

Loving your enemies – Luke 6:27-42

Jesus' instruction to His disciples on dealing with those against them, and even those with them who slip and fall, provides us with a wonderful example of applying God's love in our everyday walk.

The passage covers a lot of ground and can be broken into three parts: dealing with those blatantly opposing us; dealing with those in whom we share in some mutual way; and the consequence of our choice.

As a timeless God who is no respecter of persons (Act 10:34), the word Jesus spoke will apply to us today just as it did to the original listeners. In the case of this Scripture, it is easy to see Christ speaking directly to us, too.

On turning the other cheek.

Why would Jesus ask, no, command us, to treat people kindly when they so openly abuse us? As God's servants, He seeks to use us to convey and advance the Kingdom. This is the reason He has provided us with every tool necessary to address the world in a winning way.

At first glance, the persons described here deserve anything we might level against them as an enemy. However, in seeing ourselves as the perpetrator against Christ, who God wants us to follow in deed and action, we in turn get a vivid picture of Him dealing with us despite our best efforts to treat Him as the enemy. God's character dictates He keeps coming back with open arms regardless of our transgressions against Him time and time again.

Remember, He was giving instruction to His disciples on how to deal with others – and as disciples, He sought to have each be 'perfectly trained (to) be like his teacher' (v. 40). No matter how we cross Him, He will turn the other cheek and offer His tunic – exactly as He expects us to apply it in our lives in the same way.

On loving those who love us.

At first, God appears to be contradicting what we would expect of Him throughout Scripture. But consider the context of the passages – again, as disciples we are invited to the front lines of the Kingdom, where the warm loving embrace of God is behind us and the frontier of the world is before us.

If we are in our right place to do the work of advancing the Kingdom, we will be exercising Jesus' command to act in love and turn the other cheek. However, if we find ourselves only dealing with those we love and who love us, we can't expect credit because we are within our own friendly territory, not facing the challenges of the frontier. Dealing only with those whom from which we expect a reciprocal deed is not facing the challenge. Jesus expects us to throw ourselves into the thick of it all, especially where we have no reason to expect a like kind return.

God's movement in my life, and my subsequent growth, is seldom in my 'comfort zone'. Since God seeks to transform us, He ventures into the wilderness of our person, sets up camp, and continues to wait in reassuring love for us to turn to Him. And when we do embrace Him, where He stood waiting where He had no earthly reason to expect a return on His investment of Divine Love, our Christian life takes one step further and there is no longer frontier there but another advancement of His Kingdom (Matt 6:10). And guess what happens next – He pulls up camp and moves still farther out into the frontier again in selfless, loving service to us! That's God's best, God's love, His faith and trust in us, always faithfully hoping we will accept His invitation to move further ahead into His waiting arms. 'Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.' (v. 36)

On the consequences of accepting the call of discipleship

Verse 38 promises an overflowing return from God as your reward, still another example of His increase resultant of our faithful heed to His command. Our stores are in Heaven, and God delights in rewarding His children. Following Christ's example, an example put to us of perfectly obeying the Father's will, pleases God and brings His blessings 'pressed down, shaken together, and running over.' (v. 38a)

Applying this in our lives

A friend of mine, vacationing in San Francisco walked with his family through the Warf. Among the attractions many panhandlers tool the tourists for handouts as they pass by. His young daughter approached one such man, who, quite wretched and foul smelling, snarled "Get the hell out of the way, you're standing in my light!!" Nearly moved to confront this man, he instead steered them across the street to see a vendor. As an artist sketched their characitures, his daughter asked for a dollar so she might give it to not just any panhandler, but to her father's dismay the very one that dealt with her so badly. Anyone but him he demanded! But, promising to repay, she reasoned successfully that it was hers to spend, and this was the only man she would give it to --and she did just that.

Through the actions of a child, inexperienced to the world and as a result unjaded, we get a glimpse of real love in action. And action is the key. The love God commands of us is not a warm feeling, but an action of love, an action of service.

That mean, wretched beggar is any one of us in the sight of God, as we all fall short of His Glory (Rom 3:23). In an innocent approach, he answered with a smart slap to her cheek, and she responded by turning the other to him. Who of us has not turned Jesus away in a stinging choice of something else above Him? And who of us has ever found Jesus to be anything less than ready and willingly there when we repent and turn to Him?

She might have gone to any other beggar there. Of the hundreds among the mean one, she could have easily found a grateful soul who would have returned her effort in much gratitude. Yet instead, she pushed the envelope and attempted to further the Kingdom into the uncertain and hostile frontier.

She only gave him a dollar, yet she gave much more than that. She shared God's love with someone she had every reason to expect nothing in return from, perhaps even another dose of abuse. To the jaded world foolishness; to our Lord a good job of discipleship. A job well done, a job to be expected of a Christian.