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Earlier this week I was scanning through the thread titles at a photography forum that I'm a member of that is only for film photographers. Old school photography done with cameras that make an image on film.

So a guy asks this question; *Do You Feel At Odds With Society Because You Shoot W/Film?* It made me laugh. Goodness, if that's your biggest problem, you shoot film instead of pointing your phone at something and taking a picture.

And my answer was immediate; *No, I feel at odds with society because I'm a*

*conservative and a christian.*

Conservative politically is way way second to the first thing that puts me at odds with our culture. Christian.

Actually being a christian defines everything else. It just turns out that being politically conservative fits better, if only slightly, with this book. Political conservatism is slightly less user unfriendly to christianity than liberal politics.

Both are anathema to the God of heaven. God is about as fond of republicans as He was with the scribes and the pharisees of His time. They were in a better spot than the Saducee's but only slightly.

And that is our dilemma. We are committed, as christians, to the verbal plenary words of this inspired book. And as such, the gap between a christian world view and our culture, is enormous. Almost un-bridgeable.

That phenomenon has happened over the span of my lifetime. In 1952 when I was born people in general believed that there was a God, and that He somehow rewarded people who were good, and punished people who were bad.

Most court houses had some version of the 10 commandments on the wall. That was roughly what defined who was a good person and who was a bad one. We considered ourselves a christian nation, and it would be 8 more years before we would even elect a Catholic president.

We were protestants nationally. Most of our politicians were Episcopalian. A presbyterian was a slightly more hyper episcopalian, and baptists were actually sort of serious about what they believed. At least some of them. Beyond those categories the percentage numbers were tiny.

If steady sex was a need that was important to you, you searched for a wife. People who borrowed money they couldn't repay were considered evil. And people who didn't work . . . also evil. That was a snapshot of our culture at the

time of my birth.

Christians, in that culture, were looked upon as responsible people. Good contributors. Good neighbors. Trustworthy folks. That was then, this is now.

Two days ago Hallmark's top television executive, Bill Abbott, left the company over pressure brought on the brand because Hallmark would not allow commercials with same sex couples kissing at the alter.

I don't know if Bill Abbott was a christian or not. It doesn't matter. Our culture is currently hostile to anyone that holds up anything that is defined as right or wrong by this book. The biggest sin anyone can commit in our culture is to actually say that anything, is a sin.

And I mean hostile. Hallmark apologized and groveled over their evil deed, begging for forgiveness from the culture. No good. Someone has to pay. Hallmark must be punished. And a top executive is the sacrificial lamb in the current dust up.

And this goes on daily. You don't necessarily have to identify as a christian to be punished, but certainly, christians are at the top of any list.

Where am I going with this? I'm segwaying into our passage with a cultural update because in 1952, someone might have asked or thought about the question that the scribe asks Jesus, but in 2020, we have to do a bunch of background work and explanation of terms to even begin to understand the question, and why anyone would ask it.

*25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Our culture has dismissed the topic of life after here. They've dismissed any notion of any God. They have no concept of a God who defines sin and then judges and condemns people who have sinned, whatever that is.

There is no God. There is no right. There is therefore no wrong. No heaven. No hell. Therefore, this whole discussion Jesus allegedly had with this lawyer in ancient Israel is moot. Meaningless. It doesn't matter. To post - post - modernists, it's just stupid. Stupid talk between stupid people.

Who is Jesus, or for that matter, even this lawyer to ask a question about life after death. A life after death that must somehow be inherited. By what? Something that somebody defined as some kind of good works as opposed to what? Something illegal. Something taboo.

We have to do background work to build a context for the question and resulting answer to have any meaning. And even if we did all that, it only then has meaning to people 2000 years ago that dwelled in that culture. It doesn't mean anything to us. Because our culture dismissed God and good and evil and heaven and hell a long time ago and they could care less.

Who cares about 2000 year old questions and answers? What matters now is if you are kicking butt and taking names in the video game culture. Our generation has held court on God and pronounced their judgement on Him. They've dismissed Him and moved on.

Christianity with all it's rules and book and sky god were just a phase that we passed through on our way to post post modern culture. Dismissed. Meaningless, except for the troublesome remnants. People who still hold to the words of some ancient book and try to foist their morals onto the current generation. Most of them are old. They'll be dead soon, but meanwhile the culture is out of patience and people who would base morality in this book . . . time is up. They will be punished.

Nobody asks the question that the lawyer asked Jesus. *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

And yet, we are restless in our inner beings. The culture is playing the game that this is all there is, but we can't get Peggy Lee's song out of our minds. The haunting words.

*Is that all there is, is that all there is  
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball  
If that's all there is*

We are eternal beings, trapped momentarily in these bodies of flesh. Funny that our ancient book that is rejected to the trash heap of history speaks so perfectly to all of these questions. It answers every one. Except nobody likes the answers much. In fact the answers are the cause of the problem.

Consider a riddle from the mouth of Jesus of Nazareth. Here is what he said 2000 years ago. We studied it a few weeks ago in Luke 9:24

*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.* Our culture wants what it wants at any cost. But the cost is that saving their personal freedom, they lose not only everything now, but in the next life, eternal abandonment to hell.

Our culture loves the story of the "good samaritan". If they were going to try to salvage anything from our book, they can build a doctrine of social justice cause from the story of the good samaritan. But that isn't what it's about.

This encounter between Jesus and a scribe, a lawyer, a subject matter expert in the "law and the testimonies", the Old Testament, is a case study for us in how Jesus approaches evangelism.

The question is the most important question anyone can ever ask. That's saying a lot! THIS IS the most important question. Bar none. This life is 5 minutes long. Eternity hangs in the balance. Heaven and Hell. Yes, this man believed in heaven and hell. Those aren't obscure concepts. They are realities. And after this life, there is no correction. You have to get it right here and now. Eternity depends on it.

And in your fallen condition, spiritually dead because of sin, everything is

working against you. Your flesh wants to do evil. *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.* Our fallen flesh is working against heaven. We go through this life, moment by moment, making decisions in our fallen state to "save" our life. This is what I want. This is what my flesh wants. Needs.

But according to Jesus riddle, deciding for this life, for this flesh and what seems right to it, what gratify's it is a choice for losing . . eternal life. So this question and Jesus answer is all important. Nothing is more important than getting Jesus riddle correct. So let's take our time and work through this portion of scripture.

*25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

We've already identified who this person is positionally in his culture. The culture is judaism. And this person is an SME in judaism. He's a theologian. He has spent his time studying the torah.

What we didn't consider yet is his motive. And we have a clue, but we can't totally pidgeon hole him. It says he was putting Jesus to the test. Here's what that probably means, and there are other indicators we'll arrive at as to his position in the conversation between the Jews and Jesus.

The Jews eventually murdered Jesus. They were about as user friendly to Him as our culture is becoming to me. There was conflict. They hated Him. And the fact that Luke tells us this man was asking the question to put Jesus on trial is telling. His motive could have been to get an answer that the Jews could use to incriminate Jesus.

Or perhaps he's really not quite that combative. Maybe he really is interested in what Jesus will say. We can't be dogmatic.

In any case, this question was on every jew's mind. They had built an elaborate system based in the Law of Moses to achieve heaven by doing good

works. Heaven is attainable by giving God His due. Works righteousness. That's his area of expertise. May as well see what Jesus believes about it. So he asks his question. *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

It's the right question. He's deeply mired in all of the wrong answers. He's a subject matter expert in wrong answer religion. What will Jesus say? I think you'll be surprised.

*26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"*

This is evangelism 101. Jesus engages him at his comfort level. It's like the psychiatrist asking you 1000 times "how do you feel about that". With apologies to Jesus for comparing Him to psychiatrists. But for the sake of conversation, we engage people where they have some comfort.

If the Mormons peddle up while I'm working on the Model A and want to ask questions about antique cars . . . I get it. Begin by engaging me where I'm at. So Jesus says; *"What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"*

And I have to insert here, I was raised in a christian culture that fought against all of the current touchy feely "what does this mean to you" kind of Bible study around the room groups. Pool your ignorance and see what floats to the top.

We were taught to ask, "well, if you were dead, what does it mean? Because it means something apart from you." I'm not very interested in what it means to you, I'm deadly interested in what it means.

But Jesus throws this out like meat to a pack of dogs. Because before He's finished, He's going to devastate their belief system. He's throwing out the bait. He's going to reel them in. *"What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"*

*27 And he answered and said, "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.”*

We have to give the lawyer credit. Of all of the answers that system produced, this is the best possible choice.

What he has stated very briefly is the encapsulation of the entire law of Moses. God's law is concerned with vertical relationship. God and person. And it's concerned with horizontal relationship. Person to person. Hundreds of laws. Boil all the water away and this is the crux. Relationship to God; *“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;*

That's the shema. Deuteronomy 6. Hear O Israel. They said it daily. That's the vertical part of the law. God and person.

And then he adds from Leviticus 19:18 *AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”* And that's the horizontal. Person to person.

He's got it! You couldn't ask for a better answer. Bingo! Ding ding ding.

*28 And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE.”*

Jesus engages. You're absolutely right! And since he's a scripture guy, Jesus answers with scripture. He quotes; Leviticus 18:5 *Keep My statutes and My judgments, for the man who does these things will live by them. I am the LORD.* Jesus says; *DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE.”*

You know, if Jesus had just left it at *“You have answered correctly”* everything would have been fine. But Jesus loves him too much to do that. So He puts in the dagger. *DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE.”*



And in my mind's eye, since Jesus is the consummate evangelist, I can see Him turning to go on His way, knowing full well the hook is set; OK, we settled that, and He starts to leave, and the guy is like; Wait a minute Jesus. We aren't finished. *"And who is my neighbor?"*

29 *But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* Where do you set that bar, Jesus. Everything rides on where you set the bar. Because a guy cut me off on the freeway on the way here, and I'm thinking, he isn't my neighbor. I let him know he was number one.

Where is that bar? Notice please that the guy goes immediately to the lowest common denominator and wants to find out exactly how low that bar is. Never mind the vertical relationship. God and person. We don't even want to go there. Find out where that bar is. He goes to the bottom and says, where, exactly, is the bottom. *But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

The Jews, at that time, were not so different than the Muslims are today. They taught love your neighbor and hate your enemies. The Rabbi's taught that. You can find that in their histories.

Muslims teach today that it's OK to lie to your enemies. Our congress isn't too bright. They don't understand that. To the muslims, when it's your enemy, anything goes. The end justifies the means. Do whatever you need to do to your enemy so that you win, he loses. God will reward you no matter how brutal the action for the muslim world order to win and the gentiles to lose.

That's pretty much what the Jews believed. Not so different. Love your neighbor, hate your enemies. We just need some clarification on neighbor. Who's my neighbor, Jesus?

The hook is set, and Jesus is going to reel him in. This is devastating. This story is devastating. This isn't a touchy feely story. We should all be like the good samaritan. We should, but that isn't what this is about. This is about where God sets the bar for heaven.

Let's digress here, just for a moment. I want you to look at the mechanics of what is taking place for just a quick moment. Both Jesus and the Subject Matter Expert agree on one thing. Verbal plenary inspiration of words. The words of the book have authority. Heaven and hell hang in the balance over a single word as far as this lawyer is concerned.

If words and their meaning don't matter, this guy is out of a job. He never questions that God has revealed truth through the mediation of men who were inspired and wrote down the very Words of God.

He never questions that the words of a book, already ancient when Jesus and him were having this discussion 2000 years ago, are the authoritative Word of God. The question is over semantics. In fact they're agreeing on the authority of the book but he wants to argue over a single word.

They're arguing over a single 3 letter hebrew word. rea. (ray'-ah) friend, fellow, companion. God's book is authoritative, but please tell me who this is. Let's hope it wasn't the guy on the freeway this morning that I gestured to. We're arguing over where God sets the bar for a single 3 letter word. Who is rea? Heaven and hell hang in the balance over one small word.

And Jesus tells a story;

*30 Jesus replied and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 "But a certain 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 "And 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.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”*

This story is familiar to believers and unbelievers alike. Everybody can tell you the story of the good samaritan. In fact good samaritan has become an idiom in our language. We use it for anyone who goes out of their way to show kindness.

If you type Samaritan into google, you get Samaritan's purse, Samaritan ministries, Samaritan hospital, Samaritan house, insurance, healthcare and on and on. We identify unmerited kindness to the very word.

Yet just a couple weeks ago some Samaritans told Jesus, Don't come to our town, and James and John thought it might be good if fire was called down from heaven like Sodom and Gomorrah on those Samaritans.

Jesus story made the very word synonymous with unmerited favor.

*30 Jesus replied and said, “A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho;*

To this day, this is a dangerous road. And going down was an understatement. You drop 4000 feet in elevation in 17 twisty miles. Down down down. And that's on a modern highway. The old road was steeper.

*And it was infamous. and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead.*

Robbed. Half naked. Half dead. The language here and later indicate he had wounds that would have left him dead in a fairly short time. He's bleeding out. Helpless.

But a gleam of hope, someone is coming that way; *31 “And by chance a*

*certain priest was going down on that road,*

Oh, we're saved. Good news, not just anybody, a priest. A religious person of the same religion, a countryman, a fellow is coming down the road.

*and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

The greek indicates he got as far on the other side of the road as you could get without going off the cliff. Why?? Commentators give us all kinds of reasons. He's a priest and he doesn't want to be defiled by a dead body, he'll have to do all the ceremonial cleansing over. blah blah blah.

MacArthur likes to point out; it's a story. Jesus made this up. We don't have to assign a bunch of motives and reasons. He simply couldn't be bothered. Two switchbacks later he forgot all about it. See, now I'm making stuff up.

Another gleem of hope; 32 *“And likewise a Levite also,*

A levite. A countryman. Rock solid jews, those levites. Surely a levite won't pass by; *when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.*

Wow. It's looking grim. Nobody has any time to help this poor man. Everybody's just going about their business.

33 *“But a certain Samaritan,*

Doh! Those thieves were probably samaritans. Samaritans were half breeds. They were the refuse left behind after the 10 northern tribes were carried off to Assyria never to return.

The weak and lowest were left behind. And then Assyria re-populated the real estate where the 10 northern tribes lived with gentiles. So these folks that live up the road in Samaria. Half breeds and losers. Natural enemies to the Jews of the two remaining pure tribes. They hated each other.

In fact it was a lot of trouble for Jews up in the region of the galilees when they were going to go to Jerusalem, they would take the longer route down the Jordan valley for the sole reason that they didn't want to pass through Samaria.

So for the first time hearers, the two hopefuls didn't come through and now more bad luck for this dying man. A Samaritan.

*who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,*

Suffice to say, the previous two countrymen, the priest and the levite had no compassion. No love for anyone, except one person, themselves. The Samaritan on the other hand, has compassion for this poor man.

*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.*

In the greek, there's something here that we don't quite get in the interpretation to our language. Everything this guy did, was lavished. He went way over the top on everything mentioned here. Bandaged his wounds. From what? The guy was stripped naked. He provided his own garments to clothe and bandage the wounds.

He provided from his own wine and oil to ease the pain and cotterize. He provided transportation for the man who would have died in that spot. He is now walking while the man is riding.

He takes him to an inn and he takes care of him. He doesn't leave until the critical time is over. He cares for him.

*35 “And 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.’*

From history books we learn that the normal cost of an Inn was 1/30th of a denarii. A denarius was a days wages for a laborer. So he has just given the innkeeper 4 to 6 weeks rent for this man.

He leaves him in the care of the innkeeper and promises to repay any overage. Whatever it takes. I'll repay you. This Samaritan who is the normal enemy of the jews has lavished love on a perfect stranger, who in his health, might have been his enemy, not his friend.

Who does that? Answer. We all do. This is how we treat ourselves. From the moment we rise from our comfortable beds until we return again, we are lavishing this care on ourselves. Every decision is somehow connected to what will make us happiest.

God said, in His book, you need to treat your neighbors like that. Oops. minimum love : maximum love The samaritan was lavish in his love. The only one who gets lavish love from me, is me.

*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." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."*

Remember, this is about entering heaven. That's what the conversation is about. Do you think the lawyer was a pass, or a fail? How about you? Pass or fail.

It gets worse. The lawyer chose the easiest of all the things he listed as he compacted the whole law into a single sentence. He chose to talk about the horizontal law. Person to person. What about the other? What about how we love God? Anybody want to go there.

I'll offer a hint. The lavish way the Samaritan loved and cared for his enemy is a picture of how God loves us. Lavishly. We are enemies. Busted up by an adversary, laying helpless in the road, and God lavishly loves us and provides for every need. That's a picture of how He treats us. Anybody want to talk

about how we love Him?

The purpose of the parable, the story, is to give us a picture of ourselves. We don't even get close on the horizontal stuff that God charged us with. Loving our fellows as we love ourselves. Most of us are like the priest walking down the road. Put your blinders on and walk on by.

And our love for God. We love one person with our total whole heart soul mind and strength. Ourselves.

The parable shows us one thing. We do well if we understand this parable. That one thing is that when we look in the mirror of God's law, what He requires for eternal life . . . we are bankrupt. He loves us with a lavish love, and we are bankrupt in our love for Him, bankrupt in our love for our neighbors.

That's the point of the parable. That's the answer to the lawyer's question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus told him, Do this, and you will live. Go and love God and man with a lavish love. I can't pay that. I can't do that. All I can do is stand next to the publican and beat my breast and cry out, have mercy on me O God.

As a new christian, trying to put the Bible puzzle together in some sense we often wonder, why does Jesus always tell people to go to the law of Moses? We're grace people, not law people. Why does Jesus do evangelism different than us. Is He a works righteousness guy.

Jesus throws out that line almost like a throw away line. Do this and you will live. Exhaust every resource at all times loving God and other people. Do that. But if I'm honest, and I look inside, I can't do that. The only person I exhaust every resource on . . . is me.

God's law requires of me something that is impossible. I'm broke. All the law does is show me how broken I am. How bankrupt I am before God.

In the allegory, I'm the broken guy, smashed and bleeding. Beat senseless by sin and stripped of life. I've lost everything to sin. Law comes down the road and doesn't help me. Religion comes down the road and passes by. But finally Grace comes down the road, and even though I am an enemy, grace lavishes love on me. Grace picks me up and bandages my wounds. Takes me to a safe place, and doesn't leave me until I'm stable. Assures my continued care, And then promises to return.

Jesus says, *Do this and you will live*, and the sooner I realize, I'm broken, I can't do anything. I'm helpless to do anything. I can't pay the debt. That's when mercy can come.