

Valentines Day is in just two days... and in honor of Valentine's Day... I would like to begin this morning with a quote about love... but it is from a very secular magazine. Journalist (Pauline Jayne Isaac) in a recent article that she wrote for Cosmopolitan magazine listed the 36 greatest on-screen love stories of all time. She begins:

The most famous movie couples have the ability to turn cynics into believers, critics into fans, and can even warm the iciest of hearts. Whether it's a romantic comedy or a drama—the outcome is the same. Love stories make you believe in love.

Aaaaw. Isn't that just special! ... Perhaps my wife and daughters have been correct (all this time.) ... Networks like The Hallmark Movie Channel and GAC **DO** have great value. ... We (now) know (thanks to this article) that they are making society MORE loving. They serve us by making us "believe in love." (I don't know what that means... but it sure sounds nice!) ... Well – maybe people believe **Hollywood's** understanding about love.

But today we come to a passage of Scripture that presents a love that Jesus says you and I are to have – (and to tell the truth) THIS love is NOT AT ALL believable. It is such an unnatural kind of love (really such an impossible kind of love)... that is just too easy for us to ignore (because we don't see it as being possible.) ... So we justify it away with excuses... (“Well THAT can't be what Jesus really meant...”)

Today's passage that we come to... in our study through Luke's Gospel... takes us to the main body of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. We will find here some very **difficult** exhortations... about this love. (No! Strike that!)... We will see a HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE love that Jesus commands

from us. ... We are to love others with a love that is EXTRA-ordinary. It is to go WAY BEYOND the way people usually love.

But do you know what...? Every true believe should expect to have a new nature that is different than the character that is typically seen in the world. (And) there are many good reasons WHY more should be expected from followers of Christ... than from others. Here are just a few of them:

- Believers in Jesus claim to have something that others do not have; they claim to be renewed, repentant, and redeemed by Jesus Christ.
- Believers do in fact have something that others do not have; they are in fact renewed, repentant, and redeemed by Jesus Christ.
- Believers have a power that others do not have; they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them.
- True believers have the Spirit of God dwelling within them.

Are we showing the world that we are different than they are? (I mean in a good way...) John 13:35 tells us that the way that the world will recognize us as followers of Christ... is by the superior kind of love that we display.

We are going to look at seven actions that we must decide with our wills to do... BUT that **require** the supernatural enabling that we claim to have.

Even though we must actively chose to do these actions – we can't (in our own strength.) None of us is capable on our own. ... But anyone who decides to do them... and actually **does** do these things PROVES that Christ lives inside of them. Only through His living inside of us... can we do these seven things (which proves Jesus is there):

- (1) Love your enemies.
- (2) Do good to those who hate you.
- (3) Bless those who curse you.
- (4) Pray for those who mistreat you.
- (5) Do not retaliate
- (6) Give freely
- (7) Treat **others** the way you want to be treated

At the beginning of His ministry... with the newly called twelve standing before Him... Jesus announced a new law... calling His followers to love as He loves.

Jesus blows these folks and us out of the water with His teaching. He tells them and us in a nutshell, *“Here is what I want you to do. I want you to love your enemies and treat them well. If the persons is dead, love and forgive them.”* ... If you were at this gathering... you might have asked: *“Could you run that by me again Lord?”* ... He patiently replies: *“You heard me right. I want you to love them.”* ... Knowing myself... I would probably have asked the Lord (in order to find some loop-hole): *“What do you mean “LOVE” them?”* ... Jesus dispensed commands... that the our human nature (patently) would call “plain ‘ol stupid.”

This is an impossible call apart from Christ. ... But it comes with full force to us... if we are to be Christ followers.

(You know) in our dog-eat-dog world... it’s common to see business competitors and political combatants fight tooth-and-nail... in a no-holds-barred battle... to pummel their opposition. What an unfortunate thing it is – to see people who say that they are followers of Christ – who do the same thing. This tells us that they are living (only) by their own natural strength. WE see... and God sees... that they do not display the character of being a son or daughter of God.

(Now)... before we go to our passage and start looking at these exhortations to love others with a supernatural love... I need to address the “WHY?” Why should we make such an effort to go way beyond our natural ability to love others? I want to give you seven practical reasons why we

should not ignore these commands... (why we must decide to do them... by God's enablement.) The last five reasons are presented in our passage – but I want to give them to you *now*... as well as when we see them in their verses.

First of all... our response may change the heart of our enemy. Love like this is unbeatable. The world can usually conquer the man who fights back. It is used to jungle warfare and to the principle of retaliation... but it does not know how to deal with the person who repays every wrong with a kindness. ... It is utterly confused and disorganized by such other-worldly behavior.

Secondly... responding the right way will help **US** to not become hateful and bitter. ... It will help **US** to not become the enemy and treat others with disdain. ... Ann Landers once beautifully expressed it in her newspaper advice column: "*Hate is like acid. It can damage the vessel in which it is stored as well as destroy the object on which it is poured.*" ... Someone else has said: "*hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.*"

Now let me preview what our text today will also give (as **reasons** to obey Jesus' commands – here.) These **all** have to do with THIS principle – **“Whatever we sow – we shall reap back onto ourselves.”**

(1) Mercy will lead to mercy (Luke 6:36). When we show mercy to others – it will come back onto us.

(2) Judgment will lead to judgment (v. 37a). When we judge – we will be judged.

(3) Condemnation will lead to condemnation (v. 37b).

4) Pardon will lead to pardon (v. 37c).

(5) Giving will lead to giving (v. 38).

So... these are the motivations for us to obey this new law... to love others the same way that Jesus loved. We will experience both immediate... and eternal consequences. ... Let's (now) take a closer look at Jesus' new law.

Luke 6:27-28

OK... (first of all... let me stop here.) ... I just have to ask this. Does anyone else find it fascinating that Jesus recognizes that we will have enemies...? Is it really "Christian" to think of anyone as our "enemy"...? (It seems odd that Jesus would have us place anyone in this category. Are they an enemy – if we love them?) But Jesus assumes that all of His followers will have enemies. ...How? ...And why?

(Because)... Jesus assumed that anybody who lived for eternal values would get into trouble with the world's crowd. ... Christians are the "*salt of the earth*" and "*the light of the world*"... and sometimes the salt stings and the light exposes sin. ... Sinners show their hatred by avoiding us or rejecting us ... insulting us ... physically abusing us ... and suing us. This is something we must expect. (And) the plan of God's Kingdom takes into account real-world problems. Though we *will* have enemies... yet we are to respond to them in love... trusting that God will protect our cause... and destroy our enemies in the best way possible - by transforming them into our friends. ... We are to overcome their darkness... by our light.

In verses 27-28... we just read FOUR terse commands that demand a supernatural love. (Now)... as I am sure many of you already know... there were several words for *love* in the Greek language.

Jesus did not here command **storge** (natural affection.) ... He did not command **eros** (romantic love.) ... He did not command **philia** (the love of close friendship.) ... He demanded **agape** love.

Such a love is **not** motivated by the merit of the one who is loved. The **other loves** come quite naturally. (For example... you can fall into **eros**. ... But **agape** love supersedes natural inclinations and often exists in spite of them.) ... It is a deliberate love... rooted in the will — a love by choice.

“**Agape** love” is a deep... continuous... growing and ever-renewing activity of the **will** - superintended by the Holy Spirit”. **Agape** love says: “*I will love this person because, by God’s grace, I **choose** to love this person.*” ... This word is very intense... forceful... and strong. ... It means that no matter what that person does to us... we will **never** allow ourselves to desire **anything** but his/her **highest good**... and we will deliberately and with set purpose... go out of our way to be good and kind to him/her.

“*Love your enemies.*” Jesus did not say: “*Like them*” - but “*Love them.*” ... One loves a person when he/she tries **earnestly** to promote that person’s welfare.

In my last church... we had an associate pastor (Pastor Brad) who had retired as the senior pastor of the church. He would often say: “*God tells me that I must **love** you. But that doesn’t mean that I have to **like** you...*” ... (You see) Liking involves an enjoyment and desire to be around the person – but love is a decision to earnestly promote another person’s well-being. You can do **that** without (*necessarily*) enjoying and desiring to spend time with them. They might irritate you. But you can still love them.

Jesus does not ask you to become your enemy's soul-mate... with hearts knit together like David and Johnathan.

But this call to ascend to the unnatural heights of *agape* love for our enemies that is defined by Jesus (here in verses 27-28) involves:

Unnatural deeds: “do good to those who hate you” (v. 27b). Imagine someone who hates you—then think of doing something nice to him or her. This is an **un**natural exercise, to be sure. ... Our natural response is to pay back tenfold—“*You slap me, I’ll break your neck*”—“*You take my shirt, I’ll chop off your hand.*”

Unnatural words: “bless those who curse you” (v. 28a) Incredible! — Someone pours vile abuse on you... and you are to respond with a heartfelt blessing!

Unnatural prayers: “pray for those who abuse you” (v. 28b). Did you know that it is impossible to truly pray for someone and hate them at the same time.

(Now) take another look at verse 28...

Luke 6:28

So what do you do when you are threatened... insulted... reviled or hurt by others? ... Jesus again gives an answer to people who faced this kind of treatment almost every single day. ... He told us all: “*Pray for these folks.*”

Pray for what? ... *Pray that lightning come down from Heaven and strike them right between the eyes! Right!???* ... No... I don't think that's what the Lord had in mind. ... Pray that the Lord would deal with them in His Own way and change their heart (and while you're at it)... pray that YOUR heart would be changed... and that your hurt would be healed. ... It is difficult to be bitter toward someone whom you are praying for every day.

Bless those who curse you. The word “bless” literally means “to speak well.” It carries the idea of speaking well of someone to others. (Now this is

hard) because it means avoiding the temptation to denigrate/stigmatize/put down someone who has harmed you... in order to cause others to think less of that person. ... (What's the first thing we want to do... once we are back in the presence of our friends? ... "*Do you know what that dirty-rotten scoundrel did to me...?*")

In the New Testament the term very frequently has a spiritual connotation. To "bless" someone is to speak well of him or her to God. ... The idea of blessing is to invoke God's favor on another's behalf... or at least appeal to God for that person... (that God would make them happy... or cause them to prosper.)

Intercession to God for the opponent is one of the highest forms of love. Such love is tough love... not because it requires harsh discipline against another (as parental love might)... but because it requires a redirection of the self - to such a great degree (it is a rerouting that is not normal for any human.) ... It is a supernatural love... that requires us to reverse all natural instincts. ... It is a love that can come only in light of a dependence on God.

Luke 6:29-30

What is Jesus talking about here? ... What does the Lord mean by the phrase that we are to offer the other cheek if someone strikes us on the cheek? ... First, let's make **VERY** clear what He is **NOT** talking about.

* This passage does not teach that Christians are a bunch of doormats to be trampled upon by wicked men.

* It does not mean we are to encourage evil, and be negligent in resisting or opposing evil or wickedness. We are to resist Satan and his work.

1 Peter 5:9 (ESV)

⁹ *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

- * It does not mean we are to encourage or assist criminals or let the criminal go unreported.
- * It does not mean we are to tolerate child abuse or wife abuse.
- * This does not refer to policemen or soldiers that protect and defend us. Romans 13:1–7 teaches that the state is a divine institution that has the power to punish wrongdoers. This is impossible without force.
- * It does not support pacifism and the basis of refusal to go into the military as the Quakers insist.
- * This does not indict a nation that goes to war against an evil nation, dictator, or terrorists. God has empowered government to punish evil doers or evil nations.
- * This does not mean that church discipline is wrong. (We need to obey Matthew 18:15–18; 1 Corinthians 5).
- * This passage does not mean we are to offer no opposition to evil men when they threaten our families. Jesus did not intend to teach that we are to see our families murdered, or be murdered ourselves, rather than to make resistance. If a woman is being raped, she is to defend herself and fight off her attacker.
- * This does not mean that protests of unkind conduct are prohibited. This was demonstrated by Christ at His own trial. When one of the officers which stood by and struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, Jesus answered him and said:

John 18:22-23 (ESV)

²² *When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?”* ²³ *Jesus answered him, “If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?”*

(You see) Christ did not strike back with His fist... but He did protest the officer's actions. In so doing... His action fulfilled the principle of turning the other cheek. ... He did not retaliate... but He did protest solemnly which is permissible and practical in most cases.

So what is this all about? ... In being smacked on the cheek... Jesus is describing here an intentional (calculated) **insult**. ... An insult can be done by more than physical abuse... but also with verbal abuse. In our parallel passage - Matthew 5:39... Jesus mentions the strike of the right cheek which tells us He is describing a backhanded slap. ... Since most people are right-handed... this is surely what Jesus had in mind.

In Jesus' time... if you wanted to really insult someone... you would slap them with the back of your hand. ... According to rabbinic law... to hit someone with the back of the hand... was twice as insulting as hitting him with the flat of the hand. ... The back of the hand meant calculated contempt... or withering disdain for a person. ... It meant that you were insulted... vilified... and scorned as a nobody. (You were considered worthless... or as nothing.) ... Understanding this custom is essential in understanding what this passage is talking about.

“Striking a person on the right cheek” became a cultural expression for *“insulting someone... treating them as worthless.”* ... It will not happen very often (if at all)... that anyone will slap us on the face. ... But time and time again... life brings to us insults... either great or small. (People will treat us as worthless... and with calculated contempt.) Jesus is saying here that the true Christian has learned to not resent and seek retaliation for these insults and abuses.

When Jesus spoke of being slapped on the cheek... He was (especially) describing an insult that comes because of one's faith. ... Did you know that according to Roman Law... if you insulted someone for their faith... you could be sued for defamation. The legal action back then was called the law of Lex Talionis.) ... In other words... the person could seek damages... and make the insulter **PAY**. But Jesus says: "*Do not do it!*"

In short... Jesus was saying that though you could take your opponent to the cleaners... dont! ... Instead... lovingly absorb the insult... the hurt... pain... rejection... and abuse.

Turning the cheek is more of an attitude of your heart... than a physical posture. ... It shows an attitude opposite of retaliation. ... Anything more than that will interpret this action wrongly. Turning the cheek is a principle that says "*I will not fight back and retaliate when insulted... but will leave the execution of judgment - to the Lord...*"

Romans 12:17, 19 (ESV)

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ... ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

What "turning the other cheek" means for us - is that when we are insulted or abused for Christ's sake (whatever form that insult may take)... we must not respond by becoming bitter and getting even... by getting our legal pound of flesh according our own version of Lex Talionis... but must turn the other cheek... especially the cheek of our heart.

Jesus calls us to swallow our pride and give up our "rights" to compensation and fairness. ... Our Lord is saying we should not attempt

personal vengeance. ... Rather than avenging yourself... we are to be ready to suffer patiently... a repetition of the same injury. ... We are to endure repeated insults. ... These exhortations belong to those principally who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

To turn the cheek and forgive someone involves three things.

1. First, it means to **forego the right of striking back**. One rejects the urge to repay gossip with gossip and a bad turn with a worse turn.
2. Second, it means **replacing the feeling of resentment and anger with good will, a love which seeks the other's welfare, not harm**.
3. Third, it means **the forgiving person takes concrete steps to restore good relations**. Going the second mile when we are attacked and abused is not easy. ... Going the first mile is not easy... but it can be done... by yielding our rights to the Lord and letting Him take care of our problems. We belong to Him.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

“Give the tunic with the cloak...” (or in modern language: “give the shirt with the coat...” The second part of the verse is similar to the first. ... The picture is of a robbery and the point is that one should not seek revenge... but again remain potentially vulnerable to a second attack. ...Huh?

O.K. So... here was the immediate application. ... Missionary travel was potentially dangerous... since robbers lingered on the highways. But missionaries should not cease from missionary work... simply because they might get jumped. ... Another possibility for the remark's background is that the social ostracism of persecution produced situations

where things were taken or damaged. ... These factors should not stop one from loving and serving one's neighbors. ... The point is that... (although a believer is exposed to the hostile religious opponent) believers should continue to be vulnerable... to repeated onslaughts... without seeking revenge.

(LISTEN TO THE POINT THIS VERSE IS MAKING...) **Love for possessions should never keep a Christian from loving.** ... For the sake of showing love – we are to keep a loose grip on possessions... which ultimately belong to God anyway. The Lord called for generosity in response to greed. In the kingdom of God, physical possessions are merely a means to an end, and He can easily replace them. The point is to value people far more than things. ... Love must be ready to give everything or have it taken away if need be. But love must decide when to give and when to withhold our possessions.

We can only practice this kind of sacrificial love when we know that God will take care of us. We know that if we give away our tunic... God has plenty more of them to give us.

Luke 6:31

You probably recognize this verse as “the Golden Rule.” But please remember: It's context is how we are to treat **our enemies**... not just the people that we like! We must treat those who try to harm us – the way we want others to treat us.

Luke 6:32-34

The ancient world often lived on the premise, “*Do good to others, so they will do good to you.*” ... But Jesus' command is set forth without any such

hidden agenda. ... It is love for love's sake... which is why it is so commendable and distinctive. ... Jesus is saying that the common "*I'll scratch your back, if you scratch mine*" approach to meeting needs is not an example of how a follower of His is to love. We should give without strings attached.

Luke 6:35

This give-to-gain mentality is only logical. Loving others in the hope of receiving love in return isn't a sacrifice; it's an investment with a reasonable expectation of reward. Jesus (on the other hand) called for self-giving *without the expectation* of anything in return. ... His brand of discipleship requires faith (confidence that all good things come from God.)

What may well be the most glorious description of the reward is this: and you will be sons of the Most High.... This does not proclaim that that our unselfish love **MAKES** us sons (and daughters) of the Lord. But it proves that we are related to Him. (We are God's image bearers.)

This defines who we are – with notes of promise about our reward. We will get to those in a minute. They are specified in the closing verses of our passage.

But along with those rewards... verses 36-38 contain some of the most mis-understood verses in the New Testament. I know that time is short... and I wish that I could spend more time on them. (Please stay with me... I will try to be brief... but I'd like for you to help stop the abuse of these verses... by YOUR understanding them.) ... These misunderstood verses have a context. They are the motivations that should cause us to want to love our enemies... as Jesus has just commanded.

Luke 6:36-38

The bottom line is that we will reap what we sow – and in the amount that we sow. ... [P A U S E] ... (LISTEN!) If we judge others... we will ourselves be judged. If we forgive... we shall be forgiven... but if we condemn... we shall be condemned. He was not talking about eternal judgment but the way we are treated in this life. ... If we live to give... God will see to it that we receive. But if we live only to get... God will see to it that we lose. ... This principle applies not only to our giving of money... but **ESPECIALLY** to the giving of ourselves in ministry to others.

(And) please don't be misled about verse 37 – “*Judge not... lest ye too be judged...*” Oh how the unspiritual like to quote this to us! (...and usually in the King James version.) ... It stops many believers from condemning obvious sin in the church and elsewhere. But Jesus did not say it (here) to prohibit examining the lives of others. This doesn't even prohibit the judgment of others. ... What it **DOES** DO ...is that it requires that our judgment be completely fair... and that we only judge others by a standard we would also like to be judged by.

This speaks against a judgmental and censorious perspective toward others... that holds them down in guilt... and never seeks to encourage them toward God. ... What is commanded is an attitude that is hesitant to condemn and quick to forgive. ... What is prohibited is an arrogance that reacts with hostility. It means that the Church cannot take up a hard... contemptuous and condescending attitude towards those whom it regards as sinners. ... And if we do... (in other words if we do not love the way that we are commanded) – we will be judged by others in the same way!

- We break this command when we think the worst of others.
- We break this command when we only speak to others of their faults.
- We break this command when we judge an entire life only by its worst moments.
- We break this command when we judge the hidden motives of others.
- We break this command when we judge others without considering ourselves in their same circumstances.
- We break this command when we judge others without being mindful that we ourselves will be judged.

This message on judging needs to be interpreted in the light of all Scripture. Jesus (Himself) implies in this very chapter (verses 42, and 45)... that we must regard certain individuals as being hypocrites and evil. This requires judging (but not a harsh condemning and arrogant judgment.) And we have all sorts of verses in Scripture that tell us we ARE to judge – but not condemn...

John 7:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

1 Corinthians 5:12 (ESV)

¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

Titus 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

1 John 4:1 (ESV)

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 John 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,

The final verses of our passage today (Luke 6:36-38) are telling us that God promises to treat us – as we treat others! ... God is gracious to those who are gracious. He will not judge those who do not judge. He will not condemn those who do not condemn. He will forgive those who forgive. The demand that the follower be gracious grows out of God's graciousness extended to us. God promises to deal with each person, but the tone of his dealings is influenced by how that person deals with others.

God will measure unto us according to the same measure we use for others. This is a powerful motivation for us to be generous with love... forgiveness... and goodness to others. ... If we want more of those things from God... we should give more of them to others. This sometimes includes our finances... in loving our enemies.

Luke 6:38

Jesus encouraged the freedom to give without fearing that we will become the loser in our giving. ... He wanted to set us free from the fear of giving too much. ... This is true and has been tested when it comes to generosity with material resources. ... Simply said... you can't out-give God. ... He will return more to you... in one way or another... more than you give to Him.

Yet the most pointed application of this in context is not so much the giving of material resources... but with giving love... blessing... and forgiveness. We are never the loser when we give *those* things after the pattern of God's generosity.

Jesus commanded us to know ourselves and others by our fruit. What a passage we have seen today for doing that very thing. ... Here is a barometer to measure your spiritual growth. Where are you in your spiritual journey...? Do you love others the way Christ asks each of His followers to do...?

When I first became pastor here... in those early years... we had a man who served as a deacon. I remember him saying (one time) in a meeting... something that made me want to reach across the table and grab him by the throat. He (actually said): *“I believe that there is no more growing for me as a Christian...”* He said, *“I have been a Christian for many years... (nearly all my life)... and there is only so much growth to be had by anybody... and I believe that I have reached it...”*

But I am willing to bet... that if he took a long and hard look at the passage we have been studying today... he would see things differently.

Folks **this** is our aim! Here is our target. Don't pass it off as something impossible. This is what Jesus expects us to growing toward CONSISTENTLY.

No! I don't think any of us have perfect love yet. But it needs to be in our sights and we need to be closer to it... than we were one year ago. If I asked your friends and neighbors if you are closer to loving the way Jesus commands us to – what would they say? ... [P A U S E] ...

1 Thessalonians 3:12 (ESV)

¹² *and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,*

- God's Servant, the Apostle Paul