

*Lord, let us not be overcome by evil, but help us overcome evil with good. Amen.*

Life often operates on this principle: what goes around, comes around. Don't expect me to be good if you've first been bad. This logic of revenge infects the human race. It may not be good to do something bad, but if he started it, then I've got an excuse.

Cold shoulders. Scathing emails. Sarcastic texts. Some things are bad, but they started it. And while it may be absolutely logical, it is also absolutely destructive. Revenge divides brothers, rips apart marriages, makes high school miserable, and ruins us.

Which is why life in Jesus' kingdom is different. Last week Jesus started this famous sermon about how his kingdom works (Luke 6:17-26), and today he talks about how to handle the people who started it.

**"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back" (6:27-30).**

What Jesus commands here is not very surprising: love, do good, bless, pray, give. The surprise is whom Jesus wants you to do that for: those who hate, curse, mistreat, slap and rob you. In other words, Jesus wants you to do all of those wonderful things, not only for your friends, but also for your enemies.

So who are your enemies? You might not call them that, but who does bad to you? A classmate who's excluded you? A spouse who's broken their vows to you? A neighbor who's been critical of you? A coworker whose pessimism poisons every discussion? Can you picture their faces right now?

Jesus tells you to love them. The love that Jesus commands is not an emotion, it's an action. Love means that you act not to benefit yourself, but to benefit them (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). So when they do bad, you return good.

Did they start it? Then you end it. Is your wife critical? She does her chores. Is your husband clueless? He respects what you respect about him. Are they bullying you? Then pray for them. Do you best work for your bad boss. Sympathize when your enemy suffers; congratulate her when she succeeds.

"Yeah, but pastor, come on. Look at what Jesus says! Am I really supposed to let myself get slapped around, or not even try to protect my stuff? Should I really not consider that I'm being taken advantage of? You have got to admit, Jesus' words here raise all kinds of complex ethical questions."

Maybe. Or maybe, those complex questions are a distraction, a way to avoid the obvious. Because Jesus' point is crystal clear: do good to the people who do bad to you, **treat them unfairly**, the exact opposite of what they deserve.

And most of the time of the time, how exactly you do that is obvious: **"Do to others as you would have them do to you" (6:31)**. How do you figure out what to do? Ask yourself how you would want to be treated in the same situation.

And yes, there are times where it's tough to know how best to love your enemy, but that's rare. Yet those are the times you fixate on, not because Jesus' point is unclear, but because it is so difficult.

I mean, when was the last time that someone really tried to slap you around or take the shirt off your back? For most of us, that rarely happens. But do you know what does happen? Your spouse speaks hurtful words. Your friends insult you. Someone almost kills you because he's texting while driving. A man is standing in the cold, asking for a handout.

Those are real-life opportunities to **treat them unfairly**, to forgive before the apology, to absorb the hurtful words, to give with no regard for what they deserve. After all, that's how God treats you.

**"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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" (6:32-35).**

If you love only those who love you, do you know who you're living like? Congratulations, you're living exactly like the sinful world around you. But if you love those who do not love you, you are living just like God Most High.

He is responsible for the air we breathe, the rain that falls, the sun that shines, the gravity that keeps us planted on planet earth, and he can withhold those blessings in a heartbeat. But because he is kind, he showers them on everyone, including the people who don't recognize the good he does for them, people who sin against him. He **treats them unfairly**.

And that's what Jesus wants you to do. In fact, the translation here obscures the neat thing that Jesus is saying. Three times Jesus talks about the world's cycle of what goes around comes around, and three times he asks, **"What credit is that to you?" (6:32-34)**.



But literally Jesus says, "What grace is that to you?" Grace is undeserved love. Jesus is saying, "Where is the unfairness in that, if you only do good to those who can repay you? No, **treat them unfairly**. This is the behavior that marks you as a child of the Most High."

That's why Jesus sums it up by saying, "**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful**" (6:36). Mercy is love that does not treat people the way that they deserve.

And you have got to ask, "How can anyone live with mercy like that?" Because you and I cannot meet the standard set by our Father in heaven (Romans 3:23). It is absolutely impossible for anyone to live this way. Except for Jesus. He came not only to teach this, but also and especially to live this. This impossible way of life is Christ's way.

It is the way of the One who stood silent while they lied about him (Isaiah 53:7), who offered his back to those who beat him, his cheeks to those who pulled out his beard (Isaiah 50:6). It is the way of the One who prayed for the people who nailed him to the cross (Luke 23:34), who gave them the clothes off his back (Luke 23:34).

It is the way of the One who said, right before he gave up his life, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Don't you see? In his sermon, Jesus says to you, "Do." But on the cross, Jesus says to you, "Done."

That impossible path was walked fully and completely by Jesus. And he walked it, not for his friends – because who could ever earn a distinction like that? – but for his enemies, for you and for me (Romans 5:8). Now, he does not treat you as your sins deserve (Psalm 103:10). Now, God Most High is not longer just the ruler of the universe, he is your Father.

Think about that! Why do the people of this world need to retaliate? Because if they don't, who will? But why are you able to **treat them unfairly**? Because the God who will one day right every wrong is your Father. He is on your side. "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath" (Romans 12:19).

Why do the people of this world have to take and ask and demand for every last thing that they can get? Because it's all they've got. But why are you able to **treat them unfairly**? Because you are a child of God Most High, and your reward is great: "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

So, really, there are two ways you can have it: "**Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven**" (6:37). You can live in a world where people get exactly what they deserve. And if that is how you treat others, then that is exactly how God will treat you; and you will be judged, you will be condemned, you will not be forgiven (Matthew 18:35). Or you can live in a world where you **treat them unfairly**, where they are shown mercy and grace; and you do not judge, you do not condemn, you forgive.

And since that is how God treats you, why wouldn't you treat others that way? "**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**" (6:38).

This last verse is confusing at first. Picture a measuring cup that is completely empty, and picture God's grace and mercy as the stuff he fills that cup with. How much of it does God give you? He fills it to the top, then presses it down tight so that there's more room, and then he fills it again. Then he shakes the cup so that it settles more, creates more room, and he fills it one more time, not just to the brim, but running over, and then he pours it all into your lap. Not just enough grace and mercy for you, but enough for you to share with others. No matter how much you expend on other people, God always gives you more.

Now, when you live like that, will it be difficult? Absolutely. Will you live it perfectly like God? Not at all. But remember, God is not fair. He doesn't give you what you deserve. That's mercy. In fact, he gives you what you do not deserve. That's grace. And when you do the same, when you **treat them unfairly**, it gives them a glimpse of the limitless mercy and grace of your Father in heaven. Amen.