

Luke 6:27-31

27 "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you."

We get into a routine during Sunday morning worship. We do this, and then this, and we get used to each part in its place. When we do world communion Sunday once a year, we change the order of service. The purpose of this is to place a special emphasis on the Lords Supper. While we were planning the service this year I got to the *Prayer of Dedication* and I confess I had to ask "what is this?" In its place within the regular order of service in the bulletin we all know what it is. It is when we give thanks for the offering. However, when it was taken out of its context, I had to think about it. The routine is so ingrained within me that I could not remember what it was. When I looked it up in the bulletin from the previous week I was confronted with the obvious.

Today I will reread the Scripture because as it falls in its place, in its order of service, it becomes routine. I think this particular Scripture deserves to be emphasized. "But I say to you that listen. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you." This is Scripture that is very hard to follow.

When Jesus said "but I say to you that listen." What Jesus actually said has a different meaning depending upon how the words are emphasized. But **I** say, indicates authority. I am the one saying this; the teacher, the Messiah, the Son of God. But I say to **YOU**, indicates that it is you that he is talking to; he is not talking to the Pharisees or anyone else but you. But I say to you that **LISTEN**, indicates that others aren't paying a bit of attention. This lesson is for those of you that care enough to listen. This is for the interested audience as opposed to the critics and the skeptics who have their own agenda. I think it is this scenario - for those of you that will **listen**. It would be like saying "listen up this is a very profound lesson!" Love your enemies. That's just the beginning of the lesson. We can stop right there. If we are going to be honest we have failed already. If we made a promise to God - and we did. We made promise of loyalty to the word when we became Christians. We made a promise that we would live by the word of God and we meant it. Each and every one of us. If we made a promise to God to live by the word of God then we have to come to terms with where we are in our journey of faith. Your faith journey includes loving your enemies. It takes serious soul searching to live by this Scripture.

I was talking with a man recently and he was talking about how pastors have a difficult job. His church is going through some stress and there is currently high turnover of pastors. I said "I love it!" And then I added, "If you sincerely love the people and I mean all of the people, then it is very rewarding. I think one of the keys to successful ministry is a love for the people. If you are superficial they will pick up on it. If you are a showman they will sense it. If you are in it for a job or a career they will know it. Successful ministry requires sincere love for the people.

Do good to those who hate you is also hard to follow. Honestly, if you sincerely love all the people, then doing good for others is second nature. As a Christian you do not stop doing

good because of the nature of the other person. Caring for others is instinctive. You continue to do good because of your Christian nature. The same goes true for the rest of the commandments. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Turn the other cheek. Give away your own shirt. Give and don't ask for it back. All of these are hard to do. However, based on the principles of love, if you have sincere love for others, all others, then demonstrating love and kindness is in your nature. Yes, Jesus had hard lessons that are very hard to follow in real life. But, it comes easy when you live your life guided by love because God's way works.

Today I present to you a challenge. Apply this Scripture to your daily life starting right now. Bear with me a moment and close your eyes and think about it. Who is my enemy? Pick one. Do what you would do as if you are in a 12 step recovery program. Do step # 8 that is to make amends. Love them, do something good for them, pray for them. Then there is the golden rule - do to others as you would have them do to you.

I know as a pastor I am an inspiration for others. But I confess that I am a human being and I confess that I have human emotions and human weakness and like everyone else there are times when I fail to act like a Christian. Someone does not like you. Someone is rude or mean. You wish you could punish them. But in Bible study you learn - oh no, I have the wrong attitude. So, you pray for the other person as instructed in the Bible and you see that God's way works. The Apostle Paul was in prison. He could complain that he is innocent, a victim, there has been no crime committed. What he did is he encouraged and blessed the other prisoners. He blessed and encouraged the prison guards too and he made believers.

Jesus teaches us how to live in society; how to be the person that God wants us to be. We honor Jesus when we live by his teachings. We honor Jesus by obeying his lessons. We honor Jesus when we do what he taught. And we learn, sometimes the hard way, that God's way works. The Golden rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you) is a summary of the commandments that precede it. So what we have here is a lesson on the golden rule. Loving your enemies, doing good to everyone even those who hate you, blessing everyone even those who curse you, praying for everyone even those who abuse you, turning the other cheek, and giving to the beggar, are all lessons about doing to others as you would want them to do to you. They are very hard lessons to follow. But if you truly love Christ then you will truly love everyone, absolutely everyone. You will even love those that hate you or curse you or abuse you. When you love Christ and you love everyone else then following the commandments is easy because God's way works.