

LUKE: 10:25-37

25. And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26. He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27. And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30. And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37. And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

The lawyer who posed this most important question to our Savior asked it not because he sincerely wanted to know the correct answer, but because he was testing Him. He was looking for an opportunity to catch Jesus in an answer that he could use to discredit him. He, being an expert in Old Testament Scripture, knew what the Scriptures taught. However, he was looking to justify the perverted interpretation of this Scriptural teaching that the Pharisees used to validate their arrogant way of treating people. The Savior in effect turned the tables on this man. The Lord's answer in its truth was so obvious that the lawyer no choice but to accept it even if conflicted with the interpretation as taught by the Pharisees.

The trap that the lawyer wanted to catch the Savior in is a trap that we as Orthodox Christians encounter every day in our spiritual lives. The answer to the question of what we need to do in

order to inherit eternal life is given repeatedly in both the Old and New Scripture. What we need to do is to love. We are called to love God most of all and to love other people as much as we love ourselves. Love is such an all-powerful virtue that if we have love in our hearts and actively express it, we achieve a state of being "like God". We become His true adopted children with whom He wants to share eternal life.

Love by its divine nature gives us the power to be with God. It enables us to achieve salvation. The devil knows this. He, the "father of lies", also knows how to deceive. He also teaches us to love. But his teaching is a perversion of love. He is able to entrap people by convincing them to express their love not in a way that makes them like God but separates them from God. He teaches them to love either the wrong things or the wrong way.

The most important object of our love must be God. He is our Creator. He is the provider of absolutely everything that we have. He is our protector. He loves us so much that He is ready to forgive us even the most evil thing that we can do. He has sacrificed Himself even unto death to enable us to be reconciled with Him from our sins. He calls us to be His children. But He does not force Himself on us because He wants us to be truly happy. This can happen only if we love Him freely, by our own choice. If we open our hearts to Him, He gladly moves into them while we are still here on earth. The way that we open our hearts to Him is by obeying His commandments. This is the way that we show Him that we love Him.

The devil, on the other hand distracts us from loving mostly God. He tempts us with attachments to things other than God. He cultivates in our hearts such an attachment to these things that they become more important to us than God. They begin to control us. They become our little gods. These things can be anything. They could be money, food, clothes, power, ambition, sex, alcohol, drugs, material possessions, etc. By their nature, they can even be good or necessary things. But by having control over us, they separate us from God. We don't have time for Him. We unwittingly choose them over God. And God honors our choice.

The second object that God teaches us to love is other people. Since all people are God's creation and descend from one root, Adam, we are related to every single person that ever lived or will live. We are all one family. And God expects us to love absolutely everyone, even our worst enemy or the most evil person. This is the way that He loves everyone, and if we are to be God-like, we must do the same. His words are categorical:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matt: 5:43-48

But the devil steps in and argues that it is foolish and even insane to love everyone. Yes, you should love people, he says. Those that love you, those that you like, those that you can benefit

from. Don't waste your time and energy loving the others. And loving your enemies is just plain stupid. Hate them! Reject them! Hurt them! They deserve it. It will make you feel good, says the devil. Again God honors our choice and our separation.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, so much more can be said here. I have not even touched on the dangers of self-love, But my letter is getting too long so I should stop. I will just add my prayer. May God open our eyes and hearts in such a way that we freely accept what he tells us, reject all the distortions that the devil tries to implant in us, and love Him and each other in a pure and divine way that will enable us to be truly like God and share with Him and each other an blessed eternity.

With Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar