

SO YOU THINK YOU'RE A LOVING PERSON

LUKE 6:27-36

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So You Think You're A Loving Person

Luke 6:27-36

Last time we met we said that Jesus was addressing this teaching to His disciples. In verse 20 Luke made it clear in his statement, "Looking at His disciples, He said." I think that we don't often take what Jesus says seriously. I'm no different but as I have been studying through Luke's Gospel, I am gaining more understanding into the nature and person of Jesus. As I have said before, Jesus intends to shock us into the truth. In today's passage, His intention is to describe love as heaven defines it. In other words we talk a lot about love, especially in church. We sing Jesus loves me and I love You Lord. We say that we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We say that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And my guess is that most of us think of ourselves as loving people. I hear a lot of Christians talking about the agape love Christians have and that our love is better than the love of the world. I will hit this point again, but let me just remind us that Jesus is addressing His disciples, not merely the multitudes in general. Jesus' message this morning is for all of us who call ourselves Christians.

I would like to challenge us with this thought this morning. When we see how Jesus defines love, it seems to me that our love is closer to the world's idea of love than it is to Jesus'. We are a lot like the woman who was receiving the life insurance check from her husband's policy. The insurance man was settling up with a woman who had just lost her husband. He presented her with a check for One Million dollars. She looked at the insurance man and said to him with a tear in her eye and a catch in her throat, "You know, I miss him so much. I'd give \$50,000 of this to have him back."

Sometimes when I think I'm doing well at loving my wife or others, I read passages like this and realize that I am not even close to loving as God defines love. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **JESUS' DEFINITION OF LOVE IS MUCH DIFFERENT THAN OURS.** I know I have read this passage many times and have discussed it even more. But I don't think it ever hit me as it has this time. I want us to try and place ourselves in the disciples' shoes and hear Jesus saying these things to us. Think about how shocked you feel as He says these things to us.

JESUS LAYS OUT HIS DEFINITION OF LOVE (VS 27-28)

In verses 27-28 Jesus lays out His definition of love. What is so radical and unnerving about His definition is that **THERE IS NO SELF-INTEREST IN JESUS' DEFINITION OF LOVE.** I think it would be unfair to hold unbelievers to these standards. However, if we want to insist that we are followers of Jesus, then we need to take what Jesus says very seriously.

In the first half of verse 27 we learn that this love is described as kingdom love. In other words, He is speaking to those want to call themselves disciples. Verse 27

starts out, "I tell you who hear Me." In other words, if we want to call ourselves Christians, then His words here are for us. Remember, people who are hard hearted will be described as those who "hearing, do not hear." Let us have ears and hearts to hear and to obey.

In the second half of verse 27 and verse 28, Jesus describes for us an extraordinary love. I know that there are many articles and books written about how there are three different levels of love. Eros is often described as that erotic, passionate love. Philo is described as brotherly or companion oriented love. And agape is often described as the highest form of love. Many Christians want to reserve this type of love only for those who are in Christ. I think this is a wrong approach. Since love is part of the intrinsic nature of God, the way God loves will be the measure of all the definitions of love. Since love is an attribute of God, He is the defining measure of eros, philo, and agape. Whether we are Christian or not, love is a communicable attribute of God. In other words, these are parts of God that He shares with human beings. God does not share His omnipotence, omniscience, or His omnipresence. In other words, only God is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present at all times. He does not share this with us. However, he does share with us His love, morality, truth, beauty, freedom, etc.

We will see very quickly that none of us are even close to living out love the way God describes it. All humans, Christians and non Christians alike, love on a continuum. We can be said to love as we measure it against God's definition. In other words, we can measure our attitudes and acts of love as we compare them to God's attitude and acts of love. That applies to all three types. If you want to measure your quality of eros, picture yourself as Jesus' bride. God refers to Old Testament Israel as His special love. Both the Father and the Son refer to Israel and the church as their bride. Does your love and passion match how passionately and sacrificially God loves us?

Jesus referred to the disciples as His friends. Jesus made it clear that there is no greater love than a person lay down their life for a friend.

And of course as Jesus will point out, agape love as defined by Him is something that we will have trouble understanding. Let me start with the main problem we have in understanding God's definition of love. Since we were born into sin, and because we have inherited Adam's sinful nature, we are by nature self-centered, self-absorbed, selfish, and self-loving. The base definition of love for us is, "that which gives me pleasure." Babies love their parents because parents feed them, change them, clean them, pay attention to them, and care for them. As we grow up, this self-absorbed love manifests itself at an early age. I'm sure all of us said to our parents when we were young things like, "I hate you. I don't love you," when we did not get our own way. I think our divorce rate is an example of the fact that our love is based on the pleasure we derive from people or things. If things or people give us pleasure, we love them. When they no longer give us pleasure, we don't love them anymore and we get rid of them. Christians are no

different. Fighting our selfish, self-absorbed, self-centered, and self-loving natures is a full time battle.

That's why at times non Christians can perform acts of love that are more consistent with God's love than a Christian's. Let me give you an example. A non Christian mother's sacrificial love for her children is much more in harmony with God's definition of love than a selfish Christian husband or wife's love for their spouse. I want us to understand this because Jesus is going lay down the measure of what Christian love is all about. It just so happens that in this passage, He uses the word agape for love.

Let's say Jesus was here preaching to us this morning. He takes the pulpit, looks at us intently and says, "Those of you want to belong to me, listen up. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you." We then look at each other in disbelief. "What in the world is He talking about," we say. "Surely He doesn't mean that literally. There must be some qualifications to what He is saying. How could anyone love their enemy? How can someone do good to someone who hates him? How can we even begin to bless those who curse us? About the only thing I could do is pray for those who mistreat me. I'll pray that God punish them. Surely Jesus doesn't mean this literally."

Well let's start with Jesus' action definition of this:

"6When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:6-8 / NLT). We were enemies of God, and yet Jesus laid down His life so we could be reconciled with Him. Jesus died for enemies of God. That's the primary definition of love.

Let's see how we measure up to Jesus' definition of love. Do we love our enemies? It's easy to say in general, "Yeah, I love my enemies." Let's take a little test. Think of a person who you would consider to be an enemy, someone who has hurt you deeply. Would you be willing to save his or her life at the expense of your life? Would you die for him? Maybe you would say yes to that. Well, would you consider killing your own ego in order to make a friend out of that enemy? Would you be willing to make a humble gesture of love?

But you may say, "I'd be willing to repair the relationship if she was ready. Well, Jesus goes on to answer that as well. He says, "Do good to those who hate you." Think about someone who hates you. Do you look for opportunities to do good to them? You see Kingdom love doesn't depend on the lovability or the receptivity of the other. Kingdom love is sacrificial. In referring to our egos, it is suicidal. It is only without ego that we can pray blessings and goodness for those who curse us and mistreat us. After listening to Jesus speak those few phrases to me while

looking at me intently is enough for me to say, I'm pathetic at love. My love is more in tune with the world's self-centered idea of love than it is with Jesus' definition of love. I have to feel ashamed that I have seen non Christians love more in harmony with God's definition of love than I do. There is no way around this. Jesus defines the love He expects out of you and me as loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who mistreat us. This is a total dying to self, to ego, to self-interest, and to selfishness. In other words THERE IS NO SELF-INTEREST IN JESUS' DEFINITION OF LOVE.

JESUS MAKES HIS DEFINITION PRACTICAL (VS 29-30)

In verses 29-30, Jesus makes His definition of love practical. In addition to taking the self-interest out of love, JESUS DEFINES LOVE AS SACRIFICIAL. In other words, it really doesn't matter if we are talking about eros, philos, or in this case, agape.

In the first half of verse 29 sacrificial love begins with giving up rights. In other words, if we want to love like Jesus defines love, we must never be concerned about our rights. Kingdom lovers give up personal rights in order to love another. Jesus starts out defining this love by saying, "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also." I have heard all sorts of wild applications of this verse. In fact, I have probably taught some crazy interpretations of this verse. I have heard people say, "I'll turn the other cheek, but after someone hits that side, look out, he'll pay dearly after I give him a good beat down." Some pacifists have used this verse to justify pacifism. In other words, violence of all kinds is prohibited by Jesus. I don't think this verse is meant to justify people not fighting back to protect themselves, family members, or people in danger. It is not meant to justify abused women staying in marriages. It is not meant for a country not to go to war in order to protect her citizens. There is always a proper time and place for everything.

Let's start by defining the word strike. In Greek, the word is saigona. It can mean anything from a punch in the jaw to an insult slap, much like we have seen in the movies when a person takes a glove out of their pocket and slap the person saying, "I challenge you to a duel." I think Jesus could be referring to all of these since He suffered all of these without retaliation. Again, let's rule out protecting ourselves from being mugged, raped, or other violence. Let's take situations most of us are likely to face.

Let's go with insult slap. In other words, someone has gossiped about us, lied about us, or deeply hurt us in some way with their words. I am sure that Jesus again shocked His disciples. In the modern church, we try to make Christianity palatable and easy for people to follow. It seems to me that Jesus goes out of us way to make Christianity difficult and unattractive. Remember, He is speaking to His disciples. Here is the attitude of love He describes for them. First of all, they are to put aside their need to be right. In other words, we are to create a space for God to work on the other by giving them space to think about what they have

done. I have to say that after having studied this and tried to apply it to my life, I can see that my attitude is to argue back and match the verbal assault with a verbal response. At the same time, I have watched friends who were verbally and wrongly attacked, not respond in kind, but instead demonstrate this turning the other cheek by not addressing the attack and continuing to lovingly engage with the offender. Again, this type of love doesn't depend on the lovability or the response of the offender. It is about sacrificially absorbing the blow without the need to retaliate. If this was a onetime brain cramp deal on the part of the offender, it will provide a space for God to convict him or her of their bad behavior. Of course, if there are continued assaults, good boundaries must be set. The Bible is clear that Jesus did not trust the multitudes. However, He trusted His disciples.

If you are a person who continues to worry about your personal rights, if you are a selfish person, self-centered, and self-absorbed, you cannot love the way Jesus has just commanded. The first step for you is to die to self. Your agenda and your desires are not more important than those of others around you.

Well maybe the disciples could end up saying, "Okay, we could endure some insults on our character," but hold on, Jesus is now going to mess with their pocketbooks. In the second half of verse 29 thru the end of verse 30, Jesus informs them about giving up money. Again, this is not to say that we should not protect ourselves when being mugged, robbed, threatened, and beaten. But Jesus does describe an attitude towards money and worldly possessions. Can you imagine how shocked the disciples were when they heard Jesus say things like, "If someone takes your coat, give him your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you. And if someone takes something from you, don't demand it back." What? How could that be right? Certainly Jesus didn't mean that literally, did He? There is nothing to indicate He is not speaking literally. The Proverbs warn us about lending money or co-signing for loans etc. We are commanded to provide for our families. However, Jesus is again challenging us about our attitudes about money and our love for others. We will always encounter people around us who are in financial need and who need our help. We should be willing to give to God and others sacrificially. Of course the Apostle Paul puts some requirements on who should receive money. People who are able to work and refuse to work should not receive money. There are other criteria the Bible gives. However, this is about attitude. We need to generously give to God's work and to people who are in need. We need to be willing to share and give away our possessions to others. Basically, it is coming to the conclusion that in God's Kingdom, money is to be used in glorifying God and ministering to others. I think the Apostle Paul demonstrates what Kingdom love is all about and how we are to approach each other, especially in church. First he describes what an attitude of sacrificial love would look like:

"1Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and sympathetic?
2Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose.

3Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. 4Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.

5Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. 6Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. 7He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. 8And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross" (Philippians 2:1-8 / NLT).

And then to further nail down Jesus' definition of love he describes the proper attitude toward money, material things, and generosity:

"1When you have something against another Christian, why do you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter, instead of taking it to other Christians to decide who is right? 2Don't you know that someday we Christians are going to judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can't you decide these little things among yourselves? 3Don't you realize that we Christians will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disagreements here on earth. 4If you have legal disputes about such matters, why do you go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? 5I am saying this to shame you. Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these arguments? 6But instead, one Christian □ sues another—right in front of unbelievers!

7To have such lawsuits at all is a real defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? 8But instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your own Christian brothers and sisters" (I Corinthians 6:1-8 / NLT).

Jesus has made it clear so far that His definition of love includes laying down our lives and our rights. It involves putting our egos and selfish interests to death. It includes sharing our money and our possessions generously with one another. **JESUS DEFINES LOVE AS SACRIFICIAL.** I know that even though I have read and studied this passage, I have not taken it as seriously as I should. In verses 31-36, Jesus explains His definition of love. **JESUS MAKES HIS DEFINITION OF LOVE A MATTER OF FAITH.** Because we are evangelicals, we emphasize salvation by grace through faith. There is absolutely no doubt about that doctrine. However, authentic faith will always express itself in doing what Christ commands. Both Matthew and Luke record the ending to this sermon with an illustration. Listen to how Jesus ended this sermon in Matthew:

"24"Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. 25Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock. 26But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. 27When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash."

28After Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29for he taught as one who had real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law” (Matthew 7:24-29 / NLT).

Let’s get it out of our heads that non believers can’t love. Sometimes, many times, their expressions of love are more in tune with Jesus than ours. I can’t emphasize this enough. If we reject the teachings of Jesus, there is no reason for us to believe we have saving faith in Jesus. Jesus taught with authority from God the Father. Jesus states unequivocally that our love is supposed to be in a category way above unbelievers. Although unbelievers may be able to express this type of love from time to time, this is the quality of love that should be the norm for you and me if we want to be followers of Christ.

JESUS EXPLAINS HIS DEFINITION OF LOVE (VS 31-36)

In verse 31, we see that we should be characterized by empathic love. We come here to the Golden Rule, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” This appears in other religions and in many schools of philosophy. It appears in Western religions and philosophies, Middle Eastern religions and philosophies, and Far Eastern religions and philosophies. However it is almost always stated in the negative, “Do not do to others what you don’t want them to do to you.” We would all say that, but when actually challenged with applying it, we fail miserably. Let’s just take some simple examples. Say for example you lost your mind and said something very harmful to another. We would want them to forgive us right away and move on from there as if nothing ever happened. However, when someone says or does something hurtful to us, we are not so ready to forgive and move on as if nothing happened. If we make a mistake that affects others, we want them to overlook the offense. However, if someone makes a mistake that affects us, we want an apology and some compensation. When I am brutally honest with myself, I have to say that although I believe this Golden Rule and want to obey it, I fall way short of extending grace to those as I would like grace extended to me. I know this is something I need to constantly confess and repent of. Maybe at this point you are feeling pretty good about yourself saying, “I’m doing even better than the pastor.” But hold on, being empathic may be a bit more difficult than you think.

In verses 32 thru the first half of verse 35 Jesus illustrates love that demonstrates faith. My feeling is that you won’t be feeling so good about yourselves after reading this. In this section Jesus will give three illustrations of what we have all come to think of as love and after each illustration He will burst our bubbles and say, “Big deal! Even the sinners do that!” (my paraphrase)

He starts out by saying something like, “You love others who love you.” That sounds pretty noble. Wives and Husbands should love each other. We should love our children, our neighbors, close friends and relatives. We say, “Yes we do. We are really loving and generous to our spouses, children, neighbors, family, and

friends.” We are feeling pretty good about ourselves at this point until Jesus says, “Big deal even sinners love their spouses, children, neighbors, family, and friends.”

Now we’re not feeling so good, are we. We love all these people and Jesus kind of puts us down by saying big deal. But it doesn’t end there. We help our family, friends, and neighbors. Isn’t that what we are supposed to do? Aren’t we supposed to help out one another? But again, Jesus says, “Big deal. Even sinners help their friends and family.” Again, we are saddened that our good works mean nothing to Jesus.

But certainly our generosity to our friends and family will earn us righteous points with Jesus. But again Jesus says, “Big deal, even the sinners do that. Even unbelievers are generous with people they expect to get paid back from.”

Listen to what Jesus has just said. We thought we were pretty good because we loved our family and friends, did a lot of nice things for our family and friends, and were generous with our family and friends. Jesus informed us that even people that don’t believe in Him do these things. So we want to ask, “What is it that You want from us Jesus? What kind of love do you expect from us?”

Jesus gives us the answer loud and clear in verse 35, “Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.” Hold on now Jesus. This discipleship thing is starting to get a little extreme. Jesus expects us to love our enemies, to do good to our enemies, and to be generous with our enemies. Then He will say, “That’s the kind of love I’m talking about.”

If there is anytime you start to feel as if you are pretty good, read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5, 6, & 7 together with the sermon as given here in Luke and ask yourself how you are doing. I can’t speak for you. All I can say is I’m not even close to living up to this.

So why should we even try to love like this? It clearly will not pay a great deal of dividends in this life. Jesus answers this in the second half of verse 35 thru 36 in describing the only true reward of love. And here is our problem. Remember I said earlier that since we are born into sin, we have this bent towards being selfish, self-absorbed, and self-centered? In other words, we are always looking at what we can get for ourselves. However, in Jesus’ Kingdom we are to be sacrificial and self-denying. This will always be a struggle for us as long as we live on this earth. If I were a disciple, I’d be asking Jesus that if I dared love like this, what would be in it for me. Anticipating my worldly question, Jesus just goes ahead and answers the motivation. There will be a great reward. However, it won’t be anything we would expect. Our great reward is described like this.

First of all, we will be identified with Christ. Jesus was the unique, one and only Son of God. He was like no other in all of history; before or after. And yet, if we choose to follow Christ in faith and love as He loves, He will identify us as sons of the Most High. Usually, I like to translate things neuter gender. In other words, I

would like to say that when we love like Jesus, He identifies us as children of God. That would be fine in describing us as brothers and sisters of Jesus. That would indeed be a great honor to be identified as brothers and sisters of Jesus; children of God. However, there is more here. Jesus is the unique Son of God. He is the only One of His kind. He has special honors and privileges as God's unique Son. By saying that we become sons of the Most High, it seems to me that Jesus honors us by sharing some of His sonship status with us. What an honor to be identified with Christ. It doesn't matter if we are male or female, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, it doesn't matter our race or culture. If we submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ in faith and obey Him by loving others with the love He has just described, then we will become His brothers and sisters; sons of God. That is an incredible reward. That is the only reward that could match the work and sacrifice it takes to love like that.

But there's more. When we love like this, we are identified with God's kindness. Let us never forget this. We were all wicked and ungrateful. In fact there are many times in our lives that we continue to be wicked and ungrateful. And yet, God continues to be kind to us. He is kind by making room for us to repent and get right. He doesn't just wipe us off the face of the earth. His Holy Spirit continues to minister to us, guide us, and convict us of sin. When we love others the way Jesus has described, then we are manifesting God's love towards others. When we do this, we are identified with the kindness of God.

And even most importantly, when we love with this generous, sacrificial love, we are identified with God's mercy. It does us good to revisit all the things God has forgiven us of. When I think about all that God has forgiven me of and what He continues to forgive me of, I am overwhelmed and overcome with gratitude. The truth is if God does not have mercy on me through the finished work of Christ on my behalf, there is no way I could possibly end up in heaven. And even though I don't know your personal status, I can guarantee it is the same with each of you. So if we truly understand how merciful God has been to us, it should be easy to see how we should approach others. After all in His famous prayer, Jesus told us to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." If we want to be children of God and identified with His kindness and mercy, then we need to love like Jesus loved. There is no room for fudging. JESUS MAKES HIS DEFINITION OF LOVE A MATTER OF FAITH.

If we Christians took seriously Jesus' definition of love in this morning's text, we would stun the world. People would want to come to church and meet this God we worship. But sadly JESUS' DEFINITION IS MUCH DIFFERENT THAN OURS.

We so seldom live out Jesus' definition of love, that to our shame, we Christians are stunned when we see an example of it.

I don't know where this account comes from but here it is:

"During the Revolutionary War, there was a faithful gospel preacher by the name of Peter Miller. He lived near a fellow who hated him intensely for his Christian life and testimony. In fact, this man violently opposed him and ridiculed his followers. One day the unbeliever was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Hearing about this, Peter Miller set out on foot to intercede for the man's life before George Washington. The general listened to the minister's earnest plea but told him he didn't feel he should pardon the minister's friend. "My friend! He is not my friend," answered Miler. "In fact, he's my worst living enemy." "What?" Washington said. "You have walked sixty miles to save the life of your enemy? That, in my judgment, puts the matter in a different light. I will grant your request." With pardon in hand, Miller hastened to the place where his neighbor was to be executed, and arrived just as the prisoner was walking to the scaffold. When the traitor saw Miller, he exclaimed, "Old Peter Miller has come to have his revenge by watching me hang!" But he was astonished as he watched the minister step out of the crowd and produced the pardon that spared his life."

Why is it that we don't see this type of love and why are we so astonished when we do see it? Jesus made it clear that if we want to call ourselves His followers and be identified as children of God, then we have no choice but to start loving like this. We must.