

**MERCY, BE MERCIFUL**

Maybe you've learned the "golden rule of work" which is "the boss's jokes are always funny." Try out that one after Labor Day weekend. Then there's the Sunday School teacher who taught, "we are here to help others." A little boy pondered, "well, what are the others here for?"

Sometimes we just don't want to get what Jesus taught. We like the "golden rule" one direction but not the other. But Jesus says, "*as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*"

**EXPECT NOTHING IN RETURN** - Jesus filled out this principle with several examples in Luke 6:27-36. "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*" and "*give to everyone who begs from you, and do not demand them back.*" We find this counter-intuitive and resist.

*"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same,"* explains Jesus. "*And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.*"

Love is a choice (Matthew 5:42-46 and Luke 14:12-14). The way of love does what is best for the other person. Disciples of Jesus are not to be just like the world, but rather just like Jesus.

**LOVE OTHERS AS YOURSELF** - Jesus went further in verse 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 is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*"

The context is persecution for being a follower of Christ, with people out to get you, who do not have your best interests at heart. When you do good to your enemies, you can expect nothing in return. That is, nothing material in this life. But God will reward you.

Proverbs 19:17 says, "*Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed*" (echoed in Psalm 37:26). The perspective is, If everything is God's anyway, you're just giving back to God what He entrusted to you, for His purposes. So it's all up to God what happens to your "possessions." It's an attitude of gratitude and generosity.

**BE LIBERATED FROM THINGS** - Giving to others liberates you from being owned by things you own. Or do they own you? Jesus says give, be generous, and don't expect earthly reward. God's reward will be great. Not only for being persecuted (v.23) but for being generous (v.35). And God's reward is part of our eternal inheritance (Colossians 3:23-25, 1Peter 1:4).

But there's more. Verse 35 says give "*and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*" Do these things Jesus says, and you will be like God. In Luke 1:32 and Mark 5:7, Jesus is called the Son of the Most High. The title is "*El Elyon*" translated in the Old Testament as "Lord God" the almighty creator, the one true and living God above all gods.

"We need to learn above all, who God is and what He is like," points out RC Sproul, "because we are to be imitators of Him. All ethics and theology is a reflection of the character of God."

**CAN YOU BE MERCIFUL TO ALL** - In verse 36 Jesus adds another aspect, "*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*" Loving enemies, blessing those who curse, praying for those who abuse. "Likeness with God is our reward," observes RK Hughes, "in ourselves impossible. But through the new birth in Christ we become partakers of His divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3-4). He gives all that we need for life and godliness, to live like Him, by His power within.

Jesus' sermons in Luke 6 and Matthew 5-7 echo Moses giving the commandments, and God said the people called by His name were to be holy, like Him. Do these things and you will be. Moses was the great law-giver but Jesus is the great life-giver. You can keep the commandments only with the new heart and new Spirit that God promised, and that Jesus gives.

Christ proclaims that His kingdom has come, and all these things are being fulfilled. He tells His disciples what they are becoming, that they will be like Him, as they trust and obey Him. Jesus not only proclaims it, He proves it. 1Peter 2:9-25 presents Jesus in righteous suffering, bearing our sins in His own body, so that we die to sin and live to righteousness. Ultimate love!

His life, His love, lived through you. This is what turns the world upside down! ☐