

## Our Lord's Lesson on Love Luke 6:27-38

*27 "But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. 28 Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes away your things, do not demand them back. 31 "Treat others just as you would want them to treat you. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? To be sure, even the sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same thing. 34 If you lend to those from whom you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to be paid back in full. 35 Instead, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. In fact, the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you."*

A popular song that hit the airwaves back when I was in college in the 80's made this statement: "I want to know what love is." Do you know what love is. Earlier this month we celebrated the big love holiday—Valentine's Day. Do we express our love with a box of candy or a special card or a bouquet of flowers? Do we really know what love is? We know the greatest of all love. Our God showed us that love. On the pages of his love letter to all humanity, we read: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:16). Our heavenly Father showed us his greatest love when he gave up his Son for us. And Jesus showed the ultimate love when he gave his life for us. But how do we show such love? Of course, we turn to the One who knows what love is, the One who is love. Let our Savior tells us how he wants us to love. To do that we turn to Luke chapter six. There we find our Lord's lesson on love. He shows us the kind of love he expects. It's not an easy love to give. But it is the best way to reflect the love God has shown us.

What people in your life do you love? Probably spouse, children and grandchildren, parents and grandparents come to mind. Outside your family, you might think of people at work, at school, at church. Where does our love end? Is love for family, friends, and coworkers enough? Listen to what your Lord says: *If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? To be sure, even the sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same thing. If you lend to those from whom you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to be paid back in full.* Does our love only compare to sinners, to people who don't have Jesus in their life? No, our Lord expects more from us.

He says, *“Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes away your things, do not demand them back. Treat others just as you would want them to treat you.”* Is he serious? Love your enemies? That kind of love is not easy to give. He expects me to love people who hate me? I’m supposed to say nice things about a person who curses me every chance they get? When I say my prayers, I’m supposed to include those people who make my life miserable? If they hit me, I don’t hit back. And then I offer another target? Someone steals my coat, and I do nothing to stop them? I even let them take the shirt off my back? Whatever they ask for we are to give and then never expect to get it back again? What is Jesus saying here?

First of all, understand that our Lord is not commanding us to like our enemies. He doesn’t say we should enjoy it when they treat us this way. We do condemn sinful acts, including the ones our enemies do to us. But Jesus still wants us to love them. And the type of love that he calls for is the best kind. It attaches no stings. It adds no conditions. The kind of love that our Lord commands to give for people who are unlovable in our eyes. No, it is not an easy love to give for any of us. In fact, it is impossible for us. And yet God expects it from all who want to be called his children. Jesus said, *“Treat others just as you would want them to treat you.”* That golden rule is a good way to explain God’s second table of the law. Jesus summed up that law when he said, *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* Who of us can do that? My neighbor is not just the people in the house next door or across the street. My neighbor is every last person in my life, including people who care little about me. And for those people my Lord says, *“You love them.”* In the Scripture before us, he says, *“Love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return.”* Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For by doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:20-21). I am sorry, Lord. I have not loved people the way you want me to love them. And when I did love, it was no better than any other sinner. That is true of me. It is true of all of us. And for that we have earned God’s eternal wrath.

Thankfully God loved the unlovable. He loved all his enemies. That’s what we were when we entered this life as sinful creatures. For several excruciating hours on a cross he showed us his love. It took incredible love for him to stay there while his Father unleashed all his anger and wrath that he had for all sin. God punished Jesus for all our loveless thoughts, words, and deeds. Though he punished his Son instead of us, he still loved his Son as he loved us. His Son had completely followed his will. Jesus kept loving people even his enemies who put him to death. Jesus loved us all to death.

Scripture records two occasions where God told the world how much he loved his Son: at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration. Next Sunday we’re going to observe that second occurrence. And God showed how much he loved his Son with an action that speaks

louder than words. He raised him back to life. And after 40 days he welcomed him back to his heavenly home. Because of Jesus saving word, God now directs his love at us. He loves you. He loves me. He loves our neighbor. He loves our enemies. And that's who he tells us to love. He wants our enemies to see God's love reflected in our own love.

Our Lord definitely wants us to love our enemies. He tells us, *"Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil."* Jesus wants all people, including our enemies to know how much he loves them. He wants us to show his love in our life. That's why he said, *"Let your light shine in people's presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). Our Lord's lesson on love shows us that it is not an easy love. But then consider how God always loves us, even when we give him no reason to do so. In view of God's love for us, we gladly love our enemies. We may not like them. But we love them. And Jesus shows us how: *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.* There are times when God wants us to judge others. But what kind of judge should we be? Are you going to follow a no tolerance policy? Or is it like umpiring a baseball game—three strikes and you're out? How about showing mercy the way your heavenly Father is with you. Peter once asked Jesus how many times you should forgive people, up to seven times. Jesus answer was basically, "You never stop forgiving." Remember how our Lord taught us to pray: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

The love we show our enemies always gives and keeps on giving, even when nothing comes back in return. Maybe you'll never receive a thank you. Maybe they'll never praise our Father in heaven. But someone is sure to notice when you show love to your enemy. Jesus said, *"A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. In fact, the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you."* Jesus used this example from his day to explain how blessings come to you when you love your enemy. A merchant first poured grain into a measuring jar. He pressed it down and shook it together. Then he poured it out onto your lap. You held your garment like a sack and took the grain home to enjoy. The Bible speaks of the joy that goes on in heaven over one sinner who repents. What an honor it would be to be a part of that. By the grace of God we are. When we take to heart our Lord's lesson on love, we will display his love in our own love for others.

Do you want to know what love is? Then look to the One who loves you and me the most. He loves us when we really gave him no good reason to do so. And take that love to the people in your life—and not just to the people who love you back. Love those people who don't love you at all. May they see the love God has for them reflected in the love you show them. And God-willing they may someday praise our God who first loved us. God grant this for Jesus' sake.