

Some people just “know better” than others. It doesn’t matter if it’s a coworker at your job, an armchair quarterback at the game, or someone giving you medical advice because they Googled it, there will always be those who “know better.” Thankfully, we Christians would never fall into such an obvious sin, because we... “know better.”

No, the truth is that this sin – the sin of pride – is found in every single one of us. Because of our sinful nature, pride comes naturally to us. And in contrast, the virtue of mercy is something that comes only by the working of the Holy Spirit. Yet because God has shown mercy to us, we are able to likewise show mercy to others. That’s what Jesus is telling to this lawyer in our text – and telling to us – in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

This text starts on a very positive note. And interestingly, the beginning here isn’t often included with the rest of the parable, though it helps greatly in its understanding. Jesus takes the disciples aside by themselves and gives them words of joy and blessing. “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!” Why is that? Jesus continues: “For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

The disciples were getting to witness firsthand the fulfillment of the God’s promises to His people, the hopes of the Old Testament saints being brought to reality. The seed of the woman promised to Adam and Eve after the fall had been born of the Virgin Mary for the purpose of crushing the serpent’s head. The son promised to David who would sit on his throne forever, who was David’s son and yet David’s Lord, was even then establishing His kingdom and driving back the kingdom of darkness. As Isaiah had foretold, the virgin had conceived and born a Son, and this Son was and is Immanuel – God with us.

Even though the disciples didn’t fully realize what was going on, and wouldn’t until after the resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, nevertheless, God was there, in their midst, in the flesh, showing forth His love and mercy as He walked the path to the cross. Blessed were their eyes indeed, for they were witnessing God saving His people.

But then comes someone who “knows better.” We read, “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Jesus has just been talking about how He has come in mercy to deliver the people, how the disciples are blessed to be witnesses, not doing, but watching, and this guy asks, “What shall I do?”

Now, you might say that what Jesus said to the disciples, He said privately, and so this lawyer didn’t hear Him. Fair enough, but as an expert in the Law, this guy would have known the history of God’s people and would have known that it was always God who acted to save the people, often in spite of their not doing what they were supposed to do.

God preserved the line of David to bring about the Messiah, even when kings of that line like Manasseh were burning their children alive as sacrifices. God sent prophets to preach His word to His people, even as they stoned them and threw them in pits and chased them into the wilderness. God led

His people into the Promised Land even when they refused and instead tried to go back to Egypt. It was always God and His faithfulness and mercy working to save His people.

But this guy, he can do better. And so Jesus asks him, as an expert in the Law, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” In pride, the lawyer quickly answers, “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.”

Right answer! A plus! Truly, an expert in the Law! Jesus acknowledges this as correct, but before the lawyer’s pride can inflate too much, He adds, “Do this and you will live.” Do this. Oh. You wonder if the lawyer’s face went from a smug smile to shock to frustration in about a second. By his own words, or rather by his right quotation of God’s word, he had just condemned himself.

After all, those words from Deuteronomy speak of loving God with all, not most. And they speak of loving your neighbor as yourself, not almost as much as yourself. And this is a constant command, not just applicable on the Sabbath in the temple or when your neighbor can hear you. Love perfectly, all the time.

Confronted with the truth of God’s word and his failure to meet it, this would have been the right time for the lawyer to humble himself, admit to Christ that he wasn’t capable of keeping such commands, and ask how God’s mercy could save him.

However, pride comes in. The lawyer is still convinced he “knows better,” that he doesn’t need any help or mercy to inherit eternal life. What he must need is... an exception. A loophole in the Law. If he can find one, he’s still good.

So, seeking to justify himself, he asks Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” If he can somehow catch Jesus flatfooted by this question, or point out that the Law actually doesn’t include a giant, exhaustive list of qualifications to spell out exactly who is a neighbor, then he’ll prove that he has kept the Law, or at least that he “knows better” than Jesus or others.

As is often the case, we’re tempted to look at such people, those who oppose or question Jesus in the Bible, as obvious sinners that we’d never be like. Like two weeks ago, with the Pharisee who thanked God that he wasn’t like other men, where we are tempted to thank God that we’re not like that Pharisee, we’re tempted to look at this lawyer and think that we “know better” than to be like him.

Yet reflecting honestly on ourselves, we need to ask how often do we try to find exceptions or loopholes in God’s word. Knowing that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we might ask, “But what about those who’ve been rude or mean to me in the past, and haven’t ever apologized? Are they my neighbors?”

Or maybe we think about those who’ve brought trouble on themselves, like walking through a bandit-infested area without protection and getting mugged, and they’re just getting what we think they deserve – are they our neighbors?

What about those whom we’ve tried to help in the past, and who have refused our help? Are they are neighbors? Fueled by our pride, we’re often tempted to make whole lists of people that we don’t actually think we need to love as we love ourselves. We “know better.”

How does Jesus respond, to the lawyer, and to our sinful flesh? He lays out a story, a parable, where the truth is shown in example. A Jewish man is robbed, stripped, and left for dead. Those who ought to have helped, who should have been his obvious neighbors, pass him by.

Maybe they're scared that if they stop to help, they'll be mugged too. Maybe they don't want to get their hands dirty, possibly becoming unclean and therefore unable to do their jobs as priest or Levite. Whatever it is, they "know better" than to stop and help.

But then a Samaritan comes by, someone who should have been an enemy to this beat-up Jewish man. He does not pass by, doesn't justify leaving the man because Jews had mistreated him in the past or that they hadn't wanted his help before or any other reason.

Instead, he stops and helps the man, tending to his wounds and placing him on his own donkey to get to an inn. There, he pays a hefty price, two whole days wages, to see that the man is attended to, and promising even more money if it's needed. He puts his own plans on hold to tend to this stranger.

Why did this Samaritan do this? Even the lawyer can recognize the reason: mercy. Nowhere in the Law specifically spelled out that Samaritans must help Jews if they fall victim to bandits between Jerusalem and Jericho.

But that Law, which both Jews and Samaritans knew, told them that God loved them, and that they were to love Him in return and love their neighbors as themselves. God tells all who read His Law that He is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Those who love God do so because He first loved them and poured His love into their hearts. That command, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, can only be done by someone if God puts His divine love in them first.

And this love of God will naturally flow out to others as well. In fact, since it is from God, it will flow out to all those whom God loves. And who does God love? The whole world!

God loved the whole world and therefore sent His beloved Son, the true Good Samaritan, to save us sinners who lay dying in sin and guilt. God's love and mercy brought Him to the cross to pay for the sins of all people. Even though He knew that many will reject His mercy and forgiveness, He still died for them also.

The love and mercy which God has shown to all people in Christ helps both to overcome our pride toward others and our doubts toward ourselves. A great comfort of the cross is that, if there's ever any question of if God loves you and desires to show you mercy, you only need to look to Jesus hanging there and have a resounding "yes" shown by His wounds.

In Jesus, God came and fulfilled the hopes of the prophets and kings, showing His great mercy to all of mankind. He is the one who pours love and mercy and grace into our hearts by the power of His Spirit. Because we have His love in our hearts, we are able to go and likewise show mercy to others around us, even those to whom our sinful flesh "knows better" than to help.

We show mercy to all those whom God has shown mercy to in His Son. We bind wounds and care for needs, both physical and especially spiritual. We seek to bring others into the inn of the Holy Christian Church, where our Lord provides for our care as we await His return.

And we do all this, not in an effort to justify ourselves, which is impossible, but out of joy, as we get to see and hear our God bring the lost and dying into His kingdom, which by His mercy, includes us.

In the name of Jesus, amen.