

Mark 8: 34-38; “The Golden Rule of Christian Discipleship”, Sermon # 62 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 5th, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.

Is there such a thing as a selfish Christian? I would say that there is. Is this selfishness sinful? Well we need to be careful when we think about this. There is a sense in which our paying attention to self is righteous. “Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith.” “Or do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disqualified,” it says in 2nd Corinthians 13: 5. This morning I would like us to consider what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. Certainly this consideration of self cannot be wrong at every point. But we must acknowledge that there is a sinful selfishness that neglects the consideration of what God would have you to do, in accordance with His Word. This neglect of God’s Word and His will, and a person’s only thinking in terms of what they want in any given situation is indeed sinful. It is something that should not be taking place in the life of a Christian. And, a person should not continue to justify it if they come to find that they are selfish in that way. They should repent of it. As I said to you last Sunday, we need to remember that, as a disciple of Christ, we have a responsibility to consider the welfare and well-being of other Christians. They need rest; they need refreshment; they need to be shown the love of Jesus Christ through the way that you treat them. There are other bedrooms in this house of discipleship that you are to consider. And, there are also other people who currently do not live in this house of Christian discipleship whom the Lord would have come to live here. According to His holy purpose, He would have Christ’s kingdom to advance and grow, and others come to church here. And so, it is very important to our Triune God, that you learn to love your neighbor as yourself. The way that I would like to approach this subject this morning is to think 1st of all – About the Lord Jesus’ laying down to rest, and laying down His life, so that we could learn to love our neighbor. And then 2nd, I would like to have you think about the Lord Jesus’ giving to you the Golden Rule of discipleship to live your life by.

1st – Let’s think together about the righteous unselfishness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like us to think about the Lord Jesus laying down to rest. And I want us also to think together about His laying down His life, so that you can learn to love your neighbor as yourself. Turn with me over to Matthew Chapter 8, verse 18. “And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side.” “Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever You go.’” “And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’” Now this is a very interesting interview between this man and Christ. He wanted to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and he asserted to His face that he would follow Him wherever He would go. Jesus does not reprove this statement. Instead, He tells him that discipleship is not what he thinks; that it is sometimes uncomfortable and inconvenient to be His disciple. Jesus would, indeed, have every person who would be His disciple, to be decisive about following Him; even as this man was. But He would also have them to count the cost. He would have them to consider what it will mean to follow Him. It is not always a comfortable thing to follow the Lord Jesus. Jesus didn’t have any place to call His home. He had left His home in heaven, and He had entered this sinful world of woe. He was the King of Glory, but He was born in stable, and His crib was a manger. He grew up in a home in Nazareth, but He was on a mission; and that mission was the salvation of sinners.

This meant that He would have to keep all of God’s commandments perfectly, and He would teach men that they should repent, and believe in Him for eternal life. He came and did this out of a perfect love for sinful men. He would show them His miracles and He would astound them with His teaching; but He would be so preoccupied with doing God’s will, and keeping His law,

and helping people to understand the truth about life and righteousness and eternal life, that He would have no real time to provide for Himself a comfortable place to live. Perfect love is more preoccupied with others than it is with self. Jesus knew that even the creatures that live out in the wild; the foxes and the birds of the air have a home; have a nest; but the Son of Man, the only man who was ever the perfect fulfillment of righteous loving humanity, had no place to lay His head! This is perfect and righteous unselfishness. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (2nd Corinthians 8: 9) This is why you, as a selfish sinner, need to believe in Him.

The Lord Jesus willingly undertook, on our behalf, to so live in obedience to all of God's holy commandments, that He became poor. He had very few earthly comforts, or "normal" realities which you and I experience every day of our lives. He willingly denied Himself the comforts of a home and a bed to sleep in, so that we would be able to have a house of discipleship to live in and a bedroom to lie down in, and a bed to sleep in. He would sometimes be in such fastings and prayer that He would be up all night. He was often so tired from His many teaching labors and miraculous healings during the day, that He had to grab sleep and rest when He could; once he did this on a boat in the midst of the sea; and was even found by His disciples sleeping in the back of the boat that they were riding in, in the midst of a storm. Many people think of discipleship as something which they are going to do for Christ. They are going to give Him their heart and their life, and they will state it in no uncertain terms, that they will follow Him. They strongly assert their determination to follow Him wherever He will lead them. They do this in order that they can know themselves to be His disciple.

They declare their loyalty to His cause and their faithfulness to His truth. And then a little while later, they are not to be seen. You do not find them doing their Master's will, or keeping His commands. They find that obedience is uncomfortable and inconvenient, and the earthly benefits are disappointing. Some people have expected great earthly benefits to come to them when they declared that they would follow Jesus. But many have not realized that you can give nothing to Jesus, and do nothing for Jesus, until you come to Him in faith and realize that you have to receive something from Him first, in order that you might be able to follow Him at all. Have you realized, dear Christian, you are entirely dependent upon the Lord Jesus to be able to do the least thing in His service? Some believers, after trying to follow Christ only a little way, are ready to lie down and sleep in His service. In fact this is exactly what happened to the Apostle Peter as he attempted to follow His Lord in the strength of his own determination.

Turn with me over to John Chapter 13, verse 31, and you will see this. "So when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.' "If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately." "Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer." "You will seek Me, and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come, so now I say to you.'" "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Now watch this. "Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, where are you going?'" "Jesus answered him, 'Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.'" "Peter said to Him, 'Lord why can I not follow you now?'" "I will lay down my life for Your sake."

You see here, that we once again find this same kind of strong assertion that we found before, when we read about the man who stated that he would follow Jesus wherever He went. Peter's devotion was deeper than that man's was; he was willing to forgo many comforts and to give up everything for His Lord; but still, he could not follow Jesus at that time. Why? Because Jesus had to go to do the work of the cross alone. When Jesus accomplished this work that was impossible for any man to accomplish, then Peter would indeed be able to follow Him later; after Jesus had died for him, and after Jesus was risen from the dead. The connection with the words

that go before this, about loving one another, rests upon Jesus' laying down his life; not to sleep or to rest in His own Kingly Bedroom, but to die for His disciple's sins and for their inability to do what He was calling them to. The proof of all of this is what happened in Gethsemane. Jesus asked the disciples to watch and pray with Him, and none of them could do it. They were all found "sleeping and taking their rest". Jesus knew, that their desire was to follow Him. But He also knew their weakness. The encouraging thing for us to remember, as His disciples, are the words that He spoke to Peter: "...but you shall follow Me afterward."

What had to happen in the interim, then, while Jesus was suffering? Well turn with me to John 12: 23, and you will see Jesus predicting what needed to take place; even in the days leading up to His death. "But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified." "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." This is what I want you to see – "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also." "If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor." Oh, dear believer, or the one who is thinking of following Christ; have you come to this place where you hate your life in this world? Have you come to the place where you see that without Christ's salvation; His laying down on the cross and being nailed to it for your sake; that you will make a mess out of anything that you try to do for him? You would not have a Bedroom of Christian Discipleship if He had not suffered and gone to the cross. Have you come to the place where you hate your life in this world and now you are willing to lose it, to find Christ, and more of Christ?

This is how you come to the place where you will defeat sinful selfishness, and begin to love people around you; and especially the brethren. This is what happened to Peter. He couldn't watch with Jesus one hour in the garden of Gethsemane. He denied the Lord three times in the courtyard; denied even knowing the man; the one who he was sure that he could follow to the cross and to death. He hated his life, then, when he saw where all of his false confidence had led him. He had been trusting in his own strength. He had been trusting in his own heart; and he now found himself to be a fool. So he repented of it. Let me ask you now: Have you come to this place where you are willing to lose your life to find it? Do you hate your worldly, self-sufficient, self-justifying attitude towards life that makes you think that you do not need further grace, or further revelation of Christ in order to follow Him? Let us thank and praise the Lord that His grace encompasses all of our failings, and all of our misconceptions, and all of our mistakes, and all of our sins, in trying to live the Christian life. Thanks be to God that Christ went to the cross even for this. He even prays for the one trusting in Him that their faith may not fail. And this leads us now to the second point of our study here this morning....

2nd – I would like you to think with me about the Golden Rule of discipleship; the rule which you are called to live your life by, in relation to people around you.

The Golden Rule of Christian Discipleship is that you love your neighbor as yourself. The requirement of discipleship, in terms of love, is recorded for us in Matthew 22: 36-40, if you will turn with me there. A Lawyer had come to test Jesus after he saw that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence over their questioning of Him. He said to Jesus in verse 36, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" "This is the first and great commandment." "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Here we find the greatest commandments related to our discipleship clearly stated; hung out there, to see if we will consider them. The first is that we love God with all of our heart. All real and sincere obedience to God must be rendered out of our love for who God is; that He is our God; the One who has made us; and the One who should be loved with all of our heart, because He is worthy of it, apart from anything that He may have done for us. He is to be loved because He is the most Awesome

and Holy; the best of all Beings, infinite in understanding, great in compassion and kindness, and He is worthy of all the praise and devotion which we can give to Him, at all times.

Do you see God in this way? Then Jesus says that “the second” great commandment is “like” it. The reason that He says that it is like it, is because the obedience that is rendered in keeping the second, is similar to the obedience in the keeping of the first commandment. It is not that we are to love our neighbor with all of our heart, for that would put that person in the place of God, in terms of our highest obedience. And this would be sinful and unacceptable to God. No, it is rather that, when we think of our obedience to God, in relation to people around us, that this is the greatest commandment in relation to other people around us. It is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The highest and greatest commandment in relation to God is to love Him with all of your heart; the highest and greatest commandment in relation to men to love them as yourself. “On these 2 commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” All the other commandments that have been given to us by God, in relation to Himself, and in relation to other people, can therefore be placed under these two.

The commandment to love our neighbor is more clearly enunciated in two other passages of Scripture in the New Testament; Matthew 7: 12, and Luke 6: 31. I would like to briefly look at both, and make applications as I go. Matthew 7: 12 says, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” The word “therefore” is there so that we will consider the words that go before it. And the words that go before it read this way: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks find, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?” “Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?” “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” And then comes our verse related to loving your neighbor; “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This is an amazing coupling of truths which we have here; God’s giving good gifts to the one who asks and seeks; and our treating our neighbor as we would want them to treat us.

If we back up further in the passage, we find that the context is judging other people. Chapter 7, verse 1 says, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” These verses are not saying that we should not judge anything or anyone at all. They are not saying that we are not to attempt to discern the righteous thing to say or do in relation to something which someone else has been doing which is wrong. We are to judge them with “righteous judgment” as Jesus says in another place; in John 7: 24 – “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” But, rather, we are to understand that when we do judge, we are to love our neighbor as our self. We are to consider the measurement with which we measure. Would we like to be thought of, as we are thinking of that other person? Would we like to be spoken of, as we are speaking of that other person? Would we want to be looked at and treated in the way that we are looking at, and treating, that other person? It may be true that the other person who we are thinking about has done something wrong. But do we have to point that fact out to other people; to try to get them to see that person as a person whom they should disapprove of, and have nothing to do with? Is this how we would like to be treated if we had done something wrong?

No, Jesus is saying that there is a righteous way to judge, and there is an unrighteous way to judge. And we will look at that in a moment. But what I want you to see from this passage is what God would have you to think about, in relation to loving your neighbor. It is the good things that He is able to give to them and to you in relation to your prayers. Do you see that? “If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” You see, if your focus as a disciple of

Christ, is only on getting the other person, your neighbor, to change by your speaking against them to others, and not treating them in the way that you would want to be treated if you had done something wrong, then you are not going to be making much progress in holiness, or righteousness, or loving that person as yourself. But if your heart's focus is on prayer, and you are asking God to give good things to that person as well as yourself, then you will be making real progress, and God will be pleased.

The other verse related to loving your neighbor, and which brings other aspects of your obligation into view, of how to show them the love of Christ, is found in Luke Chapter 6, verse 27, if you will turn with me there. It says, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also." "And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either." "Give to everyone who asks of you." "And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back." "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." Now what we have here, is the disciple's obligation to teach the love of Christ to others around them; people who are unloving, unreasonable, and demanding people. They are people who do not understand the principle of truth that we studied back in Matthew Chapter 7 about God's giving good things to those who ask. They think that the only way to get the things that they want, is to attempt to force you, in some way, to give it to them.

Your "enemies", Jesus is saying, are those who need to be taught a lesson. And Jesus is saying here that the answer is not your beating them up. And it is not in telling them that they are lazy and need to be better managers of their money financially. Now, there is a place for both. If someone breaks into your house and is going to attack you, or your family, and rob you, then you have a Biblical right to do whatever is necessary to restrain them from doing so. If you know that a person is financially irresponsible and lazy, then you should not be giving them money which they will misspend. Because you know, that they will turn to you over and over again, asking you for more. But verse 32 is very revealing. "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?" "For even sinners love those who love them." "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?" "For even sinners do the same." But now, I hope that you will see that we have now come full circle in our study. Verse 35 – "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward (note that: your reward) will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High." "For He is kind to the unthankful, and evil."

Now, I want you to notice that there is nothing here about your rights; although you can thank God that you have rights. But it is the Christian's right and privilege to love, when and where there is no love to be found. It is his responsibility to teach that love by bearing with those who spitefully use them, and actually going beyond that, to be gracious and generous, and kind, and merciful to them. The Christian disciple is looking, first of all, to glorify God. How can God's character and God's love in Christ be seen in me, and through me? That is Christ's question to you today. The one who follows Jesus is hoping to hear the: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" when he sees Christ face to face. And he is willing to wait for his Master to decide on that day what kind of a reward he should have when this life is over. Should we not then, learn to love the brethren, and love the unlovely and the sinner as God does; while we have our life and our breath? Christ has died for us. And He has given us all things in Himself. He has given us the best of gifts; and He will bless us with good things every day as we ask Him. He is with us, and that is enough.

This is the Bedroom of Christian discipleship; it is to learn to love as Christ loved; to learn to lay down our lives for the brethren. Jesus said in John 15: 13 – "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends." That is the place where Christ laid His head; on the pillow of His love for us. He was the great King who wore the crown of thorns for you; so that

He might protect you, and care for you, and show you the better way of sacrificial love. That cross is where Christ laid down His body; where He died for you. And now He asks you: Will you show My love to others? Song of Solomon 3, verses 1-3 say: "By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him , but I did not find him." "I will rise now, I said, and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love." "I sought him, but I did not find him." "The watchmen who go about the city found me; I said, Have you see the one I love?" "Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love." "I held him and would not let Him go...." This is what I would urge you to do today, dear Christian; to hold on to your Lord, and do not let Him go. And, when you hold on to Him, He will teach you the better way of living the Christian life; by the Golden Rule. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is true discipleship.