

I remember when I was a child I would go to the doctor for a check-up and the doctor would check my reflexes. Do remember the doctor checking your reflexes? I remember I would be sitting at the examination table with my feet dangling off the sides and the doctor would take this little instrument and hit me gently on the knee, and when he hit my knee my foot would go flying up into the air. It's not just our knees that have reflexes. We also have reflexes in human relationships. Our sinful natures have a certain set of reflexes. If someone is mean to us, the reflex of our sinful nature is to be mean in return. But the Bible says that if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation with a completely different set of reflexes when it comes to human relationships. So today we are going to look at **The Reflexes of the New Creation.**

Twice in this passage Jesus tells us **"Love your enemies."** He says it right away in verse 27 and he says it again in verse 35. "Love your enemies." Who are our enemies? Well, in last week's gospel Jesus said, **"Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man" (Luke 6:22).** An enemy is someone who insults you because you belong to the Son of Man, because you are a Christian. Or an enemy could be someone who insults you or treats you badly for any reason at all. The natural reflex of our sinful natures is to hate our enemies. But Jesus says, "Love your enemies."

In many ways human relationships have to do with action and reaction (someone does something to us and we do something in return). And our sinful human natures have certain rules that govern those sets of actions and reactions. For example, our sinful human natures think, "If someone is mean to me, then I'm not going to talk to them anymore. I'm just going to ignore them." But Jesus challenges that reaction. Jesus says, **"Do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27).** Jesus does not tell us to ignore those who hate us. He tells us to actively do good to those who hate us. **"Do good to those who hate you" (6:27).** Martin Luther echoed these words in the Small Catechism when he said, **"We too will forgive from the heart and gladly do good to those who sin against us."** When someone hates us, the reflex of the new creation is to do good to them.

Jesus goes on, **"Bless those who curse you" (6:28).** To 'bless' is to ask God to do good to somebody else. To "curse" is to ask God to bring harm on somebody else. Have you ever heard the saying, "I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy!"? Well, Jesus says, Don't wish any harm on your worst enemy. In fact, Jesus says ask God to bless your worst enemy. The apostle Paul said, **"When we are cursed, we bless" (1 Cor 4:12).** When people curse us, we bless them. That's the reflex of the new creation. Jesus goes on, **"pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:28).** Can you think of a time when Jesus prayed for those who were mistreating him? On the cross. When Jesus was on the cross he prayed, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** Jesus modeled for us the reflex of the new creation. When they mistreated him, he asked God to forgive them. When Stephen was stoned for speaking about Jesus, Stephen's last words were **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60).** That's the reflex of the new creation. When someone mistreats us, we ask God to forgive them.

Jesus continues, **"If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also" (Luke 6:29).** When someone insults us, our normal reflex is to never talk to that person again. Part of the reason for not talking to them again is that if you don't talk to them again then they can't insult you again. But the reflex of the new creation is to continue to be kind to those who insult us, even though we know that by continuing to talk to them we are making ourselves vulnerable to the possibility of being insulted again. So our sinful natures have rules for actions and reactions. If someone is mean to me, the sinful nature says, "I'm going to be mean to them back or I'm least going to not talk to them anymore so they can't insult me again." But the reflex of the new creation is "If someone is mean to me, I'm going to be kind to them."

There's another set of action and reaction that Jesus says us not enough and that's the way of thinking that says, "If someone is kind to me, I'll be kind to them back." There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but Jesus says that kind of thinking is not enough. If you only do good to those who are good to you, then that does not rise above the thinking of the sinful nature to the level of the new creation. Jesus says even sinners operate by the kind of thinking. Jesus says, **"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." (Luke 6:32-33).** We can't pat ourselves on the back and think that's we've done something special when we love those who love us and do good to those who do good to us.

Another set of action and reaction that Jesus challenges is the thought that says, "I'll be generous and lend money to people, but only if I'm sure that they are going to pay me back in full." Jesus says, "**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**" (Luke 6:34). Christians should certainly pay their debts. The apostle Paul said, "**Let no debt remain outstanding**" (Romans 13:8). We should pay our debts. But if someone needs my help and I lend them money, I shouldn't be overly concerned about getting that money back. If they don't pay me back, God will pay me back, either in this life or at the resurrection of the righteous. In Luke 14 Jesus said, "¹²**When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.** ¹³**But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,** ¹⁴**and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.**" (Luke 14:12-14 biblegateway.com) Christians can be generous because God will pay us back at the resurrection of the righteous.

The reflexes of the new creation come from how gracious God is. We can love our enemies and do good to those who hate us because of how gracious God has been to us. God is so gracious to us that he even attaches the promise of a reward to the commands he gives here. Jesus says, "**But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great**" (Luke 6:35). God attaches promise of a reward to the command to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. He says when we love our enemies and do good to them and lend to them our reward will be great. I don't know exactly what that reward will be but Jesus promises that when we love our enemies and do good to them our reward will be great. It's not that we deserve a reward. Loving our enemies and doing good to them are things we should do whether there is a reward or not. But God is so overwhelmingly gracious that he attaches promises to these commands, promising that our reward will be great when we love our enemies and do good to them. At the end of our passage for today, Jesus talks about how overwhelmingly gracious God is. In verse 38 he says, "**Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap**" (Luke 6:38). The picture here is that when people back then went to buy grain, the person who sold the grain measured it in a basket and if he was really generous he would fit as much grain into the basket as possible by pressing it down and shaking it up so that as much grain would fit in there as possible and then the seller would pour the grain into a little pouch that you would make with your coat. Jesus says here that when we are gracious to others, when we give, God is going to be overwhelmingly gracious to us.

God is overwhelmingly gracious and the new creation that God has made inside of us has been made to be overwhelmingly gracious like God is. Jesus says, "**And you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked**" (Luke 6:35). Martin Luther also echoed this verse in the Small Catechism when he said, "**God surely give daily bread without our asking, even to all the wicked.**" Every day God feeds those who do not acknowledge him. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says that God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good. The picture of the sunshine on the cover of your bulletin is referring to that verse. God is so gracious that he gives sunshine even to the wicked. We are the children of God and therefore we should be kind to our enemies as well. And if someone does wrong to us, Jesus wants us to forgive them.

Jesus says, "**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**" (Luke 6:37). Because God has forgiven us so much, the reflex of the new creation is to forgive others when they sin against us. So much of human relationships are about action and reaction. The sinful nature says, "If someone sins against me, I will hold it against them." But God broke the cycle of action and reaction by sending Jesus to pay for our sins and forgive us even though we didn't deserve it. And when we see how much we've been forgiven, then the reflex of the new creation is to forgive others. Let's leave those cycles of action and reaction and instead let's show the gracious reflexes of the new creation. Amen.