

Luke 6:27-38
Life in the Kingdom

There are many ways to identify a true believer. They are humble and gracious, repentant and dependant on God, prayerful and giving. They bear good fruit and put others before themselves. They are joyful and thankful. But most of all, they are loving.

During the 4th century, the Church became popular. Persecution ended, and Christianity became the religion of the empire. To not be fed to the lions was a great blessing, but there was also a downside. Now everyone wanted to be a Christian. To set themselves apart and prove that they were true believers, many spiritually-minded people left society and wandered the deserts alone, searching for communion with God and trying to demonstrate their renunciation of worldly pleasures. Basil the Great, a church father who lived in Asia Minor in the 4th century once wrote a study of this early form of monasticism. He challenged his readers, “if you live alone, whose feet will you wash.” He believed that a true Christian can only be identified in a group setting, because he or she can only be distinguished from non-believers by their love for others.

In this passage, Jesus is addressing “you who hear” (v. 27). These words are meant for believers, for “a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:14). This passage describes life in the kingdom of God.

The Command

The command is fourfold, “²⁷love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (v. 27-28). Such thinking is so common in the Church today that it borders on the cliché, but to a 1st century Jew, this was a radical idea. Not that it should have been, for the Law required such behavior.

Exodus 23:4, “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.”

Leviticus 19:18, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”

Proverbs 25:21, “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat;
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink”

Through the years, however, the Law had been twisted so that hatred of your enemies, be they Gentiles or more specifically Romans, had become spiritually praiseworthy. The scribes taught that it was acceptable, even virtuous, to hate your enemy, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’” (Matthew 5:43). The Law had emphasized love not vengeance, but that was not the current teaching in 1st century Palestine.

It was not difficult to move from hating your Gentile or Roman enemy to hating those Jews who did not follow the Law as well as the Pharisees expected. In addressing those who were listening to Jesus, the Pharisees remarked, “this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed” (John 7:49).

It is unfortunate that some of the most violent and hateful acts of human history have been done in the name of religion. Self-righteousness and a false sense of justice combine to make religious people some of the least loving people on the planet. Christians cannot succumb to such temptations. The Law required that we love in practical ways, not merely theoretical. Jesus expanded upon that in this age of grace when He insisted that we were to love, do good, bless, and pray for our enemies and those who hate us. We need not approve of evil, but we cannot hate evil doers.

We are commanded to “bless those who curse” us (v. 28). We are to be known for our love not only by how we act, but by what we say (and think). This does not mean we cannot hold others accountable for sin, Jesus Himself did that on many occasions. Sharing the gospel, with its implications for proper behavior is commanded as well. It does mean, though, that we are to do this “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

Finally, we are to “pray for those” who mistreat us (v. 28). We must remember that vengeance belongs to God and that our role is to pray for the salvation of those who are lost. It is not our place to judge, and if God is willing that none should perish, we can do no less,

Each of these commands requires a demonstration of love. We must love others as we have received love. Jesus loved us unselfishly and we must do the same.

Practical Applications

Jesus then gave some very practical, and very extreme, ways to apply the commands of love He just stated. We are to not respond when attacked, not hold back personal possessions from those who take them, give to whomever asks of us, and not expect anything in return.

These are extraordinary requirements and must be looked at in the entire context of Scripture. Jesus cannot have meant that we are to never defend ourselves. Before He went to Gethsemane, Jesus told His followers to be prepared to defend themselves “And He said to them, ‘But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one’” (Luke 22:36). Also John the Baptist did not tell soldiers to quit their jobs, but to not abuse their authority (Luke 3:14).

Jesus modeled what He meant when He was brought before the high priest. “²²When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, ‘Is that the way You answer the high priest?’ ²³Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?’” (John 18:22-23). Notice that Jesus did not ask to be struck again, but He also did not respond with anger and threats of retaliation. He pointed out the injustice of what was being done, but then submitted to it. Likewise, we are to accept the fact that we may be persecuted. Our duty is to respond with love to acts of injustice. We must never take matters into our own hands in anger.

In Romans 12:19-21, Paul states it eloquently, “¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ²⁰But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning

coals on his head.’ ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” That is the ultimate goal, to overcome evil by doing good.

The next illustrations involve our possessions, not our person. When someone “takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either” (v. 29). The outer garment was important for warmth and comfort. So much so, that the Law required that if it was borrowed, it must be returned by evening so the owner could use it for warmth at night, “If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets” Exodus 22:26. Jesus then follows that with “give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back” (v. 30). The main point in each example is that believers should not be so attached to personal belongings that we place them above people.

Again, context is important. The command about giving to those who ask is done in the context of those who borrow because they need. The Law insisted on generosity to the poor, “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother” (Deuteronomy 15:7). Since, Scripture speaks plainly against helping those who are lazy, “if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either” (2 Thessalonians 3:10) we can presume that context of Jesus’ command is that the person is not simply manipulating the system to their advantage. Still, we are commanded not to let the fact that we may not be repaid keep us from sharing what we have. The point throughout is that we are not to seek our own selfish will, but rather the benefit and blessing of others.

The Criteria

This is the criteria for deciding doubtful cases. “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you” (v. 31). Among many cultures, what we have learned as the “Golden Rule” is taught.

Buddhism, “A state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?”

Confucianism, “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you”

Greek Philosophy (Isocrates), “Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others”

Hinduism, “This is the sum of all the true righteousness: deal with others as thou wouldst thyself be dealt by”

Judaism (Talmud), “That which is hateful unto thee do not to your neighbour. This is the whole of the Torah. The rest is commentary”

Judaism (OT) “you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18).

Sikhism, “Treat others as thou wouldst be treated thyself”

Zoroastrianism, “Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others”

I think one of the things we can learn from this is that there is a general revelation in humankind about right behavior. Even those who do not believe in a deity acknowledge this. C. S. Lewis spoke much about this in *Mere Christianity*. The distinctiveness of Christianity lies in the fact that the motive is not self-preservation or self-aggrandizement, but rather to reflect to others the love God has shown us.

It is well stated later in Luke's gospel. ²⁵“And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ ²⁶And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’ ²⁷And 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.’ ²⁸And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’” (Luke 10:25-28).

No Better than the World

“Even sinners love those who love them” (v. 32). This straightforward comparison with the world (the word used for sinners, *hamartoloi*, refers to unbelievers) is clear. We do not naturally (that is, in our nature) love those who hate us. Our love is not to be reciprocal. Our love is not to be conditional. We are to love others as Jesus loved us. Jesus loved us:

Unconditionally - Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Sacrificially - Philippians 2:8, “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Permanently - John 10:27-28, “²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

The Reward

Jesus says clearly that “our reward will be great” (v. 35). As we have talked about before, this includes not only eternity with God, but spiritual blessings now. Among these are the promises of God such as:

Romans 8:28, “we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Romans 8:38-39, “³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And many others

Nothing can compare with what lies ahead. “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” No person is ever a loser when they give of themselves to the cause of Christ. Like Paul we should “spend and be expended” for the souls of men (2 Corinthians 12:15).

We are “Sons of the Most High” (v. 35). We are adopted into the kingdom of God, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,” (Ephesians 1:5). Our actions do not make us Sons, but rather demonstrate that we are such. They are the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. And as adopted sons, we ought to recognize that we have no control over who else is welcomed into the family.

Judging

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged” (v. 37). This is straightforward, but also must be seen in the entire context of Scripture. Christians are commanded to be discerning. We are to be as “shrewd as serpents” when dealing with the world (Matthew 10:16). Within the body of Christ we are to be especially aware of, and intolerant of, open sin, “I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler -- not even to eat with such a one (1 Corinthians 5:11).

What Jesus is saying is clarified by the next command, “do not condemn” (v. 37). This speaks to the critical, judgmental spirit with what Christians often view the world. While we need to use discretion in determining the intimacy of our relationships with others, it is not our place to pass final judgment upon them. We rarely know all the important circumstances, and we can never know the heart. Matthew 7:3, “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” is a case in point. We have enough to do rooting out sin in our own lives. We need not be too concerned with sin in others.

Here are two principles to keep in mind. We tend to judge others by their actions and ourselves by our motives. When we forgive others, we are most like our God.

A good standard in this area might be to refrain from what is untrue, unnecessary, and unkind. After all, that is how we would wish to be judged. Consider David and his conversation with Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:1-7,

¹Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said,

‘There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor.

²The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.

³But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb

Which he bought and nourished;

And it grew up together with him and his children.

It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom,

And was like a daughter to him.

⁴Now a traveler came to the rich man,

And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd,

To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him;

Rather he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.’

⁵Then David’s anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. ⁶He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion.’

⁷Nathan then said to David, ‘You are the man!’”

Take Aways

The standards for life in the kingdom are high and only by God’s grace we can meet them. Yet, this is to be our true goal as sons and daughters of the Most High God. When we reflect upon what we have received, can we ignore what is required of us?