

Loving Your Enemies

by J.C. Ryle

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that we should love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us, and that this practice will bring its own reward.

Scripture: Luke 6:27

Topics: "Christian Love", "Mercy and Forgiveness"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the profound teaching of Jesus on loving one's enemies, highlighting that true Christian love is selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional. He explains that this love should extend even to those who hate us, urging believers to act with kindness and patience, reflecting God's mercy. Ryle points out that Christians are called to a higher standard of love than the world, which often reciprocates kindness only when it expects something in return. He encourages believers to look to God's example of mercy and assures them that practicing such charity will ultimately lead to blessings. Ryle concludes by stressing that genuine love stems from faith in Christ and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

"But I say unto you that hear, love your enemies, do good to them who hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them who spitefully use you." (Luke 6:27,28)

The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in these verses, is confined to one great subject. That subject is Christian love and charity. Charity, which is the grand characteristic of the Gospel, the bond of perfectness, without which a man is nothing in God's sight, is here fully expounded and strongly enforced. Well would it have been for the Church of Christ if its Master's precept in this passage had been more carefully studied and more diligently observed.

In the first place, our Lord explains the nature and extent of Christian charity. The disciples might ask, Whom are we to love? He bids them, "love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that spitefully use you." Their love was to be like his own toward sinners--unselfish, disinterested, and uninfluenced by any hope of return. What was to be the manner of this love? the disciples might ask. It was to be self-sacrificing and self-denying. "Unto him that smites you on the one cheek, offer also the other." "He that takes away your cloak, forbid not to take your coat also." They were to give up much and endure much for the sake of showing kindness and avoiding strife. They were to forego even their rights and submit to wrong rather than awaken angry passions and create quarrels. In this they were to be like their Master--long-suffering, meek, and lowly of heart. Our Lord

condemns everything like a revengeful, pugnacious, litigious, or quarrelsome spirit. He enjoins forbearance, patience, and longsuffering under injuries and insults. He would have us concede much, submit to much, and put up with much rather than cause strife. He would have us endure much inconvenience and loss, and even sacrifice some of our just rights rather than have any contention.

In the second place, our Lord lays down a golden principle for the settlement of doubtful cases. He knew well that there will always be occasions when the line of duty toward our neighbor is not clearly defined. He knew how much self-interest and private feelings will sometimes dim our perceptions of right and wrong. He supplies us with a precept for our guidance, in all such cases, of infinite wisdom. It is a precept which even infidels have been compelled to admire: "As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise." To do to others as they do to us and return evil for evil is the standard of the heathen. To behave to others as we should like others to behave to us, whatever their actual behavior may be, this should be the mark at which the Christian should aim. This is to walk in the steps of our blessed Savior. If he had dealt with the world as the world dealt with him, we should all have been ruined forever in hell.

In the third place, our Lord points out to his disciples the necessity of their having a higher standard of duty to their neighbor than the children of this world. He reminds them that to love those who love them and do good to those who do good to them and lend to those of whom they hope to receive, is to act no better than "the sinner" who knows nothing of the Gospel. The Christian must be altogether another style of man. His feelings of love and his deeds of kindness must be like his Master's--free and gratuitous. He must let men see that he loves others from higher principles than the ungodly do, and that his charity is not confined to those from whom he hopes to get something in return. Anybody can show kindness and charity when he hopes to gain something by it. But such charity should never content a Christian. The man who is content with it ought to remember that his practice does not rise an inch above the level of an old Roman or Greek idolater.

In the fourth place, our Lord shows his disciples that in discharging their duty to their neighbors they should look to the example of God. If they called themselves "children of the Highest," they should consider that their Father is "kind to the unthankful and the evil," and they should learn from him to be merciful, even as he is merciful. The extent of God's unacknowledged mercies to men can never be reckoned up. Every year he pours benefits on millions who do not honor the hand from which they come or thank the giver of them. Yet every year these benefits are continued. "Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, never cease." His mercy endures forever. His loving kindness is unwearied. His compassions fail not. So ought it to be with all who profess themselves to be his children. Thanklessness and ingratitude should not make them slack their hands from works of love and mercy. Like their Father in heaven, they should never be tired of doing good.

In the last place, our Lord assures his disciples that the practice of the high standard of charity he recommends shall bring its own reward. "Judge not," he says, "and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned; forgive, and you shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you." And he concludes with the broad assertion, "With the same measure that you mete withal, shall it be measured to you again." The general meaning of these words appears to be that no man shall ever be a loser, in the long run, by deeds of self-denying charity and patient long-suffering love. At times he may seem to get nothing by his conduct. He may appear to reap nothing but ridicule, contempt, and injury. His kindness may sometimes tempt men to impose on him. His patience and forbearance may be abused. But at the last he will always be found a gainer, and often, very often, a gainer in this life; certainly, most certainly, a gainer in the life to come.

Such is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ about charity. Few of his sayings are so deeply heart-searching as those we have now been considering. Few passages in the Bible are so truly humbling as these eleven verses.

How little of the type of charity which our Lord recommends is to be seen either in the world or in the Church! How common is an angry passionate spirit, a morbid sensitiveness about what is called honor, and a readiness to quarrel on the least occasion! How seldom we see men and women who love their enemies and do good hoping for nothing again, and bless those that curse them, and are kind to the unthankful and evil. Truly we are reminded here of our Lord's words, "Narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it."

How happy the world would be if Christ's precepts were strictly obeyed. The chief causes of half the sorrows of mankind are selfishness, strife, unkindness, and lack of charity. Never was there a greater mistake than to suppose that vital Christianity interferes with human happiness. It is not having too much religion but too little that makes people gloomy, wretched, and miserable. Wherever Christ is best known and obeyed, there will always be found most real joy and peace.

Would we know anything by experience of this blessed grace of charity? Then let us seek to be joined to Christ by faith and to be taught and sanctified by his Spirit. Let us understand that real, genuine, self-denying love will never grow from any roots but faith in Christ's atonement and a heart renewed by the Holy Ghost. We shall never make men love one another unless we teach as St. Paul taught, "Walk in love as Christ has loved us." Teaching love on any other principle is, as a general rule, labor in vain.

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