

The Golden Rule.

Text: Luke 6:27-31

1) What do these words mean?

Suggested Hymns:

2) How should we use this Law?

520, 270, 363, 358, 797

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 6:27-31, ²⁷ *“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.*

²⁹ *“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. ³⁰ “Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. ³¹ “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Many people think that Jesus came to teach us to gain heaven by obeying the Law, or by our own righteousness. They think and teach that Jesus came simply to give us a better insight into the Law of God, and then to offer in His own life as an example of this obedience. In other words, that Jesus came to provide us with a model which we are to imitate and follow and thus gain heaven.

If that had been His purpose, His coming would have been a perfect failure. To prove this, all one needs to do is to read our text and to consider the life of Jesus. Where are the men and women who have done, or are doing, what Jesus here demands of them? No where!

Others, again, have thought that Jesus came to do away with all Law and to substitute for it the Gospel. They have said that, since we preach the Gospel of the love of God for sinful man, we do not need to proclaim the Law of God any more.

But these false teachers are refuted by the words of Jesus, ¹⁷ ***“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”***¹ And they are also refuted by the words of the Apostle Paul, who forewarns us that the Gospel of the grace of God does not do away with the Law, ³¹ ***“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”***²

Let us keep in mind that the Law of God is God’s holy will concerning our lives and must be preached to the end of days. All Christians, even the very best of them, must continue to study God’s holy Law.

Here in our text we hear the Lord Jesus proclaiming this Law as the perfect Teacher of God’s holy Word. This summary has often been called the Golden Rule. But whatever people may call it, it is God’s holy will concerning our lives. Let us therefore implore the Spirit of grace and of truth to enlighten us and to guide us as we now consider, ***just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.*** May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. What Do These Words Mean?

Let us first exclude false opinions. Many people have said that these words do not constitute a commandment at all, but simply advice to those who wish to be very holy, better than the average person.

But let us ask such a person, What right have you to change God’s Word? Oh, what an appalling sin it is to adulterate the Word of God! We consider it a crime to adulterate food for the body. We denounce those lawyers that try to twist the word of the law in favour of some criminal; but where is the condemnation sufficiently severe for those who do not hesitate to adulterate, to reduce, or to pervert, the very Word of God?

That is satanic and devilish. That is what the devil did when he spoke to Eve and told her, ***“Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”***³

Jesus does not say that He is giving us advice, — He declares here in our text, ***“I say to you.”*** At another place, where this very same sermon is reported, He declares, ¹⁹ ***“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of***

*heaven.*⁴ Jesus is not simply giving advice, but is teaching the Law, the will of God.

Remember, therefore, it is to this day the absolute, holy will of God that we are to bless those who curse us, that we are to love our enemies, and to do good to those who hate us.

Another misunderstanding which our text refutes is this, that God in His holy Law simply demands outward actions. Oh, no! God demands the complete and full affection of the heart. Here in our text we are told, "*Love your enemies.*" Love is not an external action, but an affection of, and feeling in, the heart.

God does not demand of us mere outward actions such as, that we should at times fast, eat a little less than usually, fold our hands, walk to church, kneel down, stand up, etc. God expressly condemns those people in very severe terms who offer Him external righteousness, visible service, without the perfect affection and devotion of the whole heart.⁵

What, then, do these words demand of us? They mean just what they say. You know what you want others to do to you. You wish to be loved. You do not wish any one to injure you, to rob you, to hit you, to speak ill of you, to hate you, to curse you, or to rejoice over your misfortune.

No; you want people to think well of you, to respect you, to be kind to you, to help you, to sympathise with you, to hold you in high esteem, and to consider your life very precious. You want others to wish you well, to pray for you, and rejoice with you in your joy, and to sorrow with you in your sorrow.

Very well, that is exactly what you are to do to others, even to your enemies. That includes that you should much rather suffer wrong than do wrong. In our text we read, *Give to everyone who asks of you.* That does not mean that we should help people to live in sin, to steal, to lie, and to cheat. Certainly Not! But when people ask us to help them, we should be willing to assist them. And if one is in need of what belongs to us, we should rejoice that with our goods we may help him. And instead of simply giving what is requested, we should give them more, all that is really needed.

We are not to help another person and to encourage him in any injustice, just as we are not to be partakers of other people's sins.⁶ But on occasion we should be willing to suffer even stripes and corrections from our neighbour, just as the

psalmist prayed, ⁵ *Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil.*⁷

In short, we should love our neighbour, our fellow-man, even though he has cursed us, even though he has injured us, sinned against us, and we should pray for him as earnestly as we pray for ourselves, that God may bless him and help him; just as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, *"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

All this we should do willingly, cheerfully, and of our own accord. Just as no one needs to admonish you to love yourself, so there ought to be no need of any one's insisting that we must love our neighbour. Love is not something that can be produced with threats, or with promises of rewards, or with the threats of punishment.

If you must be bought to love some one, then you love the reward, you do not love the person. If you speak kindly to someone because you fear to be punished or you fear suffering if you do not, then you fear the punishment and the suffering, but you do not love the person.

We are to love as God loves us. He saw nothing lovable in us, but He loved us, and He wishes us well. He would like to save us. So without any promise of reward, without any threat, we are spontaneously to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. That is the meaning of the Law.

Let us be sure that we understand it correctly, and let us make no mistake concerning this will of God. Let us not excuse ourselves by saying that we do as well in this respect as others, or that we do the best we can. God created us holy, in His own image, and what He gave us, that He demands of us. He wants to find in us exactly what He bestowed upon us.

Let us therefore never diminish the demands of God's Law. Let us remember that He is serious, in earnest, just as He has said at another time in Matthew 5:48, ⁴⁸ *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*

2. How Should We Use This Law?

But now, having gained a right understanding of this Law, let us also consider the proper use of this Law. It is true that the text does not speak of the

use of the Law, but the Bible speaks of that at other places; and whenever we consider the Law of God, we should certainly also learn from God's Word how it is to be used.

It is an abuse of this Law to teach that people are to gain heaven by obeying it. St. Paul and other writers of Scripture make it very plain that righteousness is not by the Law. Even in the Old Testament, David prayed in Psalm 130:3, ***3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*** And again it is taught, ***20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.***⁸

The proper use of this Law is that we look into it, as in a mirror, and see our own sins and shame. The Bible expressly teaches this in Romans 3:20, ***“By the Law is the knowledge of sin.”*** It is also true that man's conscience certainly upbraids and accuses him even though he does not study the Word of God.⁹ Just like Proverbs 28:1 says, ***The wicked flee when no one pursues.*** Even the great English poet Shakespeare has said, ***“Conscience does make cowards of us all.”***¹⁰

Oh, how important this proper use of the Law of God is! The great majority of people are continually defending themselves against the accusations of their own conscience. A good part of their thought is taken up with congratulating themselves on their own goodness.

Some of the worst people on earth think they have been very smart because no one may accuse them of a public sin. Those who have escaped the clutches of the police, and have to a certain extent, led an upright life will in most cases flatter themselves that God Himself can demand nothing more of them.

Even in the churches there are many who consider themselves better than others. There have always been those Pharisees who stand in the Temple and say, ***God, I thank You that I am not like other men.***¹¹ To them and their type, Jesus says in Matthew 23:28, ***you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.***

That is the proper use of the Law, that we see in it our own sinfulness and shortcomings and cry to God, ***“God be merciful to me, a sinner.”***

And this is the proper use not only for those who are ungodly that it should bring them to a knowledge of their sins, but we Christians must also daily repent of our sins and our shortcomings. Not one of us has even for one day fulfilled

the Law of God. Even Shakespeare said, *“In the course of justice none of us should see salvation.”*¹²

Our Lutheran Church therefore admonishes us in the Small Catechism to examine ourselves according to the Law of God that we may daily humble ourselves before God’s holy majesty and confess our sins and implore His forgiveness.

It is true, today’s text does not tell us how we are to be saved from these terrible sins of ours, but in the same Gospel, from which this text is taken, God has revealed that secret to us. There is the parable of the Prodigal Son. Certainly, when we have seen our sin, then we are to go to our heavenly Father’s throne and say, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,”*¹⁹ *“and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”*¹³

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector we are told that we are to come before God’s presence and say, *“God be merciful to me, a sinner.”* And here we are also told that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, and that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Having therefore again been reminded of our sin, let us now also earnestly implore God’s mercy; let us thank Him for His unspeakably rich gift in His dear Son Jesus Christ, who laid down His life that He might atone for our sins, who as the Lamb of God took away our sins and bore the cross which we deserved.

However, let no one suppose that this is the only use of the Law, and that having seen our sin and obtained God’s forgiveness, we have no further use for the Law. Certainly not! We Christians should make use of this Law also as a rule whereby to guide our lives.

As we have said before, this Law remains the will of God: we should do to others as we want them do to us; and we should love our enemies. That is to be our model, which we are to strive to fulfil. We are not only to say with Paul,¹² *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but* we are also to say, *“but I press on.”*¹⁴

We are not only to say with Paul that we are chief of sinners, but we ought also truthfully to say with him,²⁴ *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize?*¹⁵ So *Run in such a way that you may obtain*

it. ²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶ Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Every sin and shortcoming of God's will is shameful and brings upon us God's displeasure. We are therefore earnestly to strive against it. Therefore, let us daily fight against our sinful flesh and our evil passions, just as we pray in that beautiful morning hymn.¹⁶

Keep our haughty passions bound;
Save us from our foes around;
Going out and coming in,
Keep us safe from every sin.

Again another hymnist writes:¹⁷

O God, forsake me not:
Take not Thy Spirit from me,
And suffer not the might
Of sin to overcome me.
Increase my feeble faith,
Which Thou Thyself hast wrought;
Be Thou my strength and power:
O God, forsake me not.

Let us crucify the Old Adam, and if he wishes to take revenge, let us say, No! Let us follow our Saviour in praying: "**Father, forgive them.**" Let us ask God to give us more hatred of sin and more love of righteousness, yes, that He would fill us with a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Let us for this purpose look at the examples of the saints. See how patiently they laboured on. Consider Stephen who said, "**Lord, do not charge them with this sin.**"¹⁸

And let us "**look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**"³ For consider Him who

endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”¹⁹

It is true that in our flesh and blood nothing good dwells.²⁰ It is rebellious and ungodly and does not wish to do God’s will; but if we are Christians at all, there lives in us also God’s Holy Spirit. He has created in us a new spiritual life, and according to this Spirit we wish to do God’s will. We love God’s will, and we make at least a beginning to do God’s will.

The Christian’s prayer is expressed in the words of the hymnist:²¹

Destroy in me the lust of sin,
From all impureness make me clean;
O grant me power and strength, my God,
To strive against my flesh and blood.

Create in me a new heart, Lord,
That gladly I obey Thy Word,
And naught but what Thou wilt, desire:
With such new life my soul inspire. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matt. 5:17-19

² Romans 3:31

³ Genesis 3:1

⁴ Matthew 5:19

⁵ Matt. 23:27-28; Amos 5:21-23

⁶ 1 Tim. 5:22

⁷ Psalm 141:5

⁸ Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁹ Rom. 2:15

¹⁰ Hamlet: Act 3, p 4

¹¹ Luke 18:11

¹² The Merchant of Venice: Act 4, scene 1, p9

¹³ Luke 15:18

¹⁴ Philippians 3:12

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:24

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- 16 Hymn 520 v 3
 - 17 Hymn 363 v 2
 - 18 Acts 7:60
 - 19 Hebrews 12:2
 - 20 Romans 7:18
 - 21 Hymn 358