

Sermon: God's Way of Loving

Text: Luke 6:27-36

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Introduction: Even though Luke probably takes material for his gospel from a common source, there are differences between the gospel narratives. We noticed last week as we began Luke's *Sermon on the Plain* that his account was much shorter than Matthew's *Sermon on the Mount*. The passage before us today, though, is actually longer than Matthew's coverage of the same material. There are also unique pieces to each gospel's account. You might also notice, as we read the text, how Luke has transitioned from simply statements about Jesus' teaching to imperatives about how to apply this new Kingdom ethic.

Luke 6:27-36 (NIV) ²⁷“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Jesus is saying something very new when he commands his followers to love their enemies. Love does not mean we agree with everyone, but we do desire what God wants for his creation: peace! God hates evil, but desires reconciliation (see Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary, p.253).

God's Way of Loving (as presented perfectly by Jesus) is:

I. Extraordinary

A. Better than the Old Testament standards (v.27a)

Luke 6:27a (NIV) ^{27a}“But I tell you who hear me:

Not everyone has an “ear to hear” or is ready to listen, but for those who are - Jesus reveals to his listeners that he expects more from them than what they had been taught before.

Matthew makes this clear when he draws the distinction between O.T. teaching and now what is new in Jesus’ teaching. “You have heard that it was said...But I tell you,” Jesus would say.

There was really nothing wrong with the old teaching. It was the misinterpretation and man-made rules that had added distortion to God’s teaching. Now Jesus was here to make things clear.

One item of importance, I believe, was to let the Pharisees and others know they were not good just because of their meticulous obedience to the Law. Jesus was saying that not doing evil is only part of what God wants. A person also needs to do good. We are not to live separate, isolated lives, but ones that are involved by:

B. Engaging one’s enemies (vv.27b-31)

Luke’s writings tell us it is about witness, and we are all missionaries.

Luke 6:27b-30 (NIV) ²⁷“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

The story is told of an Irish boxer who got converted and became a preacher. One day as he was setting up his tent for meetings, some local toughs came and began heckling him. One of them took a swing at the preacher and hit him on the cheek, knocking him down. The preacher got up and pointed to his other cheek. The guy clobbered him there, knocking him down again. As he rose to his feet, the preacher took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, clinched his fists, and said, “The Lord gave me no further instructions.” Pow!

The preacher had missed the point of Jesus’ teaching (hyperbole vs. literal). “Jesus’ followers do not reciprocate, don’t retaliate, and do not draw their behavioral patterns from those who would victimize them.” - Craddock, Luke, p. 89

Yet, we are not just to hold up under difficulties, but actively pursue the best for those who would mistreat us.

Jesus' kind of love (*αγαπη*) always seeks the best or the "highest good" for others. It is sacrificial and just the opposite of being self-centered. It operates on the basis of the will not the emotions. We will not always feel like doing the right thing.

Jesus assumes, that to follow him, we will be put at a disadvantage. Jesus does not say that we will not have enemies, only that we should not treat them as such. The way we engage enemies is to love them, do good things to them, and ask God to bless them.

Luke 6:31 (NIV) ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is commonly called "The Golden Rule." Even though we find this in Scripture, the idea is not original with Jesus. We see it in Homer, Seneca, Tobit, II Enoch and Philo (Craddock, *Luke*, p. 90). The great Rabbi Hillel also taught, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof" (Shabbath 31a, quoted by Morris, p. 130). Jesus, however, states this in a more positive proactive manner.

God's way of loving is:

C. Better than the world's standards (**vv.32-34**)

Luke 6:32-34 (NIV) ³²"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

Even young children learn quickly that being nice and playing nice will generally serve their interests. When a child wants something, we'll say to him: "what do you say?" And the answer is, of course, please! And then: "thank you." When a child has hurt another person, we tell him to say: "I'm sorry" or "I apologize."

Can any of these words be said without sincerity? Well, of course, they can. Jesus is interested that we do the right things for the right reasons. We are to attract the world to Jesus by the stark contrast of our loving behavior and heart. I think Jesus is simply saying here: "Christians can and should do better."

God's Way of Loving (as presented perfectly by Jesus) is:

II. Extravagant

A. Doing good to those without merit (**v.35a.**)

Luke 6:35a (NIV) ^{35a} But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.

How many times have you noticed that a good deed was done only to produce a debt or obligation? When someone is generous and kind to us our cynical natures wonder what's the catch. Try giving water away at Garrison Day. People are suspicious.

A number of the parables Jesus taught dealt with this very point. The offense of the vineyard workers who came late in the day yet received full wages would be one example. Luke tells a story that is frequently called *The Prodigal Son*. Talk about undeserving! Even God's man, Jonah, in the Old Testament complains about God's patience and grace toward Ninevah.

Matthew points it out, too: **Matthew 5:45bc (NIV)** He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

It seems grossly unfair to us after all we have done for God. Yet we forget that we are all sinners, none of us good on the basis of who we are or what we do.

If you think about it, Luke's concept here is really the essence of the Gospel.

God's Way of Loving (as presented perfectly by Jesus) is extravagant:

B. When it comes to reward (**v.35b**)

Luke 6:35b (NIV) ^{35b} Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, (i.e. Gentiles treated like Jews, family)

It is not that by acting a certain way we receive our reward and are adopted into the family. It is because we have been adopted that we are obligated to live our lives to honor our Heavenly Father.

Our reward has been made possible by Jesus who lived by His words. He gave up everything to come and live with us (**Philippians 2**). He was rejected, humiliated, slandered, blasphemed, beaten, crucified and died just to say *this is what I mean when I say I love you*. It is "in the context of rejection, Jesus calls for extraordinary trust in God. Disciples should reflect such love constantly." - Bock, *Luke*, p. 189

God's Way of Loving (as presented perfectly by Jesus) is:

III. Exemplary

A. Through man (**v.31**).

This is especially true for the non-Christian.

Luke 6:31 (NIV) ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Where can the unbeliever look for God? We hope the unsaved will be able to see Jesus in us. We not only bear His image, but we also carry His Spirit.

Our lives certainly are not perfect, but we do have opportunity to show God to others by the way we live among others. There are people watching how we will respond to the next adversity or trouble.

After Jesus washed his disciple's feet he said: **John 13:15 (NIV)** ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

The Apostle Paul said: **I Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)** ^{11:1}Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

I Timothy 1:15-16 (NIV) ¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that *in me*, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as *an example* for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

“To be his child is not only to be brought into a relationship where God has forgiven us; it is the beginning of a process of reflecting God's gracious, merciful, and forgiving character to the world. As we do so, we live out our call to be like him, to reflect his image. ‘Moral likeness proves parentage (Plummer, *Luke*, 189).”

- Bock, *Luke*, p. 191

It is time we regain the power of a good example and a life lived for God. It is time the church starts acting like the ideal for the N.T. Church in Scripture.

The other day I saw “a nine-pound sparrow walking down the street in front of my house, and I asked the sparrow, ‘Aren't you a little heavy?’

The sparrow said, ‘Yeah, that's why I'm out walking, trying to get some of this weight off.’ And I said, ‘Why don't you fly?’

The sparrow looked at me like I was stupid and said, ‘Fly? I've never flown. I could get hurt!’

I said, ‘What's your name?’

And he said, ‘Church.’

God's Way of Loving (as presented perfectly by Jesus) is exemplary:

B. Through God (vv.35c-36)!

This is especially true for the Christian.

Luke 6:35c-36 (NIV) ^{35c} because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

God has given us a perfect example of how we should live in relationship to others through Jesus.

Sometimes we can get discouraged because we fail to live up to His standards, but God also forgives and extends mercy to those who care enough to try. Because He gave himself for us and others, we can give His love to others for His glory.

There is a prayer that I pray probably 4-5 times a day. It is simple. "Lord, please help me to be the best witness I can be for you."

Matthew adds his part here: **Matthew 5:48 (NIV)** ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Again God is offered up as the example from which we are to pattern our lives. Maybe extending mercy to sinners is a way we are perfect in the eyes of the Father.

"Sometimes we hear of a lifeguard who risked his life to save someone from drowning. Say you're the lifeguard, and you've been watching a beautiful girl on the beach. She goes in the water, and the undertow begins *pulling* her out to sea. She calls for help. Will you go to rescue her? Probably you'd be out there in a flash!

But let's say that as you are sitting in your lifeguard tower you see a guy who wronged you terribly. He lied about you and stole your girl friend. Even worse, he caught you alone one night and beat you up, even though you did nothing to provoke him. He goes into the water and is drowning. Would you go to rescue him?" (story taken from *Radical Love*, a sermon by Steven J. Cole)

The Apostle Paul reminds us Jesus did exactly that:

Romans 5:6-8 (NIV) ⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

C. S. Lewis speaking about God said: "He loved us not because we were lovable, but because He is love."

God could overpower us, but chooses to allow us to come to our senses through an environment of love and offered forgiveness. But no one should confuse God's mercy with sloppy sentimentality or eternal tolerance. Love does not exclude discipline or judgment. Of the two thieves on the cross only one is rewarded explicitly. And a good example is only helpful if it is followed.

Conclusion: We are to follow God's example of loving! How do *we* love like this? Only with God's help and Spirit can a person intentionally live his life to glorify God. It seems to me there are a number of practical reasons for loving the way God does: it provides an example of the cost of discipleship for others to follow; it shows what God is like and finally we are promised a great reward. The reward, of course, is being included in God's family: sons and daughters of the Most High. Are you a part of God's family?