

Trinity 4 - Luke 6

We all have standards. We have standards in etiquette and manners, a standard of work, organization, and other habits. And it's only natural that if we hold ourselves to these standards, then we tend to hold others to the same standards. But this is often deceiving. It's easy enough to get used to your own routine and habits. It might very well be a good routine. They might be good habits. They work for you. But if your own measure becomes the standard, then you inevitably become blind to God's standard. This only brings about hypocrisy as people justify themselves by judging others for falling short of the measures they have set. Perhaps you went to college, or you went into a particular line of work. You spend money a certain way. You eat certain things, and you don't eat certain things. You spend your free time in a certain way. Whatever particular order you adopt for your life can easily become the bar you conveniently set for yourself and others.

But we don't set the standard. God does. Jesus summarizes it in this way: Be merciful as your Father is merciful. God's standard is mercy. This is what his law requires. His law condemns blasphemy and false doctrine. It condemns rebellion against parents, murder, every kind of sexual perversion and unfaithfulness, stealing, gossip, and greed. Those who practice these things will most certainly be judged by God. All are accountable to this perfect standard of judgment. And yet, Jesus says that the weightier matters of the law are mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness. In other words, the very heart of what the law requires is love. Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself. This is the standard by which all people are judged. Everyone who dishonors his parents, hurts his neighbor's body, property, or reputation, and lives to satisfy his own sinful desires is breaking precisely this standard. He is failing to love God and his neighbor. He is failing to show mercy.

Every good habit you might adopt in this life should serve to support this one, perfect standard of love and mercy. Whether you get up early or you work into the hours of the night, the purpose should always be to love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself. Whether you work white collar or blue collar, whether you speak well or you don't do grammar very good, none of this amounts to anything if you are ignoring the standard God has set. As Paul says, "Though I give all my money away to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it doesn't do me any good." Love and mercy are the true and pure measurement, surpassing all other standards.

Jesus says that the measure you use will be measured back to you. If you are uncharitable toward your neighbor, then this will remain your own measure. If you put the worst construction on what he is doing, seeing him as a rival, assuming ill motives, judging, envying, and constantly scrutinizing him, then this will only be measured back to you. It will weigh down on your conscience. It will be your constant lot in life as you rob your own soul of any lasting rest. Because your feeling of being in the right will continue to depend on seeing how others don't meet up to your standards. So you'll keep looking for faults in others in your disparate attempt to give yourself peace of mind.

And you will find these faults. That's easy enough. After all, you're dealing with sinners. Digging for shortcomings in your neighbor is as easy as digging for weeds in your own garden. Maybe he's lazy. He's either too arrogant or abrasive, or he's too weak and timid. He made a comment that

seemed rude or out of line. Whatever the transgressions are, you can pile these things up. And the more you pack them into your little black box, the more you can imagine that your standard has the best measurement.

But this is just blindness. And the blind can't lead the blind, no matter how well they imagine they have their ducks in a row. No matter how well you think you can identify your neighbor's faults, no matter how accurate you appear to be in your judgments, you remain blind if you refuse to judge yourself by the standard of God's righteousness. Jesus compares it to having a log stuck in your eye. It's hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is talking the talk and even walking the walk, but not believing what God says. It's the ability to follow the rules, hold to the right doctrinal standards, and have good, moral opinions, and yet you don't allow God to have the final word. Jesus describes these people as those who refuse to walk into the light, because they don't want their wickedness to be exposed. It might look good on the outside, but it is nothing but spiritual blindness and death.

The thing about hypocrisy is that it rings true to an extent. The hypocrite says things that are true. But his heart is completely darkened, void of any truth. Maybe your judgments against your neighbor have some basis. Perhaps he is heading for destruction because of his sins. But if you refuse to judge yourself according to God's law of love, then you will both end up falling into the ditch. This is the warning our Lord gives us.

The heart of the law is love. It is mercy. It's bearing with your brother, seeking to restore him with a spirit of humility and gentleness. This is what God requires of us. And when we examine ourselves before this perfect standard and measurement, then we must be honest about the dark, merciless, sin of our own hearts. But while Jesus teaches us the true weight of the law, he doesn't direct us to the law to find this measurement. Instead, he makes known to us the mercy of his Father. Be merciful, he says, as your Father is merciful. This is why Jesus came into this world. He came to reveal the Father to us. "If you have seen me," Jesus says, "you have seen the Father." Jesus himself is the very mercy of God. He is the Son whom the Father gave up into death in order to show mercy on sinners.

Now, grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. They go together. We deserve judgment and condemnation. For Christ's sake, the Father doesn't condemn us. We deserve to have all our sins tallied up. But God doesn't count them against us. We don't deserve anything good. God gives us eternal life. He daily and richly forgives us of all our sins even as he daily and richly provides for all we need for our body and life.

This mercy of God is what God's law requires but could never fulfill. It only exposes that the sinful heart is completely lacking in it. Instead, Jesus himself fulfilled the law in its fullest measure. He had mercy on poor sinners. This is the measure God gives us. Jesus calls it good measure, pressed together, shaken down, and overflowing. He has prepared this measure for you. He has set the standard, and according to this standard of his own blood and righteousness, he forgives you of all your sins and declares you righteous by his grace. He anoints your head with oil so that your cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life, and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

This is the measure God gives you to live on. It's his mercy. And this mercy never runs out. It continues to overflow. So use it. Measure with the measure God has placed into your lap.

When we give freely and show charity toward one another, being patient and passing over each other's faults, we aren't doing so in order to earn anything before God. Instead, it is because of what God has already promised us in Christ. When Jesus says, "Don't judge, and you will not be judged," he isn't giving us a tit for tat bargain. No, he is simply teaching us what it means to be children of God. Children are like their Father. Good fruit comes from a good tree. A merciful attitude toward those who fall short comes from those who have received mercy from God. Kindness and generosity come from those who have been forgiven of their sins and are promised all good things from God.

As Jesus teaches us to be like our Father, he reminds us of our Father's promises. You will not be judged. Your sins will not be counted against you. And no matter how much you appear to lose in this life, no matter how much people seem to take advantage of you, no matter how many tears you must shed and burdens you must bear, God will give it all and even more back to you. When all your money and time are spent, when your body is dead, God will take you to himself. And on the last day, he will raise up your body, bestowing more blessing on you than you could ever imagine. This is what you have to look forward to. And none of the sufferings and losses in this life can compare at all to the great weight and measure of this glory.

So rely on your Father's mercy. Make use of it. Take refuge in it. And the full measure of his promise will be given to you. Amen.