

Text: Luke 6:27-38

Title: The Ethics of Christ's Followers

Truth: We are like Jesus when we love our enemies, do good, and bear with evil. We are unlike Him when try to take His place as judge.

Date/Location: Sunday January 7, 2024 at FBC

Introduction: Kingdom Ethics?

My NKJV Study Bible has the heading "Rules of Kingdom Life" above this section of the text. This heading is a bit premature, because although Luke has mentioned the kingdom of God in 1:33, 4:43, and 6:20, Jesus does not say it is present or that we are in it now. He explains it and offers it and tells about the conduct of its citizens, but He does not say that it is inaugurated at the time when He spoke, nor even afterward.

Over the course of the remainder of the gospel, Jesus and our narrator Luke speak of the kingdom often.¹ Because the King himself was present, the kingdom had come very close (Luke 9:27, 10:9, 10:11, 11:20, 16:16, 17:21). But in fact, the kingdom would not appear immediately (19:11). His followers were to pray for it to come (11:2), to seek it (12:31), to know it would draw near once again in the future (21:31), and to look forward to the Lord again eating and drinking with them when the kingdom comes (22:16, 18, 30).²

Luke continues to speak about the kingdom in his second book, Acts, but the number of mentions of it are much fewer, numbering only eight or so,³ compared to his gospel's nearly four dozen. Luke records the Lord teaching on the kingdom for an extended period after the resurrection. We read of the apostles' question about the kingdom and the Lord's answer. That answer dismisses the disciples' inquiry about the *timing* by focusing their attention on

¹ Luke 7:28, 8:1, 8:10, 9:2, 9:11, 9:27, 9:60, 9:62, 10:9, 10:11, 11:2, 11:20, 12:31, 12:32, 13:18, 13:20, 13:28-29, 14:15, 16:16, 17:20-21, 18:16-17, 18:24-25, 18:29, 19:11-27, 21:31, 22:16, 22:18, 22:29-30, 23:42, 23:51.

² That Jesus says "I bestow upon you a kingdom" does not mean that the kingdom appears immediately. Rather, Jesus is *promising* them participation in the future kingdom in which they will sit on thrones judging Israel.

³ Acts 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31.

All Scripture is from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

the task God has assigned to them. But Jesus does not dismiss their notion about the kingdom coming at some point. Philip and Paul proclaimed the kingdom in their preaching, in a way which I believe is very much like what Jesus did.

What I am saying is that we are not in the spiritual or symbolic kingdom of Jesus. We are in the Church—in the church dispensation, carrying out the Great Commission. We plant new churches, not new departments of kingdom government or new states in the worldwide hegemony of King Jesus. The influence of the church is present, to be sure, but it is not worldwide or dominant as the Kingdom will be in the future.

But though we are not in the kingdom presently, every Christian has by second birth become a *citizen* of the kingdom that will appear in the future. This means we have a certain ethic, a certain morality, a certain code of conduct and thinking that our King Jesus commands us. Our focus should not be on eating and drinking, but on righteousness, peace, and joy. Our service then to Christ will be acceptable (Romans 14:17-18) and we will not bring a stain upon the reputation of the coming kingdom.

All the above explains how it is that we can read the Sermon on the Mount and other ethical teachings of Jesus without becoming all confused as to whether those teachings are for us, or only for those in the kingdom, or some of each. We must read carefully so as not to apply the texts in an over-broad way. For example, if a police officer must turn the other cheek, we would have anarchy.

Instead of focusing on “Kingdom Ethics” let us call this message more generally “The Ethics of Christ’s Followers.”

I. Disposition Toward Enemies, 6:27-31

The kind of person who is poor in spirit, who hungers for righteousness, who weeps over the condition of the world, and who is persecuted for the sake of Christ, is a person who wants to be like His Lord. So, Jesus teaches His people what our life should look like when interacting with those who are *not* followers of God.

The principles we learn here are binding on *all* people no matter if they are followers of Jesus or not. It is like any general law of God;

if you disobey, you are guilty. If you are not a Christian, you may bristle at that thought, but that is because your nature has not been transformed and your thinking is not in line with God. You possess the same nature that you had when you came into the world, one that leans decidedly against God's ways. Your mind needs to be re-tooled to understand that these are the best ways to live. If you are a follower of Jesus, you will naturally gravitate toward His teaching. In other words, you will hear his voice (John 10:27).

In a series of five quick statements, the Lord teaches us:

- A. Love your enemies. What is love? Loving one's neighbor is important, but it is not complete (Lev. 19:34). Jesus does not tell us to close our eyes to their evil, or pretend they are fine, or be a weakling, or give up our morals, or excuse their behavior. See an example in John 18:23. Yes, you *can* tell a wicked person they are acting wickedly—that is love! But the way to help them is not to *harm* them, and it is not to *hate* them! If you hate those who hate you, you are just like them!
- B. Do good to those who hate, not evil. 1 Peter 3:8-12 teach us this too because Peter would have us inherit a blessing. If you behave like evil people, returning bad for bad, you are no better than they are. Instead, overcome evil with good Rom. 12:21.
- C. Bless those who curse. Say something nice; do something helpful. Do not return fire for fire, or eye for eye, or tooth for tooth, or stripe for stripe, or brand for brand. You are supposed to be a Christ-follower, not a jerk!
- D. Pray for those who use you. They need God to intervene in their lives more than you need to be "un-used."
- E. Humbly submit when wronged. You could be wronged by someone striking you or taking something from you. Your dignity or private property is not worth sacrificing love and testimony and dignity of Christ. Your property belongs to Him, and if you are persecuted for His sake, it is not your honor that is impugned.
- F. These are instructions for individuals in individual settings of personal rights, not for nations with criminals or nations with other

nations in military conflict. Nor do they prohibit self defense in criminal situations where the likely outcome is beyond a slap on the face or an insult. If it is great bodily harm or death, then self-defense is permissible, and I would say, required to prevent the outcome that is displeasing to God.

- G. Giving. We naturally want to put some kind of fence around this, and such a fence is sensible, say if the limitation has to do with someone who asks *reasonably*. A person who asks something outlandish or who does not have legitimate need is not to be catered to. Jesus is talking about someone who has a real need and who asks for help. This assumes that the needy person is self-sufficient, as much as possible in the circumstances, and has enough “pride” that he would not ask for a handout when he is not being diligent in his life. However, we cannot put so much of a fence around this instruction that we do not obey it at all! If we did that, we would be like the Pharisees and scribes who nullified the word of God with their clever traditions (Mark 7:9-13).
- H. Deny self to help the sinner get to know God. Here is the thing: the goal is not to vindicate oneself. God will take care of that. The goal is not to feel powerful and great or morally superior or smug. The goal is to win other people to the Lord and to honor God along the way.
- I. Golden rule. You might formulate it the opposite way: “If you do not want someone to do something to you, don’t do it to them either.” That phrasing would, if followed, tend to reduce injurious behavior, but it would not produce as much positive good. Jesus made it *more* by stating it positively. “Just as you want men to do you, you also do to them likewise.”

II. Being Like God Has Great Reward, 6:32-36

- A. The Lord Jesus next deals with a widespread problem: a truncation of his teaching to make it apply only to those who are nice to us. Human nature in its sinful state is not “programmed” to do what He teaches above.
- B. There is something deeply wrong with loving only those who love you, or doing good only to those who do good to you. Unbelieving

people do that all the time, with no effort, and like doing it. If all we do is behave like they do, that is no credit. Sinners do the same. Lending to those who will give it back is not difficult.

- C. Character is on display best when conditions are worst.
- D. The Lord reiterates that we are supposed to love our enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return. Those are the ways to express our faith in God and to receive a great reward in heaven. Further, it is a way to demonstrate that you are a son of the Father, because as a son you will share His character. For God is kind and merciful to every person, even those who are ungrateful and evil. That common grace is amazing and challenges to us to conduct ourselves likewise.
- D. We are all too likely to hate those who are evil and have no place of compassion in our hearts for them. Sins which we think are particularly egregious or stupid in others are especially difficult for us to overcome so that we can show true compassion toward them. It should be helpful to remember that *all* our sins are egregious to God, yet He had mercy upon us. He did not only send sunshine and rain on the good people; He did not only give life and health and food and air to His friends. He loved us while we were enemies.
- E. If you live by faith like that, God will reward you. The timing of the reward is not guaranteed: the reward may come in part in this life and in part in the next, or all in the next. But it will come.

III. Evil Judgment Forbidden, 6:37-38

- A. The Lord gives four more quick statements: Judge not, condemn not, forgive, give. If you do these things, you will experience a merciful judgment, not condemnation, forgiveness, and reward.
- B. Lack of compassion toward those who are unthankful and evil creates an evil judgmental attitude.

We must be clear that the Bible does not condemn all judgment. Discernment and judgment between right and wrong must occur. Even in this passage, the Lord is saying that we are wrong if we act in un-godlike ways.

With that as context, we discern that the Lord is saying to us that we are not to judge others outside of those boundaries. What He means is that we are not to judge in a harsh, hyper-critical, hypocritical, censorious way, lest we ourselves be judged with a similar kind of severity. We are not to condemn others lest we too be condemned. We might be like the massively forgiven servant who went out and condemned a fellow servant for a far smaller infraction. In such a case, God will turn the tables and we will face a harsher judgment (Matthew 18:21-35).

- C. Two interesting thoughts about this. **First**, when the Lord says, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged,” you cannot use this in a way to excuse yourself from future judgment. God appoints to us to die and then judgment at the bench of the perfect Judge. I imagine someone erroneously thinking that they will never judge others, be genuinely nice, never condemnatory toward another person, and then think that because they have not judged others, they will escape future judgment also. That is an improper use of the Lord’s words.
- D. **Second**, when the Lord says this, He *does* mean what He says. With the judgment that we use, we too will be judged (Matt. 7:2). If we are harsh and unmerciful, then we can expect similar. “Out of our own mouths” we will be judged (Luke 19:22, James 2:13).
- E. This is about our attitude. Do we in our minds set ourselves up as judges, or do we humbly keep to our own business and relationship with the Lord? The Lord is talking to disciples and is showing them how to relate to non-disciples, toward enemies and sinners. He is calling them to leave judgment in the hand of God.
- F. An example: you look at a person living in sin and ask how they could go to heaven if they “just say they believe in Jesus.” You are demonstrating an attitude of judgment, taking the place of God— James 4:11.
 - 1. In the first place, that is a mischaracterization of the gospel. One enters the blessing of the gospel by belief in Christ, but that is not all that happens! What comes with true faith is conviction and much grief over sin; repentance and transformation; regeneration and the indwelling of God’s Spirit; the forgiveness

of Christ because He paid for that sinner's sins on the cross of Calvary; and the constituting of that person right in the sight of God based on righteousness imputed / credited to that person.

2. In the second place, that attitude is wrong because you likely have little to no idea what that person's life is like, what their thoughts are on the inside, what battles they are facing, what liabilities they have had over the years of their life, what harms others have done to them, etc. You simply do not know enough to be a good judge. You cannot know enough to put all the facts together to make a proper estimation of the situation.
3. Third, you are not holy enough to be a good judge. Your judgment is clouded in some measure by sin.
4. Fourth and finally, you are not a god. You are not a judge. You do not have the right to judge, at least yet.⁴ You are a servant. You are a fellow human. A fellow *sinner*. A finite little person. Cool your heels on judging others, meddling in their business, and instead focus on your own life and family and serving in the church. I notice a tendency in people that looks outward to criticize others, but not much looking inward to see and fix the problems that are in their own lives. Some of us have big complaints and/or grand solutions about the world's political and economic problems, but we cannot keep our own house in order! If you do not have the little things right, how do you expect to have solutions for the important things?

Conclusion

The end of the matter is that the Lord promises a great reward in heaven, primarily that you will be related to God as true sons. For those who give and forgive and are merciful, they will receive a great reward. Jesus highlights the generosity of the reward with the phrases (1) good measure—a lot; (2) pressed down—well-packed; (3) shaken together—to remove the air pockets;

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 indicates that some believers will in the future judge the world and angels. The apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).

(4) running over—over-flowing the top edge of the container. If you measure out that way, you will receive that way.

But is this realistic? Can someone really live like this without being ruined or treaded down like a doormat? Many Christians have demonstrated it is possible, even in the face of bad persecution. Jesus Himself did so: 1 Peter 2:19-23.

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