

LUKE

“The Power of God’s People”

Luke 6:27-36

Sunday, October 8, 2017

By David A. Ritchie

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 abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

³² “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ 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. 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. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ¹

Glorious Father, we confess that your good creation has been bent and broken by sin and the power of hatred. The deadly shootings that unfolded in Las Vegas, Nevada one week ago have shown us the effects of sin are very real. As part of our worship this day we pray for the victims and the families of the victims of this violence. We pray you would bring them healing and hope. We pray for all the civic, state, and federal leaders who are responding to this situation; that you would give them wisdom and courage. We pray for the churches of Las Vegas; that they would shine the light of your gospel in this darkness. And we pray as we have prayed for so many tragedies these last few weeks – Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus. May your kingdom come!

And as we turn our attention to your Holy Word, I praise you Heavenly Father; that you have shown us your love in that, while we were still sinners and your enemies, you sent your son to die for us and by his blood reconcile us to yourself (cf. Rom. 5:8, 10). I thank you that your perfect power is revealed by your amazing love. May your Holy Spirit move upon our hearts this day as we study your inspired words, so that we may be imitators of your love and walk in love, as Christ your Son has loved us (cf. Eph. 5:1-2). We pray this in the glorious name of Jesus. AMEN.

I. Introduction

Sir Isaac Newton’s Third Law of Motion states: “**For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.**” This universal law describes how power and energy interact in the physical universe. But it also seems to describe the realm of human relationships. If you’re nice to me, I am bound to be nice to you. But if you hurt me, I feel like I’m entitled to hurt you. Thus, we get locked in vicious cycles wherein power exchanges through acts of violence. Person 1 hits Person 2, and Person 2 gets to hit Person 1 back. Nation 1 bombs Nation 2, and Nation 2 bombs Nation 1 back. If you don’t get a rose on

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 6:27–36.

the finale of *The Bachelor*, you become the next *Bachelorette* on the next season. It's a vicious cycle of retaliation that never ends.

This law of constant action and reaction describes how humans tend to view power in relationship to one another, and this has been the state of humanity ever since the Fall of Man. God created the heavens and the earth and mankind with fundamental goodness and perfection. But the goodness of God's creation was shattered when we as a race began to worship ourselves instead of worshipping God. We began to view our individual desires as ultimate and divine; and when this tendency is played out across society and time, it causes rape, murder, oppression, and chaos.

But rather than allowing this cycle to perpetuate until we destroy ourselves, God has intervened into creation that he might redeem it. He sent his Son Jesus to show his people how this cycle is broken.

Last we saw how Jesus challenges his people to have a new system of values that are totally different from the world. In today's text, we will see how Jesus gives his people a new way to practice and relate with power that is just as counter-cultural. So today we are going to talk about "*The Power of God's People.*"

II. Text

For the rest of our time today, I want to break our text down into three ideas, and show you how Jesus is calling his disciples to exercise power in a different way: *1.) The Power of Generosity, 2.) The Power of Grace, and 3.) The Power of Godliness.*

1.) The Power of Generosity.

Let's read the first few verses again: "*But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them*" (Luke 6:27-31, ESV).

Here Jesus lists eight imperative commands one after another. And this is a significant event in the Gospel According to Luke, because, as New Testament scholar Robert Stein notes, "*they are Jesus' first direct commands in the Gospel.*"²

And as the very first command suggests each of the commands entails a specific way for God's people to embrace the power of love in lieu of the power of coercion. More than that, I want to make the argument that Jesus is calling his people not only to love but to love *generously*.

Now some of these commands are fairly straightforward. We are to generously love not just our friends or those who it would be in our best interest to love. But rather we are to love our enemies. We are to do good to people who hate us, bless them with our words, and even pray for them.

But what does this mean in real life? It means that we refuse to gossip about those whom we know are speaking ill of us. We resist the temptation to promote ourselves by slandering our enemies. When we

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 206.

feel the temptation to justify ourselves before others against those that oppose us, instead we pray for our enemies.

Now I found it an honest challenge at times to pray for people who I would consider my enemies. But I will give you a little bit of practical advice. Don't feel compelled to pray dishonest prayers. You don't have to fake it with God. So praying for your enemies does not mean, "God, I pray you would just bless this person who is talking behind my back; please give them health and financial prosperity and everything they want. AMEN." No. There are better, more honest prayers to pray for your enemy. Instead, when people sin against you pray that the Holy Spirit would convict them of their sin so that they may find the blessings of grace and understanding. You can even pray this little gem of a prayer that I found in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer: *"O Lord... pardon all those who have done or wish us evil, and give them repentance and better minds."* This is an honest prayer. It is a powerful prayer. And it is a generous prayer to pray for those who abuse us.

Now a few of the other commands that Jesus gives are best understood in the cultural context in which Jesus was giving them. This is true of the two commands of verse 29, *"To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either"* (Luke 6:29, ESV).

In first century Judean culture, a slap on the cheek wasn't as much an act of actual violence as it was an act of dishonor.³ It was a way of letting someone know you thought they were beneath you and that you did not acknowledge his or her dignity. Thus, Jesus is calling his people to reject all notion of pride and a self-made reputation, and instead, purposely posture ourselves toward humility.

Likewise, a tunic was a one-piece undergarment and a cloak was an outer garment. These two items, for most people in Jesus's culture, were the only clothes they owned. Thus if someone demanded to take your tunic or cloak, it was like asking to take something of basic necessity.⁴ So in this statement, Jesus is not just commanding generosity, he is commanding a radical generosity that makes one vulnerable and exposed.

Finally, Jesus commands, *"Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them"* (Luke 6:30–31, ESV).

Christians are not only called to be exposed and vulnerable, they are called to uniquely serve the exposed and vulnerable – namely the poor. And for centuries, Christians have been committed to feeding the hungry and providing clothing for the naked.

Now, if we really feel the weight of what Jesus is asking of his followers it should shock us. Jesus is surgically going against every tendency we have to shield our pride, our possessions, our time, and our financial resources. ***Jesus desires his people to be postured toward vulnerability, self-sacrifice, and generous self-giving in a world centered on self-protection.*** The disciples of Jesus are those who seek to generously serve others when we feel the most tempted to protect our

³ "What is being referred to involves insult more than injury (cf. Isa 50:6, esp. in the LXX) and should be understood as occurring "because of the Son of Man" (Luke 6:22)." Stein, 207.

⁴ Ibid., 207.

sense of personal convenience. The disciples of Jesus are those who generously give of our time and finances when we feel most tempted to spend those resources on our comfort.⁵

These words would have been such a challenge to the listeners of the first century. These were people living under one of the most brutal and oppressive empires of history. And Jesus is saying that he wants his followers to be *more vulnerable*.

But one of the brilliant things about Scripture is that it is just as counter-cultural and counter-intuitive now as it was when it was written. Because *I can think of no other text in the Bible that is more of a critique of our modern obsession with “rights” than the passage that is before us.*

Now I want to be very clear in saying that the Bible is not against human rights. In fact, you could very persuasively argue that it is the biblical worldview that provides the *only* basis for such a thing as human rights. It is the Bible that states that men and women are created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:28) and are therefore imbued with dignity and value and purpose. We are not just an accidental collision of atoms with no inherent purpose.

This is why when the Apostle Paul is being unfairly abused and mistreated by government officials in the book of Acts, he appeals to his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29) and even demands to appeal his case before Caesar (Acts 25:11-12).

So with this in mind, how should we see the notion of rights through the lens of the gospel? Should we reject them altogether? Should we protect them at all cost? I would suggest that the best way forward is to allow the mission of God to be the principle that guides us. This means there will be times that, in order to display the kingdom of God, we intentionally lay down our rights for the sake of others. There will be other times that we appeal to our rights so that we may further display the kingdom of God. This is how we can make sense of why Paul appealed to rights as a Roman citizen. He wasn't doing this to protect himself. He did this ultimately because he wanted to preach the gospel in the city of Rome, before Caesar himself.

But the takeaway is this: we are called not toward self-protection in our relationships but toward generous self-sacrifice. We are called to the mysterious power of generous love. As Dr. Sinclair Ferguson comments: *“Behind this lies the principle by which every Christian is called to live: do not make your ‘rights’ the basis for your relationship with others. Be prepared to take a lowly position, as a humble servant; be prepared to pay the price of imitating the example of Jesus.”*⁶

2.) The Power of Grace.

Jesus continues his teaching and says, *“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. 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”* (Luke 6:32–34, ESV).

⁵ “[Jesus’s] Disciples must give freely, even to those who have no legitimate claim upon them; there is no place for the claims of self over against generosity to others (cf. Ps. 37:21; Pr. 21:26)”. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 262.

⁶ Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*. (Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth, 1987, 1997, 2006, 2009, 2015), 99.

Here the revolutionary aspect of what Jesus is commanding is not *that* we love, but rather *whom* we love. We are to love our enemies; those who hate us; those who we would be most tempted to hate. There is a word for loving those who do not deserve love, and that word is “*grace*.”

Now in trying to understand what Jesus is teaching here about grace, we must first understand what Jesus means when he uses the term “love.” I would argue Jesus is not teaching that love is being okay in an abusive relationship. Love is not feeling obligated to work for a boss that has zero integrity. Love is not enabling an addict to have access to what they crave. Instead, *love means genuinely praying for and promoting God’s best for someone despite his or her sin*. Or as Dr. Michael J. Wilkins has written on this passage, “love” is “*...an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person in which I give myself to bring the relationship to God’s intended purpose.*”⁷

Here Jesus is engaging us at the heart level. It is possible to do the right thing with the wrong motive. It is possible to turn the other cheek while concealing hatred in our heart. But Jesus calls his people to employ the life-transforming power of grace. He is liberating us from the tyranny of bitterness and unforgiveness, which only poisons our hearts and brings zero justice to our enemies.

Now as a pastor one of the most common things that I have to walk people through is not just the pain caused by the sins they commit, but rather the pain that is caused by sins committed against them. And one of the most important steps in this process is to encourage people to truly forgive those who have hurt them.

I often have to say that when you truly forgive someone, you are not saying that what that person did was right. You are not acting like it never happened. What you are saying is that you are choosing to no longer create your own justice by harboring bitterness. Instead, you are entrusting your justice to the true and perfect judge.

In fact, I would argue, our ability to totally forgive derives, in part, from trusting in God’s perfect justice. If you think about it, when we hold onto bitterness and un-forgiveness, we do so because we desire justice, we desire vindication, and we think we have to get justice for ourselves. But God invites to let go of the poison of our bitterness. Why? Because he alone is a judge who is perfectly wise, perfectly good, perfectly merciful, and perfectly just. You can entrust your pain to him. You can rest in him. He will bring forth our justice as sure as the sun will rise (cf. Ps. 37:6-7). He will be your vindication.

When we love the unlovable with a love that is patient and kind, a love that does not envy or boast, a love that does not insist on its own way, a love that is not irritable or resentful, a love that bears all things, believes all things, hope all things and endures all things (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7), we are displaying to the world a better kingdom. And more importantly, we are displaying a better *King*.

This leads us to our final point.

3.) The Power of Godliness.

⁷ Wilkins, 266.

Our call toward generosity and extravagant grace are not rooted in some arbitrary command for God's people to obey. Our call is rooted in character and nature of God. As God's people, we are called to bear and represent his name.

Jesus says, *"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. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:35–36, ESV).

Now the sermon Jesus is preaching here in Luke 6 also appears in the Gospel of Matthew. And this week, as I was comparing the texts, I was struck by the slight difference that in the way Jesus describes God's likeness. What Matthew calls God's "perfection" (Mt. 5:48), Luke calls God's "mercy." In other words, the gospels show us God's merciful, compassionate love is perfect, whole, and complete. It lacks nothing and extends even unto those who would be his enemies. This is the essence of godliness that God's people are called to imitate.

The call of the Christian life is to walk in imitation of the God who has loved us as an act of worship. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Ephesians 5:1–2, ESV).

III. Conclusion

We began this discussion with Newton's Third Law of Motion: that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. But it here that I think it is appropriate to look at Newton's First Law of Motion: *"An object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force."*

In the physical universe, an object will stay on its current course of motion indefinitely – *unless* it is acted on by an external force. So too, we must understand when we talk about our vicious cycles, must understand we are more often than not a part of the cycle. We are part of the problem. We cannot save ourselves. We need an outside force. And this is what God gave us when he gave us Jesus.

And the power of Jesus's love has entered into human history to break our cycles of violence, not merely by preaching, but also, by practicing what he preached.

Jesus wasn't just struck on the cheek; he was beaten and spit upon. Jesus wasn't just robbed of his tunic; he was stripped naked and humiliated and the Roman guards cast lots to determine who could take his clothes. Jesus wasn't just asked to give food to hungry, healing to the sick, and friendship to the lonely, all of which he did; but even more, he was asked by his heavenly Father to make the ultimate sacrifice of giving his life for the sins and rebellion of his enemies. And Jesus wasn't just persecuted and hated and abused – he was crucified. But as he was crucified, he cried out in loving prayer for the forgiveness of those who put him to death.

But the good news of Jesus isn't his death. It is his resurrection! Jesus not only endured the power of evil. He has overcome it. And the same Spirit that empowered Jesus in his ministry and resurrected him from the dead now abides in the hearts of all who have faith in Jesus. And it is the same Holy Spirit who reaches into our dead hearts and resurrects them to love even our enemies, as Christ loved us when we were his enemies.

The love of Christ is counter-intuitive, yes. But it is also powerful. Powerful enough to topple empires and split history.

So Redeemer Christian Church, may we be a people who embrace the power of a generous love, a gracious love, and a godly love. May the power of God's love be the defining attribute of our lives before a watching world!! AMEN.

Holy Father, empower us to love as you have called us to love. May your Spirit help us to be generous, gracious, and godly. Free us from the bondages of self-centeredness and bitterness. In Jesus's name we pray, AMEN.

Community Group Discussion Questions

- 1) *What are some real life examples of opportunities we have to love our enemies (Lk. 6:27)?*
- 2) *How do the directives of Luke 6:28-29 challenge our modern day culture that is so obsessed with the notion of "rights"? How should we view our rights in light of the gospel?*
- 3) *How should God's mercy toward us motivate the way we have mercy toward others (Lk. 6:36)?*
- 4) *In what ways did Jesus live out the commands of Luke 6:27-36 on the cross?*