

# 10-13-19 Do Unto Others As You Would Have God Do Unto You

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We have in today's Gospel perhaps one of the more difficult scriptures for us to embrace. It is certainly not a scripture that the world endorses or accepts. It is a scripture that when examined magnifies the hypocrisy of so much of the fallen humanity today. It is a scripture from which we have what has become known universally by many people and many religions as the Golden Rule, Luke 6:31, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

It seems quite simple, but it's more difficult in practice than we might suspect. And what if we were to modify that scripture just slightly and say, "Do unto others as you would have God do unto you"? "Do unto others as you would have God do unto you." What's the difference? Well, perhaps in practice there's no difference. However, God knows everything about us. He knows our sinful passions. He knows our deepest thoughts. Your fellow man doesn't know everything about you, but God knows all. Realizing that God knows everything about us, what is it that we want from him? We want his grace, his mercy, his patience, his forgiveness. Not just for the outward and obvious sins of our life, but for those deep-rooted passions and thoughts that try to plague us so much of the time. Is this not true? Am I the only one that thinks this way?

If we are at all serious about our salvation, then we must be concerned about God's response to our sins. We want God to be patient with us. We want God to be merciful to us. We want God to forgive us. So, this Gospel says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." How we want others to treat us, how we want other people to treat us individually comes at least in part, from the fact that we love ourselves, in a good sense. Meaning that we take care of ourselves. We nourish our bodies. We exercise to stay strong. We eat right to stay healthy. We bathe ourselves to stay clean, and this is good, we should. Ephesians 5, "Indeed no one ever hated his own body, but he nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church. For we are members of His body."

Granted this scripture from Ephesians is in the context of how husbands and wives should treat each other, but it's a message that can easily be applied to today's Gospel, which applies to all of us. As a side note to the married folks, it's a good idea now and then to reread Ephesians 5. Verse 32, "If you love those who love you", "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." Now this is a little difficult one, this next one. It's interesting that the Lord put this in, "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."

Let's look a little closer at these verses. It seems perfectly natural to love those who love us. It seems perfectly natural to do good to those who do good to us. And it seems perfectly natural for us to expect that when we lend to others that we will be paid back in full. But the Lord is making a much more profound statement. There's nothing extraordinary about loving the same people that love you. It's certainly a good thing that we love those who love us, but it's nothing above and beyond what everyone does, believers and unbelievers, Christians and pagans.

But we must pay attention. The Lord is developing a much more elevated point. He's raising the level of understanding from the earthly to the heavenly, from the temporal to the eternal. Verse 33, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same."

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What if we interjected the opposite? Think about that. "If you do bad to others because they do bad to you, how are we any different from the rest of the sinners?" Would we find justification from the Old Testament, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"? It's in the scriptures. But if we try to justify our bad behavior from the Old Testament, can we really claim to be a Christian?

A Christian is one who follows Christ. What does Christ say, what does He instruct, even command that we do? Looking at the previous array, a different gospel from Matthew, Chapter 5, "You have heard that it said, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'", so here we have Christ addressing that exact issue. "But I tell you", the Lord is speaking, "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other as well." I have to admit I'd have a hard time with that one.

My dad bought us boxing gloves when I was just big enough to walk, really. And we grew up that way, boxing. We loved doing it and we got pretty good at it. Turning the other cheek when someone slaps you would be a challenge. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy', but I tell you", the Lord again, is speaking. "I tell you", He says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." And this is the motivation to do it, "That you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven." That's the motivation. That's what would motivate me to turn the other cheek, to be the son of God.

Back to chapter 6 of the Gospel of Luke, "But love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be the sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." One 3rd -century Christian commentator said, "To love friends is custom for all people. But to love enemies is customary only for the Christian."

Saint Ambrose of the 4th century, contrasting the Law and the Gospels said, "The law commands revenge of punishment. The Gospel bestows love for hostility and benevolence for hatred." Saint Isaac of Nineveh, also known as Saint Isaac of Syria, said, "When a man overcomes justice with mercy, he is crowned." He is crowned not with a crown awarded under the law of the righteous, but with the crowns of the perfect who are under the Gospel. He says, "Both Old and New Testaments command us to love our neighbor, to feed the poor, to clothe the naked. But the perfection of the Gospel in Jesus Christ goes beyond that. In the Gospel, we are to lay down our life for our brother."

Saint Ephraim the Syrian says, "An eye for an eye is the perfection of justice." It's equal, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", is the perfection of justice. But "Whoever strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other", that is the perfection of grace. And grace is the higher calling.

And what did I mean when I said that the Lord is raising the level of understanding from the earthly to the heavenly, from the temporal to the eternal? Saint Gregory Palamas offers us a glimpse into the deeper meaning of the Gospel. First, of course, he identifies the obvious things that the Lord is saying. If we are mistreated or cheated, or insulted, we come to the correct conclusion that we have been wronged by this other person. But he says the hypocrisy is that whenever we do the exact same thing to someone else, we come to an entirely different conclusion. Somehow, we find the justification in what we do. We have not wronged them, they got what they deserved. In this case, we hold ourselves to a much lower standard than that to which we hold others. It says we are

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created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, we are created with a nature that is good. This is our true self, the self that God created us to be. But unfortunately, this has been tarnished by sin.

Saint Gregory says that anyone who does not want the same things for his fellow man or pass the same judgment on them that he wishes for himself is a foolish person. It is our natural nature to love our fellow man, to wish the best, to look for the best, to assume the best. When sin entered and corrupted our true self, that good nature that God created in us, it didn't extinguish the love for self, but it severely damaged the love for our fellow man. And our love for our fellow man is the crown of all the virtues. In this life, loving those who love you, doing good to those who do good to you, and lending to those who will repay you is in itself its own reward. It is an earthly reward.

Saint Gregory says there is no benefit for us to be called Christians if we act just like heathen, the unbelievers. Acting as the world acts, doing only as much as the world does brings no heavenly reward. The saint says it brings absolutely no profit or grace by way of eternal compensation. But he says the absence of even these basic, good worldly actions, in other words, those who don't even love those who love them, he says they are the worst of sinners. He goes on to expose those who loan with interest, or those who refuse to loan to those in need.

This is a hard concept for many to accept, but the saint is expressing the message that Christ is imparting to his disciples. The goal is not earthly wealth, the goal is not earthly wealth. The goal is heavenly wealth. Of course, we are to be prudent and industrious with what God has given us, with all thanksgiving. But the goal is always the same, to be obedient to Christ and His commandments, laying not up for ourselves treasures on earth, but laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

Doing good to those who are good to us is normal. It is expected. It is a good earthly response. Doing good to those who hate us or mistreat us or malign us in some way, returning good to them for the evil that they give to us is unnatural in the world. It's unnatural in the world, but it is, according to the Lord himself counted to us as righteousness. And it is deserving of a heavenly reward. Lending to others and expecting to receive everything back with interest brings no heavenly reward. Lending to those in need, asking no interest, knowing you may never be repaid brings no earthly reward, but it brings an infinite amount of interest in the heavens.

Saint Gregory says that this life is the time for sowing good works. The season of the harvest is the age to come. And Saint Paul says in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "What agreement can exist between the temple of God and idols?" For we, we are the temple of God. "What agreement can exist between the temple of God and idols?" God has said, "I will live in them and walk among them and be their God. And they will be my people."

Therefore beloved, since we have these promises, the promises that God has made us, that He will be our God, that we will be His people, since we have these promises let us cleanse ourselves, cleanse ourselves from everything that defiles the body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Brothers and sisters may this be our path, our chosen path, our journey into His eternal kingdom.

Amen.

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