

The title for today's message is: **Imitating God.**

Jesus said: **Love your enemies**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

Jesus, after addressing His disciples, now turns to all who will listen. He begins by teaching that all Christians should apply the way God loves to themselves.

Here Jesus illustrates how generosity in its many forms is also a form of love and forgiveness.

Luke tells us that Jesus is speaking to His disciples. Yet it is clear, Jesus was also speaking to a larger audience, especially the "rich."

Here God's promise of salvation is an invitation to all to become the "poor of God," but not all accept it.

And doing good to others in the hope that they will do good to you, is not wrong. The point here is that there is no reward.

However the person who does good expecting nothing in return receives a great reward from God.

Look, Jesus never urges people to serve for the sake of repayment. To do so would be to exchange material selfishness for spiritual selfishness.

But for a Christian that reward is communion with God and opportunity for more service. Jesus says: “He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked”.

Were to be modeled after the Old Testament command: “Be holy as I am holy.” Yes, We are called to imitate none other than God Himself.

Now having God’s character, and enjoying His love shows one has the very same character and love as God.

Look, Jesus says do not judge. Certainly we are to pass judgment on the morality of actions. But that should not extend to people.

If the principle of generosity is not applied in our attitude toward people who do wrong in our judgment.

Then the principle of “tit for tat” will be applied in our case. Yes will be judged according to the same standards we have applied to others.

If we have been narrow, stingy, rigid, and self-righteous toward others, God will measure us by the same yardstick.

Condemnation of another spells our own condemnation. A refusal to forgive prevents our own sins being forgiven by God.

If God judges us according to our actions, He wants us to judge others accordingly.

That is without crossing the line into a judgment of the person or his or her worth before God. If our judgment is generous, so will be His.

If stingy, He will use the same measure. God will treat us better than we deserve until judgment. Then, He will treat us as we have treated others.

The topic here is the interplay between justice and mercy. God is both just and merciful and there is no contradiction in God.

Jesus is teaching us what is meant by justice and mercy and how we can see both of these divine attributes in our relationships with one another.

Only Jesus uses seemingly different categories of thought to make His point in several different ways.

When we remember that Jesus did not, in fact, deliver this ‘sermon’ at one time, but that it is a collection of His teachings.

We have no trouble with the seeming repetition, that is, saying the same thing in different ways.

Instead of justice Jesus is returning kind for kind or unkind for unkind and instead of mercy, Jesus speaks of generosity.

That is, going beyond justice to, “above and beyond the call of duty,” really a form of heroism.

The behavior Jesus recommends, is the behavior that reflects God’s behavior, which is most uncommon for human beings.

To love enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, to turn the other cheek when slapped.

To give to all who beg, to lend money without expectation or requirement of repayment, to not judge people is to behave like God, to be a most uncommon human.

It is to “go beyond” what any human might expect of us. In a word, its not exchanging things with others for mutual benefit nor is it justice.

But it is generosity, self-giving or giving-up self-interest, to the point of what humans would call “heroism.” Some might even call it “lunacy.”

Jesus would call it being “poor in God.” Or being “a child of God.” Whatever it might be called, it is what Jesus wanted to tell us.

Indeed to show us by example, of being a child of God, a “spitting image” of our heavenly Father.

Jesus is saying that we should practice generosity now and we will receive justice later.

At judgment we will be judged not on how “just” we were, but on how generous we were in this life.

In the end God will apply the standard of our own personal generosity to us when He places justice upon us.

This is definitely not the way we would set it up. We would apply even-stein justice, rather than mercy or generosity.

We would maintain that we returned kind for kind, unkind for unkind and that makes us “just.”

God has a different idea. One of the very important things Christ came to tell us is that the standards of eternity are different from those of earth.

Personal generosity is more important to God than justice. In the end justice and mercy will meet.

Essentially they are the same, but only in the final analysis, in the final outcome, on the last earthly day.

Jesus recommends “uncommon” behavior, the fundamental quality of God that makes Him “uncommon,” “unique,” “incomparable.”

If we want to be like God, “uncommon,” “holy,” we need to compare our behavior not to that of other humans but to God’s.

Jesus gives us insights and examples on how to do just that. Of course, for Jesus being holy and being loving is the same thing.

In the Old Testament the uniqueness of God was described as “holy;” in the New Testament it is described as “love.”

Not love in the sense of romantic love, though there is nothing wrong with that, or friendship love, certainly, a good thing, but sacrificial love.

Self-giving love, love that does not require or depend on any response from the other, good action love rather than simply good feeling love.

The essence of this “uncommon” behavior is treating people better than they treat us, treating them better than they deserve in the even-stein justice sense.

For Jesus that is also the essence of love, the essence of forgiveness and the essence of generosity.

Love, forgiveness, and generosity are three different words for the same reality, the reality of God Himself, yes, God's essence.

Jesus uses some pretty ugly or, at least, uncomfortable settings and situations in order to illustrate His point.

Turning the other cheek instead of returning unkind for unkind, lending without demanding repayment, doing good to those who do evil.

Loving where hating would seem perfectly just and justified, behavior like this is hardly held in high regard.

Look in common human society and those who behave in such ways are hardly considered the heroes they really are in God's eyes.

Love: In Greek, the language in which the New Testament was originally written, there are three words that are all translated into English as "love."

Because of this there is confusion about just what Jesus is advocating and what He is not advocating.

One word is the Greek word "Eros" aka "god of love" aka "cupid." Our English word "erotic" comes from that word.

It stands for in-love love, romantic love, love of the sexual kind. This is a wonderful love, but not the love of which Jesus speaks.

We can “control,” to a certain extent, what we do about being in love for example, we do not have to have sex with that person.

Now, the last word for love is the Greek word “agape.” Now there is no English equivalent for this word.

But, “agape” is the word Jesus uses to describe what He is commanding of His followers.

Its God’s kind of love, although God is also in love with each of us and its not two way, but is a one-way love.

Look, it doesn’t depend on what the other person does or does not do, but is a right attitude and action love.

And all three kinds of love here can co-exist, but its in the absence of any type of good feelings.

Look, we cannot really be in love or be friends with someone who is not in love or friends with us in return.

Yet, its possible to love and be friends with one’s enemies in this way, to act well toward them, despite the negative feelings.

When Jesus said to “turn the other cheek,” for example He wasn’t saying that we should refrain from defending ourselves, or defending another person.

And in the same way Jesus doesn’t want us to strip naked in public when he said to give your clothes to someone who is in need of them.

He is exaggerating in order to make a point, that He is serious and want's us to take Him seriously. Its a typically Semitic way of expressing oneself.

Look, were to take generosity to its ninth degree, materially lending without expecting let alone demanding repayment.

The principle behind all these examples are the same: make generosity the standard, not a justice balancing scale.

Compensation may be the just thing, but not the generous one. Leave justice for eternity.

On earth, God's justice is found more in overdoing generosity than insisting on equality.

The latter almost always leads to overdoing justice. On the social level, forgive injustices rather than retaliate.

And remember, forgiveness is a form of generosity, treating people better than they have treated us, giving more to them than they deserve.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.