

A Hermeneutical Reflection on πλησίον (Neighbourliness) in Luke 10:25–37 and Its Relevance to Christ Apostolic Church, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Nigeria currently faces grave challenges such as social disintegration, tribalism, human rights abuses, and insecurity—all threatening the nation's stability. Most Nigerians live in extreme poverty while a privileged minority enjoys luxury. These issues stem from selfishness, lack of brotherly love, and ignorance of scriptural teachings. This resembles the parable of the Good Samaritan, where a man is assaulted and abandoned, but a Samaritan intervenes—challenging societal norms of the time. This paper explores the concept of πλησίον (neighbourliness) as presented in Luke 10:25–37, and how it applies to the Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria. The study adopts descriptive and exegetical method to analyse the text. Questionnaire was administered, data collected were qualitatively analysed. Findings reveal that ignorance of both social and biblical principles undermines genuine neighbourliness, it also shows that biblical teachings on neighbourliness is a powerful moral tool for promoting empathy and community spirit. The study concludes that embracing love and patriotic concern for others is key to national restoration and urges the Church to leverage the transformative message of the Gospel to fight hatred, inequality, exploitation, and poverty.

Key words: πλησίον (Neighbourliness), Patriotism, Parable, Love, C.A.C.

1. Introduction

The widespread ethnic and religious division in Nigeria has become a matter of deep concern. This disunity largely stems from a lack of understanding and application of key biblical and moral principles such as patriotism, brotherhood, and neighbourly love. A "neighbour" is commonly understood as someone who lives nearby, yet from a moral and biblical perspective, it refers to any fellow human to whom one owes compassion and ethical responsibility. The neglect of such values contributes to societal dysfunction and corruption. Scripture, such as Matthew 22:39—"Love your neighbour as yourself"—remains largely ignored. Biblical examples like Cain, Jacob, and Joseph's brothers highlight historical betrayals among kin. When a lawyer asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus responded with a story pointing to the universal obligation of compassion, not limited by ethnicity or status. This paper examines these biblical principles and their relevance today (Maluleke, 2014: 102-105).

2. Exegetical Insights

The conversation with the lawyer interrupts Jesus' private teaching moment with his disciples, underscoring the broader audience of Jesus' message. The lawyer's intent may have been to test Jesus, but his question still aligns with Jesus' ongoing theme of practicing God's word. Jesus doesn't just offer theological answers—He leads people toward practical action. The phrase "do this and live" links love for God and neighbour with eternal life.

The parable becomes more than a moral tale—it is a hermeneutical device to unpack the essence of the law, particularly Leviticus 19:18. It redefines the concept of neighbour as anyone in need, regardless of race or religion. Importantly, Jesus uses this story not merely to tell the lawyer what to do, but to demonstrate how genuine righteousness is lived out through mercy and action, not mere religious titles or discussions.

In line with Luke's theology, true hearing of the word of God is proven through obedience. Thus, the story acts as a mirror, challenging both the lawyer and readers today—especially members of the Christ Apostolic Church—to embrace neighbourliness in their daily lives. The type of practice leading to eternal life emphasized in this narrative is highlighted in three key ways—two within the passage and one from a broader context (Ukpong, 2018: 96).

First, at the heart of Luke's story is the Samaritan's reaction to the injured man: he was "moved with compassion." This mirrors God's faithful love (Luke 1:78) and Jesus' compassion for the grieving widow (Luke 7:13). The lawyer, using similar language, identifies the Samaritan's action as "mercy" (Bolaji, 2019:78). This reflects a core message of the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49): one's actions reveal one's inner character. Loving others flows naturally from a deep love for God.

Second, the parable is framed by the question of who qualifies as a "neighbor" (vv. 29, 36). While Jesus had earlier removed distinctions between friend and enemy in his teaching, the lawyer attempts to reintroduce this division. His question, "Who is my neighbor?" is less about who he should love and more about who he is permitted not to love (Dube, 2017: 78-82). Jesus shifts the focus, rejecting the idea that love should be limited to certain groups. True neighborly love has no boundaries.

Third, the setting—from Jerusalem to Jericho—and the mention of temple officials (priest and Levite) contrasted with a Samaritan reflect the geographical and ideological scope of Jesus' mission. Earlier, Jesus had attempted to reach out to Samaritans (9:51–56), and now he is heading to Jerusalem, the heart of Jewish religious life. The temple, which set strict limits on social interactions, is being challenged. In his Galilean ministry, Jesus began breaking down these barriers; now, he continues to do so on his journey to Jerusalem. The Samaritan, representing the outsider, models God's covenant faithfulness—unlike the temple officials—subverting the religious norms of the time (Bull, 2014:51–52). Although Luke doesn't show the lawyer's response, it's clear that a genuine encounter with Jesus would have profoundly challenged his worldview (Cooley, 2014:76).

3. Theological and Socio-Cultural Analysis of Neighbourliness in Luke 10:25–37

Akinboye (2018) emphasizes the courage required to live out Christ-like principles, especially in expressing compassion and justice in real-life encounters. Similarly, Green (2014:429) observes that after sharing the parable, Jesus responds to the lawyer's question not by reaffirming the initial query—"Who is my neighbor?"—but by redirecting the focus to "Who acted as a neighbor to the wounded man?" This reframing undermines the legal expert's attempt to define boundaries of neighbourliness based on identity. Instead, Jesus implies that being a neighbor is determined by action, not by proximity or social group.

Hart, Gulbranson, and Smith (2022:15–24) argue that Jesus' choice to depict the Samaritan as the one who fulfills the law redefines neighbourliness as a practical outpouring of love rather than a theoretical legal debate. Labruyere (2017:30) adds that this narrative reverses the purity codes embedded in the Jewish worldview, making care for the marginalized—a symbol of "the poor" (cf. Luke 4:18–19)—the new ethical standard.

The lawyer, while initially testing Jesus, ends up affirming the principle embedded in the parable: mercy shown through action distinguishes the Samaritan. Tolstoy (2011:120–122) notes the open-ended nature of this encounter—while the lawyer acknowledges the correct answer, the narrative leaves it unresolved whether he will live it out.

Theologically, the parable of the Good Samaritan stands out among Jesus' teachings for its depth and universality. It illustrates the core of Christian virtue: holiness, charity, kindness, and godliness (Lovell, 2015:71–80). The lawyer's motive may have been to trap Jesus, yet his question unveils a fundamental issue: what must one do to inherit eternal life? Okoye (2011:16) reminds us that asking such questions is crucial for any discerning individual.

Jesus responds with two core commandments: love for God and love for neighbor. Narramore (2013:37–40) elaborates that loving God means finding joy in His righteousness, surrendering to His will, and honoring His name. This divine love is instilled in the believer's heart through the Holy Spirit. Mead (2014:107–110) points out that the Jews often approached God with fear rather than love, largely because they did not recognize God as revealed in Christ. Albert (2015:21) insists that Calvary is the ultimate expression of God's love—a truth many Jews of Jesus' time had yet to grasp.

In today's context, Bain (2012:71) argues that loving God is the highest expression of human dignity and spiritual fulfillment. While worldly things may fail, the love of God strengthens, sustains, and qualifies us for divine reward.

The second lesson in Jesus' response centers on genuine neighbourliness. The question "Who is my neighbor?" must be internalized by each person. Mukharjees (2018:188–195) argues that if we only love those who are like us—family, friends, fellow citizens—we do no more than what

non-believers do. Jesus challenges this limitation by portraying a Samaritan, someone despised by Jews, as the true neighbor (Samuel, 2016:66).

The parable unfolds on the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, where a man—ethnically and religiously anonymous—is attacked. The priest and Levite avoid him, possibly fearing ritual defilement (Papalia, 2009:215). In contrast, the Samaritan, despite being viewed as a heretic (Withing, 2017:88), responds with compassion, attending to the victim’s wounds and ensuring his continued care.

Obasi (2017:90) and Maier (2019:216–220) highlight the Samaritan’s practical mercy—his self-sacrifice, disregard for social stigma, and prioritization of human life. Jesus’ question, “Who was a neighbor?” is answered not by identity but by action. The neighbor is anyone in need whom we are able to help.

4. Implications for the Christ Apostolic Church, Ibadan

The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), as part of the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria, has historically embraced the principle of neighbourliness as central to its faith and growth. Bakare (2011) attributes much of the early Pentecostal revival and conversions from historic churches to this emphasis on practical Christianity and generosity.

Church leaders in CAC organize regular teachings, conferences, and crusades that stress brotherly love and national unity (Ogunlade & Olasehinde, 1995:35–40). These efforts are intended to inform and transform the attitudes of believers.

The CAC leadership is encouraged to continue creating platforms for behavior and character formation that align with Christ’s teaching on neighbourliness. Members should be open to learning and transformation, fostering better interpersonal relationships (Alao, 2011:43). The church must take seriously Jesus’ call to love God fully and love others selflessly, as foundational to Christian witness.

5. Conclusion

In view of the findings discussed in this study, it is concluded that love is a fundamental virtue that fosters genuine neighbourliness, which in turn is essential for peaceful coexistence and a meaningful life in God. Furthermore, the concept of neighbourliness extends beyond acts of kindness; it embodies a patriotic duty and a moral obligation to care for and support fellow human beings, irrespective of differences.

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