

# Luke 10:25-29

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-10/luke-1025-29/>

*A lawyer comes to put Jesus to the test by asking Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus deftly flips the question back to the religious expert: “What does the law say?” The lawyer answers with the two greatest commandments: Love God and Love Others. Jesus tells him that he has answered correctly and to do this to inherit eternal life. The lawyer wishes to justify himself to these commandments and asks Jesus: “Who is my neighbor?”*

This interaction has no apparent parallel in the gospel accounts.

After *Jesus* privately told His disciples how blessed they were because they were witnessing the beginning of the kingdom that the prophets had foretold (Luke 10:23-24), *a lawyer stood up and put Jesus to the test*. The text does not indicate if this exchange took place immediately after *Jesus*'s private remarks or sometime later and under different circumstances.

Lawyers were religious legal experts in *Jesus*'s day. They created rules to measure a person's righteousness. These religious lawyers condemned those who failed to keep their rules even as they created loopholes in *God*'s *Law* to justify themselves when they disobeyed His commandments. These lawyers were close associates with the Pharisees and may have even been a special type of Pharisee—who focused on the manufacture of religious legislation. They might also have been prosecutors of those who broke their laws.

Even as the Pharisees and Lawyers were seen by the average Jew as the champions of the Jewish faith against the Pagan influences of Rome, in actuality they made a mockery of *God*'s *Law* by replacing it with their corrupt version of Judaism. The result of their legalistic sham was a bad religion (Matthew 23:1-36). This hypocrisy was what was pointed out by *Jesus*, to the chagrin of the religious establishment.

This particular *lawyer stood up and confronted Jesus and put Him to the test*.

If the religious *lawyer* had *stood up* in good faith to *test* or to verify whether or not *Jesus* was the Messiah, it would have been a good and proper for *him* to do. Any individual could falsely claim to be the Messiah, and it would be proper to *test* them and their teachings against the scriptures. As a religious leader, this *lawyer* had an obligation to protect the people from false teachers.

But it does not appear that the *lawyer* came with these intentions. It seems that *he stood up to Jesus to test Him* for a flaw. It seems that *he* was only interested in looking for an excuse to dismiss *Jesus* as being the Messiah.

The Greek word Luke used for *test* is a form of the verb: “ek-pei-ra-zo” (G1537). It means to “*test*” or “thoroughly prove.” “Ekpeirazo” is used four other times in the New Testament. And in all four additional instances, “ekpeirazo” (*test*) is used in a context where it is expressly forbidden to test *God*.

“Ekpeirazo” (*test*) is used during *Jesus*’s refutation of Satan during His temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

- “Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, “**You shall not put** the Lord your God **to the test.**”””
- “And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘It is said, “**You shall not put** the Lord your God to **the test.**”””

And “ekpeirazo” (*test*) is used twice more during Paul’s negative example of the grumbling children of Israel in his first letter to the Corinthian church.

- “**Nor let us try** the Lord, as some of them **did** [literally “**tested**”], and were destroyed by the serpents.” (1 Corinthians 10:9)

These other usages of “ekpeirazo” suggest that this religious *lawyer* might have had the intention to *test* God in this negative way when *he stood up and put Jesus to the test*. It seems that the *lawyer* was trying to twist *Jesus*’s response in such a way as to take *Him* down.

There is a lesson in here for everyone—believers and unbelievers alike. No one should *test God* in this way. We should not come to *God* looking for ways to dismiss *Him*, minimize His commands, or manipulate *Him* into conformance to our wishes. We should not put *Him* to the test and demand: “If *God* really cared about Me He would let me enjoy this”; or “He would never let me experience this pain”. As creatures, we do not test the Creator’s goodness, existence, or purposes. He is *God*.

The Bible says we must come to *God* in [good] faith in order to please *Him*:

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”  
(Hebrews 11:6)

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must **ask in faith without any doubting**, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”  
(James 1:5-8)

The *lawyer*’s question was basic and common: *Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

The religious *lawyer* addressed *Jesus* with a term of respect—*Teacher*. (He probably used the Hebrew term “rabbi,” and Luke translated this for his audience to the Greek word “Di-das-kale” (G1320, see John 1:38). But even though *Teacher* was a term of respect, the context suggests that it might not have been genuine. The context suggests that the *lawyer* addressed *Jesus* as *Teacher* to flatter or lull *Him* into a trap. This is both due to the use of “ekpeirazo”/*test*

mentioned above, as well as the fact that after *Jesus* answered, the text notes that the *lawyer* sought *to justify himself*, indicating that he was not truly seeking to know and learn.

Interestingly, the religious *lawyer*'s question was remarkably similar to what the rich young ruler will later ask *Jesus* (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-25). The rich young ruler asked *Him*, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18). It seems the rich young ruler was a genuine seeker, unlike this religious *lawyer*.

The religious *lawyer*'s question—*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*—was a way of asking what things he needed to *do* to receive the full inheritance of *eternal life*. He was asking what the moral requirements were to enter the kingdom that *Jesus* so often preached about (Matthew 4:17). The *lawyer* was not asking what he must do to go to heaven when he died. (To learn more about the nature of the religious *lawyer*'s and rich, young ruler's question see the [commentary for Matthew 19:16-22](#) ).

To learn more about what it means *to inherit eternal life* see ["Eternal Life: Receiving the Gift vs Inheriting the Prize."](#)

Even though these two questions were functionally identical, *Jesus*'s responses to the religious *lawyer* and the rich young ruler are strikingly different in tone and content. The reason for these differences is most likely because *Jesus* was addressing two very different hearts. The rich young ruler was asking in earnest, but the religious *lawyer* was putting *Jesus to the test*. Mark makes the sincerity of the rich young ruler clear, when he wrote how when *Jesus* saw the rich young ruler that "He felt a love for him" (Mark 10:21). *Jesus* recognized and admired the authenticity and devotion that the rich young ruler had. There seems to be not only a lack of sincerity from the religious *lawyer* in his question, but a sinister trap being set to ensnare *Jesus*. Therefore, *Jesus* addressed each man differently—according to the heart with which each man offered their question.

*Jesus* essentially returned the *lawyer*'s question back to *him* through two new questions, "*What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?*" In other words, *Jesus* said to *him*, "You are a religious expert *in the Law* of Moses. You tell Me." By responding as *He* did, *Jesus* shrewdly gave the *lawyer* nothing to twist and use against *Him*.

With the first question—*What is written in the Law?*—*Jesus* directed the *lawyer* to scriptures where the answer could be found. The *lawyer* likely considered *the Law* to be the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is notable that *Jesus* framed His question by directing the *lawyer* to *God*'s word, rather than allowing the *lawyer* latitude to speak of man-made rules which claimed to show people how to fulfill *the Law* (but in reality made the people subservient to the religious establishment). The *lawyer* will in fact take his answer from the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, as *Jesus* asked.

With the second question—*How does it read to you?*—*Jesus* deferred to the *lawyer*'s expertise and subtly, or not so subtly, flipped the question back to the *lawyer* in such a way as to get *him* to

speak the “Pharisaically-correct” answer. It was a brilliant maneuver. It framed the question within *God’s* word, and it put the *lawyer* on the record.

The religious *lawyer* then gave a scripturally sound answer:

*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.*

*He* correctly cited the two greatest commandments. The first was from Deuteronomy:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”  
(Deuteronomy 6:5)

The second greatest command was from the book of Leviticus:

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”  
(Leviticus 19:18)

These are the exact commandments that *Jesus* answered later on, when *He* was asked by another *lawyer* in the temple: what is the greatest commandment? (Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34). *Jesus* answered that the greatest commandment was Deuteronomy 6:5, then added that the second was like it (Leviticus 19:18).

To learn more about these two commandments please see our commentary for [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#); [Leviticus 19:9-18](#); [Matthew 22:37-38](#) ; [22:39-40](#)).

*Jesus* responded, *You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.*

The religious *lawyer* answered correctly. *Jesus* affirmed his answer of *what he* must do to inherit eternal life and enter the kingdom. *He* must love *God* above all else and serve *his neighbor* in love. This is what *Jesus* meant when *He* said: *Do this and you will live* [abundantly]. In other words, follow these core commands and *you* will inherit a great experience of life, *eternal life*. [Eternal life](#) is both a gift as well as a reward.

Notice how once again, *Jesus* shrewdly gave the religious *lawyer* nothing *he* could use to twist against *Him*. The *lawyer* could not condemn *Jesus* for anything *He* said without also condemning himself.

But something in this exchange may have pricked the conscience of the religious *lawyer*.

*He* had come to put *Jesus* to the test in order to find fault with *Him* and dismiss His teachings. But having essentially answered his own question truthfully according to *God’s Law*, and having *Jesus* (the One he came to dismantle) humbly confirm his answer, something seemed to have stirred inside his heart.

It might have been *Jesus's* gentle response (Proverbs 15:1a). Or it might have been hearing his own voice meaningfully recite the goodness of God's word (Isaiah 55:11). Or it might have been something else entirely that moved the *lawyer* to press further. Maybe, *he* felt, that if *he* could not dismantle *Jesus*, *he* would at least make *himself* appear righteous.

A prick of conscience, an urge to be right, or both, or something else altogether; the conversation would have ended here if the *lawyer* did not raise one final question for *Jesus* to answer.

*But wishing to justify himself*, the religious *lawyer* said to *Jesus*, “*And who is my neighbor?*”

Whether his heart was sincere or (as it appeared) hostile toward *Jesus*, the *lawyer* wished to *justify himself* and the way *he* treated other people.

The word *justify* in Greek (“di-kai-O” - G1344) shares the same root as the Greek words for “righteous” (“di-kai-os” – G1342) and “righteousness” (“di-kai-o-sun-é” – G1343). They are essentially the same word in different forms (*justify* = verb; righteous = adjective; righteousness = noun). *To justify* something means to align it into right standing or harmony according to a standard. This *lawyer* was wanting to align and harmonize *himself* and his existing behavior to the standard of *God's Law* to *love your neighbor as you love yourself*. *He* was not seeking to learn from *Jesus* and change his behavior such that *he* could be conformed to the righteous standard of *God*. Rather, *he* sought to have his existing behavior justified. From the way *Jesus* will answer, we can presume that this *lawyer* was a self-righteous person that remained aloof from anyone they considered inferior to themselves in keeping their code of religious rules.

The *lawyer* came to test *Jesus*, but now found *himself* at a moral crossroads. *He* could repent of his failures to love everyone as he loved himself or *he* could *justify himself* and draw limits to how far *God's Law* applied and thereby excuse his unloving actions.

The first option of repentance would have been better if the *lawyer* wanted to inherit eternal life, gaining the maximum fulfillment of life available to us while living on this earth (Matthew 4:17). But this *lawyer* chose the second option, the option of self-rationalization.

Instead of repenting and learning how best to *love* and serve others (as required by the second greatest command to *love* our neighbors), *he* was essentially asking *Jesus*:

- “Which people count when it comes to this commandment?” (Only the ones I want it to)
- “Which people are excluded from this commandment?” (The ones I desire to exclude)
- “Who do I not have to *love*?” (Because I don't want to follow this command)

When the religious *lawyer* asked *Jesus* “*And who is my neighbor?*”, he was really asking, “*Who is **not** my neighbor?*” The implied answer is “The people who are beneath my station.” *Jesus* will disabuse this religious *lawyer* of his position, and in doing so give us one of the most famous of all parables.

It is in response to this question, that *Jesus* addressed this religious *lawyer* with one of His most memorable parables—“the Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-35).

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>25</sup> And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> And He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” <sup>27</sup> And 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.” <sup>28</sup> And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” <sup>29</sup> But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**