

Memory Verse

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:40)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Work [Behavior]
God will judge us regarding how we help others in their time of need.	God is righteous and just.	Serve God by serving our brothers and sisters, which can be done by overcoming our apathy and growing in love.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Final Judgment
- B. Lessons Learned from the Sheep
- C. Lessons Learned from the Goats

Life Application

- 1. Overcoming Apathy
- 2. Growing in Love

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Before Christ the righteous judge comes again, let us serve the Lord and man with a genuine loving heart.

Spiritual Teachings

A. The Final Judgment

First, let us read Matthew 25:31–46. While the two parables from the previous lesson discuss events prior to Jesus Christ’s second coming, this parable teaches us what will occur during the final judgment, after Christ has come again. People of all nations will be gathered before Jesus Christ, who sits on the throne of His glory, and He will separate them into two groups: the sheep and the goats.

Now, let us make an in-depth comparison of the sheep and the goats.

The Sheep	The Goats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On the right (v. 33)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On the left (v. 33)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Come” (v. 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Depart from Me” (v. 41)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blessed (v. 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cursed (v. 41)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will inherit the kingdom prepared by God for them (v. 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will depart into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels (v. 41)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helped strangers, those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, imprisoned, etc. (vv. 35–40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neglected strangers, those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, imprisoned, etc. (vv. 42–45)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deemed righteous (v. 46)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go into eternal life (v. 46)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go away into everlasting punishment (v. 46)

B. Lessons Learned from the Sheep

The key difference between the sheep and the goats is that the sheep were willing to help the least of Christ’s brethren. First, let us ask ourselves: who are Christ’s brethren? The answer can be found within the Bible. In Matthew 12:49–50, Jesus Christ points to His disciples and says, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” Today, we who do the will of God are Christ’s disciples. Therefore, Jesus Christ considers us His brethren.

However, the sheep did not simply help the brethren of Christ. Specifically, they helped the least of them. In the context of the parable, the word “least” refers to individuals or groups that seemed insignificant in the eyes of the world. These are people who relied on others for support, and who were unable to help themselves. Outcast, excluded, and looked down upon by society, they needed the most help, but often were unable to find it.

This parable is a wake-up call for us, clearly revealing to us the importance of helping our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need. It is a call to action. We know what it means to give food or water to those in need. However, more important than helping someone with their physical needs is helping them with their spiritual needs.

Let us take a careful look at the spiritual teaching for each action of love performed by the sheep.

1. Give food to the hungry

Our spiritual food is the word of God (Mt 4:4). As we study the Bible, we can use what we have learned to encourage those around us. Through our sharing of God’s words, we give nourishment to those who hear it.

2. Give drink to the thirsty

The word for “to give drink” is the same word as “watered” in 1 Corinthians 3:6–8. From this, we can see that to give drink is to help someone to grow in Christ. Without water, a seed cannot grow, and without water, a person can feel weak and dehydrated. So, “to give drink” can be something as simple as praying for those whom we know are facing trials, so that God can refresh them and give them strength.

3. Show hospitality to the stranger

Abraham, who showed hospitality to three strangers, was actually serving angels (Gen 18:2; Heb 13:1–2). We can learn not only from Abraham’s actions of servitude, but also from his attitude of receiving guests. Abraham was quick to act and took the initiative to offer the best food that he had to the three strangers. Today, this means that we should also take the initiative and offer to those in need. When we see that someone is struggling, instead of waiting for a cry for help, we can take the first step and ask, “How can I help?”

4. Clothe the naked

Nakedness represents shame (Rev 3:18). When we see those who are naked, we must help them to put on clothes to get rid of their shame. The Bible records that after Shem and Japheth, two of Noah’s sons, were told of his nakedness, they “took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father” (Gen 9:23). In a similar manner, clothes can represent righteous deeds (Rev 19:8). Thus, we can “clothe the naked” by encouraging those who are not keeping the Sabbath, who are not walking the path of light, or who are struggling with various temptations.

5. Visit the sick or imprisoned

Visiting the sick or imprisoned is as simple as being present for people in their time of need. Though words are able to express sympathy, a person’s physical presence can mean so much more, even if the person does not know what to say. We are all part of the body of Christ (Heb 13:3). When one member is in pain, then all the members are in pain.

The result of the sheep’s acts of love is that during the final judgment, they will be considered the blessed and righteous ones of God. He will call them to come closer to Him, so that they may inherit the kingdom of God and receive eternal life.

C. Lessons Learned from the Goats

From verse 44, it is clear that before God condemned them for their inaction, the goats were completely unaware that they had done anything wrong. They did not equate loving and serving their brothers and sisters in need with the love they had towards God. 1 John 4:21 tells us that, “he who loves God must love his brother also.” Today, we cannot say that we love and serve God when we do not show care and concern for our brothers and sisters in need.

When we look closely at the goats, we can see that their inaction originated from their apathy towards other members who were in need. To be apathetic is to feel an indifference or lack of concern for others. Like the sheep, the goats saw those in need; unlike the sheep, they did nothing to help them. Though the goats did not directly harm others, they indirectly caused harm by neglecting to help those that needed it.

Let us study an example of apathy recorded in the Bible.

The Gospel of Luke 10:30–35 records the parable of the good Samaritan. In this parable, thieves attack a man who is traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. The thieves “[strip] him of his clothing, [wound] him, and [depart], leaving him half dead” (v. 30). As the injured man lies on the road, slowly succumbing to his injuries, the Bible records that three individuals encounter him. First, a priest comes along, but seeing the injured man on the road, he makes the decision to pass by on the other side. Second, a Levite comes along, and after taking a look at the severely injured man, also chooses to pass by on the other side. Lastly, a Samaritan sees the injured man and has compassion on him. The Samaritan not only bandages his wounds but sets the injured man on his own animal, brings him to an inn, and takes care of him (v. 34).

When the priest and the Levite both chose to pass by the injured man after seeing him with their eyes, they exhibited apathy. Instead of coming to his aid, they each made the conscious decision to ignore his clear need. Though they had not been the ones to cause him harm, they were apathetic to his suffering, possibly causing the man mental anguish. The priest and Levite explicitly demonstrated the inaction of the goats: they saw with their own eyes the need of their brethren, but actively chose not to help.

The parable of the sheep and the goats is an important reminder that God judges not only what we have done, but also what we have not done. For their inaction, the goats will be judged unfavorably on the last day, as Jesus Christ will command them to depart from Him and go away into the everlasting fire. Today, let us reflect: Are we a sheep or a goat?

Check for Understanding

- 1. What time period does this parable teach us about?** This parable is set during the final judgment, after Christ has come again.
- 2. Who are Christ’s brethren? Provide biblical support.** Christ’s brethren are His disciples, who are His brothers and sisters in Christ (Mt 12:48–50).
- 3. Explain the spiritual significance of each:**
 - a. Giving food to the hungry: Encourage with the word of God.
 - b. Giving water to the thirsty: Pray for and watch over those in need.
 - c. Showing hospitality to the stranger: Take initiative when helping those in need.
 - d. Clothing the naked: Encourage those who are struggling to live a life of righteousness.
 - e. Visiting the sick or imprisoned: Being empathetic to the pain of those going through trials.
- 2. Why did Jesus Christ command the goats to depart from Him?** They were apathetic to the needs of their brethren.
- 3. What is the end result for the sheep and for the goats?** Sheep will receive eternal life; goats will receive everlasting condemnation.

Life Application

1. Overcoming Apathy

From this parable, we can see that the opposite of love is not hate, but apathy. The goats did not receive eternal condemnation for acting with evil intention; they received eternal condemnation for failing to act at all. Sometimes, we can be just like the goats. We may hear our brothers and sisters share about trials they are going through or temptations they are currently experiencing but simply nod our head in silence. We may hear an announcement about a person who needs our prayers but forget about the person right after the announcement is over. Let’s take a moment to reflect on the following questions.

- What can cause a person to be apathetic to someone in need? (*Ask students to share some reasons why they or others may be apathetic towards others.*)
- How have we been apathetic to the needs of our brothers and sisters? (*Ask students to share about one way they have been apathetic or about an instance of apathy they have witnessed.*)
- What is one way we can overcome our apathy towards our brothers and sisters?

Though our servitude for the Lord will be judged on the last day, another critical aspect we will be judged upon is our service to our brothers and sisters. God does not only want us to love and serve Him; He wants us to live out this love by showing care and concern to those around us.

When Jesus Christ looks upon the suffering of His brethren, He considers it His own suffering. Thus, when we show care and concern for our brothers and sisters, we are showing care and concern for Jesus Christ Himself. Knowing this, let us not be apathetic, but instead, take the initiative and be proactive in looking after the needs of our brothers and sisters around us. Let us strive to be sheep by showing our love for our brethren through our actions and prayers.

2. Growing in Love

In order to be called sheep, we must not only overcome apathy, we must also grow in love. So, what does it mean to grow in love? In Philippians 1:9, the apostle Paul encouraged the members “that [their] love may abound still more and more.” This tells us that we can always increase in our love for others.

But what does it mean to grow in love? Love is not just a feeling, nor is it passive. True love for others requires action and is displayed in our speech and in our conduct. Just as the sheep saw a need and actively offered help, we must proactively demonstrate our love for others.

What are concrete ways that we can show love to our brothers and sisters? (*Examples below.*)

- *Visit members who are ill*
- *Bring food or water to elderly brothers and sisters*
- *Refrain from speaking negatively about brothers and sisters*
- *Be faithful in keeping the church clean*
- *Pray for members who need intercession*

When we put our love into action, others will benefit, and we will glorify God. It is a conscious decision for us to choose love. So, let us constantly ask ourselves:

- How have I grown in love today?
- How have I put love into action today?

Testimony

It was the middle of Joanne’s summer vacation. Her parents were cooking for a church seminar and since they would be shorthanded, she had to go help out. On the way to church, she was not a happy camper. It was her time to sleep in and lounge around at home, but instead she was on her way to work in a kitchen. After arriving, she was given the task of cutting and washing the vegetables. As she was working and sulking, several older members came to help her. They were smiling and chatting away cheerfully. Their faces were filled with such joy, though they were doing such a mundane task, that Joanne had to ask them, “Isn’t it tiring to have to cut and wash all these vegetables?” The older members looked at her and replied, “It is a joy to be able to serve our brethren and to serve the Lord!”

Through the words of the older members, Joanne was reminded that her service was not only for brothers and sisters, but it was also for the Lord. Their example helped to change her heart. No longer did she complain about having to use her summer break to help her parents; now she praised God for the opportunity to be able to serve others.

- Anonymous

Memory Verse

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:40)

Meaning

1. Jesus Christ is our King.
2. How we treat our brothers and sisters is equated to how we treat Jesus Christ.
3. The least of Christ’s brethren are the disciples of Jesus Christ that seem insignificant in the eyes of the world.

Conclusion

Our God in heaven is just and righteous. He will judge all people, and this judgment is inevitable. Before Christ comes again, we must wisely use our time to serve the Lord and to serve man with a loving heart. For our love, Christ will say to us that we are blessed, and we will be able to receive our inheritance in heaven that has been prepared for us.

Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does the memory verse teach us about helping the least of Christ's brethren?
The least of Christ's brethren are the disciples of Jesus Christ that seem insignificant in the eyes of the world, and how we treat our brothers and sisters is equated to how we treat Jesus Christ.
2. What event does this parable concern, and what does it teach us to expect?
It concerns Christ's second coming, and it warns us to expect separation between the blessed who will inherit the kingdom and the cursed who will depart into everlasting fire.
3. Why were the sheep blessed by the Lord?
They were not simply those who followed God, they were those willing to help the least of Christ's brethren – the outcasts, the excluded, or those looked down upon by society. The sheep were those who took action to help those in need.
4. Why were the goats cursed by the Lord?
Unlike the sheep, the goats were those who did not serve their brothers and sisters in need. While they did not have evil intentions, their lack of action resulted in the neglect of the needy, and thus of Jesus Christ Himself.
5. Why is it important to Jesus that we avoid apathy? How can we overcome it?
*When Jesus Christ looks upon the suffering of His brethren, He considers it His own suffering. Thus, when we show care and concern for our brothers and sisters, we are showing care and concern for Jesus Christ Himself.
Answers will vary.*
6. How can we grow in love? Name at least three concrete ways we can show our love.
True love for others requires action, and it is displayed in our speech and in our conduct. Just as the sheep saw a need and actively offered help, we must proactively demonstrate our love for others. Examples will vary, but may include visiting sick members, refraining from speaking ill about other members, bringing food and water to older members, keeping the church clean, interceding for others, etc.