

From the Desk of David Lantz

It's Not My Job! A Fresh Look at a Familiar Parable

Sooner or later, all of us, either in our homes or at our work, come face to face with someone who says: "It's not my job!" I work as a salesman, and my company sells, installs and maintains telecommunications systems. When I sell a system, there are a number of steps which must be followed so that we can correctly install it, often times involving different vendors from different companies. I have yet to be involved in a sale where someone didn't say at a certain stage of the process "It's not my job." Unless someone steps forward to manage the situation, the person who is ultimately hurt is the customer.

The "it's not my job" syndrome can be seen in other areas of life: The child who insists that a chore is the job of another sibling, the stranded motorist we pass by on the highway assuming someone else will help them, or a church that will not allow certain important changes to be made because no one can decide which committee should make the decision. In all of our affairs, we make rules to guide general behavior: Learning personal responsibility, keeping our children safe from strangers, being good stewards of God's resources. Too often, our blind adherence to these rules prevents us from "loving our neighbor as ourselves."

The Lesson of the Good Samaritan

In Luke 10:25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan unfolds with a lawyer asking Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds, not with an answer, but with this question: "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"

For years, I have read the parable of the Good Samaritan, and heard sermons preached on the subject. Always, the focus has been on how, with God's grace, I should be more like the Samaritan. One day, as I was preparing a study on this parable for a high school class, God made me focus on Jesus' question. Why did Jesus ask it? To answer that question, I believe it instructive to learn whom those referred to as "lawyers" were, and what Jesus thought of them.

The Scribes and the Pharisees

The lawyers of Jesus' day were scribes who administered the law as judges in the Sanhedrin. Furthermore, these lawyers:

"...belonged mainly to the party of the Pharisees, (and) functioned as members of a highly honored profession. They were professional students and defenders of the law (scriptural and traditional), gathering around them pupils whom they instructed in the law." (Ryre Study Bible, note to Matthew 2:4)

Thus, for most purposes, one can interchange the words "scribe" and "lawyer." Just how interrelated the lawyers were with the Pharisees can be seen in Luke 11:42-52. In an encounter

with these two groups, Jesus takes them to task for caring only for following their rules, disregarding justice and the love of God for their fellow man.

“Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.” (vs. 43-44).

In verse 45, one of the lawyers speaks up, saying “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” Jesus responds to this lawyer by pointing out how they weigh the people down with impossible burdens, and in so doing, “have taken away the key of knowledge.” (vs. 52). Like the Pharisees, Jesus saw the lawyers as those who had become so consumed with following their own rules and regulations that they had forgotten the very purpose of God’s laws.

This is how Jesus viewed the lawyer who asked: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The lawyer was looking for a rule, a law, anything he could point to and say: “See, I’m doing my job right. It’s those other people who aren’t following the rules, who aren’t doing their job, who are in the wrong.” Jesus asks the question “What is written in the Law?” in order to demonstrate that by blindly following all the rules, one will never inherit eternal life.

The Priest, the Levite and the Samaritan

When Jesus asks “What is written in the law?” the lawyer gives the exact same answer Jesus gave to the question of the greatest commandment posed by a lawyer in Matthew 22:36. That answer is:

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.



Jesus certainly would have recognized that the lawyer was repeating His words without truly understanding them. Thus, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus uses the lawyer’s own words to demonstrate how the “godly” priest and Levite failed to be mediators of God’s love to the beaten man.

Remember that the man was left half dead, so a passer-by might easily think the man *was* dead. According to the law, anyone touching a dead person would be made ceremonially unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:11-13). This would prevent one from entering the temple during Passover. In the case of the Levite, this was reason enough *not* to help. Likewise, a priest was prohibited from touching a dead person unless he was a blood relative of the deceased (Leviticus 21:1-2). From the priest’s standpoint, touching the body of the beaten man was clearly not his job. Because they believed the man to be dead and were unwilling to break God’s laws, both the priest and the Levite refused to touch him.

But the Samaritan “felt compassion” on the injured man (vs. 33). Even though he was not a blood relative, he helped the man. *Even though it “wasn’t his job,” he made it his job to do that which only a blood relative was expected to do.*

You, the Samaritan and Me

Just as the Samaritan came along at the right time and saved the man who had been left for dead, you and I have that same opportunity when it comes to those who don’t know Christ. One of the tensions which occur in many churches is the type of message different people want the Pastor to preach on Sunday morning. Often, non-saved people who come to church to seek Jesus won't listen to a message which contains a heavy dose of theology. On the other hand, those who have been in the church for a while, who know Jesus as their savior, are interested in hearing a message which, at least in their opinion, has more “depth.” I know several churches where the “seekers” find the message being preached to be challenging and uplifting, while those with perhaps a greater understanding of the Bible and have known the Lord for some time complain, saying “we’re not being fed spiritually.”

In a world where one can listen to Christian radio or play taped messages from some of the most powerful preachers with whom God has ever blessed mankind, we have ample opportunity to be spiritually fed. **When we make our being spiritually fed the issue, instead of ministering to those who come seeking God, we become the modern-day priest and Levite found in the parable of the Good Samaritan.**

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day came under condemnation because they made themselves the focus of God’s attention instead of focusing their attention on the lost.

Jesus tells us: “It’s not about you: I came for the lost.” As Christians who already claim a relationship with Christ, it is our job to have compassion on the lost and care for them. Christ died on a cross for our sins because the phrase “it’s not my job” wasn’t part of His vocabulary.

And because of His example, the phrase needs to be stricken from ours.



David Lantz provides project management consulting services to not-for-profit organizations. An Adjunct Professor of Business Management for the University of Phoenix and Indiana Tech, he writes on the use of Business Technology and Christian Leadership. His latest publication is the e-book, **Finding Community: Creating Connections on the Frontier of Online Ministry**. Go to www.findingcommunity.net, to learn more, or email him at dlantz@buyingtechnology.com