

The Good Samaritan and a Theology of Mercy

by Tami Jelinek

Greg Boyd, in his book entitled *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church*, writes:

One wonders why no one in church history has ever been considered a heretic for being unloving. People were anathematized and often tortured and killed for disagreeing on matters of doctrine or on the authority of the church. But no one on record has ever been so much as rebuked for not loving as Christ loved.

Yet if love is to be placed above all other considerations (Col. 3:14; 1 Peter 4:8), if nothing has any value apart from love (1 Cor. 13:1-3), and if the only thing that matters is faith working in love (Gal. 5:6), how is it that possessing Christ-like love has never been considered the central test of orthodoxy? How is it that those who tortured and burned heretics were not themselves considered heretics for doing so? Was this not heresy of the worst sort? How is it that those who perpetuated such things were not only not deemed heretics but often were (and yet are) held up as "heroes of the faith"? [1]

While Dr. Boyd advocates open theism, a position with which we as believers in God's omniscience and absolute sovereignty strongly disagree, we would do well to contemplate his question here, "How is it that possessing [or rather demonstrating] Christ-like love has never been considered the central test of orthodoxy?" Let us examine this by asking, "How would Jesus have defined orthodoxy;" or "whom would He have called a heretic?"

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the familiar story of "The Good Samaritan" in answer to the question posed by a self-perceived law abider, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Since it is reasonable to equate Christ's answer to that question with what *should* be considered by His church to be true orthodoxy, we will examine this parable in that context.

Luke 10: 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.

This passage plainly states that the lawyer (or expert in the law) had a two-fold motive: to "tempt" or "test" Jesus (vs 25); and to justify himself (vs 28). Jesus said to the Pharisees:

Luke 16:15 ...Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

This was certainly a strong indictment against those who, like this "lawyer", were experts in keeping the Law of Moses, and trusted in their own righteousness and looked down upon others whom they deemed unworthy sinners. These keepers of the law represented the "orthodox" of their day; and yet Jesus declared it was the contrite and humble in heart whom God would justify:

Luke 18: 9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Indeed it is these with whom God promises to dwell and raise up to heaven:

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

When examining the parable of "The Good Samaritan," it is important to remember the question Jesus is addressing in telling it: "*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus, knowing this man's heart, and being aware of the self-righteousness which motivates him, and in which he proudly places his trust, asks this lawyer to interpret the requirements of the law:

Luke 10: 26...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.

Of course we know that "a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16); therefore Jesus' statement, "this do, and thou

shalt live," is designed to enunciate the man's utter inability, in spite of the fact that he is still seeking to justify himself by his own works:

Luke 10: 29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

It is notable that the self-righteous man's focus seems to be on the boundaries defining the word "neighbour", as though his aim is to limit its application. This may remind us of Jesus' words concerning the prostitute who knelt at His feet in the presence of her accusers: "Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Luke 7:47) One who has been forgiven much, loves much; and therefore would not ask the question, "who is my neighbor?" or in other words, "how many outside of that qualification am I free to avoid loving?" Conversely, the one who has been forgiven little--which is simply a reference to his own lack of acknowledgment of his need to be forgiven, and certainly not a statement qualifying him as relatively less guilty--loves little, and will not be able to demonstrate Christ's love by showing mercy to those around him. In fact he will even deliberately avoid being merciful, and maintain a sense of vainglorious piety in the process.

Luke 10:30 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.

The self-righteous accusers of the brethren, the enemies of God's people, seek to expose their faults, leaving them naked, ashamed, and uncomforted. David, in the depths of the torment of his guilty conscience, cries out:

Psalms 38:4 For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. 5 My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness...

In the midst of his shame, his wounds laid bare, he says of his enemies:

Psalms 38:12 They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long.

Solomon says of the wicked that their *words*--clearly not a reference to *bodily* harm--lie in wait for blood:

Proverbs 12:6 The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood.

Isaiah compares the judgmental words of the self-righteous, who use their practice of law to condemn others, with a striking fist:

Isaiah 58:4 Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist.

Perhaps the wounds and nakedness of the man who fell among thieves represent the shame of one who falls prey to merciless accusers.

Luke 10:31 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.

This is akin to the loneliness David experienced in the midst of his shame:

Psalm 38:11 My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off.

The one who would pass by a brother in need of mercy may do so because he falsely views himself as beyond such need. He may say with the Pharisees of Jesus' day, "I would never do that, succumb to that temptation, or fall in that way, or fail to that degree."

Matthew 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

But the presence of God is promised to those who do not hide themselves from their own flesh in need of mercy and restoration:

Isaiah 58:7 Is it [true worship] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.

In contrast to the merciless self-righteous who would pass by and deliberately hide themselves from one in need, the Samaritan had compassion. In Matthew 25, we see that this is the mark of those who are Christ's, and truly members of His body. These are the ones to whom the kingdom belongs:

Matthew 25: 34...Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

In Christ we show others the mercy we have been shown. This is the "Christ-like

love" Dr. Boyd suggests should be the true test of "orthodoxy." Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35) This is what doctrinal integrity, or a theology of mercy, looks like:

Luke 10: 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.

The oil and wine represent our healing and comfort and restoration through the forgiveness and cleansing of Christ:

Isaiah 61:3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

In the kingdom we experience this provision continually and abundantly:

Isaiah 55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Matthew 9:16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. 17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

We prove we have been restored, made new, and filled with the "new wine" of Christ, when we in turn minister that same healing and restoration to each other, "pouring in oil and wine," thereby covering wounds, rather than exposing them:

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Proverbs 17:9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.

I Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." (NKJV)

Again, we should remember the question to which Jesus was replying when he told the lawyer what to *go and do*:

Luke 10:36 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 question was, "*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" The answer is clear: the one who inherits is the one who shows mercy. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7) Or, the one who has obtained mercy will prove that by being merciful. The Source is Christ. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19), and we demonstrate our love for Him by loving His people:

Matthew 25:40 Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 10:8 ...freely ye have received, freely give.

To love as Christ loves, to give out of the abundance of what we are given, and to practice a theology of mercy: this is true "orthodoxy," the evidence of genuine faith.

[1] Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (page 83).

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