

The Commands of Kingdom Love

Scripture: Luke 6:27-28

Code: 42-86

Back to Luke chapter 6 for our study of God's Word this morning. I'm not really giving you my sermon; I'm simply drawing your attention to the sermon our Lord Jesus Christ preached. And we're kind of working our way through this sermon, endeavoring to understand its profound and yet straightforward and simple truth. It is often called the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's record of what Jesus said that day near the Sea of Galilee is recorded in chapter 6 verses 20 to 49. It is the same sermon about which Matthew wrote in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Matthew has a much longer treatment of the sermon. Matthew recorded much more of what the Lord said, but the Lord said what Matthew recorded. The Lord also said what Luke recorded. And the sermon would be the combination of both and probably a lot more, since you could read through both passages in a very few minutes, and it's likely that the Lord preached for a long time.

We conclude, therefore, what Matthew gave us is a true record of a portion of that sermon. What Luke gave us is also a true record of a portion of that sermon. Combined they would come short of the full teaching of what Jesus said, which we would have to leave to the discretion of God. He gave us what He felt we needed to hear. As so often in the preaching of Jesus through the gospel record...for example, in chapter 4 when He preached the sermon in the synagogue...we only got His opening statement. He began His sermon by saying, "Today this is fulfilled in your hearing." We don't know what the rest of the sermon was in terms of specific content, yet we do know the general intent of that because it's given to us there and we can tell by the reaction of the people.

So typically the sermons of Jesus are given to us in some very brief summary fashion, although this particular sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, is one in which more material is included than any other of His sermons. It is an important sermon because it's a sermon about salvation. It's a sermon that draws some very clear lines. It is a very simple and very straightforward sermon. It always amazes me of how complicated...as to how complicated certain commentators can get in trying to understand what is very, very simple and straightforward. This sermon draws a simple contrast. It is a contrast between those people who are blessed and those people who are cursed. And, frankly, that includes everybody. Everybody everywhere who's ever lived either falls into the category of being blessed or being cursed.

I suppose if a person looked at religion in the world, on the surface, at least, it would seem that there are very many options, thousands of them, as you sort through all of the various religions of the world and try to come to some understanding of the complexity of religion. But in the fact, there is really a

very simple approach to religion. Everybody relates to God in one of two ways. You're either blessed by God or cursed by God. There is only one true and living God and that is the God revealed on the pages of Scripture. There is no other God; there are no other gods. And all men relate to the true and living God one way or another. They are blessed by Him or they are cursed by Him. They are in His Kingdom, or out of His Kingdom. They are His children or the children of Satan. They are in the kingdom of light or they're in the kingdom of darkness. They are citizens of heaven or of hell. And that's how it is. Everybody in the human race fits into one of the two categories.

And that's how Jesus begins His sermon by pointing clearly to the blessed and the cursed. The word "blessed" is in verse 20, 21, and 22 and the cursed are referred to with "woes," woe meaning curse, in verses 24, 25 and 26. And Jesus, like any good evangelist, creates a contrast. There are the people who are saved and the people who are lost, the people who are cursed, the people who are blessed, the people who belong to God, and those who belong to Satan, those who have been redeemed, those that have not, those that have been transformed and regenerated and those that have not, those headed to heaven, those headed to hell. And that's the simplicity of it. If God is not your Father, Satan is. If heaven's not your home, hell is.

That is not complex; that is simple. That is the message of every prophet of old, the message of Jesus, the message of John the Baptist, the message of the apostles and the message of every true evangelist since then up to this very present hour. The simple contrast is clear to us throughout all of biblical history, and it is crystal clear to us in this sermon which Jesus preached. Verse 20 tells us that He was talking to disciples. That's a broad generic word for learner, student. There were lots of people following Him, not just the twelve apostles.

Don't confuse the disciples here with the apostles. The apostles were disciples but they are set apart from the disciples as apostles. Disciple means student, learner; apostle means messenger, sent one. And they had been identified, as we know, back in verse 12 to 14 as apostles. So the apostles are the twelve apostles. The rest of those following Jesus and learning Jesus' teaching to one degree or another, being students of Jesus are in the broad category of disciples. Jesus then speaks to this broad category of people and says you're either blessed or cursed; you're either in one category or the other. You're either in the Kingdom of God or outside the Kingdom of God.

And that is still a message that I would give today. You are all here. You are to one degree or another learners. You are students; you've come to hear me speak. And you fall into those two categories; you're among the blessed or among the cursed. Some of you have been among the blessed for a long time. Some of you are newly converted to Christ and you're newly among the blessed. Some of you are among the cursed, but you're coming out. You're coming to understand the gospel, and the Spirit of God is directing you and you're moving toward faith in Christ. Some of you have heard the message over and over and you're resolute in your unbelief and maybe you're drifting in the other direction and it won't be long before you don't even show up anymore.

That's the way it was with the crowd that was following Jesus. They were at all points on the spectrum from being disciples to being...true disciples to being false disciples and the processes in between. And Jesus said that's the way you have to view this whole matter of religion in the world. You're either among the blessed or the cursed or in process of coming to that blessing or going to that eternal cursing. Now how are we to understand who's who? How are we to understand who is blessed and who is cursed? The first way we understand is how they view themselves. You can tell who has been redeemed by how they view themselves. And that's what we learn in verses 20 to 26.

The blessed, those who are in the Kingdom, yours is the Kingdom of God as verse 20 says. The blessed view themselves as poor, hungry, weeping, and alienated. And that is to say that they have a view of themselves that sees their true spiritual condition as one of sin. That's their bankruptcy. They see themselves as spiritually bankrupt, empty, beggars, hungering for a righteousness that they don't have and can't earn. And there is in them a sadness, a weeping, a sorrow, a brokenness, and a sense of being alienated and ostracized.

And once they make that identification with the true and living God through faith in His Son, there is, of course, an alienation, a spurning and even persecution, the Lord points out. So the first way you can tell a Christian is by how he views himself. And, inevitably, he views himself as a desperate, empty, hopeless, helpless...fill in the blank...sinner. That's how true believers view themselves.

That is not how religious people view themselves. That's not how the Jews viewed themselves. That's not how the Pharisees and Sadducees and the Essenes and the Zealots and those people who were a part of the system of Judaism in the land of Israel at the time of our Lord, they didn't view themselves that way. And religious people never do view themselves that way because if you're not a penitent in terms of your religion, if you don't view yourself as a helpless sinner, helpless who can't save himself or herself, who is absolutely spiritually bereft and bankrupt in a beggarly condition, doing nothing to earn salvation, if you don't see yourself in that desperation, crying out for mercy from God, then you must see yourself as having some religious merit, having some religious achievement, having some moral works, or ceremonial works, or religious works by which you can gain some favor with God.

And that's the way religious people see themselves, whether they're Jews, or whether they're Muslims, or whether they're Mormons, or Jehovah's Witness, or whatever they might be in the world. You either believe you can make no contribution to your salvation and you're hopeless, helpless beggars hungering for what you don't have, dissatisfied, and in some ways the off-scouring of the religious world, or you believe that you can make a contribution. And the Jews of Jesus' time were into a works/righteousness system.

And so Jesus says as long as you view yourself, verses 24 to 26 as rich, well-fed, happy and popular, you're doomed because that's all the comfort you're going to get and you're going to be forever hungry, forever mourning, forever weeping because you're in the same category as false prophets. They were popular, too. But God damned them and clearly the prophets the true prophets proclaimed that damnation. And that's the way it breaks down. Those people who are true disciples of Christ, true followers of Christ are known by how they view themselves. And we saw that last time.

Now, I want to move to another category. They are also known by how they view others, by how they view others. They are not self-righteous, they see themselves as wicked sinners. They do not believe that anything they do morally or religiously can make a contribution to their salvation. And so they see themselves as having no hope but to cry out for mercy, cry out for grace, cry out for forgiveness and plead with God to save them though they don't deserve it. They are the penitent, they are the humble, they are the poor, the hungry, the sad, the alienated, saved by grace. That's how they view themselves.

And anybody who doesn't view themselves like that isn't in the Kingdom. May be religious...most people are. But they think they're rich because of their religion. They're satisfied with their religion. They're happy with their religion, and they're, to some degree, rewarded by the people around them who are in the same system who affirm them. Those are the people who are lost. Because it starts with a view of yourself, and if you don't see yourself the way you really are, if you don't see yourself as a lost sinner totally depraved and helpless, you're not going to come to the gospel.

But the second thing is the way you view other people, the way you view other people. You can tell whether a person is a true disciple of Christ, Jesus says here, by how they view other people. Look at verse 27. "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 mistreat you.' " We'll stop at that point because I'm not getting past there anyway. I wanted to. I tried to. Some mountains I can't climb. Nothing seems more formidable to me than trying to climb over a Bible verse. I just got stuck on verses 27 and 28.

Here is the...here is the second test for a true disciple. First one is how he views himself. The second one is how he views others. And it's clear to whom Jesus is referring because verse 27 begins with these words, "But I say to you who – " What? – "who hear." That's a very important statement. There's a contrast being made here. There's a contrast being made between people who have the ability to hear the voice of God and respond and people who don't.

We remember 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "The natural man understands not the things of God, to him they are foolishness." And there is a clear distinction between sinners who are referred to in verses 32, 33 and 34, and sons of the Most High, referred to in verse 35. There is a dramatic difference. And part of that difference, of course, is that the one who is not a true disciple, the one outside the Kingdom, the one who has never been regenerated, the one who has never been saved has no

capacity to hear. That is to say to understand, to believe and to act on divine truth.

So the Lord narrows His audience here and says, "I'm talking to you who can get it. I'm talking to you who have spiritual understanding, the true believer, poor, hungry, sad, unpopular. I'm talking to you who are rejected. I'm talking to you who are persecuted, and I'm telling you, you are not only known by your hatred of sin...mostly in yourself...but you're known by your love of your enemies. This is your character."

And, you know, this is an important balance because I could create a sort of spiritual case for isolation. I could say, "Oh, you know, I'm so poor and so hungry and helpless and hopeless and so sad and so morose and mourning and morbid about my failings. And my total depravity so overwhelms me and I feel so badly about myself." Like some strange people do, I could put rocks in my shoes and thumbtacks in my shorts. This is true. There are people who do it. They wear a scapular around their waist with little needles in it that inflict wounds on their waist because that's what they think they deserve.

And I could just decide that I'm going to crawl in my little hole of self-protective, self-pity and I'm going to cut myself off from my persecutors. And I'm going to agree with them that I am an unworthy wretch and I'm just going to wallow in my wretchedness. And, furthermore, I don't want to hang around sinners because if I get around sinners they'll tempt me and they'll be a source of influence and I'll even feel worse about the way I feel. And I don't want to get anywhere near those kind of people who are going to corrupt my life and they're going to...if I get around sinners, the sinners are going to make things worse for me.

And I'm going to take the high ground and I'm just going to wallow in my wretchedness. I'm going to stay away from the influence of evil people. I'm going to go lock myself up in some monastery somewhere. I'm going to retreat into a place of isolation where I can really let God how...know how bad I feel about myself. And I'll cut myself off from the people who hurt me and persecute me and make me feel worse and the people who might influence me to do evil. So you become morbid and morose and self-protective and you retreat into isolation.

Is this a virtuous thing to do? Is this a righteous thing to do? It's the very opposite of what we ought to do. How are you going to take the gospel to every creature if you don't go out and find them and get to know them? How they going to hear without a preacher, and how they going to have a preacher unless somebody goes? Romans chapter 10. There are some people who can rejoice in their persecution, rejoice in their rejection and conclude...or "that if sinners liked me, if sinners got to like me, that might indicate that I had fallen from grace." So if they did contact sinners they might want to contact sinners in such a way it would make sinners hate them more and then they would feel sort of self-righteously persecuted.

In fact, I suppose people could come up with some complex of thoughts that would indicate the truest devotion to Christ was always to be rewarded with hatred, so the more you were hated the truer you were to Christ so that the idea would be, "I'm going to be isolated; I'm going to wallow in my iniquity, and if I do get out, I'm going to go interact with sinners in such a way they're going to hate me more than ever. And if they hate me more than ever that means I'm godlier than ever. Well, there are people who think that way.

No, this is an important balance here because Jesus says your relationship to others is not to be one of isolation; it's not to foster persecution. Your relationship to other people is to be characterized by love, love. No true disciple is going to wallow in his iniquity and cut himself off from the world. He's not going to accept animosity and even try to heighten and intensify that animosity. He's not going to retaliate.

There are some who think maybe the just and righteous thing to do is to retaliate against your persecutors. Not to do that either. What Jesus says in verse 27, with that astonishing economy of words with which He always spoke, is simply this, "Love your enemies. Love your enemies." Why? Because that's not normal. And that will be a demonstration that you're not normal because they don't do that. People outside the Kingdom don't love their enemies. They basically hate their enemies.

I was driving in to church this morning with Patricia and our little granddaughter, Katie. And we pulled up behind a car and I was looking at one of the bumper stickers on the left and it said something like, "God in all things." I don't know, maybe they were coming here. I didn't follow them all the way in. But it said, "God in all things." And I thought, "Well, that's kind of neat, God in all things." And the other bumper...I looked over, and there was another one and it said, "I'm really mad because a drunk driver killed my son." And I thought, "Those two bumper stickers don't work." You can't say God in all things and then you be mad at your enemy, that's not what the Scripture describes.

But that's human attitude. And you know what? He is proud that he is mad. And he is religious and proud that he is mad because vengeance is a virtue, among unbelievers. It's a point of strength, of sort of moral hostility against what is wrong. That's the world. That's the way sinners are. Not a true disciple. True disciples love their enemies. That's not normal. Normal would be God in all things, and the bumper sticker says, "I love and pray for the drunk who killed my son." That's not normal. If you have that on your bumper, people will think you have something else going in your mind than what is normal.

Now even in Israel it wasn't normal. And you can't get more religious than they were. Roots in the Old Testament, the true religion that developed a highbred of Judaism that was part Old Testament, part human tradition and invention, and the end result was an apostate form of Judaism. But it was a very complex kind of religion and very highly codified and defined. And in their system...listen to this...it

was a sin to love your enemy. It was a sin to love your enemy. So when Jesus stepped in front of the crowd in the Sermon on the Mount...and He's got Pharisees there and scribes there; they followed Him everywhere. He's got priests and rabbis and local synagogue rulers and the populous...and He says, "Love your enemies," that, to the Jews, is a statement that is immoral. It is ungodly to say that. It's not right. That's offensive to them because they tied their spiritual virtue to their hatred.

And then it would be like saying to...it would be like saying to a Jew in Jerusalem, "Love the Palestinian suicide bomber." Are you kidding me? Virtue is tied to the hatred. Or, "What you need to do is love your hostile Arab neighbors." Well, the Jesus...Jews of Jesus' day had...they had a direction in which most of their hatred was going. It was very, very clear. It went toward the Romans. They didn't like to be occupied. They didn't like the Roman presence. They didn't like it for a lot of reasons. They didn't like it politically because the Romans had taken away their self-rule. And then they had appointed the despicable Herodian rulers and stuck them all around the area of Israel to rule, and they were despised Idumaens, not Jews. They had to deal with these usurpers and invaders and occupiers.

They hated the Romans because the Romans were idolatrous gentile pagans. When they came in with their poles on which they had the image of Caesar, that was a violation of the commandment to make no graven images because they worshiped Caesar as a God. And so here they had blatant idolatry in the land. Every time a Roman coin passed through a Jew's hand, it was something to spit on because it had the image of Caesar engraved upon the coin and that was an idol. There was a group of Jews connected with the Zealots called the Sicari, who were the terrorists, the Jewish terrorists who went around stabbing Romans. They were obviously clandestine. They were murderous. The Jews hated them. And they thought they hated them with holy hatred; they thought they hated them with a righteous hatred.

They also had developed a hatred of people who violated the law and traditions. And they thought that that was a righteous thing to do. I suppose they're not unlike some people today who think their responsibility is to hate abortionists, or to hate people in a cult, or hate Muslims, or to hate people who pervert sex, or corrupt culture, or diminish the name of God in the public discourse, or do acts of terrorism. It's a crucial message for us, as it was for them. Because hate has become a virtue for us. Not a religious virtue but sort of a noble American virtue, a macho virtue.

But here Jesus steps into this environment and says, "Love your enemies." This is unacceptable. But then again, everything He said was. That's why He only had to preach one sermon in His hometown of Nazareth; they tried to throw Him off a cliff. And He grew up in that synagogue, had been there for thirty years, as a child, as a young boy, as an adult. They knew Him well, they were His extended family. They were His neighbors and His relatives and they tried to execute Him after one sermon because everything He said was the opposite of what is CW, conventional wisdom, PC, politically correct.

Now, I want to give you several points as we work our way through verses 27 to 38. But the whole section is about Kingdom love, okay? That was just introduction. Now we're going to get to the point here. This is about Kingdom love. And true disciples of Christ are known by how they view themselves and how they view others. And how they view themselves is with hatred for their own sin, how they view others is with love. Interesting. You hate this sinner, you love that sinner. And this section unfolds for us, first of all, with four commands. Okay? The commands of Kingdom love, let's call them, the commands of Kingdom love.

Verse 27 and 28, which I read to you, has four simple commands. The first one, love your enemies. Now that's...let's just say that's how we feel about them. That's cultivating an affection. That's how we feel about them. Love your enemies. The Essenes who were the most devout, I suppose in some ways even a step beyond the Pharisees. The Pharisees were fastidious with the law, but the Essenes were the monastics. They eschewed living in social, cultural normalcy, and they went out into the desert and they lived down by the Dead Sea. They were monastic. They were the isolationists. They saw themselves as the most devout, sacrificial, unworldly.

Here's what the Essenes says, and I quote some of their literature. "Love all that God has chosen and hate all He has rejected." They also wrote, "Love all the sons of light and hate all the sons of darkness." That was prescribed in their ethical, moral, religious code. Hate sons of darkness, unbelievers. In fact, they went to far as to curse all non-Essenes, which means hate the Pharisees, hate the Sadducees, hate the Zealots, hate everybody who is a non-Essene, hate them all.

And the Pharisees weren't much better than that. I'm quoting from one of the Maxims of the Pharisees. "If a Jew sees a gentile fallen into the sea, let him by no means lift him out of there, for it is written, 'Thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbor but this man is not thy neighbor.' " Why? Because he's a gentile, let him drown. It's a sin to lift him out of the water. Don't rescue a gentile. Now this had become a point of their virtue. In fact, the Romans...you can find in Roman writings...the Romans actually accused the Jews of hating the human race. Nice reputation. We would like to think that Christians are known by their love. In the ancient world Jews were known by their hate. It is not unlike contemporary Middle Eastern and other places in the world...Islam. Strange parallel.

And, of course, the Pharisees and the scribes had figured out, along with the Essenes, some justification for this. And you're saying to yourself, "Well how in the world could they come to this conclusion they were supposed to hate everybody." Well, they went back to the...they went back to Deuteronomy 23, for example, and in Deuteronomy 23 God determined that He was going to judge the wicked. And so He brought judgment upon the wicked, using Israel as an instrument of judgment, and brought about the death of idolaters. And you have a number of those sort of holy wars, I guess you could call them, which God Himself prescribed. No man could prescribe such action.

But God Himself can determine to judge who He wants when He wants. And in the Old Testament when Israel was the theocracy and the tool of God, there were times when God used Israel as that judge. He also used Assyria as a judge. He used Egypt as a judge. He used Persia as a judge on other occasions. But God could determine to use human agencies, governments, nations as judges, and He did that. And they thought that that had somehow been delegated to them, that they had some personal right to act as the judge of everybody, even executioner if need be, which they did in the case of Jesus.

They would also go back to the imprecatory Psalms, imprecatory meaning there are Psalms that imprecate, Psalms that call an imprecation or a judgment upon somebody. The psalmist we read this morning, in Psalm 59, is calling for God to judge the enemies. The psalmist...very carefully remember this...the psalmist didn't do the judgment. He simply said, "God, these are dishonoring to Your name, these are dishonoring to Your glory, these are blasphemous enemies and they are worthy of judgment. O God, vindicate Yourself and judge them." The Pharisees again had felt that this somehow had been delegated to them so that they could not only act as a nation which God was using as an instrument, but they could act as God Himself and bring about their own imprecation upon whomever it was that they desired.

Those issues in the Old Testament had to do with a national judgment which God brought. It had to do with a divine judgment which God brought. But very clearly Deuteronomy 32:35 says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." When it comes time for that, I will do it. Not you. Those were all matters of divine action, not human liberty. But the Jews had put the prerogatives that belonged only to God into operation in their own personal relationships. And, of course, that was another way in which they had skewed the Judaism of the Old Testament. This was never Old Testament law. In Exodus 23, there are a couple of verses. I think it's verse 4 and 5, it talks about if you see your enemy...his donkey under a heavy burden, go relieve the donkey's burden, help your enemy. That's pretty clear. And that's a very simple expression of a law that you find.

For example, I'll just give you a couple of illustrations. There are a lot of places in the Old Testament, but Job 31 also, verse 29, "Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, or when evil befell him? No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse. It would be a sin for me to curse a man. It would be sin for me to speak evil into his life, to speak judgment on him." That's for God to do, that's not for me to do. All I can do is say to that man, "God will curse you if you reject Him." I can't speak that curse into his life. God will judge you if you turn your back on him. I can't bring that judgment on him.

That's why Jesus in the same sermon, as Matthew records it, said, "Judge not lest you be judged." That's not your call. And Proverbs 25:21 is another, I think, clear indication of the Old Testament standard. "If your enemy is hungry –" Proverbs 25:21 – "give him food to eat. If he's thirsty, give him

water to drink. For you'll heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you." In other words, show love to your enemy. Show good will, benevolence to your enemy. This is what the Old Testament taught. And, in fact, there was a very clear indication of what the Old Testament taught in Leviticus 19:18. And Leviticus 19:18 sums it up. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love your neighbor. But that became an escape hatch. Ah, your neighbor. And then the big question, the big question in Jewish theology was, "Who is my neighbor?"

And in, of course, the text of Luke 10:29, the man comes to Jesus and he says, "Okay, I'm supposed to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, supposed to love my neighbor as myself, but who is my neighbor?" If you were an Essene your neighbor was an Essene and nobody else. If you're a Pharisee, your neighbor was a Pharisee and nobody else. Jesus then went on to tell a story about who your neighbor is, and it's the story of the Good...what?...Samaritan, that great story of a Levite passes by...this is a man who had the religious responsibility as a leader of the nation. A Levite passes by; he won't help. A priest passes by; he won't help because they hated anybody outside their little clique. But the Samaritan came by, who was the outcast of outcasts, the most despised of all despised, the half-breed traitor to Judaism. He does what nobody else will do.

Jesus essentially is saying your neighbor is whoever is laying in the street and needs your help. That's your neighbor. Whoever comes across your path, that's your neighbor without racial, religious distinction. Even your enemy is your neighbor. But they didn't interpret the Old Testament that way. Jesus then has to reassert the truth. And, again, what we said last time is so true. Everything Jesus said was contrary to how they thought, contrary to how people always think, contrary to how people think today. Love your enemies?

I always think back to Duane Rea when he was pastoring here years ago and up at SanVal Market up in Sun Valley, his son was working and somebody came in to rob the place. They were on drugs. Got a cashier in a compromising situation with a gun and he tried to intervene because he was there to help and he was killed, a fine young Christian, young man, college student. And I remember that his father, Duane, was so compelled and eager to get to the prison to see this guy who did the murder because he wanted to share the gospel with him. And that's what he did.

Love your enemies. That's the attitude you have toward them. Romans 12...I need to just give you this one scripture and then we'll go to the rest of the verse, but just so you have the text. Romans chapter 12 verse 17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." Verse 19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved. Leave room for the wrath of God for it is written –" Deuteronomy 32:35 – " 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' " And also, as I read earlier, Proverbs 25:21, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he's thirsty give him a drink, in so doing you'll heap burning coals upon his head."

Don't allow the evil that person does to overwhelm you, but overwhelm that evil with responding goodness. This is not normal. And isn't that the point? That's why down in verse 35 it says, "If you do this, if you love your enemies and do good to them and lend to them and expect nothing in return, your reward will be great and more than that, you will be sons of the Most High." The point being, they will recognize that this is not human, and it will become clear that this identifies you as having a preternatural or a supernatural love. So the attitude, how you feel about them, you love them.

Secondly, the act, you do good to those who hate you. That's what we do. We do good, *ka/s*. That's inherent good, not superficial good. Not beauty but good, inherently good. You do what is good. And what is ultimately good is what is redeeming, what has lasting goodness. You do for them what can lead to their eternal salvation. So the strategy then is, "What do I need to do to my enemy in order to gain an entrance and an openness for the gospel?" How do I feel? I love him. How do I act? I find every means possible to do good, to show that I can overcome his evil with good. I act in his life benevolently. I act in his life with goodness.

Thirdly, how you speak. Not only how you feel and act, how you speak is important. Verse 28, "Bless those who curse you." What is to bless? It's to speak...it's to speak goodness into their life, to speak blessing into their life even if they curse you. And, of course, many of the followers of Jesus were cursed unofficially. They were just vilified and cursed, ostracized, spurned, alienated in an unofficial way. And they had to deal with that. And the Lord wants them to know, because there are going to be Holy Spirit impulses, you know, going on in their heart, that they should love these people in spite of this. But the system they had grown up in told them to hate those people.

So, you see, the reason Jesus puts this in the form of a command is He wants them to know they can follow the impulse of the new creation and not fall victim to the brainwashing of the religious system they've been in. It isn't right to hate. What you were taught is not right. Matthew 5:43, Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount, he quotes Jesus as saying, "You have heard it said – " which means this is the rabbinical tradition – "love your neighbor and hate your enemy," Matthew 5:43. That's exactly what they were taught. Jesus said, "I have to teach you all new again, you've got to start all over again, I have to tell you, you must love that enemy, you must act benevolently to that enemy so that you literally overpower his evil with your goodness, and you must speak blessing into that life, even if you are unofficially cursed."

On the other hand, you could be officially cursed. What was that? John 16:2, "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue." They will excommunicate you, they will unsynagogue you. Jesus went further, "They will kill you thinking they are serving God. They'll kill you thinking they're serving God." What do you do to the people who are going to kill you thinking they're serving God? You speak good into their life. What is that? That's the gospel. You speak that which brings about their ultimate good.

It doesn't mean there's no place for warning. How can you speak goodness into their life if they don't understand their sin and judgment? You have to speak about sin and righteousness and judgment, as the Holy Spirit convicts that way, according to John 16. You have to warn men that, "If anyone love not the Lord Jesus Christ – " 1 Corinthians 16:22 – "let him be accursed." You have to say like verse 24, 25 and 26, "Woe to you who are rich and woe to you that are well-fed and laughing and popular," you have to speak that but that's the first part of the good news, isn't it?

Paul gave his life to bring salvation, blessing to the enemies of God, to the enemies of Christ, to the enemies of the gospel, and to his own enemies who eventually took his life. Why did he do that? Because he loved so greatly. He said to the Romans, "I can almost wish myself accursed, I mean, I'd almost take the curse of God if I could bring the blessing of the gospel to my people, Israel." His love for his enemies was not natural. It wasn't part of conventional religion because conventional religion is a reflection of the natural or the demonic.

The love that the apostle Paul had, the love that true Christians have and have always had is not explained on any natural level, can't even explain the life of the apostle Paul, a constant life of suffering. Just go back and read 2Corinthians for yourself and see the litany of things he endured. Five times at a synagogue the Jews whipped him with 39 lashes. And he suffered that because he loved them enough to continue to speak into their life blessing, the blessing of the gospel. And there is absent in this any sense of self-interest, self-protection.

And, finally, He says, "Your attitude toward others involves how you feel, how you act, how you speak and how you appeal, how you appeal." The end of verse 28, "Pray for those who mistreat you." What should be our prayer? Well we could say, generically and generally, "God, we want You to reveal Christ and establish the glorious Kingdom and bring evil to an end. We want You to destroy the enemies of the truth. We want You to silence the false prophets. That's for You to do. "But there's this person who hates you, hates the gospel and doesn't like me. And, God, I want you to save that person." That's the prayer. That's what Jesus did.

Jesus didn't act in a judicial fashion on the cross. He acted in a personal illustration and hanging on the cross He said, "Father – " What? – "forgive them." That was a prayer. "Forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." And Stephen in the seventh chapter of Acts, while he's being crushed under the stones that are being pummeled into his body from above, says, "Lay not this sin to their charge," which is another way to say, "Forgive them." This is praying for those in the midst of being mistreated. Those are the commands of love.

And so I say to you, true Christians are known by two things. How they hate sin, mostly in themselves, and how they love others. And Jesus is then putting the sword through the crowd and separating who the true disciples are from those who are not. Those are the commands of love. Next time we're going to talk about the reactions of Kingdom love and there are four reactions starting in

verses...starting in verse 29 and running through verse 30.

Father, we thank You for this good word, basic word, simple, straightforward, uncomplicated. So many people today wonder what their relationship to You is. They can know. They can know by how they feel about the sin that is in them and their inability to save themselves and their need to cry out in desperation in mercy and grace, like the Publican who beat on his chest and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," and wouldn't even lift up his eyes.

And, Lord, they can also know by how they feel about their enemies, loving them, acting benevolently into their lives, speaking the goodness of the gospel, praying for their salvation. That is being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving each other as God in Christ has also forgiven us. That is, as Paul says in Ephesians 5:1, being imitators of God and walking in love as Christ loved and gave Himself up for us. While we were enemies, You loved us. While we were enemies, Christ gave His life for us. You have set the example, a feeling and acting and speaking on behalf of enemies, redemptively. And we would be manifestly Your children, forgiving as You forgive, as Christ forgives, loving as You love, walking in love as Christ loves.

In a world of vengeance and a world of retaliation and a get-even mentality, may we stand out as lights in the darkness, letting our light shine so men in seeing this love and the work of goodness that flows from it may glorify You, our Father, who is in heaven. May the world know that we are not like them, but are sons of the Most High, El Elyon, the ruler of the universe, the sovereign God who has transformed our souls. This then becomes the platform for our mission on behalf of the gospel. Lead us to our enemies with the same grace that You came to us when we were Your enemies and bring to them through us the salvation You so graciously granted us. To that end we pray for Christ's name. Amen.

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