

Luke 10:25–37

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS OF RATIONALIZATION

INI

INTRO

This last week I was studying in my office and I began hearing a scratching sound in the walls – yes, a mouse. I believe he slipped down between two steel beams. It was a good thing my wife was gone this week, although I am not sure whether or not we've heard the last of him or not. Think of the barriers that mouse faced. The studs in the walls are steel, so he can't climb them. Even if he finds his way around one beam, there is another waiting on the other side.

“To rationalize” according to the dictionary means: “attempt to explain or justify (one's own behavior or attitude) with logical, plausible reasons, even if these are not true or appropriate.” We build our own barriers. We construct steel beams that trap us inside. We slip down between the beams of trying to “justify” our attitude or behavior, as the dictionary says, “even if these are not true.”

We cannot climb out. The only way out is to have God's Word, break down the barriers of rationalization. Jesus does this in our account by reminding us that #1 we tend to ask all the wrong questions, #2 we tend to not understand true love, and #3 we forget about the Good Samaritan.

1. Barrier #1 — Asking all the wrong questions

Jesus must first break through the barrier of rationalization that asks all the wrong questions. **v.25** — “A certain lawyer” – an expert in the law, that is the law of Moses. – The lawyers were a religious subset of the Pharisees. Here we have the supposedly wisest expert in the law of Moses, who, as Jesus shows, is asking all the wrong questions.

“To test Him” we read was the lawyer's motive. He wanted to trap Jesus. He hoped that Jesus' answer would contradict the Law of Moses, that he would say you can get to heaven without following the Law of Moses. If He did, then they could label him a heretic. This is why we find the lawyer asking all the wrong questions. The lawyer's first question is wrong, because he is looking for something within himself to assure him of salvation.

v.25b — This is the same question, “what shall I do...” that theologians throughout the centuries have been asking, some more subtly, some more bluntly. Basically, “How can I know that I am saved?” For the lawyer this question amounted to – “have I kept the law of Moses?” For us it often leads to questions like, “have I been a good enough Christian,” ... “am I doing better than those other so called Christians?”

This is where false theologies have developed, such as, “I know I am saved because I see myself living a Christ-like life.” In fact, I heard recently a former member of a charismatic church say that they would teach that we could ethically become more Christ like, that we can and must progress in our sanctification. This thinking is all based on the question, “how I know I am saved?” – looking to oneself rather than Christ. – thinking, My living a more righteous life is what sets me apart from the unbeliever. My sanctified living is what assures me of eternal life.

Jesus, knowing the trap, directs the attention back on the lawyer. **v.26** When Jesus say “what is your reading of it?” He is asking not only for the words of the text, but also for the us to think about the meaning. Not just what are the words, but what are the words saying?

The lawyer knowing the Law well, responds, **v.27,28** — The bare words of the law speak for themselves. “Do this and you shall live.” Can any of us respond, “o.k., I will love God with my whole heart and whole soul and whole mind?”

Back to the lawyer’s original question, **v.26**. What rationalization looks for is something inside of me. A barrier that separates me from the truth that I am full of sin. Our sinful nature is always looking for something inside of me to assure me that I am o.k.

But the law says, love God with your whole heart and love your neighbor as your self.” But the lawyer rationalizes — “well, who is my neighbor?” We ask all the wrong questions. We think, “what about that guy, what about what he has done to me?” “He cannot be my neighbor after what he has done to me.” Just who is my the person I am supposed to show love to?

Jesus breaks down barrier #1 by simply letting the law speak for itself: If you can love God with your whole heart, if you can prevent any possession, object of desire, or sinful dissatisfaction from finding any place in your life, then yes you will live. Not only that, you must also love your neighbor with the same love you wish to be shown yourself — at all times. If you can do those things, then you will inherit eternal life. The barrier is broken down when we stop rationalizing and realize ... when we realize we haven’t done what is needed to inherit eternal life.

2. Barrier #2 — Not understanding true love

This leads us to barrier #2 – not understanding true love. **v.27b**. Understanding the law is ultimately about understanding of true love. True love sees in your neighbor the treatment you wish for yourself. The lawyer does not see this ... We so often do not see this.

v.29. - as if there is someone who is my neighbor and another who is not. Rationalization wants to justify myself – it wants to declare myself right. It wants me to feel o.k. with my sins. So I build up barriers in telling myself that my attitudes, my desires, my thoughts about other people are really not that bad. Rationalization looks to

blame the other person for what they have done or not done to me, rather than asking what I can do for them. What the words of the lawyer say is not just who is my neighbor, but who is my enemy? – as if there must be some who just don't deserve our help or love.

The word “neighbor” means “near by” or “close at hand.” Jesus reveals through the actions of the Samaritans that the one “near by” is not geographical, it is spiritual. The one “near by” is the one in need.

We should be sure to understand the cultural significance of what happens in our text. The Jews and Samaritans had hundreds of years of hostility toward each other. The Samaritans had intermarried with foreign nations and developed false teachings and practices. Many Jews viewed them outside the covenant with God, unclean, and not worthy of help. These two groups had several centuries of hostility, war, and anger against each other.

So when this Samaritan is the only of the three to stop, it is rather shocking. The lawyer, plugging himself into the scene as the wounded man on the road would be shocked to hear of the Samaritan's grace. The Samaritan would likely be viewed as an enemy of the Jews.

There are several ways in which the priest and the Levite may have rationalized their actions. For the priest to stop and visit a dead body, or one he perceived as dead would render him ceremonially unclean. So he passes on. The Levite, being a worker in the Temple, is merely a follower and understudy of the priest. If the priest did it, then it must be o.k. for me.

If you saw the pastor doing something sinful or unloving, would that make it all right for you to do the same. Do we ever look at other people's example to justify what we know to be wrong. Well, they're doing it. We pass by the right thing to do in this sense. We keep walking and ignore the real problem – Stuck between two beams.

Jesus completely smashes our barriers of rationalization when he shows the good example of the Samaritan reaching out to one who otherwise might consider him an enemy. He smashes our barrier by asking the reversal of the lawyer's question, **v.36**. Notice how he asks, “which was neighbor to him?” Not “who is my neighbor?” but rather, “who can I be a neighbor toward?” This is the fundamental truth of the law when it says, “love your neighbor as yourself.” True love then does not see in that person either a neighbor or an enemy? True love sees only myself in need. How can I show myself a neighbor to others? is the question.

v.37 The problem is our barriers of rationalization keep us from going and doing likewise. What the lawyer and we all should see is the fact that we just have not loved God with our whole heart, nor have we loved our neighbor as ourself. Too often we see in others either a neighbor or an enemy. Too often we rationalize, well, what have they ever done for me. Or we think, if they prove themselves worthy of my help or love, then

I will do something. That is not what true love says. True love is says what Jesus said in Matthew 5 “*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,”* (Matthew 5:43–44, NKJV). True love is unconditional. It is something none of us can claim to have done perfectly. That is why true love is only found in what Jesus has done for us. “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Romans 5:8, NKJV) This is how we are broken out and are set free of the barriers we create for ourselves.

3. Barrier #3 — Not knowing the Good Samaritan

The third and greatest barrier Jesus smashes down for us is not knowing the Good Samaritan. Notice nowhere in our text does the word “Good” come in. Why do we often refer to this man as the “Good Samaritan?” Because the person that best fits this role is the only “Good” One – Jesus.

Rationalization says, what must I do? God says, “I have done it for you.” Rationalization says, “I will only help my neighbor, but not my enemy.” God says, “while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us. Christ died for the ungodly.” God did not wait for you to make the first move or earn a right to have him help you. When you were completely helpless, lying for dead on the side of the road, the Good Samaritan stopped. He rescued you, healed you of the brutality of sin, and gave you an eternal resting place through faith in Him. He has provided for you eternal inn which all expenses paid.

v.25b. Nothing. An inheritance “inherently” implies not doing anything. You don't earn God's inheritance it is given to you through adoption into His family. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. As we read in our Scripture reading, “*For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*” (Galatians 3:18, NKJV) This inheritance of eternal life is yours because Christ has paid for your sins and given it to you by grace.

God has seen the rational barriers we set up, the ways we try to ignore sin. For this reason He has sent the Good Samaritan to break down those barriers – to break through them in our place. He has asked the right questions, like, “how can I be your neighbor?” He has shown true love, making no distinctions about who he will die for. And He has been your Good Samaritan, saving you from death and giving you the inheritance of eternal life.

Only with barriers destroyed do we run free. You are set free from those rationalizing thoughts that once boarded you in. You are set free, redeemed, to follow in the steps of our Good Samaritan – to ask the right questions, to understand and show true love, and to trust and follow your Good Samaritan. Jesus breaks down the barriers of rationalization. In Jesus Name, Amen.