

10. Absurd advice in a selfish era

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An aged pastor decided to retire from the church he has been serving for a long time. So the pastoral selection committee work very hard to find the right pastor who can take over the pulpit from the former pastor. They gradually narrowed down the candidates and selected one young enthusiastic pastor.

Finally with all the excitement, the congregation came to the first Sunday morning service of the new pastor. The young pastor taught a sermon that would ringing in their hearts for the entire week and stunned their souls deeply. They couldn't wait to come back to hear another great sermon until next Sunday.

On the following Sunday with much anticipation to hear from this great young expositor, the congregation held their breath. When the pastor started to teach, the congregation was rather surprised by the exact same sermon as the last Sunday. But it was such a great sermon that they thought it wasn't so bad to have a rerun.

The third Sunday rolled in and the congregation waited for a new great sermon. To much of their disappointment, it was the exact sermon as the first and second week. They couldn't believe what they just heard the same sermon three weeks in a row.

After the service, the head elder went to the pastor and said, "Pastor, we didn't mind listening to your great sermon for a couple of times, but don't you think it is a bit too much to repeat it three times?" Without blinking his eyes, the young pastor replied in as-a-matter-of-fact manner, "When you guys started to do what I taught in my first sermon, I will start to teach new things."

Many people go to church around the world. However, the majority of them don't have any intention to do what they have heard from the Lord on Sunday morning or in the Midweek Bible Studies. They come, listen, leave and back to the way they've been living. Then what is the point of learning new things?

This morning Jesus wants us to get out of lethargy and complacency of our comfort zone and get back into His program. The thing we are about to learn is completely absurd advice in this selfish era we are living in.

A. THE BEATITUDES

Luke 6:20-26 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. 24 But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

This sermon is probably a shorter version of what we call "The Sermon on the Mount" from Matthew 5-7. Some fine Bible scholars believe these were two different events and the others say that they are the same.

To most people, the word “blessing” gives images of a long life, wealth, a healthy family and defeated enemies. It is true that God’s covenant with us may include such material and physical blessings. But those are not the only blessings God has in mind.

The Lord explained in this sermon that the truly blessed life comes not from getting, or from doing, but from being. The emphasis is on Godlike character. God cares far more about our character than comfort.

This sermon is not “the Gospel” and nobody goes to heaven by following the Sermon on the Mount. They must first be born again and receive God’s life. Nor is this sermon a “constitution” for the kingdom God will one day establish on earth. The Sermon on the Mount applies to life today and describes the kind of godly character we should have as believers in this world.

In this opening, Jesus is not telling us that poverty, hunger, persecution and tears were blessings in themselves. Rather, He was calling for that brokenness of heart that confesses spiritual poverty within. To those people, He will extend His grace, mercy and love. But to those who think that they don’t need Jesus to get to heaven, He will give them eternal separation from Him.

B. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Luke 6:27-36 “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. 32 But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Some people think that Christianity insists no self-defense and Christians are supposed to take physical assault from others with hands down. That is far from the true meaning of Jesus’ teaching here. Culturally, the slap on the cheek was more an attack on honor than a physical attack. When someone tries to kill you or hurt your family, by all means protect yourself and them. But when someone insults you, you can ignore it instead of lashing it back at that person.

It is hard for a bunch of rednecks like us to accept this command, because we say, “This ain’t right.” But this is a commandment from the Lord, not a suggestion.

Our typical idea for an insult would be:
Do unto others BEFORE they do unto you.
Don’t get mad, get EVEN.

We can look for loopholes here as long as we like, but we won’t find them. We are commanded to love the ones we don’t care to be around.

Loving enemies or those whom we don't care to be around cannot be done in our own strength, but it can be done through the power of the Holy Spirit. The important thing is not that we are vindicated before our enemies but that we become more like God in our character.

C. TWO OF THE MOST MISINTERPRETED VERSES IN THE BIBLE

Luke 6:37-38 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

These are two of the most misinterpreted verses in the Bible. Many carnal Christians somehow memorized and are ready to use them whenever the Holy Spirit convicts them through other mature Christians. Instead of repenting, they excuse themselves by reciting these verse.

Within the context here as well as Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus is not calling for a universal acceptance of any carnal lifestyle or doctrine. Actually, these verses should remind us that we reap what we sow and in the amount that we sow.

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult things we can accomplish on this earth, because we are emotional people one way or another. If we Christians learn to forgive each other well, we wouldn't have church splits or fights within the body of Jesus Christ.

We often hold grudges against one another and dig our heels deep to retaliate or ignore others. The people who offend us may not even realize that they did and that irritates our feeling all the more.

Here is a \$50,000 question to ask you: What are you supposed to do? According to the Bible, you should go to that person and make it right with that person by explaining to him or her in love as the Lord did to us according to v36 and 37.

Mark 11:25-26 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

If you choose not to forgive that person, it doesn't matter how much Bible knowledge you have or how mature you think you are in the Lord, you are not even doing the basic thing of Christianity. In other words, you are immature.

If following in Jesus' steps means anything, it means being able to forgive our enemies. And the basic building block of forgiveness is God's wonderful quality of mercy.

Before you leave this service, if you have anything against one of your brothers and sisters in the Lord here, make it right with that person. If you don't, I can tell you this much by the authority of the Living Word of God, your sins will not also be forgiven. Can you live with that? I can not. So make it right with that person. Don't worry about other people would think and even your own pride. Do what the Lord said to you. He will be pleased with you and bless you for it.

D. PLANK vs. SPECK

Luke 6:39-42 And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? 40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. 41 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Jesus' sense of humor sparkles here. Imagine how ridiculous you would look with a log sticking out of your eye. People would have to duck every time you turned your head. You'd be knocking over lamps, bumping into doorjamb. But imagine that you are oblivious to the problem. Instead of getting rid of the log, you worry more about the next fellow with a tiny speck of a fault in his eye, a speck nobody notices but you.

That seems silly to us, but to Jesus, that's exactly what the hypocritical Pharisees were like. They were supposed to have been the nation's clear-eyed teachers of morality, respected men of the cloth. But all Jesus could see were logs of pride sticking out from their faces. "First," Jesus was saying to them, "humbly deal with your own sin. Then you can help out a brother."

The person who holds a grudge against others or wouldn't forgive others are the ones with a plank in their eyes and trying to take a speck out of others' eyes.

E. EVENTUALLY THE INSIDE WILL BE REVEALED

Luke 6:43-45 "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. 45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

The fruit of individual life is the inevitable result of who we are. Eventually the good or bad fruit is evident, revealing what sort of "tree" we are.

F. ARE YOU GOING TO DO WHAT YOU HAVE JUST LEARNED?

Luke 6:46-49 "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? 47 Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. 49 But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house

The secret to standing firm is not what's in our house nor in the quality of paint nor the elaborateness of the design. The secret is where we lay our foundation. There's no stronger bedrock than the truth Jesus preached. Wise people build their lives on it.

Our Lord's emphasis here is on obedience. It is not enough merely to hear His Word and call Him "Lord." We must also obey what He commands us to do.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also

Love and mercy are the things the Lord wants us to give to others as we live as Christians, not just hear and talk about it.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God cares far more about our character than comfort.
- 2) If we Christians learn to forgive each other well, we wouldn't have church splits or fights within the body of Jesus Christ.
- 3) Love and mercy are the things the Lord wants us to give to others as we live as Christians, not just hear and talk about it.