

June 26, 2022

HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Luke 6:12-49

(12 of 12 in a series through Luke 1-6)

In 1976 Francis Schaeffer wrote a book analyzing the history of Western Civilization and exploring how believers should live in light of these developments. The book was appropriately titled, *How Should We Then Live?* I think that title could be a helpful heading for our text this morning, Luke 6:12-49. After showing us who Jesus is, how he called his followers to himself, and how he confronted the scribes and Pharisees, Luke compiles some teaching from Jesus' ministry in order to instruct us—Jesus' followers—in how we're supposed to live.

And as we look at his teaching to his followers, what we're going to see is that it cuts quite contrary to the way we naturally analyze the world, the way we naturally think of treating others, and the way that we naturally think of ourselves. In each of these areas Jesus calls us to adopt a way of thinking and living that stands contrary to the way the world works and, consequently, calls us to stand out in a distinct way from the world.

Luke sets us up to hear Jesus' instructions on how Jesus' followers are supposed to live by beginning this section with a summary of those whom Jesus called to be his followers. He tells us that Jesus had called many to be his disciples but chose from among that group twelve to be his apostles to whom he would ultimately reveal himself and all truth through his Holy Spirit so that the Scripture might be written and provided to us—as an infallible and authoritative word for us.

So, after calling a number of disciples and the apostles to himself, he gathered them—with a great multitude of others listening in—and began to teach them what it means to follow Jesus as Lord. And in light of the fact that we claim to be followers of Christ ourselves, what Jesus taught them in this text is crucially important for us to know, understand, and apply. What then did he tell them? I'll group his teaching under three headings. First, Jesus calls us to live with eternity in mind.

Jesus calls us to live with eternity in mind

As Jesus begins to teach his disciples, he notes that they are blessed, though they may well fall into categories that don't look very blessed to others in this world. Those whom he identifies as blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned on account of Jesus. Now, again, these don't sound like very blessed categories. I don't know many who get excited about being poor, hungry, crying, or being hated, excluded, reviled, or spurned.

But notice the use of the word "now" in verse 21. He calls "blessed" those who are hungry *now* and who weep *now*. By contrast, see how he uses the future tense in that same verse as he

speaks of their blessing. He declares, “You *shall be* satisfied, and you *shall* laugh.” Jesus is saying that what we are experiencing now isn’t a reflection of what we’ll experience in eternity. In fact, it’s the direct opposite. Those who are poor now are those who see their need for Jesus. That’s most likely why Jesus identifies this specific group as being blessed. There’s no inherent good in being poor, necessarily, so that you and I should strive to attain poverty. Nor is it the case that everyone who is poor now will be blessed in eternity. But, generally speaking, those who are poor know they are in a place of need, and that is what each of us needs to realize if we’re going to come to Christ in repentance and faith. And for them, Jesus tells us that will inherit the kingdom God. This realization of our need is also present with those who are hungry or who weep. They may be low now, but their lowliness has led them to see their need for Christ, and so they will inherit the kingdom, shall be satisfied, and shall laugh in eternity.

This is even true when following Jesus makes us the object of hatred, exclusion, and reviling. Jesus says that we should rejoice when this happens to us now because our reward is great in heaven. Moreover, we can see in this that we’re in the same company as the prophets. They too were reviled, but now they’re with the Lord.

This reality of eternal blessedness is what Jesus directs his disciples to keep in mind. We’re to live in light of eternity. Weigh our situations in light of eternity. It is indeed true that if there weren’t such a thing as eternal blessedness with our Lord then many of us would no doubt merely see our lives as filled with sorrow and loss. After all, that is the reality of this world on this side of eternity. However, the Scripture reminds us that our suffering, sorrow, and loss now is only light and momentary compared to the glory of what is coming and will eternally be ours.

But Jesus also announces the contrast. Just as he announces those who are blessed, he announces those who will face judgment as he pronounces “woes” on those who are rich, full, laugh, and are spoken well of. As you can see, these are basically the opposite. In these cases, Jesus is saying, “You may be living in such a way that you have all you want in this life, but you’ll see in the next that your eternity will not be what you desire. You’ll weep, mourn, be hungry, and know you’re under God’s judgment.” Moreover, you’ll see that you’re in the same place as the false prophets, whom everyone spoke well of in this life but faced God’s judgment in the end. It’s the same theme we see throughout the Scripture. You can make your life about following Jesus, and you’ll get this world’s attacks. You may well be left poor, hungry, crying, and reviled. But in the end, you’ll know that you’re the object of the Jesus’ eternal love. Or, you can seek after what this world can give, and you may well receive all the approval this world hands out. But in the end, you’ll face the wrath of the Son of God for eternity.

So do not judge life with this life only in mind. Live with eternity in mind. This is what Jesus demands of his followers. We spend our money thinking of its eternal impact. We choose our words based on their eternal impact. We choose what we watch, what we do, and the relationships we choose based on their eternal impact. We willingly make sacrifices now because we understand what eternity will bring. And, especially in light of the loss we’ve walked through recently as a church, we mourn now, knowing that eternity is coming, and there will be no more sorrow, pain, death, or tears there. We mourn in hope—in hope of eternity. So,

remember Jesus' words. Remember what he demands of his followers. He tells us to live now in light of eternity in everything we do. And, second, Jesus calls us to love our enemies.

Jesus calls us to love our enemies

Just when you thought, "Okay, that's hard, but maybe I can do that, Jesus adds more." But remember, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Not only is he actually calling us to do what is best for us and what will bring eternal blessing—which means his demands are no ultimate sacrifice for us—but he'll equip and strengthen and enable us by his Spirit. But let's look at his command to love our enemies.

Jesus tells his disciples, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (vv. 27-28). Clearly, when I say "love our enemies," I'm merely summarizing all that Jesus says here, for he says more than simply to love them but specifically shows us ways to love them. And I believe that Jesus is speaking in the context of when we face persecution for being followers of Christ. Let me give you a few reasons why I think this is the case. First, he's just spoken to his disciples about being persecuted on account of Christ as the prophets were. Second, the actions he notes happening to us would fall under the category of persecution. He mentions being struck on the cheek and having our cloak taken from us. Now, we might say that verse 30 isn't in the context of persecution because Jesus merely mentions one who "begs from you," but the word translated "begs" could also be translated "demands" (see Luke 23:23), and I think that's the best translation in this context. John Calvin agreed, writing in his commentary on this verse, "[I]t may readily be inferred from the context, that Luke does not here speak of a request to obtain assistance, but of actions at law, which bad men raise for the purpose of carrying off the property of others."¹ Moreover, Jesus will follow these commands that I'm saying deal with persecution by saying in verse 32, "If you love those who love you," insinuating that the group he's telling us to love in verses 27-31 aren't those who love us but who are against us. Jesus is telling us to love those who most definitely do not love us and even want our harm.

So, with that in mind, Jesus tell us to do something utterly unnatural. When being persecuted, our response isn't to match hate for hate, curse for curse, and abuse for abuse. Rather, we seek to love our enemies, do good to them, bless them, and pray for them. We act toward them as we wish they acted toward us. Isn't that what he's telling us to do in verse 31? Too many times we apply this verse merely to remind ourselves to be gracious to people who aren't our enemies, but think of the power of this text in regard to our enemies. No doubt there are many testimonies from those who once opposed Christians who are now themselves Christians in no small measure because those believers loved them, did good to them, prayed for them, and treated their enemies the way they wish they were treating them.

¹John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint ed., 1981) 16:300, quoted in Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke 1-13* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2021), 116.

Now, this doesn't mean that we have to press every response literally so that if someone who hates Christians wrote an article saying we should give our houses to our enemies that we just at that, give away our houses, voluntarily throw in all our possessions, and the like so that we walk around naked, starving, and homeless. Nor do I think Jesus' intention in this text is to forbid the believer from practicing self-defense. One key reason I don't think that's the case is because Paul rightly appealed to the law as an act of self-defense to stop being hit in the face before Ananias (Acts 23:2-5). It seems that Jesus is pressing some things in extreme ways (as he does in telling us to pluck out our eyes or cut off our hands). He pushes the extreme in some ways to show that we must take radical measures to make sure that we're not matching rage for rage and curse for curse but are showing kindness and grace in the face of hatred and rage, even as Jesus describes our Heavenly Father as being "kind to the ungrateful and the evil" (v. 35).

Moreover, we show mercy and forgiveness to others when they've wronged and attacked us. Jesus says in verse 37, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven." As we all know, the first part of that verse is often quoted by individuals who do not want to be corrected when walking in sin, but clearly Jesus is not teaching there is not occasion for judgment. After all, the church is commanded to judge those professing believers who are walking in unrepentant sin (1 Cor 5), and we can't preach the gospel without declaring the judgment of the Lord that rests on the unrepentant and unbelieving. But I think the point is clear in how he ends the verse, saying, "Forgive and you will be forgiven." What Jesus is forbidding is withholding forgiveness and judging one as being unworthy of mercy and forgiveness.

If we live our lives judging others as being unworthy of mercy or forgiveness, then Jesus declares that this standard will be measured toward us as well (v. 38). If we refuse to forgive, we will know the Lord's just judgment, but if we show mercy and forgiveness, then we will see it heaped upon us in good measure by our Lord as well.

But the point of all of this is that this will lead us to stand out in this world. As Jesus notes in verses 32-36, the whole world is made up of people who love those who love them and who do good to those who do good to them. But that's not what Jesus is calling us to do. He's calling us to love, pray for, bless, and do good to those who hate us and try to do evil to us, even forgiving them as they wrong us.

Now, perhaps it's worth us reflecting on what this looks like in our setting. When you're at work or school and people mock you for your faith, you don't retaliate. In fact, you do the opposite. You do good to them. You love them. You pray for them. You find yourself praying for those who are leading the sexual revolution and seek to love them, even while working against their causes and seeking to stop their aims because we love our neighbors and know that they are working toward their destruction. In other words, we seek to stop the evildoer always in love for our neighbor, but we also act in love toward them, pray for them, and are ready and eager to show mercy and forgiveness to them as they repent. And if we do these things, we'll stand out in this world as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I know it is difficult, but if we don't find Jesus' teaching challenging at this point, then surely we're not feeling the weight of what he's saying. This should make us uncomfortable. This should cause us to wrestle and think. This should cause us to examine how we responds to those who are against us. And that need to examine ourselves leads us to Jesus' final demand. Jesus calls us to be self-discerning.

Jesus calls us to be self-discerning

Jesus begins this last group of instructions with a parable about a blind man leading another blind man. Obviously it doesn't help one blind man to lead another, for they will likely both fall into a pit. Consequently, Jesus tells his followers to be self-discerning. We don't want to put ourselves in a place of leading others if we ourselves are blind. Or, perhaps more pointedly, we don't want to call others to follow and obey Jesus as we ignore the fact that we're not obeying him in many areas of life. Therefore, Jesus tells us, before we go to remove the speck in our brother's eye, we need to examine ourselves. We need to look and make sure we don't have a log in our own eye. And if we do, we should first remove it.

Similarly, Jesus reminds us that one reason we examine our deeds is because they reflect and flow out of our hearts. He teaches his disciples, saying, "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by hits own fruit" (vv. 43-44). Then, he tells us clearly what he means by this illustration, saying in verse 45, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil, for our of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

This is why it's important to examine our lives. If we're not seeing any desire to obey Christ and any obedience to his commands, then it may well indicate that we don't have a new heart that Jesus promised through the prophets to give his people. It may be that we need to be born again. Now, the clearest text where Jesus speaks of needing to be born again is when he says that to Nicodemus. You'll remember Nicodemus first thought Jesus meant something about physically needing to be born again, but Jesus made clear he meant the work of the Spirit, whereby the Spirit gives you a new heart. And then Jesus reminded us that the Spirit is like the wind, blowing where he wills. We do not see him, but we see his effects. Isn't that Jesus' point here? We look for the effects of the Spirit's work in our lives. And, let me say as well, that if you came into this room this morning as an unbeliever and yet are feeling a desire now to repent and place your faith in the one who lived, died, and was raised for us, then it may well be that you're seeing the effect of the Spirit working—like the effect of the wind blowing—and so I want to encourage you to obey and bend the knee to Christ.

But Jesus directs this teaching to those who were following him as disciples because he wants us to examine ourselves and make sure we're truly obeying him. If we're not, then Jesus tells us that we're showing ourselves to be like someone who built his house without a foundation so that when the flood pressed against it, it was ruined. Therefore, if we're going to call Jesus "Lord," then we must make sure that we're doing what he says.

Jesus says it in multiple ways, but the point is clear—we must be self-discerning. We must be the kind of people who look at our lives and evaluate whether or not we're obeying Christ, whether or not what we're professing matches with how we're living, whether or not we're showing that we have a new heart.

Now, Jesus isn't telling us to be so self-critically introspective that we question everything we do and leave ourselves feeling hopeless. He's simply telling us to look and see if indeed we are seeking to obey the Lord. Are we pursuing sexual purity? Are we seeking to use words that edify others instead of gossip about them or tear them down? Are we characterized by generosity with our money and possessions or by greed? Do we seek to love others and do good to them? If these things aren't our desires and don't characterize our lives, then we need to repent. We may be those who call Jesus "Lord" but do not do what he tells us, and ultimately we'll be exposed.

But let me tell you how to respond if you're being exposed before the Lord. Don't respond by saying, "Alright, I'll do better." Rather, run to the crucified and risen Lord. Confess your sin, see that forgiveness is found in what Christ has done for us by living, dying, and being raised from the dead. And then, once you realize the sufficiency of Christ for your forgiveness and righteous standing, then turn and obey him. Live in obedience to the one who declares us righteous in his Son.

How should we then live as followers of Jesus Christ? We must live lives where we examine ourselves to make sure we're obeying Christ's commands in all areas. We do not want to be those who call Jesus "Lord" but don't actually obey his commands. We must love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who abuse us. And we must live in light of eternity, evaluating everything we do in light of the life to come. And if we do these things, we will indeed stand out in this world, allowing our light to shine before men so that we might glorify our Father in heaven. We will be seen as known as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. And now let us identify with him once more as we come to the table. Amen.