

LIU LA NAMIKANGO

Namikango Mission

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Loving God or Loving My Neighbor?

Imagine that you are walking along the road today, going to the market, and a stranger begins a conversation with you. After a few minutes of talking, the stranger discovers that you are a Christian. The stranger then says, "Please, could you tell me what the Bible says?" What would your response be? How can you summarize the entire Bible in just a few words to a stranger who has never read any part of it?

One day, Jesus was teaching the crowds when the Pharisees came to him to question him. They were very displeased by his teachings, and they were looking to trap Jesus. So one of them, who was a lawyer, asked Jesus one question, "which commandment in the law is the greatest?" This may seem like a simple question. However, it was a major trap for Jesus. The Jewish law had over 600 commandments, and each one was considered to be extremely important. If Jesus chose one law over another, he would be saying that some laws are more important to others. The Pharisees thought their question was very clever.

Yet Jesus immediately responded by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Without hesitating, Jesus said the first law is to love God, and the second and equal law is to love your neighbor! Then Jesus said something

incredible. He said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

In other words, Jesus said that the whole law, all the commands, every teaching, everything in the Bible can be summed up in two commands, love God and love your neighbor!

In this Liu we are going to explore these two commands a bit more to see what they have in common with each other. The first lesson asks the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The second lesson considers why we have to love our neighbor. Once we understand these two ideas, we have to ask ourselves how we live in community together, loving and caring for each other. In the third lesson, we look at a way for communities to use their money to help each other, care for others, and show how to love God by loving our neighbor through proper use of our money. As you read these lessons, remember that Jesus says that everything in the Bible, everything that we as Christians believe, hangs on these two great commands, to love God and to love your neighbor. For Christians, this must be the main focus of our lives!

-Eric Gephart

Go, Love Your Neighbor

Read Luke 10:25-37

The question that this expert in the law asks Jesus is: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” There are two things we should recognize here. First of all, what is an inheritance? Is it something you work for? Can you do something to get an inheritance, or is it a gift? It is a gift, yes? When your parents die, is the family land given to you, or should you pay for it? So, when the expert asks what he can do to inherit, we should note that there is a problem with his question.

Second, what does he mean by eternal life? It was another way of talking about the age to come, or the kingdom of heaven as Jesus talked about. The Jews expected that when the Messiah came and made things right and set them free from the Roman oppression, that a new age would begin – the age to come.

Jesus answers the man not with an answer, but with a question, and asks him what he thinks he should do. He says love God and your neighbor. Jesus then says, “Good answer. If you do this, you will live well.” The man’s answer is a good answer. In Matthew 22:34-30, we see Jesus give the same answer to this question; love God, love your neighbor (also see Matthew 7:12).

But do you see what happened there? The man asks a question about how to get something in the future, and Jesus tells him how to live now. This is very important. We will come back to this in a bit.

The man isn’t satisfied with the answer, and he wanted to “make himself righteous”. We see with the man’s first question and with this explanation of what he was doing that this man believes that getting “eternal life” is something that he can obtain by his own doing. He also has been “testing” Jesus, and perhaps doesn’t like that Jesus “won” the discussion, so he says in effect, “Ok, I can love God and love my neighbor. But before I go love him, I need to know who exactly my neighbor is.”

Luke 10:25-28

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

There were many Jewish debates over exactly who your neighbor was. If you look at Leviticus 19:18, where the command to love your neighbor comes from, there is no context for who the neighbor you are supposed to love is. Is it someone who lives in my village, is it a stranger, is anyone from another country, is it my enemy? You could discuss this for hours and not come to a conclusion.

We are now ready for Jesus parable. Remember, this is Jesus’s answer to the man’s original question...“what must I do to get eternal life?”

The first man to pass was a priest, which means his job included offering sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem, which is probably where he was going. If we were going to compare it to today, it would be like an elder going to church. In the scriptures it says that if you touch a dead body, or a nearly dead body, you become unclean. This was a law. Often, we think the priest didn’t care about the hurt man. But he was actually keeping the law. However, there is a problem. There is another law as well; the one we mentioned above that says, “love your neighbor.” So the question is, which law is greater? In this situation, to keep one law, you must break another law. If the priest “loves his neighbor” and helps the wounded man, he breaks the other law and cannot offer sacrifices at the Temple. The priest would become unclean and must return home and cleanse himself and wait for a period of time before going to worship.

So, he chooses to remain clean. He considers the law of cleanliness more important than loving his neighbor. Next, the Levite comes along. We can say the Levite was a little below the priest. Today, we might compare it to an elder or a deacon in the church. So when the Levite arrives at the injured man, he chooses the same as the priest. Perhaps he decides for himself that to be clean is more important than to love his neighbor. Maybe also, he knows that his priest is ahead of him on the road. And, he says to himself, "if the priest didn't help this man, who am I to do differently than my superior?"

Then last comes a Samaritan. Now, we must realize that Jews and Samaritans hated one another. There is a story from the time of Jesus where a teacher is asked "Who is my neighbor? Is a Jew who does not go to synagogue my neighbor? Is a Roman soldier my neighbor? Is a Samaritan my neighbor?" The teacher replies, "For the Jew, it would be better for him to go to synagogue, but yes he's your neighbor. And the Roman soldier is made in God's image too, so yes, he is your neighbor. But the Samaritan...he is not made in the image of God. No, he is not your neighbor."

This story helps us understand how the relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was. So, when Jesus tells this story and the third person to come is a Samaritan, everyone is wondering what will happen. Maybe he will go ahead and kill the injured person? Or spit on him? But you can imagine how surprised they must be when Jesus says the Samaritan helped the man, paid his own money for the man, and risked his own life by taking an injured Jew into a Jewish town to an inn. The people who saw him bringing their fellow Jew in could have stoned the Samaritan, thinking maybe he had hurt the man.

Now we come to the end of the story. And Jesus turns to the expert in the law and says, "Who was the neighbor in the story?" The man responds, and only says, "the one who helped him." The hatred is so deep between the Jews and Samaritans, that the expert in the law cannot even bring himself to say his name. Do you see? He cannot even say "the Samaritan." He only responds, "The one who helped." And see what

Jesus has done; he has just made the "enemy" of the Jews to be the one who is loving God. He has taken someone who everyone agreed was outside the kingdom of God, outside the church; and said, "This is the one who has kept the law. He has loved." This is so powerful.

The last line in the story comes from Jesus; "Go and do likewise." We can translate it like this: "Go, love your neighbor." Remember the man's question at the beginning; "Who is my neighbor?" And before this, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Do you see Jesus' answer? To get life, you need to love your neighbor. And who is your neighbor? Your neighbor is the Samaritan. Your neighbor is your worst enemy. So to us Jesus says, "If you want to inherit eternal life, you need to do something kind for your greatest enemy." Remember, for Jesus eternal life begins now (John 10:10).

He wants us to have life now, not just some day in the future. And how do we get life now and in the future? How do we show that we have been saved? "By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another," (John 13:35). There are not many laws that must be kept, or many long discussions to have. Just, "love" (also see Paul say the same in Galatians 5:14, 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 13:9-10). Jesus knows that those who cannot forgive now, cannot love now, will not have peace or joy now. To remain in anger and un-forgiveness is to have no life; it is being in hell now (Matthew 5:22). So Jesus' final statement in this parable is go and do. We cannot sit and just discuss who our neighbor is. We cannot just go to our worship services, leaving unreconciled relationships as they are. Jesus ends the parable with a command for us to go love. Love is the greatest commandment.

But who of us can love like this? What about that person who has hurt us so bad, it's hard for us even to say their name? How can we love him/her? The answer has to be, that by ourselves, it is impossible. We must look at Jesus. On the cross, Jesus, seeing all those there who had put him on the cross said, "Father, forgive them." We look at Jesus who, like the Samaritan who risked his life to save the hurt man, gave his life for all of us. By the power of God's Spirit in us, looking at

how Jesus loved us, forgave us, and reconciled us when we did not deserve it, we can do the same for others. Even for those, whose names we cannot bring ourselves to say.

-Ben Hayes

Loving God by Loving Others

Talking about the love of God we cannot explain nor understand it properly. Naturally, love exists between two people who are living in harmony and also in unity. They wish each other well all the time. There is love which exists between parents and their children, between a man and a woman, among people who are related. And also love between a human being and God; this is spiritual love.

Real love needs to come from both sides of those who love each other. If love comes from one side, it doesn't last long. You find someone who is weak or sad. But this is not so with God's love. According to our scripture from 1 John 4:19, "It was God who first loved us." If we look at the love from the world, there is someone who first loves but there is always reasons which attract that individual. Beloved, you need to know that God did not love us because we were good, or we were righteous, no! There is nothing, God just loved us without looking at our sins.

Psalms 78:37-40 says, "their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return. How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland!"

In this scripture, we see that the human race has not stopped competing with God and most of the time we are rebellious in our behavior. The life of sinning habitually and not willing to repent is rebellion against God. Love is the nature of God. Romans 5:8 states it like this, "But God demonstrates his own his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us".

If we go back to verse 7 it says, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die."

If we were asked, "do you love God?" We would give the answer, "yes." How do we love God? Some may answer quickly saying by gathering with others to worship on Sunday, some helping the poor, others preaching and spreading

1 John 4:19-21

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

the good news. All these things are important but they do not necessarily show that we really love God. Some of these may happen without having the love of God. Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, we are seeing the greatness of love. This love which Paul is sharing with us is the love among people. This is the love which makes it possible for the love on God to be possible and true.

In the verses that we are sharing, we are hearing John advising us that everyone who say they love God must also love his or her neighbor. Is this happening? Don't we have those around us from our homes, in our villages, in our churches even in our areas that we take them as enemies and we don't live in harmony with? God, who is not partial and loves the good and the bad people, wants us to show love to those whom we call enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:43-45). If we love God we need to start by loving our neighbors, especially those we consider enemies. If we are failing to do that then it is also impossible to love

God.

Many of us are liars; because of our hatred we are failing to end among ourselves, and yet we call ourselves as people who love God and we serve him because of our love for him. A lack of tolerance, misunderstanding and quarrels among us causes the unbeliever not to believe the gospel we preach and they cannot be saved because of us. Some of us say we love God but in our families we stopped talking with our spouses. Still others if we speak it is only possible through a phone message. For others, they just cling to the marriage because of kids but there is no love in the family.

Leaders at a church are not uniting, and yet they still preach and administer the Lord's supper, and say they love God. They return to their homes without reconciling their friendships and repent. They still harden their hearts and even fail to forgive, citing because they love God and are doing what God wants them to do. This is a big lie; God just laughs at us.

Everyone who loves God must also love his brother. We rush to love God and think we are doing fine but God wants us to love our neighbors if we say we love him. Not all our neighbors are good people. Others do not wish us well and they say bad things about us even say we are very bad. Jesus wants us to love these people and to pray for them and wish them well and not curse them. Test yourself to see if you truly love God. How is your relationship with other people?

-Symon Katete

Loving People Through VSL

Poverty is one of the things that makes people search for answers for other things in their lives. This is so because of wanting to live good lives. Although things are like this, there are some people who just stay idle the way they are saying they are satisfied by just being Christians instead of working hard doing work. Because of this kind of thinking, people and a lot of families don't progress. As Christians we need to realize that God gave us the ability to be doing business

and other works, despite having few resources and we can be taking care of our families. Today we have VSL groups, which aims at helping people economically.

VSL is an abbreviated English name of Village Savings and Loans. Namikango started this program in 2014 in a few districts here in Malawi. The aim of this program is to change lives of Church of Christ members holistically through Village Savings and Loan groups. Members save money little by little through these groups and have opportunities of taking loans for small scale businesses from the same money they have been saving. They also share the word of God at each of their meetings; this helps them to grow in their spiritual lives.

The benefits of being in these groups are many, like having an opportunity to take loans for small scale businesses at a low interest rate, getting help in times of sudden problems, saving any money one may have, learning different skills, and also growing spiritually through the word that is shared in these groups.

There are other duties that these groups are supposed to do apart from saving and loaning money. These duties are helping the church with any help it may have but also helping out in spreading the good news of love by reaching out to the needy in their churches and also in their villages. Through this program, other churches have managed to build their places of worship. An example is the church of Christ of Kasenga in Rumphi district whose pastor is Felix Mhone. Another church is that of Chinkhoma in Kasungu district. These churches also built their places of worship through their groups.

Many people from different districts have also benefited by having stable businesses. At the moment, this program is in other parts of Mozambique but also in districts like Rumphi, Mzimba, Nkhotakota, Kasungu, Machinga, Mulanje, Zomba, Phalombe here in Malawi. Other people have a negative attitude when they hear about VSL because of other groups that fail to succeed when other members fail to pay back their loans. This happens because some groups start without a purpose to fulfill and in the end they just misuse the money. And when they fail to pay back

These things happen if groups are started by people who do not have a purpose to fulfill in their lives. After seeing these problems Namikango Mission started lessons on how to run these groups with the aim of helping those that are ready to follow principles and guidelines of these groups so that they should have an opportunity of having meetings to encourage each other. The number of VSL groups with Namikango right now is more than 164 and we have many other places wanting this program. God is doing the work of changing the lives of people through this program.
-Towera

Announcements

Education

Namikango Mission wishes to inform all congregations in Malawi that we are in the process of introducing an English Bible School at our campus. All prospective students will be required to have a full Malawi School Certificate of Education with 4 credits including English. When everything is set, we will send messages to churches and other channels.

Camp Meetings

2019 Three day Gospel meetings will begin in June as follows:

07 – 09 June	Changoima (Chikwawa)
21 - 23 June	Naphazi (Thyolo)
21 - 23 June	Lamusi (Zomba)
28 - 30 June	Mivumo (Phalombe)

2020 SAIL

We thank God for granting travel mercies to our brothers and sisters who travelled to Eswatini to attend 2019 SAIL. The next SAIL will be held in Bulawayo Zimbabwe and registration fee is R600

per person. Those interested to travel to Bulawayo are encouraged to start preparing now.

The Deceased

- Gogo Mary Thindwa died on 18 February 2019 and was laid to rest on 22 February. During her life time she worshipped at Redcross and Kachere Church of Christ.
- Bro. Mkhuwawe, a Preacher from Chingale area died on 20 April and was laid to rest on 21 April, 2019 at his home village in Chingale Zomba.
- Bro. Chinseu, another Preacher from Namilongo area in Zomba also died on 20 April and was also laid to rest 21 April, 2019 at his home village at Namilongo in Zomba.

Praying for the Sick and the Elderly:

- Bro Ephraim Master from Mayaka in Zomba.
- Bro John Katete from Chingale Zomba.
- Bro Samson Mbewe from Liwonde in Machinga.
- Bro Bvuta from Likangala in Zomba.