

The Golden Rule

LUKE 6:27-36

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****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM****

It is good to be with you this morning! We are back in the garage today! I have been living out here since I got back from Washington nearly two weeks ago – at first, to keep my wife safe from me, and then to keep me safe from her! Dane County is a real hot-spot right now, several of our members have tested positive for COVID-19 over the past week or two (I count around 14 of us either positive or awaiting test results), so the elders have decided to go back to an online only service for at least the time being, and we'll then re-evaluate and decide where to go from there. I will miss seeing you outside on the church lawn this morning.

As we did back in late March, into April, and then May, we'd like to encourage all of you to partake of the Lord's Supper at home this morning. We have some recipes for the Unleavened Bread out there on our website and on the church's Facebook page. Most grocery stores have unleavened bread (the matzo crackers) in the ethnic food section, we've also determined to the best of our ability that Triscuits also seem to qualify as unleavened bread – make sure the only ingredients are wheat, oil, and salt. But we do have some options there. We can get grape juice just about anywhere, including most gas stations. I am personally thankful that worship is incredibly simple and profound. The supplies are minimal. We would also encourage you to sing at some point today. And please also remember that we have a link for electronic giving on our website and also in the bulletin. As always, checks can be mailed to the church's post office box (also in the bulletin).

I'm here in this format to bring a lesson from the word of God. As we get started, I do want to be clear about God's plan of salvation. God sent his Son to die in our place, as a sacrifice. We respond to that sacrifice by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins. And we're sharing one example this morning from the Roesser Road congregation in Phoenix, Arizona. Tony Fierro was baptized into the Lord Jesus last Sunday morning, and so we rejoice with Tony this morning and with his new Christian family. And again, we are sharing this by way of encouragement. What Tony did last Sunday, you can do this morning. Get in touch with one of the elders, and we would be honored to help in whatever way we can.

This morning, we'll be looking at another request that came in from someone who's been joining us on the phone every week. If you are joining us on the phone and have something we need to study in sermon form – a

question, a favorite passage, a topic we need to explore – I would love to hear from you. Give me a call or send me a text at 608-224-0274. Maybe a month or so ago, one of our seniors called with something of a crisis of conscience. I have some notes from that call, where I quickly scribbled down what she said, so I'll do the best I can, and I hope she forgives me if I fail to communicate this clearly. But she had just been to Wal-Mart, and she had been in the cookie aisle. And right there in the cookie aisle, her Christian faith suddenly became incredibly relevant, and she had to make a decision.

By way of background, she claims that the Chesapeake cookies by Pepperidge Farm are perhaps the world's most perfect cookie. Remember: We are also in the middle of a pandemic. Well, she approaches the appropriate shelf and realizes that there are just a few left. But this in itself is pretty amazing, because apparently there is something of a Chesapeake cookie shortage in the world right now. Word on the street is: Get these while you can, because the shelves are often empty. So, she sees a few left, but as she is standing there, a scripture comes to mind, and she remembers the words of Jesus, ***"Treat others the same way you want them to treat you."*** And so, in a moment of Christian maturity and courage, she applies the words of Jesus to the situation, she realizes that if she were the next person to walk down that aisle, she would want somebody to leave some Pepperidge Farm Chesapeakes for her, so she decides to take one and leave the rest. She then gets home and calls me and asks that we study Luke 6:31.

And I am totally amazed! First of all, that there is apparently a hoarding problem with a cookie I've never heard of. But secondly, I'm also amazed at the self-control! So, when I hear this, I decide that I need to do some research. So, I go out to find me some Pepperidge Farm Chesapeake cookies! I don't have time to look at Luke, I need to get myself to Wal-Mart before these things disappear! I'm also looking for some Comet Shower Cleaner spray, and by the time I strike out here and there, I get to the Wal-Mart in Sun Prairie, and I hit the motherlode on both! But again, this is research! And these are some amazing cookies: Chesapeake Dark Chocolate Pecan, "Baked with BIG Chocolate Chunks," "Baked with care, and Rich Dark Chocolate, Crunchy Pecans, Creamery Butter, Cage-Free Eggs, and Real Vanilla Extract." I did notice, though, that they have apparently made a huge mistake in the Nutrition Facts. They seem to suggest that a serving size is "1 cookie." That is clearly not my experience. They say they have 8 servings in this bag, but that is clearly not the case. I would say this bag is more like two servings. We have two layers in this bag – that's a very convenient way to divide the bag very neatly between the two servings. Other than that, though, I have been impressed. On my recent trip out west, two of these servings kept me awake through most of Montana, as I remember it. But, very, very good!

Nevertheless, when I got home, I continued the research, this time looking at the passage she suggested – Luke 6:31. And I realized that in nearly 30 years of preaching, I have never preached a sermon from Luke 6! I've preached on the Golden Rule from Matthew 7:12, but never from Luke 6. So, I hope to change that today.

All of us will probably agree that we're living in a world that's pretty uptight right now. Right? People are on edge. Some of us are on edge. All of us, then, we need this reminder! And so, if you have a Bible, I would invite you to turn with me to Luke 6. And as we make our way to Luke 6, I'd like to warn all of us by way of reminder: If we are looking for a nice, easy faith where we show up or log in to worship once a week and then we're done with it for the next seven days, true Christianity is not it! However, if you are looking for the kind of faith that reaches out and disturbs you in the cookie aisle at Wal-Mart, stay tuned! Following Jesus is a blessing, but it is also a real challenge sometimes.

What we sometimes refer to as the "Golden Rule" is found in Luke 6:31, where Jesus says, ***"Treat others the same way you want them to treat you."*** That right there is hard enough. That right there will keep us challenged

for a lifetime. But as we study this morning, I want us to widen it up a bit, and I want us to notice that the surrounding verses are jam-packed full of action words. I had a hard time organizing my thoughts on all of this this week. But as I read, I kept noticing some repetition in this paragraph. So, for the purpose of our study this morning, as we look at the Golden Rule, I want us to look at Luke 6:27-36, and I want us to notice some ACTION WORDS, then we'll look at the two PRACTICAL EXAMPLES Jesus gives here, and we'll end with our MOTIVATION for doing these things. Treating others the same way we want them to treat us is at the heart of it, but Jesus gives some examples, and every single one of these is a challenge.

So, as we study this request from one of our senior saints, let's look together at Luke 6:27-36,

27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

- I. So again, let's start by noticing some of the ACTIONS in this passage, and as we go through these, let's try to compare and contrast God's standard as opposed to the world's standard.

- A. And we start with Jesus commanding us to LOVE OUR ENEMIES.

The action word is "**LOVE**." We see this in verses 27 and 35, and then we have the contrast with the way the world loves in verse 32. But the first command here is that we love our enemies. And I know we often think of love as a feeling, love is something we fall into, but the kind of love Jesus refers to here is a CHOICE, a decision to do what is best for somebody. We think of the lawyer who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life, he and Jesus both agreed that he had to love his neighbor, but then the man wanted to know, "**And who is my neighbor?**" And that's when Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the story about a man who demonstrated love to somebody who was not like him. He made a decision. This kind of love is a choice that we make as we decide to treat others just as we would like to be treated – not as we have been treated, but as we would like to be treated.

And as if this is not challenging enough, the people we are told to love here are our "**enemies**." As I understand it, the word Jesus uses goes back to a word referring to "hate." Not that we are to love the people we hate (that doesn't make sense – Jesus would have just told us to stop hating); but instead, we are to love those who hate us. These are people who consider us to be their enemies, not the other way around. Don't most of us have enemies? Don't most of us have people in our lives who hate us? That's who Jesus is talking about here. As God's people, we are to love those who hate us – an angry neighbor, an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend or spouse, a co-worker who can't stand us. We are to love those who consider us to be their enemies.

And this is where we see the contrast (in verse 32), where Jesus says, ***“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.”*** The world says, “Be nice to your friends.” God says, ***“Love your enemies.”*** God says, ***“Love the people who hate you.”*** We don’t just ignore our enemies, but we look for ways to treat them in ways that we would like to be treated. And again, this is not a feeling we have toward them, but in many cases, we might need to overcome our feelings in order to actually do what we need to do, treating them with love and respect, even when we might not feel like it. From time to time, I will see Christian people post online something to the effect, “If you respect me, I will respect you – it’s a two-way street.” And yet, as we think about it: That is one of the most un-Christian, worldly attitudes we could even imagine! According to Jesus (in verse 32), this is the way sinners behave, ***“For even sinners love those who love them.”*** As God’s people, we have to go beyond that. We are to love those who hate us. We are to treat everybody not as we have been treated, but just as we would like to be treated.

B. As we continue in verse 27, we find a similar thought as Jesus says that we are to DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU.

So, it’s not just a case of loving our enemies, but it’s a case of actively doing good. In Galatians 6:9, Paul tells us not to ***“lose heart in doing good.”*** In Titus 2:7, he tells Titus ***“to be an example of good deeds.”*** In Titus 2:14, he tells Titus that we are to be ***“zealous for good deeds.”*** In Titus 3:8, he says that ***“those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds.”*** In Titus 3:14, he says that, ***“Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs.”*** In 1 Timothy 6:18, he tells Timothy to, ***“Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.”*** Over and over again, the Bible tells us to ***“do good,”*** and that’s what we see here. Only here, we are specifically told to ***“do good to those who hate you.”***

If I know somebody hates me, I might try to just avoid that person. But here, Jesus tells us to ***“do good.”*** So, how do we know what to do? Well, again, as he says in verse 31, we are to, ***“Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.”*** We are to think of somebody who hates us, we are to think of what we might want to have done for us, and then we do it. Perhaps we give them some rare and hard to find cookies. Whatever we might want to have done for us, we do for them. It’s not a matter of just not hurting them, but we actively ***“do good,”*** Jesus says.

And isn’t that what Jesus has done for us? We think back to Romans 5:8, ***“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*** And then in Romans 5:10, ***“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”*** Jesus did what was good for us, even while we were his ***“enemies.”*** And this brings us back to the contrast. We see it in verse 33, ***“If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.”*** This is the world’s standard. If we want this, we just need to join a bowling league or some kind of social club or maybe head down to a neighborhood bar. Doing good to those who do good to us? We can get that anywhere. But the Christian faith is different. Jesus calls us to a higher standard. Maybe we go grocery shopping for a neighbor who really gets on our nerves. Maybe we get out early and remove the berm of snow from the driveway of the guy who’s always making hateful comments at the neighborhood association meeting. We do good, even to those who hate us. And this kind of doing good has a way of changing people. This kind of love is shocking. This kind of love points people to Jesus. We treat people the way we would like to be treated.

C. The next big action word comes in verse 28 as Jesus tells us to BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU.

The word we have translated here as *“bless”* is basically a word we would recognize if we brought it straight over from Greek to English, the word *“eulogy.”* Literally, it refers to a *“good word.”* A *“eulogy,”* of course, is what happens when we speak well of someone at their funeral. We are speaking *“good words”* about that person. Only here, Jesus is telling us to speak *“good words”* to those who curse us. We think of what Paul wrote in Romans 12:14, when he said, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”* Or, we might think of what Peter wrote (in the context of marriage) in 1 Peter 3:8-9, when he said, *“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”* So, instead of returning insult for insult, we treat those who curse us just as we ourselves would like to be treated. Instead of lashing out, we say something to build up and encourage. As Solomon says in Proverbs 12:18, *“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”* As God’s people, we are the ones who are motivated to bring healing into relationships. Words matter.

D. And this brings us to the last action word we’ll be looking at this morning, as Jesus tells us to PRAY FOR THOSE WHO MISTREAT YOU.

Often, when somebody mistreats us, when they treat us unfairly, when we are abused in some way, it’s natural to be almost overwhelmed with that. We think about it 24/7. We dwell on it. Jesus suggests here, though, that we pray for those who mistreat us. We might be wounded and hurt, but instead of dwelling on what was done, we take that focus and attention, and we use it to pray for that person. We’re already thinking about it, so why not pray about it?

Isn’t this what Jesus did? Even as he was being nailed to the cross (in Luke 23:34), it’s Luke who tells us that Jesus was saying, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”* And he didn’t just say this once, but the tense of the verb suggests that Jesus *“was saying”* this, over and over again, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”* Jesus shows us what it means to treat others – not AS we have been treated, but just as we would LIKE to be treated.

As we pray, most of us pray for our family and friends. We pray for the nation. We pray for the church. But if we are not doing so already, let’s also be praying for those who mistreat us, asking God to heal whatever it is in their lives that has caused them to do such terrible things, asking that God might be merciful. So, these are the action words – we PRAY, we DO GOOD, we BLESS, and we PRAY.

II. Before we move on, let’s at least briefly look at two very PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES.

A. The first is found in verse 29, where Jesus says, “Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also.”

And the general idea is: When we are insulted, we as God’s people CHOOSE NOT TO RETALIATE. Just a note here: A slap on the cheek isn’t life-threatening. This isn’t a stabbing, but this is a personal insult of some kind. And as Christians, we don’t respond how the world responds. We don’t slap back. And again, we think of Jesus on the cross, described by Peter in 1 Peter 2:23, *“...and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”* Jesus did not

retaliate. And, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, love is *“not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,”* love *“endures all things.”* So, as a general principle, we choose not to retaliate.

B. The second principle comes in verses 29-30 and in verses 34-35 with the idea that PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN STUFF.

Generally speaking, we give, we lend, expecting nothing in return. If we make a mistake in this area, let's make a mistake in the direction of generosity. It's better to give too much than too little. We could spend all day discussing this, but the idea is: People are more important than possessions. We know this, but sometimes we need the reminder. People are more important than cookies.

III. Before we close, I would also just briefly note the REWARD.

We do have some motivation here. If we live by the Golden Rule, Jesus says that our *“reward will be great.”* And we have the power to be like Him, because we are sons of the Most High. We ourselves have been shown mercy, and that allows us to show mercy to others. We think back to how God has treated us, and we treat others the same way. We react with mercy in mind. And when the world sees what we DO, the world will see God in us. We are sons of the Most High. We are merciful, because he is merciful.

Conclusion:

As we close, I want to share a story I read on Fox News earlier this week. Several days ago, Teo Jordan, 18 years old, was bagging groceries at a Kroger in Covington, Kentucky. The high school junior, on the basketball team, just started worker as a bagger a few weeks ago, as a way of helping out his family as well as saving up for a car. Earlier this week an elderly man came through the line and didn't have enough money. The cashier told the elderly man to put some items back, but Teo stepped up, took out his wallet, and covered the \$35. I kept reading, and toward the end of the story, Teo said this, “Just treat people how you want to be treated, you know, always help out if somebody needs it.” Amen to that!

I am so thankful for the cookie crisis that led to today's lesson. I'm thankful that one of our seniors has a well-trained and sensitive conscience. This week, based on what we've studied today, I would encourage us and challenge all of us to try to think of some practical ways to treat others just as we would like to be treated. That might mean wearing a mask. It means not going out in public if we have symptoms. It means looking out for ways to help and to do good.

The Golden Rule is simple, yet challenging. We don't need a high I.Q. or an advanced degree to understand it. How do I want to be treated? Once I figure that out, I go out and do that for others – we love, we do good, we bless, and we pray.

As we close, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and merciful God! Thank you for challenging us today with your word. The world may seem to be falling apart all around us, but we know that your Son holds all things together by the word of his power. We've studied his word this morning, and we are thankful for

the challenge. We are thankful for the reminder. We pray that we might take it seriously, that we would allow your word to take root in our hearts. This morning, we ask for opportunities to do good. We pray that we might be merciful, just as you are merciful.

We ask a special blessing on those we know and love who have tested positive for the virus. As you know, some have no symptoms at all, but others are suffering. We pray that our faith would be strong and that all of us will be able in some way to do good and encourage.

Thank you for making us a part of your family. We come to you in the name of your son Jesus.
AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com