

Are You Living Like a Child of God?

Part 1

Luke 6:27-36

Before we begin to work through this passage I want to draw your attention to the end of verse 35 and verse 36. After giving all the moral instruction found in the earlier verses of this text Jesus said at the end of verse 35, [If you do these things] “ye shall be the children of the Highest, for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

These verses don't just teach morals. Jesus wasn't simply teaching the golden rule and then applying that to different circumstances in life. In this passage Jesus taught that this is how we must act toward those around us because this is the nature of God. God is kind and longsuffering to the unthankful and the evil. God is merciful. Are we emulating the kindness demonstrated by our heavenly Father? Are we showing mercy? Are we living like the children of God? God wants us to live like we are his children.

I. Context

Before we get to our text itself let's review the context for this sermon as a whole and for this portion of Jesus' sermon in particular. Jesus was in the countryside of Galilee, probably somewhere near the city of Capernaum. He was

speaking to a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers and there were three distinct groups in this crowd. There was the general multitude made up of people from throughout Judaea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. There was the group of committed followers of Jesus, his disciples. This was a fairly large group at this time. And finally there were the twelve who had just been chosen and called as apostles.

And we noted in the last sermon that there were unbelievers in each one of these groups. The multitudes would ultimately turn on Jesus and demand his crucifixion. Many of the disciples would turn away when the teachings of Jesus became hard to accept. And even among the twelve, one was a traitor. This is important because it means that not everyone who originally heard the words of our text from Jesus were children of God. Many of these people were not living like a child of God because they were not children of God. They had never been truly born again. There had never been a work of the Spirit of God in their hearts bringing them from death to life.

This text is a call to self-examination. Am I a child of God? Have I been born again? You can follow the moral principles Jesus gives here and not be a Christian. Just because you do these things (or appear to do these things) is no guarantee that you are a Christian. Many people with a high degree of outward morality will hear Jesus say to them on the day of judgment, "I never knew you,

depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:23) Doing these things is no guarantee that you are a Christian.

But not doing these things, having no interest in them, and feeling no conviction about them, that is a sign that you are not a Christian. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) Where there is a true love for Jesus Christ there will be a true desire to obey Him. Where there is not true desire to obey there is no true love. Where there is life in a physical body, there will be resistance to corruption. Where there is spiritual life, there will be resistance to the corruption of sin. Where there is no resistance, there is no life.

Again, this text is a call to self-examination. Am I walking as a child of God? And if not then we must ask, “Am I a true child of God?” May each one of us take seriously this call to self-examination.

This text is also a call to repentance. None of us can honestly look at this text, plumb the depths of Christ’s words found here, and say, “All of this I have done perfectly.” Each one of us should be challenged and convicted from this text and be moved to repentance and a renewed desire to walk in obedience to Christ’s commands.

And finally, this text indicates the degree of suffering Christians should be willing to endure for the sake of Jesus Christ. Remember when we looked at the “blessed” statements found in verses 20-23 and we saw that those had a first-line application to those who suffered for the “Son of man’s sake,” for Jesus sake. This

is not a new sermon. Jesus was still talking to the same group of people. The context has not changed. The suffering and self-denial described in our text should be willingly and even gladly taken up by every believer for the Son of man's sake. In our flesh, we recoil from some of the things Jesus says in these verses. But we bear this burden out of obedience to Jesus Christ and for His name's sake.

Now let's begin to look at the text itself. The first section of this passage, verses 28-31, I'm going to call "The golden rule applied." Before we look at the specific examples or applications Jesus gives here let's look at the golden rule itself as it is stated in verse 31.

II. The Golden Rule Applied

In verse 31 Jesus said, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

This seems like a ubiquitous moral statement. There doesn't seem to be anything unique and distinctly Christian about this statement. This seems like a statement that any rational, philosophically-minded man could develop. The Jews had very similar statements. For example, Maimonides, the great Rabbi from the 12th century wrote: "All things whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do you the same to your brethren, in the law, and in the commandments."¹

¹ Quoted with footnotes in John Gill's commentary on Matthew 7:12.

And Aristotle, when asked how we ought to behave toward our friends, replied, “[As] we would wish they would [behave] toward us.”

Many people look at this statement from Jesus and say, “Ah, he was a great moral teacher and philosopher.” Like Aristotle. Like Maimonides.

But is that all Jesus was? Is the “golden rule” as it comes from the lips of Christ really the ubiquitous moral statement that it appears to be at first glance? Let’s examine it more closely.

First, Jesus statement is unqualified. Jesus did not say, “Act this way toward your friends.” Or, “Act this way to your brethren, your fellow Jews.” The only word Jesus used to describe who we must act this way toward is “men.” “As ye would that *men* should do to you.” This is the word “anth-ro-pos.” It refers to men or mankind generally. It is used over 550 times in the New Testament. According to the words of Christ, this is how we should act toward all mankind.

Second, Jesus’ statement is rooted in justice that is separated from the identity of the person we are acting toward. There is an idea that is gaining popularity in our time that suggests we should adjust “justice” based on the identity of the people involved. That’s not a biblical idea. That’s not true justice. We are to treat everyone, regardless of their identity, as we want them to treat us.

We tend to be very good at discerning justice when it applies to us. Even children have a strong sense of justice as it applies to them. How many times have you heard a child say, “That’s not fair.” Sometimes we are correct and what we do

want really is justice, but many times we are biased and what we really want is mercy or favorable treatment. We are to take that same judgment that we so quickly apply to our own circumstances and apply it to everyone.

Don't be concerned about justice only for you and yours, but have that same level of concern for everyone. Put yourself in their position. Ask yourself, "If I were in their position, how would I want to be treated?" Then actually act that way.

John Calvin wisely observed, "Where our own advantage is concerned, there is not one of us, who cannot explain minutely and ingeniously what ought to be done. And since every man shows himself to be a skillful teacher of justice for his own advantage, how comes it, that the same knowledge does not readily occur to him, when the profit or loss of another is at stake, but because we wish to be wise for ourselves only, and no man cares about his neighbors?"²

God is concerned about justice. Heaven forbid that we should shut our eyes to the justice God demands and demonstrates in his Word. Heaven forbid that we should turn from even the natural revelation of justice, of right and wrong, that God has put in our hearts. We discern it for ourselves. We are without excuse if we do not discern it for others, all others, and then act accordingly.

So we have seen that this statement from Jesus is unqualified, it is rooted in justice, and finally it requires that we lay down our lives. I believe this is the point of greatest separation between the statement from Jesus and the statements from

² John Calvin's commentary on Matthew 7:12.

mere human philosophers. Jesus statement makes it a moral imperative that we lay down our lives.

I'm not referring to physical death, though that may be required in extreme cases if we are to be faithful to this command from our Lord. But every single day, if we follow this command from Christ, we will be required to lay down our lives. There's that story of the husband who said to his wife, "I love you so much, I would die for you." And his wife said, "I don't want you to die. I want you to help me with the dishes." It's easy to talk about dying, but to actually live it out requires you to lay down your life, that is: your desires, your wants, to deny yourself to help with the dishes. That's a silly example, but it illustrates what this text requires.

If we will obey Jesus at this point, then we must daily die to ourselves. Our wants, our desires, our feelings must be laid aside. We must lay our lives down before our victorious Savior and say, "Lord, my life is yours to use as you will. Help me to obey." And we know that this extreme of self-denial is called for because of the examples Jesus gave in the preceding verses.

Let's look at those examples now beginning in verse 27: "Love your enemies." Jesus didn't cushion the blow. This is a strong statement that makes our flesh recoil. He said, "Love your enemies." And Jesus used the strongest word for love: "agapao," that self-denying love. That love that is drawn out, not by the object of affection, but by the very nature of the one who is loving. In the truest sense, this is only possible if we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We must

be transformed by the grace of God and be new creatures in Christ to love as we are commanded to love in this verse.

And the word enemy is very strong as well. It means “hated” or “hateful.” Have you ever hated someone?

I say “hated” in the past tense because I hope and pray that there is no one here today who is harboring hatred in their heart for anyone. That’s a sin against God and it will destroy you. If you have ever harbored hatred in your heart, bitterness in your heart, you know that is self-destructive. Lay that burden down at the cross of Jesus Christ and bear it no longer. It is a burden too heavy for you to bear. Repent. Turn from your hatred and in obedience to this command from Jesus, turn from hatred to love. Love your enemies

But if you have ever hated someone you know how hard that can be: to choose to love them. Our capacity as sinful humans to harbor ill-will toward other people defies reason. But Jesus turns that around and requires us to love other people beyond reason. Beyond human reason. They are your natural enemy. They may hate you. You may have every reasonable cause in the eyes of the world to hate them. But Jesus commands us to “Love your enemies.”

Before we move on I just want to point out that Scripture removes any excuse for lovelessness. Scripture commands a man to love his wife (Ephesians 5:25), to love other Christians (I Peter 1:22), to love his neighbors (Matthew 22:39), and even to love his enemies (Luke 6:27). And it is this same word,

“agapao” that is used in all these commands. Where you find yourself unloving, you find yourself in disobedience to God.

Verse 27 continues: “Do good to them which hate you.” Is there a true distinction here or is this tied in with the first part of the verse? It certainly expounds upon and applies what Jesus had just said, “Love your enemies.” I separated it because the word used here for “hate.”

It is the Greek word “miseo.” This word indicates active hatred. Sometimes we can keep our enemies at a distance. They can hate us from a distance. We can love them from a distance. But when it is up close and personal and we are aware of their active hatred toward us it can be much harder to love them. But our responsibility is unchanged. As they exercise hatred toward us, we must do good to them. Like Stephen in Acts 7, as the stones they hurl rain down upon us we must pray, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:60)

And notice that this is an active show of love that is commanded here. We are not to love in word only, but in deed. We are to “do good” to them which hate us. We are to show by positive acts, whenever there is opportunity, that we harbor no malice, that we do not seek revenge, that is is our desire to love our enemies and do good toward them.

Next, at the beginning of verse 28 we read, “Bless them that curse you.” This word “bless” is where we get the English word eulogy. It indicates speaking well of a person or speaking well to a person. We should always endeavor to speak

as well of another person as we possibly can. Such an instruction from the lips of Christ forbids us from gossip, from slander, from verbal attacks, from cursing, and from any other use of our tongue as a weapon for the destruction of others. The tongue has great power for destruction and we must be on guard against it.

Remember the warnings about the tongue we receive in the book of James. James 3:2 says, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” James 3:6, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” James 3:8, “The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

We must submit the use of our tongue to the authority of Jesus Christ and use it for blessing. We are to bless our family, our friends, our neighbors, and our acquaintances. We might not always succeed in this, but we would all recognize that, ideally, we would bless these people: speak well of them and speak well to them.

But in our text Jesus did not say, “Bless your family, your friends, your neighbors, your acquaintances.” Jesus said, “Bless them that curse you.”

Have you ever been cursed? How did that make you feel? I’m a very non-confrontational person. I don’t like conflict. Only on very rare occasions have I been cursed at because I usually walk away from a situation long before it would

get to the point of someone cursing at me. But on those rare occasions when I have been cursed, I have been filled with an overwhelming desire to bless that person.

No, that isn't how I have felt. Maybe that has been your experience and if that is the case, you are more spiritual than I. When someone curses me, in my flesh I may want to curse back at them. Or speak ill of them toward someone else. Or think mean thoughts about them. Or even do violence toward them. There are all sorts of possible reactions from my sinful flesh. But if you are in Jesus Christ, if you have been made a new creature in Christ by the grace of God, if your heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh, then we must resist the inclination of our flesh, and obey the command to Christ to bless those that curse us.

It is not easy, but it is the way we are called to respond as Christians. It is the way of obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ, and that would be reason enough for our obedience. Infinitely reason enough. But it is also the way of freedom.

We do not have to be bound in our response by our enemies, those who hate us, those who curse us. We can rise above, by the grace of God, and love them, do good to them, and bless them.

Jesus continued in verse 28 and said, "Pray for them which despitefully use you." Those who abuse you, those who mistreat you, those who falsely accuse you: what is your recourse as a Christian? Prayer. You are to pray for them.

Now, I want to qualify what I just said because I don't want anyone to leave here with the idea that the Bible teaches that the Christian who is being

despitefully used, abused, mistreated in any context, has no Biblical recourse but to pray for that person. That is not the case. God has ordained authority structures in human society to protect people.

God has ordained the family and the authority structure that God has given in the family is there to protect the members of the family. (Ephesians 5 and 6) The children submit to the parents. The parents love, instruct, and discipline the children. The wife submits to the husband. The husband loves the wife. And in this authority structure there is protection provided for those who are within.

God has ordained the church and the authority structure of the church, when functioning as it should, serves to protect the members of the church. The church is vested by God with spiritual authority. Authority to instruct, correct, and discipline. And this provides another layer of protection for people who are under this authority structure which God has ordained.

And God has ordained human government. Human governments have authority from God. They wield the power of the sword. And they are to use that power, Biblically speaking, to punish evil doers. So once again, this provides another layer of protection.

The family unit should protect members of the family from abuse, the church should protect members of the church from abuse, and the government should protect its citizens from abuse. All of these institutions have different areas

of authority. And in different circumstances it would be our right and even our responsibility to appeal to these different God-ordained institutions for protection.

The Bible does not teach that Christians must suffer being “despitefully used,” abused, mistreated, and we have no recourse but prayer. No. The Bible gives very clearly defined authority structures to which we can appeal to for protection. God says, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” He will ultimately right every wrong on the day of judgment, and he has ordained means to right wrongs here on earth. It is proper and right for us to avail ourselves of these means which God has provided for our protection.

Now look again at our text: What does Jesus say we, personally, are to do if we are being “despitefully used?” We are to pray for them. Again, this does not forbid the use of means God has provided for protection. But immediately, personally, what I as an individual am to do, is to pray for that person. When we were looking at verse 27 we used Stephen as an example of someone who did good to them who hated him, and we could use him as example again here as he prayed for those who “despitefully used” him, even to the point of killing him.

Why did Jesus instruct us to pray? What does prayer accomplish? Prayer won't change your enemy. Prayer won't fix your circumstance. So why pray?

The obvious answer is obedience. God has commanded that we pray. He has ordained the ends, but he has also ordained the means, and he has commanded us to pray. If we do not pray we are actively disobeying the commands of God. The

Biblical word to describe disobeying the commands of God is sin. We pray as an act of obedience, worship, and submission to God. And that would be reason enough, infinitely enough, but prayer also accomplishes something else.

Prayer changes us. Prayer will bring our will into submission to God's will. Prayer brings us into an attitude and mindset of worship. As we pray for those who spitefully use us, it will be easier for us to resist the inclinations of our flesh to avenge ourselves, and to submit to the command of God to love our enemies.

Verse 29 begins, "Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other." Before we decipher the meaning of this instruction, let's eliminate some things we know this cannot mean. We know that the Bible does not prohibit the use of physical force. God has given the sword to the state as part of their God-ordained authority. In the Law God gave to Israel he made provision for force to be used by private individuals for self-defense. This statement from Jesus is not a call to pacifism. It is not a prohibition from the use of physical force.

This verse speaks to our response when we are personally insulted. If we suffer an insult against our person, even a physical assault like someone striking us, we are to turn the other cheek. We are not to avenge ourselves. We are not to take it upon ourselves to exact retribution. We are to appeal to the authority which God has ordained. And to tie this in with what we studied in verse 22 of this chapter, if we suffer assault for righteousness sake, for Jesus' sake, we are to bear it

patiently, and even to rejoice and be glad that we are counted worthy to suffer for his name's sake.

After giving this instruction on how to handle affronts to our person, Jesus instructed us on how to handle affronts to our property. In the second part of verse 29-30 we read: "Him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."

Some of this may sound strange to us, but it would have been more clear to the Jewish audience who first heard this instruction. This instruction to not forbid someone to take your coat has to do with Jewish civil law. If you were a Jew and someone insulted you in the street you could take them to civil court and exact a substantial fine from them (the equivalent of about \$1300 in today's money). One of the specific examples in the Jewish law of this sort of public insult is someone taking away of an outer garment like a cloak or coat.³ So the Jews who first heard this instruction from Jesus would have thought previously that if someone took their cloak away by force, they could sue them and recover a substantial amount in damages. But Jesus told them that not only should they be willing to suffer such an insult, but they should be willing to suffer it twice and lose their coat with their cloak rather than give place to a vengeful attitude.

³ Misn. Bava Kama, c. 8. sect. 6.

And then Jesus gave these instructions about money: “Give to every man that asketh of thee.” Jesus is referring to charitable giving here, giving to meet the most basic needs of human life. The Jews had a strong tradition of alms giving to support those who were unable to support themselves, but they were reluctant to give to anyone outside the Jewish nation. Jesus’ instruction told them that this should not be the case. We should be willing to give to meet the basic human needs of every person who is unable to provide for himself, Jew and Gentile alike.

Further, Jesus said, “And of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again.” Jesus is not talking about robbery, where someone has taken your money or goods away by force. The Christian has legitimate recourse from crimes like this through the government that God has ordained. God has given human governments the power and responsibility to punish evildoers, like thieves and robbers. Christians can and should go to the government for help when they are a victim of a crime like that.

What Jesus is referring to here is a situation where you have borrowed someone money or goods and that person, because of some calamity that has come upon them, is unable to repay you. Under Jewish law at the time, the creditor could take the debtor to court and have him thrown in prison until he could pay his debts. The creditor could get a lien against the debtor’s property and sell it until he had recovered his money. But Jesus said no, if this happens it is better to suffer the loss

than to do harm to your brother. And this was no new instruction, but a reminder of the instruction given in the law of God (Deuteronomy 15).

And that brings us back to verse 31. Jesus gave all these examples in this sermon and then laid out this overarching principle that was to guide the lives of his disciples: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” This command from Jesus Christ is unqualified: You are to treat your family, your friends, your neighbors, and even your enemies this way. This command from Jesus is rooted in justice and not in identity. And finally, this command from Jesus requires that we lay down our lives.

Jesus is our supreme example in keeping this command. No man has ever loved his enemies like Jesus loved his enemies. Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Our sin made us Christ’s enemies, yet he loved us with an everlasting love.

No man has ever done more good to those who hated him than Jesus. While on this earth he was cursed, reviled, rejected and killed. For those who hated him, Jesus died. He willingly laid down his life for our good while we hated him.

Jesus blessed those who cursed him.

He prayed for those who spitefully used him.

When he was insulted and beaten he did not avenge himself, but submitted to these insults against his person to the point of death in obedience to the Father’s will.

He was stripped of his clothing, but he gave not just his clothing away, but the covering of his righteousness, that we would not stand naked before the judgment of God.

All the world was his by right of creation, but he did not insist upon his rights. Rather, he humbled himself and entered his creation as a servant to accomplish the work of redemption.

What a beautiful revelation we see here of Jesus Christ: his love, his humility, and his work as the redeemer. If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, read the verses we have gone over this morning and realize that everything that Jesus said, he did, for you. You are his enemy, but he loves you. You actively hate him as you go on in sin, but he does good toward you. You curse him, but he blesses you. You spitefully use his common grace, but he prays for you.

Turn to Jesus Christ in repentance today, in the day of his mercy. God will not always suffer sinners. He is long suffering, but he is not eternally longsuffering. When Jesus came the first time, he came as the suffering servant. When he returns he will come as the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Judge of all the earth who will rule with a rod of iron. You must know Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin, or you will face him as your Judge.

And for the Christian, we see that Jesus does not call us to anything in this passage that he did not do himself. He has led by his example. And now we are

under command to live in obedience to this passage because this is God's character. God is kind and longsuffering to the unthankful and the evil. God is merciful. God is loving. Scripture calls us the children of God. Are we living like children of God?