood and then laid him on the back seat. He drove on into Albany and took him to the hospital and said to the nurse, 'You all take good care of this white man I found on the highway. Here's the only two dollars I got, but you all keep account of what he owes, and if he can't pay it, I'll settle up with you when I make a pay-day.'

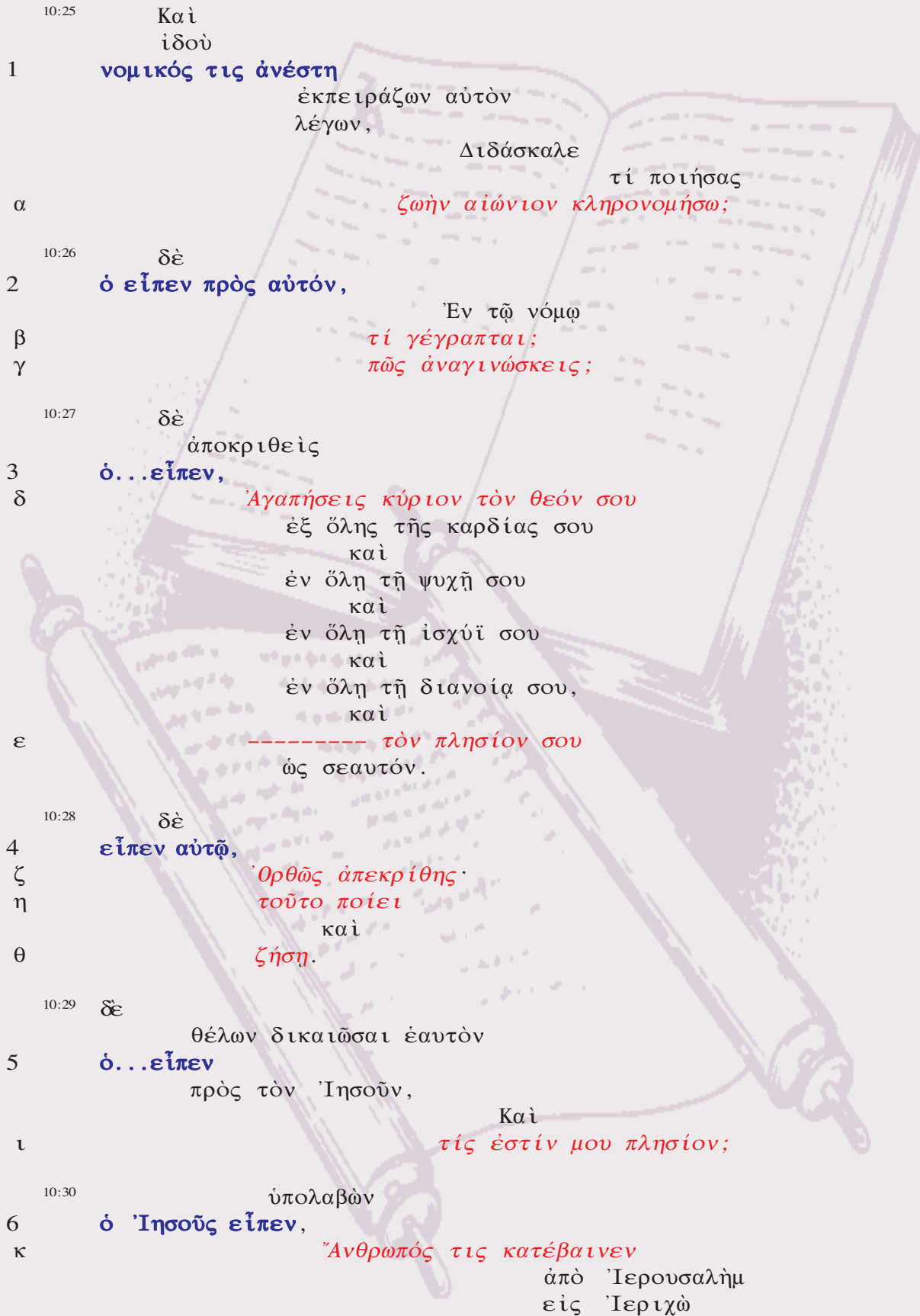
"Now if you had been the man held up by the gangsters, which of these three—the white preacher, the white song leader, or the black man - would you consider to have been your neighbor?"

The teacher of the adult Bible class said, "Why, of course, the nig - I mean, er ... well, er ... the one who treated me kindly."

Jesus said, "Well, then, you get going and start living like that!"



Diagram of Luke 10:27-37



καὶ  
 λ λησταῖς  
 ----- περιέπεσαν,  
 καὶ ἐκδύσαντες αὐτὸν  
 καὶ πληγὰς ἐπιθέντες  
 οἱ... ἀπῆλθον  
 ἀφέντες ἡμιθανῆ.

10:31  
 δὲ  
 μ κατὰ συγκυρίαν  
 ἱερεῖς τις κατέβαινεν  
 ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκείνῃ  
 καὶ  
 ν ἰδὼν αὐτὸν  
 ----- ἀντιπαρήλθεν·  
 10:32  
 δὲ  
 ὁμοίως  
 καὶ  
 γενόμενος  
 κατὰ τὸν τόπον  
 ἐλθὼν  
 καὶ  
 ἰδὼν  
 ξ Λευίτης... ἀντιπαρήλθεν.  
 10:33  
 δὲ  
 ο ὁδεύων  
 Σαμαρίτης τις... ἦλθεν  
 κατ' αὐτὸν  
 καὶ  
 π ἰδὼν  
 ----- ἐσπλαγγίσθη  
 10:34  
 καὶ  
 ρ προσελθὼν  
 ----- κατέδησεν τὰ τραύματα αὐτοῦ  
 ἐπιχέων ἔλαιον καὶ οἶνον,  
 δὲ  
 ἐπιβιβάσας αὐτὸν  
 ἐπὶ τὸ ἴδιον κτῆνος  
 σ ----- ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν  
 εἰς πανδοχεῖον  
 καὶ  
 τ ----- ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ.  
 10:35  
 καὶ  
 ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον  
 ἐκβαλὼν  
 υ ----- ἔδωκεν δύο δηνάρια τῷ πανδοχεῖ  
 καὶ

φ

----- εἶπεν,  
/-----|  
Ἐπιμελήθητι αὐτοῦ,  
καὶ  
ὅτι ἂν προσδαπανήσης

ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαί με  
ἐγώ... ἀποδώσω σοι

χ 10:36

*τίς τούτων τῶν τριῶν πλησίον δοκεῖ σοι γεγονέναι  
τοῦ ἐμπεσόντος  
εἰς τοὺς ληστάς;*

10:37

7

δὲ  
**ὁ εἶπεν,**

Ὅ ποιήσας τὸ ἔλεος  
μετ' αὐτοῦ.

8

ψ

ω

δὲ  
**εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς,**

*Πορεύου*

καὶ

*σὺ ποίει*

ὁμοίως.