

Love, Mercy, and Lordship

““But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?

As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck the house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." LUKE 6:27-49

Americans and the Bible - Statistics from Barna Research 2014-

The number of those who are skeptical or agnostic toward the Bible - who believe the Bible is "just another book of teachings written by men that contains stories and advice" - has nearly doubled from 10% in 2011, to 19% in 2014.

This is now equal to the number of people who are Bible engaged - who read the Bible at least four times a week and believe it is the actual or inspired Word of God.

Americans continue to view the Bible very positively.

Being pro-Bible doesn't necessarily mean Americans use the Bible regularly, however.

While the Bible's place in American as a cultural icon endures, it's not always perceived as a transformational text. Even as Bible ownership remains strong, readership and engagement are weak.

- Statistics from Lifeway Research

"While the majority of churchgoers desire to honor Christ with their lives and even profess to think on biblical truths, a recent study found few actually engage in personal reading and study of the Scriptures."

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These statistics are both saddening and alarming to me. It seems that as a nation, generally, and as churchgoers, specifically, we give a lot of lip-service, but need to consider how much true importance we give the Word of God in our lives on a daily basis. This book, which we, as Christians, declare to be God's perfect and infallible Word to us, and which should be our guide for faith and daily living, is rarely even read by most of us. We will come back to this as we end.

Let's take a look at our text to gain some insight

1. Love Your Enemies

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Vs. 27-36)

Matthew records the more complete version of this same sermon of Jesus in chapters 5 and 6 and we know it as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Listen to how He writes in Matthew 5.

““You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **THAT YOU MAY BE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.**” Matthew 5:43-45 NIV

"Love your neighbor" is from the Mosaic Law (The Pentateuch - 1st Five books of the Hebrew Bible) and can be found in Leviticus 19:18. But "hate your enemy" was an added clause which Jesus condemns here. These additional words, though not stated in the original text, represent a conclusion that any of us could have easily drawn. The term neighbor seems to be restrictive in nature. In other words, not everyone is my neighbor, so anyone outside that category would fall outside the command to love. Thus, the addition of the phrase, "and hate your enemies." For ancient Hebrews, anyone outside the Israelite community fell into the enemy category and outside the command to love.

Here Jesus exceeds the teaching of Leviticus 19:18 and introduces the idea of indiscriminating love. In Luke 10 He uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate this point.

“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled,

came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37 NIV

The out-working of this kind of love is further outlined in our text...

- a. do good to those who hate you
- b. bless those who curse you
- c. pray for those who mistreat you
- d. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.
- e. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.
- f. Give to everyone who asks you
- g. if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back
- h. Do to others (meaning everyone) as you would have them do to you.

This type of love is not based on any attribute of the one being loved, but rather based on the character of God Himself. Consider Jesus' words in John 13:34. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

What does our text say?

God doesn't love us based on any lovable trait in us.

"But when the righteousness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. (Titus 3:4-5a) His love is based solely on His character. 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love". God can do nothing but love because He is LOVE. And God's love is unconditional. Jesus teaches us that if we are truly children of God the Father, our love must be unconditional as well.

To be sure, this is completely opposite of the way the world operates. But then again, kingdom principles are the polar opposite of this world. Jesus said,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV

So Jesus calls us to radical love...to love those who are unloveable, undesirable, unworthy and undeserving. He calls us to love like God loves.

2. Be Merciful, Not Judgmental

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Luke 6:36-38

A. This section is all about showing mercy and Jesus speaks in terms of judgment and forgiveness. The over-arching theme is this. The measure we use to judge others is the standard that will be used by God to judge us. Will we be quick to pass judgment or will we extend forgiveness? Jesus suggests that God will respond to us in the same way we treat others.

The Jews of the day would have been familiar with this idea because it is recorded in their Mishnah (their oral traditions). In it they are instructed, "When you judge, incline the balance in his favor." Another rendering says it this way, "Give all individuals the benefit of the doubt."

It's so much easier to judge the actions of others and condemn them. After all, they deserve it, right. They certainly don't deserve mercy. But that is exactly what Jesus is teaching us. He instructs us not to judge or condemn, but rather to forgive and give generously. He uses the everyday example of measuring out grain for purchase to explain how God will bless us when we generously give mercy to others.

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." (explain).

God promises to give abundant grace to those who are abundantly gracious to others.

B. Being merciful means being quick to help...

- restore relationship with someone who has offended US
- help restore someone to right relationship with God after they have sinned or messed up. True mercy doesn't take pleasure in pointing the finger, exposing sin and condemning the sinner.

Instead, one commentator writes, "It (mercy) roots for the sinner to find a way home to spiritual health." Instead of snubbing and writing them off because they have offended us; instead of ignoring them because we don't know what to say or how to respond to their sin; instead of cutting them off because we don't want to associate with "the deeds of darkness", scripture teaches us to be quick to help them repent and experience restoration.

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently..." Galatians 6:1a

There are several great examples of this kind of mercy in scripture.

Hosea - Though his wife Gomer was unfaithful to Him, he showed her mercy and restored her to right relationship with him.

The Prodigal Son - Though he had lived a sinful life and squandered his inheritance, his father was quick to forgive and restore him to the full rights of sonship.

Of course, Jesus sets the ultimate example for us. He was the sinless One, and if anyone had the right to judge and condemn, he did. Instead he showed mercy.

The Woman Caught in Adultery - Though caught "in the very act" and there was no denying her sin, Jesus showed her mercy and said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

The Thief on the Cross - Though the thief was being rightfully executed for his crimes, Jesus was quick to offer mercy and forgiveness, saying, "today you will be with me in paradise."

What Jesus is teaching us is to have the heart of God.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." John 3:17 NIV

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV

This is certainly not to say that we should ignore sin and wrongdoing. Being merciful does not mean suspending moral judgment and responsibility. According to Galatians 6:1, which we read earlier, we have a responsibility to acknowledge the sin, but also help the sinner be restored to right relationship with God - and us if that applies. Not with a self-righteous attitude, but with gentleness.

"But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted." Galatians 6:1 NIV

I am reminded of the phrase, "There but for the grace of God go I." Mercy doesn't judge and condemn self-righteously, because it understands that we are all susceptible to temptation and need God to show us mercy.

Example: Jennifer and her probationers/officers; Art Roberts

Consider Jesus' questions.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Luke 6:41-42 NIV

Jesus is reminding us that "we all have some pretty big faults that we must deal with before we are in a position to help others. We should judge ourselves and deal with the plank in our own eye instead of judging others for a speck in theirs. Mercy is the only reasonable response to the failures of others when we understand that we are just as flawed as they are. We want others to show us mercy when we fail, so we should offer them the same consideration. Remember what Jesus said in vs. 31.

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

C. There is one other perspective I want us to consider as we discuss showing mercy and not judging. It is easy for us to look at those who are not followers of Christ and judge whether...

- they are worthy to be told the good news about Jesus
- they will even listen to what we have to say about Jesus

If they don't look right, or act right, or smell right, we might judge them unworthy of our time and God's mercy. Or, we might judge them as someone who would never listen to what we have to say or accept God's mercy and forgiveness.

I was personally challenged by testimonies given at Art Roberts funeral. Several told how Art didn't judge people by what they looked like, acted like, or smelled like. This statement was made of Art.

“Art loved people and Art did not judge people because he knew that each of us could come to Jesus only through the cross and because Art, like each of us, needed God’s grace.”

He simply showed mercy, as God had shown him mercy, and shared the gospel with them.

3. It's All About Lordship

Jesus teaching was counterculture. Kingdom principles are completely opposite of the way this world thinks. We can't think like the world and it's culture and please God. We can't call Jesus Lord and continue to think and live by the principles of this world.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2 NIV

The point Jesus is making here is this. Loving like God loves; showing mercy and not judging; are principles of the kingdom of God by which He expects us to live our lives. So we have a choice. Will we live according the ways of the world, or will we submit to the lordship of Jesus and live according to His Word and do what He says? I'm reminded of the words of Joshua in the OT.

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15 NIV

But how can we serve Jesus as Lord; How can we obey His Word and live according to kingdom principles if we don't know what His Word says?

- The number of those Americans who believe the Bible is "just another book of teachings written by men that contains stories and advice" was 19% in 2014 - equal to the number of people pwho read the Bible at least four times a week and believe it is the actual or inspired Word of God.

- Only nineteen percent of churchgoers report reading the Bible "Every Day" (not as part of a church worship service). Nearly the same percentage (18%) say they rarely/never read the Bible apart from church.

I hear Jesus asking us, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” Luke 6:46 NIV

I hear Him saying, “If you love me, keep my commands.” John 14:15 NIV

This will require a renewed commitment to Him as Lord of our lives.

It will also require a renewed commitment to knowing His Word - reading and studying it on a daily basis.

Finally, it will require a willingness for us to change our thinking to conform to God's kingdom principles and live counter-cultural lives.