



Sunday School Lesson for January 13, 2008
Released on January 9, 2008

"Responding to Opposition"

Printed Text: Luke 6:27-36

Background Scripture: Luke 6:27-36

Devotional Reading: Psalm 37:1-11

Luke 6:27–36

27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.

30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Today's Aim

Facts: to demonstrate how Jesus expected the Golden Rule to be applied in everyday life.

Principle: to understand how love is foundational in relating to friends and even enemies.

Application: to learn how to use love to enhance the lives of those contacted by believers.

Introduction

The life of the godly has never been easy. Because of the rebellious nature of sinful humanity, no one enjoys being rebuked by the words or the life of a godly person. So it is normal for God's people to be opposed and persecuted.

Scripture cites numerous examples of faithful prophets who suffered horribly at the hands of wicked rulers. Jesus, the ultimate witness to truth, was hated, maligned,

and executed. He warned His followers that they could expect nothing better (John 15:18-16:3).

His prophecy came to pass. Early Christian believers were persecuted, and not until the fourth century did the church enjoy an extended rest. Since then the message and lives of Christians have invited opposition from every apostate and decadent society on earth. How should disciples of Jesus respond to such opposition? Evil can be overcome only by rising to the higher standard of this week's lesson.

Lesson Background

This week's passage is an excerpt from Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49). The sermon is dominated by a beatitude section (Luke 6:20-38) that is very similar to that in Matthew 5. It is important to consider the background of the sermon as a whole in order to develop a context for our passage today.

After His baptism (Luke 3:21) and temptation (Luke 4:1, 2), Jesus returned to Nazareth. There He announced the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1, 2 (Luke 4:18, 19). News about Him spread rapidly, and He began to perform miracles to affirm His identity (Luke 4:31-41). Then He selected His disciples. He further affirmed His identity in debates with the Pharisees and by healing people (Luke 5).

Luke 6:1-11 begins to show us that Jesus' understanding of the law was different from that of the Pharisees with whom He debated. Jesus deliberately did things on the Sabbath that certain Pharisees believed to be unlawful. Jesus informed the Pharisees that their understanding of the law was the reverse of what it should be. This is important because the sermon in Luke 6:20-49 presents the proper way to think about how God expects us to live.

Somewhere along the way, religious leaders had begun to teach that godly behavior was based in following minute details of the law. Jesus announced that the details must fit within a bigger picture (compare Luke 11:42).

As Jesus and His apostles came down from a mountain, they were met by a large crowd of people (Luke 6:12-19). They tried to get close to Jesus—to hear Him, touch Him, and be healed by Him. Although the sermon was "in the audience of the people" (Luke 7:1), we find that Jesus turned and directed His sermon toward the disciples (Luke 6:20). The sermon presented the way to think about the law and what it meant to follow and honor God. Those disciples eventually ended up being leaders of the church. So how did Jesus instruct them on how to live before God?

A Call to a Radical Response (Luke 6:27-31)

1. What were the circumstances in which Jesus gave the teachings in this week's lesson?

The teachings of Jesus in this week's text are recorded in a broader setting that begins with His choosing of the twelve apostles (vss. 13-16). These men accompanied Him as He descended from a mountain and stood on a plain (or plateau) (vs. 17). There they were joined by a larger group of disciples and a huge crowd that had come to hear Him and be healed (vss. 17-19).

Jesus gave this diverse group a series of blessings and woes, a call to love and mercy, and a series of parables related to the reception or rejection of His teaching. What Luke recorded includes much of the same teaching as Jesus' Sermon on the

Mount (Matt. 5-7). The exhortations in our text, constituting the heart of this teaching, tell disciples how to respond to others, especially their enemies.

When Jesus said, "But I say unto you which hear" (Luke 6:27), He was addressing those who not only heard Him speak but also heeded what He said (cf. Matt. 18:15-16; Acts 28:28). They had a genuine desire to be His disciples. He exhorted, "Love your enemies" (Luke 6:27). The love of which Jesus spoke is love produced by an act of the will, not by the attractiveness of another person or the expectation of love in return.

2. What did Jesus mean by "do good to them which hate you?" (Luke 6:27)

Jesus tells the listener in verse 28 to "do good to them which hate you." The normal response to someone who hates you is to hate him or her right back. If people do nasty things to us, we naturally are not very likely to respond by doing things that are genuinely in their best interest! But the life of Jesus provides an example of how love-as-sacrifice reveals itself. By commanding us to *do good to them which hate you*, Jesus is asking us to sacrifice our feelings and indignation on the altar of obedience to Him.

We must be careful to note that Jesus is not saying, "Don't hate them back." He is requiring us to go beyond not hating—actually to go so far as to do good for them! Further, the underlying language suggests that Jesus is not talking about just one act of kindness. Rather, He is referring to an entire way of life that is characterized by doing good to those who hate us, as difficult as this may be to implement.

3. How can we bless those who curse us without condoning their actions? (vs. 28)

Those who curse are invoking supernatural power to bring calamity on someone, and one who is so treated is tempted to respond in kind. But the Christian is to respond by invoking God's favor on such a person (cf. Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12). This does not mean we condone his evil but that we turn his evil over to God. He will avenge as He sees fit (Rom. 12:19), but we should desire only his good.

It is okay to hate the action, but not the person. Wrong acts should still be declared sin, but the person should still see the love in us. Remember that God loved us in our sins, but He loved us too much to allow us to remain in our sins. Christians must seek to save lost souls so that they can be empowered by God to receive deliverance from their sins.

4. How should we respond to those who abuse us?

The Lord also urged that we "pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:28). Both Jesus and Stephen did this when they prayed for their tormenters (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). Today prayer continues to be the duty of all who for Christ's sake are verbally or physically abused. In His grace, God may convict and transform the abuser, perhaps even using our exemplary witness to bring him to his senses. Jesus commanded us to return good for evil not because doing so would earn us merit, preserve social unity, or induce others to treat us well in return. Rather, He commanded us to do it because it gives evidence of our spiritual lineage. It reflects the nature of our heavenly Father.

5. What illustrations did Jesus give on how radical love would look in practice? (vs. 29)

First, Jesus said, "Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other" (v. 29). The idea in this and the following verse is contrary to the cultural ideal today that we should demand that others observe our personal rights. Once again Jesus is calling us to have a sacrificial attitude. We are commanded to surrender our instinctive reaction toward an enemy for an entirely different response.

Jesus also commanded, "And him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also" (Luke 6:29). This refers to the two garments a man normally wore. The "cloke" was the outer garment, and the "coat" the inner one. The outer garment was long, and the inner one was a shorter shirt, or tunic. Jesus was describing a robbery. The thief grabs the outer garment. The victims normal instinct would be to seek revenge or to try to regain his possession.

The key lesson is that Jesus' disciples should be willing to suffer loss and should not curtail their ministry to others in order to avoid it. Reaching people for Christ necessitates vulnerability. Sadly, some will take advantage of us as they did of Jesus. If we allow a bad experience to make us focus on protecting ourselves, we may be safer, but we will also lose our witness to others.

6. Can a generous Christian avoid being used? (vs. 30)

"Give to every man that asketh of thee," said Jesus, "and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again" (Luke 6:30). We may ask ourselves how the behavior proposed in this verse 30 even possible! Is Jesus saying that if someone asks me for my home and all of my possessions, then I am to give it all away with a smile?

Keep in mind that Jesus is further developing the idea of love. In so doing, He is saying that our attitude toward our possessions, our sense of entitlement, should not get in the way of our ability to exhibit Christian love. Christian love cannot work in a context where we privilege ourselves over others.

7. What is Jesus' governing principle of human relations? (vs. 31)

The radical responses Jesus called for are based on a principle that He now stated: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Jesus made "The Golden Rule" the governing principle for all human relations.

In Jesus' day, there are two forms of this rule floating around: a negative form and a positive form. The negative form is something like, "don't do bad things to others lest others do bad things to you." This form is popular in both Judaism and in the wider Greco-Roman world of the first century.

Jesus stresses the positive form of the Golden Rule. This is the less common but not unknown form at the time. The positive form has a different function: it shifts the focus from self to others. The negative form says, "Keep yourself safe by not stirring up trouble"; the positive form that Jesus uses says, "The way you treat others should be based on how you would like to be treated."

That Jesus uses the less common form demonstrates that He is not just tossing around a popular cliché. Furthermore, the positive form of the Golden Rule reflects the values Jesus has been developing throughout His sermon. In particular, it reflects the idea that our actions toward others cannot be based on how we have been treated so far. Again, we see a reflection of the sacrificial attitude that is required by Christian love.

A Call to a Higher Standard (Luke 6:32-34) -Proper Motive

8. Why is good treatment of our peers not worthy of reward? (vs. 32-34)

Each of the verses before us contains the phrase *what thank have ye?* This means something like "why should you get any recognition for doing that?" Returning love for love, good for good, and stuff for stuff is what *sinners* themselves are very capable of doing. That's just natural. But Christians are to go above and beyond this.

When Jesus commands us to live according to the Golden Rule, we should be careful to note that He does not promise that people will respond in kind. The rule is a command from our Lord to act toward others in a specific way, regardless of their response. It is, therefore, not based on a desire to make our lives easier. The single point in these three verses is that the Golden Rule is a norm for *our* behavior and lifestyle. As such, the way we implement this rule is not dependent upon the actions of those whom we are called to love. Since this was humanly unnatural and impossible, this would show the reality of God's power within them. Thus, it would testify of God's love towards humanity.

9. In the twenty-first century, what does loving, doing good for, or giving to people who can return the favor look like? How does that contrast with Jesus' example?

Secular publications have plenty of ideas on how to use a "network" of people to exchange career-building favors! Yet Jesus exchanged Heaven for a manger. He released His grip on equality with God to be bound by a physical body. He muted the songs of angels to hear the mocking of the soldiers, the cursing of the thief, the rejection of the people, the denial of Peter, and the betrayal of Judas. He embraced the thorns, the whips, and the cross for us. Which of us can return the favor to Him?

There is no way to pay Jesus back for what He has given us. Perhaps we can say that Jesus has asked us to "pay it forward." Visiting an AIDS patient in the hospital, spending time with a prisoner in jail, or volunteering in a nursing home will probably not be rewarded by an approving public. Sometimes it may not even be appreciated by other church members. It will be seen by God and honored by Him

A Character of Divine Origin (Luke 6:35-36)

10. How did Jesus say we should treat our enemies? (vs. 35, 36)

The final two verses of our lesson sum up Jesus' teaching on the believer's response to opposition. They also add the reason we should be able to live by a higher standard. We are exhorted again to love our enemies, to do good, and to lend without expectation of future favors.

In repeating these commands, Jesus also attached a promise—"and your reward shall be great" (Luke 6:35). In contrast to those who loved, worked, and lent for purely human motives (vs. 32-34), the one who lived on a higher plane would receive recognition. And this recognition would come from the heavenly Father Himself. Here is a paradox: the disciple who serves Christ in true love seeks no reward; yet God takes note and eventually rewards him abundantly.

We must take care not to misunderstand when Jesus said, "And ye shall be the children (sons) of the Highest" (Luke 6:35). Being sons of God is not a reward for treating our fellow men well. Rather, our good deeds are the *evidence* of our divine pedigree. As sons of the Highest, we display His nature, "for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." In Matthew's account, Jesus is even more specific: He sends sunshine and rain on both evil and good, just and unjust (5:45).

Do we want others to know that we are God's children? They will believe it only when His gracious love is manifested in our human relationships. At times we have difficulty showing love even to fellow believers. How much more of a challenge to love those who mistreat us! Yet without this evidence, the world will never know what God is like.

Jesus said to be merciful just as God the Father is merciful. Mercy is God's characteristic of showing His goodness to those who are in misery or distress. It is significant that this is the way He deals with those who oppose Him. Instead of immediately punishing evil-doers, He pities them and seeks through kindness to bring them to their senses before His judgment must fall on them.

This mercy is the pattern for us. If a merciful God is our spiritual Father, we should reveal His nature by being merciful ourselves. Compassion, pity, patience, and long-suffering ought to be hallmarks of the Christian's life. This will not be easy, for we still live in sinful flesh. But we have the assurance that the One whose nature we share is willing to share His strength as well if we claim it by faith.

Conclusion –

A good Old Testament example of good overcoming evil is found in 2 Kings 6:18-23. Elisha treated the Syrians with mercy. The classic New Testament passage on this subject is Romans 12:17- 21. As time allows, have your class look at these Scriptures and realize their worth for spiritual development.

Seek to make this lesson relevant to your students by challenging them to look for ways to overcome evil with goodness. If possible, make time during the next class period to report on their experiences.

Prayer

Our loving Father, thank You for exhibiting true love to us through Jesus. Please help us to love as He loved because that kind of love is so difficult. In Jesus' name and by His love we pray, amen.

Thought to Remember

Love doesn't always feel good, but love always is good.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

As students of history, we are aware of people who faced predicaments from which they despaired of being extracted so that life could be normal again. Analyze Luke 11:5-13 to learn how to get out of tight situations. What help can they depend on receiving from personal ingenuity, other human beings, and God Himself?

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