

I have come back around to the gospel of Luke in my personal study time. I find it necessary to re-anchor myself from time to time in the center of our faith.

We can very easily go off the rails chasing down doctrinal snipes, or whatever the new big debate in society is, if we are not careful. If we become entangled in what Paul characterizes as “foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.” And would you believe it, he has similar advice to Timothy as well.

Bearing that in mind, I come back to the gospel, to Jesus himself. For me, it is a welcome relief in a world filled with focusing on anything BUT Jesus...even in broader christendom.

We begin in v. 27 of Luke chapter 6. (Read thru v.27-36).

It's quite a familiar passage. One that you would expect a visiting pastor to teach on perhaps. One might even say that we find here the nuts and bolts of practical Christian living right? These are commands...things we must carry out to be good christians.

I believe that the almighty temptation in reviewing these verses is to make them into a check-list of sorts to govern our behavior.

You see, it is possible, I suppose, to follow these to the letter as merely instructions and miss the point Jesus is making entirely.

In fact, that is what we would call legalism. To adhere to a set of principles or a code or a law in order to gain moral superiority or righteousness. The transaction looks like this: If I do this, then I get that. It is an exchange of goods and services - purely economic. If I do these things, love, give, pray, etc then God will be pleased with me.

Since this type of living is so deeply ingrained in our lives we are offended when others don't participate in our economy - when they "cheat" the system.

These words, Christ's words, are how we are SUPPOSED to live if we are good red-blooded, God-fearing, Christians!

But, as Christ, often did - I want to flip this idea on its head - if you'll permit me the grace to do so.

I propose to you, that in our text, what we perceive as very direct instructions on practical christian living, Christ was ALSO composing a high definition picture of His relationship with the world (even the world that hates him), with us. As we re-read the text it will become apparent.

IF that's the case, that what we have read is primarily representative of God's relationship with us, then we must come to the position where we realize that apart from Christ we are all incapable of this "practical Christian living." We realize that our actions - if they become, or are rote representations of dead legalism, then they are meaningless and will

remain so apart from the Living Christ. Apart from Christ, no matter how close we come to working this out we will fall short in some area - and be ok with it, and rationalize away our incompleteness as “well, I’m only human.”

Let’s examine the text.

V.27-28 I say to you who hear - why did Jesus say this? Often it was accompanied with parables and figurative language.

Parable of the soils Luke 8/Matt 13 “he cried, he that has ears to hear, let him hear.”; parable of the wheat and the tares Matt 13; instruction on salt and saltiness Luke 14; Christ instructing the churches in Rev 2&3.

In these instances it’s as if Christ is trying to cue the listener in on something bigger than the surface level discussion. He’s saying, pay attention. Listen...which is what I will say occasionally in my teaching.

Love, do good, bless, pray - to enemies, haters, foul-mouthed, opportunists who take advantage of our good-will.

Before we come to a place where we can authentically work out these incredibly difficult actions (it’s hard for us to do this for people we care about!) we must come face to face with the realization that Christ exemplified this pattern first and foremost.

Christ loved us when we were His enemy. He loves us when we are in the middle of rebellion.

His goodness abounded toward us when we hated Him and everything He, His kingdom, and His people represent.

He blesses those who curse Him, and use His name in a derogatory manner.

He prays for sinners who seek to take advantage of His good will.

[Luk 23:33-34 NKJV] 33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do..."

V.29-30 the physical abuse and robbery Christ endured was beyond vicious, and yet He offered His entire body and all His heavenly worth willingly to the punishment.

[Luk 22:63-65 NKJV] 63 Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. 64 And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, "Prophecy! Who is the one who struck You?" 65 And many other things they blasphemously spoke against Him.

His robes were literally and figuratively taken away from Him and given to somebody else.

Literally -

[Mat 27:28 NKJV] 28 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.

[Jhn 19:23-24 NKJV] 23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. 24 They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Figuratively, and yet more permanently -

[Isa 61:10 NKJV] 10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks [himself] with ornaments, And as a bride adorns [herself] with her jewels.

[Gal 3:27 NKJV] 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

(signifies "to enter into, get into," as into clothes)

He never asks for them back.

V.31 Christ desires that we should love Him and so he loves us.

1 John 4:10-11 - [1Jo 4:10-11 NKJV] 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Love is authentic when there is a choice and it's not under compulsion - that would be something related to stockholm syndrome.

Stockholm Syndrome - feelings of trust or affection felt in many cases of kidnapping or hostage-taking by a victim toward a captor.

But that's not how God demonstrated His love toward us - He loves us first! Without taking hostages, and we, being so moved by that act of love reciprocate in kind.

God wants a relationship with us, where we have real authentic love for Him, and to make sure that can happen He loves us first. He leads by example.

V.32-33 - adds support to our interpretation of v.31. Christ loves the ungodly, wicked, abhorrent, heretical, vile, dirty, unwell, broken, addicted, swindlers and scrubs of our time. This is what makes the Gospel good news!

The legalist's view, and the prevailing wisdom of religion, is that God loves good people. That is a fact, God does love good people but isn't that what

we expect? The good news, the great news, the message that Christ preached and we preach, is that God completely and overwhelmingly loves bad people while we are in the midst of our rotness.

Now God doesn't love bad people more than good people. God's love is a complete love - immeasurable and nearly incomprehensible to us - if we did not have the example of Jesus Christ to drive the point home.

[Rom 5:7-8 NKJV] 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

V.34-35 - we can never repay Jesus - that is a hard concept for us to grasp, but if it is missed then we may find ourselves down that dangerous path of works based religion because that wonderful saint - eternally grateful for their paid debt - seeks to pay off the debt!

Yet Jesus gave to us, knowing we could never pay it back. That's the nature of God's love toward mankind. Though we curse him to his face, and yell "I don't love you anymore," as teenagers do in their hormone fueled rage and spouses proclaim in dead tones in broken marriages - He extends His riches to us.

Hoping for nothing in return - God's love toward us is never contingent on return on investment.

You may say, what about the faithful steward? Hear me...when we were not yet stewards God's love abounded to us. When we squandered His grace and cursed His holy name His heart yearned for us as we find in the parable of the prodigal (wasteful) son (Luke 15) - how did His father received Him?

\*HE IS KIND TO THE UNTHANKFUL AND EVIL (REPEAT) - that is our Father's eternal, unchanging nature. That's Christ's nature, being one with the Father. He is kind to us, who are often unthankful; who sometimes have competing interests as the spirit and the flesh war against one another; we, who have certainly come out of evil. And it is God's goodness and undeserved favor that leads the unthankful and evil to repentance (Rom 2:4).

V.36 - therefore - since all of that, since we are sons and daughters of the Most High King - we demonstrate those same merciful (not getting what you deserve) characteristics to the unthankful and evil; to those who have no means to pay us back; to those who take take take without a second thought. Why? Because our Father in heaven demonstrated that towards us when we were in that state and we remember and if we are sons and daughters of the most high then it's in our DNA, our very makeup - kindness and mercy to the unthankful and evil.