Can You Learn from Those Who Don’t Believe What You Do?

We live in a highly polarized and divided world. People seemingly agree on very little. There are various theories as to why this is the case, but one explanation is that people only speak to or receive information from others who share the same view. In other words, only communicating with or learning from those who already hold the same belief. By doing so, a single belief is reinforced.

As Christians we must be careful to ensure that what we learn and speak about is the truth. Peter spends the entire second chapter of II Peter warning of the dangers of false teachers. In the first few verses he says, *“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.****2****And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.****3****And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago.”* (II Peter 2:1-3).

Despite the warning not to be influenced by false teachers, can we learn from those who don’t believe as we do? To think about this question consider how Samaritans were viewed by the Jews. When Jesus sent the 12 apostles out in Matthew 10, he specifically told them not to go to the towns where the Samaritans lived. (Matthew 10:5). On another occasion Jesus encountered a woman from Samaria. She was uncomfortable around him because of the animosity between the Jews and Samaritans.**“**The Samaritan woman said to Jesus, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” (John 4:8).

Based on this, you would think that the last person Jesus would use to illustrate the nature of good works and charity would be a Samaritan. But he did, and so much so that the phrase “the Good Samaritan” is one we still use today. Laws are even named after him. Remember the parable from Luke 10:25-37:

***25****And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”****26****He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”****27****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.”****28****And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”*

***29****But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”****30****Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.****31****Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.****32****So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.****33****But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.****34****He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.****35****And the next day he took out two denarii[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10&version=ESV#fen-ESV-25390c)*] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’****36****Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”****37****He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

Jesus provided this parable so we can learn something, even from a person who was in many ways opposed to Jesus and what he taught. All of this raises questions for discussion:

1.) What did Jesus want us to learn from the man who became known as the Good Samaritan? Why did Jesus use the example of a

2.) Do we sometimes miss the good of others or a good lesson from them merely because we don’t otherwise share the same beliefs?

3.) What can we do to get a good lesson from someone else even if the person is one with whom we would otherwise disagree?

I hope these questions will provoke some thoughts and good discussion.