

The Sermon On The Level - Part 3

Luke 6:37-42

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In Luke's Gospel we have come to the place where Luke records for us Christ's Sermon on the Plain, in Luke 6:17-49. You've heard of it as The Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7. The Sermon on the Plain strictly speaking begins in Luke 6:20. We are going to be discussing part three of The Sermon on the Plain or The Sermon on the Level.

We have seen so far that Jesus gave us the marks of true discipleship or of true disciples. Number one, the "poor" are poor in spirit, verse 20, who see themselves as sinners before God. Number two, they are hungry and thirsty, verse 21, after righteousness. Number three, they are weeping over their sins in repentance, verse 21. Number four, they are hated and persecuted, verse 22. Number five, they are to love their enemies, verses 27 and 35. Then He explains how to love our enemies: with agape love. And number six, we are to be kind and merciful, like God the Father, verse 36. "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." They are showing mercy like God. So we are poor, hungry, weeping, hated, loving our enemies and kind and merciful to them.

Today in our text we discover two more descriptions of the disposition of a true disciple. The word "disposition" means "a person's inherent qualities of mind and character; his predominant attitude." It's the predominant spirit of an individual. There are two, basic areas of the believer's disposition that Jesus describes. Number one, it is to be magnanimous, which means "generous" or "giving." It's a Latin word which means "big" or "mega" in spirit. So it would be a person with a generous, giving spirit. You would show favor and grace, even toward your enemies or those who oppose you.

The second quality of a true disciple is that they have a discerning disposition. They're not naïve, critical or fault-finding; they're discerning concerning false teachers.

Just about everything we read in our text today is in red letters, because it is spoken by Jesus in this sermon.

The first section of our text is in verses 37-38 where we see a true disciple has a magnanimous disposition. Jesus said, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 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."

I want you to note these key imperatives or commands. "Judge not...condemn not...forgive...give." These are all commands in the Greek expected of true disciples or true believers.

The context of these qualities in The Sermon on the Level of a magnanimous disposition is the fruit of agape love. Everything we read today in our text is the outflow of God's love from our

lives. The dominant feature or mark of a believer or Christian is love. So we will be magnanimous in our disposition.

In these four, character qualities listed, two are negative and two are positive. The first negative quality, in verse 37, is that true disciples are not to be judgmental. “Judge not, and you shall not be judged.” We’re familiar with this statement of Jesus.

The question is, “What does Jesus mean?” We know what Jesus said, but what does He mean? First, let me tell you what He is not saying. He doesn’t say that we are not to be discerning truth from error. He’s not saying—like our culture today says—that there are no absolutes. The culture says everything we want to believe is okay. “You have your truth; I have my truth. There is no right or wrong. Just do as you please.” So they say we have no right to tell somebody that that’s wrong and this is right; that that’s evil but this is good.

We live in a culture today—because we’ve systematically eliminated God—that has no higher authority or fixed point. The culture is being controlled by a relativistic, pluralistic philosophy; that nothing is right, nothing is truly wrong. It’s all a matter of being relative.

If you ask somebody, “Do you believe in absolute truth,” they might say, “No.” Then ask them, “Is that an absolutely true statement?” You can see that it’s self-defeating. So they say, “Well, I guess there’s only one absolute truth: that there is no truth.” Isn’t that a convenient statement. It’s so ludicrous! We’re not even thinking correctly. So we’ve abandoned truth.

This thinking has come into the church. We’ve watered down the Gospel, the Scriptures. We want to make them palatable, so pragmatically we can have a growing church. We give the people what they want to hear rather than faithfully preaching what the Bible says and what it means.

My job is to be faithful to preach God’s Word in its historic, theological, grammatical truth. It’s to read the text, explain the text—What’s the author’s meaning by what he said?—and apply the text. Nothing more and nothing less. That’s what a preacher or pastor is supposed to do: preach the Word.

Before Francis Schaeffer died he said, “Tell me what the world is saying, and in seven years, the church will be saying the same thing.” So the church is always a few years after the trends in the world, rather than following the Word of God in preaching Biblically, thinking Biblically, living Biblically and letting our lives be grounded by the truth in God’s Word.

So Jesus is not saying that we can’t make distinctions doctrinally, theologically and morally. 1 John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” It’s almost as though we have lost the concept today that there are false prophets and false teachers in the church, even when Jesus has warned us of them in the Bible.

So Jesus is not saying we shouldn’t be looking at others. Later on in our text, He’s going to be

saying that there are “blind [who] lead the blind.” And how do you know if you are following a blind leader if you don’t make a distinction? Jesus said, “Nor cast your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6). And how do you know it’s a swine? You have to make a distinction. You have to think Biblically and scripturally to be able to make that moral and doctrinal distinction of truth.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He didn’t say “a way...a truth...a life.” He said “the way...the truth...the life.” There is only one way to heaven, and that’s through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. It’s by believing in Christ, trusting in Christ, receiving Christ and being born again by the Spirit of God. There’s no other way to get to heaven. It’s by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. We can’t compromise the Gospel.

Then what does Jesus mean by saying, “Do not judge”? Jesus is talking about having a critical, judgmental, fault-finding, censorious spirit. In the context, Jesus is most likely referring to the scribes and Pharisees of His day. When you read the “woes” of Matthew 23, in verse 13, it’s clear He’s talking about the religious leaders of His day. So don’t be judgmental, critical and fault-finding.

Legalistic churches quite often are judgmental. “That’s the wrong haircut. That’s not the Christian haircut. Those aren’t Christian clothes. Christians don’t do this. Christians don’t do that.” They have all these rules and regulations. Some people ask, “Can Christians dance?”

I say, “Some can; some can’t.” The ones I’ve seen dance ought not to dance. It’s really sad.

“Can they do this? Can they do that? Can they go here? Can they wear this?” They have all these rules: how they worship, whether they sing hymns, if they sing contemporary choruses. Don’t be critical, judgmental and fault-finding. Jesus is talking about a censorious spirit.

The second negative thing Christians are not to do is to condemn others. Verse 37 says, “Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.” “Judge not” and “condemn not” are two, separate commands. How does condemning differ from judging? Judging is being critical and fault-finding; condemning is pronouncing punishment or a sentence on someone.

This is illustrated in the story of David committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then he tried to cover his sin. David brought Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, home from battle. He tried to get him to spend the night with His wife. It didn’t work out, so David had him murdered in battle. He told His general, Joab, to put Uriah at the front of the battle, attack the walls and then pull back the troops but keep Uriah out front. Then Uriah was killed; David murdered him.

David had written all those beautiful psalms, and now he had to write a letter of murder. He tried to cover his sin, so he married Bathsheba and thought all was well, until one day Nathan the prophet visited David.

God sees and God knows. “All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must

give account” (Hebrews 4:13). Nathan told David, “There’s been an injustice in your kingdom.”

David said, “Tell me about it.”

Nathan said, “There’s a wealthy man in your kingdom who has many flocks and herds of sheep. He had a visitor one night, and rather than killing one of his own sheep to feed his guest, he went to his neighbor, who only had one, little, ewe lamb. It was like a pet to them. He stole that lamb, slew it and fed it to his guest.

When David heard this story, he was incensed. He said, “The man who has done this shall surely die!” (2 Samuel 12:5). How bad our sins look on other people. Then Nathan stuck out his finger at David and said, “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7). Wow! David repented and God forgave him his sin. Then through Nathan, God said to David, “The sword shall never depart from your house.” A child born will die, and there will be trouble in his family for many generations. Then David said, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:5-13).

We are so blind to our own sins. We have a beam in our own eye, so we can’t see the speck in another’s eye. We don’t judge our own hearts. We become critical, judgmental, fault-finding and condemn others. In Romans 2:1, Paul says, “You are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” You are judging someone else, when you are guilty of the same sin. So Jesus is the one we are to follow in His example.

John 3:17 says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” Jesus came to die for our sins, so we might have eternal life. He didn’t come to condemn the world. In John 8:10-11, Jesus spoke to the woman caught in the act of adultery. He said, “‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” So Jesus didn’t come to condemn us, and we shouldn’t be condemning other people with a critical, fault-finding, judgmental attitude.

they forgive, verse 37. “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Here Jesus is not saying that we earn merit or deserve forgiveness by forgiving others. What He is saying is that though we are forgiven and saved by God’s grace, the evidential sign of a forgiven heart is a forgiving heart. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “We come to the Cross to be forgiven; we stay at the Cross to be forgiving” toward others. How can you say, “I’m a forgiven sinner before God, but I won’t forgive others who sin against me”?

This forgiveness toward others is because we have experienced forgiveness from God. This is called “fellowship forgiveness.” 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So then we have fellowship with Him. We don’t lose “sonship” when we sin, but we do lose fellowship. Then we need to repent and confess, which means “to agree with God.”

It’s interesting, though, that if a believer is unwilling to forgive others, it is an attitude that is

unreceptive to your own sin, seeing your own need, thus, you do not experience forgiveness yourself. One author says, "The unforgiving person remains unforgiven, because he is unforgiveable. That is the very condition which produces an unforgiving spirit. It is that which renders one unable to receive forgiveness. The one who shuts another out shuts himself in. Release and you shall be released." The word "forgive" literally means "to release, let go." God forgives us, so we should forgive others. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Remember that.

The fourth, and second positive description of a true disciple is in verse 38: they are giving. "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For..." Here's the rationale. "...with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." This is what we call being "magnanimous" or giving, being generous. This is characteristic of or the demeanor of a true child of God.

The picture here is of a man of this time wearing a robe that is pulled up above the belt to form a little basket, in which they would put grain. So this basket was the "bosom." So when we think of people blessing us, we don't think of a "bosom"; we think of our pocket or wallet. They used their robe to pour the grain into. They would shake it up, press it down, pour more in, shake it and pour more in.

Have you ever bought a bag of potato chips and thought there would be some potato chips in it? The bag looks like a big pillowcase. You open it and it's half air with a few chips. "I've been ripped off! Where're my chips?!"

God doesn't give that way. God has a bigger shovel than you do. You cannot outgive God.

The word "give," in verse 38, is an imperative without a modifier, so it refers to any and all gifts that we may find can help others in need. You can give your time, you can give your talents, you can give your treasure, you can give love, you can give forgiveness, you can give prayers. The mark of a believer is love, and love is manifested in generosity. You don't have a miserly spirit. You don't cling to your own things. You don't say, "It's my time. These are my treasures!" Rather, you're generous, giving and magnanimous.

Then will men give "into your bosom." God and men will give to you. You'll be blessed in this life and in the life to come.

So all these characteristics are pictures of those who live in the kingdom of God.

Now, in summary of this section, ask yourself, "Am I judgmental? Am I critical? Am I fault-finding? Am I censorious toward others?" Ask yourself, "Am I condemning others? Do I want God to punish them or judge them? Am I assigning them judgment?" And "Am I forgiving?"

This is difficult. But if you claim to be a Christian, you shouldn't have unforgiveness in your heart. It doesn't mean you're not hurt and upset. It means you don't hold on to it anymore. Don't shut yourself in.

Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant? He was forgiven such a large debt, but he wouldn't forgive one who had a small debt to pay him. So he was thrown into prison until he paid the large debt. Unforgiveness puts you in a prison. Don't carry that unforgiveness around. You will be locked up and unable to experience forgiveness in your own heart.

As a parent when you have multiple children and they don't get along but fight, they come to mom or dad and want love or affection. You tell them, "Make up with your sibling before you think you will be right with me."

Many times we are out of fellowship with other believers, but we come to church to praise and worship the Lord, to have Him bless us, to sense His presence and the sunshine of His love. But we say, "I don't want to see that person over there. Every time I see them or think about them I get angry!" You need to let that go. Release that and forgive. Then you will be forgiven, as well.

Then ask yourself, "Am I giving? Am I generous?"

There are three applications I want to make. Number one, the most contented people in the world today are those just described. Psychologically, those who are not judgmental, those who don't condemn, those who are forgiving and those who are giving are psychologically adjusted. They are contented people.

Number two, they lead the most meaningful, fruitful, joyful lives. So they are socially adjusted, as well. They are not living in isolation and unforgiveness.

Number three, this kind of life is a barometer of true spirituality. The qualities of not judging, not condemning, forgiving and giving are qualities or marks of a truly spiritual disciple of Christ.

Now the second, main section of our text, verses 39-42, should technically go to verse 45, but that will be for next week.

This section illustrates that a true disciple has a discerning disposition. "And He spoke a parable to them: 'Can the blind lead the blind?'" This is a question that expects a "No" answer. It's not a good idea to have a blind man lead another blind man. I want someone with good eyes.

"Will they not both fall into the ditch?" The answer is "Yes." He says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained..." or "brought to completion" "...will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? 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!"

Now remember that Jesus had just said, in verse 37, not to judge. And now He's calling someone a "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."

From verses 39-45, Jesus is warning us of the danger of following false teachers. Then He will exhort us to follow Him, a true teacher; to build our house not on sand, but to build it on the rock of Scripture and obedience to Him.

Then in verses 46-49, Jesus calls us to follow Him, living under His Lordship obediently and faithfully. Jesus did the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount. He warned us of the two gates: one gate is narrow and the other gate is wide. The narrow gate is the true way to heaven; the wide gate is the way of the false teachers. Then He warns us of the false prophets who come as wolves “in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15). So when Jesus says, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged,” He is clearly not saying you should not be discerning.

One of the biggest tragedies in the church today is Christians being naïve, gullible and undiscerning. And a lot of it is because, number one, they’re ignorant of the Bible; number two, they don’t see the Bible as the final authority; and number three, they bought into the world’s lie that there is no truth—it’s all relative. They don’t see the Bible as being absolutely true. So they can’t think critically, they can’t discern between truth and error—they can’t say, “That’s a false teacher; that’s a true teacher” or “That’s a false prophet; that’s a true preacher of the Word.” They are blind and being lead blindly by false teachers, so they both fall into a ditch. So a true disciple must have a discerning disposition.

Notice these three characteristics of false teachers. First, they are blind, verse 39. “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?” In Matthew 15:14, Jesus is talking about the scribes and the Pharisees. In Matthew 23, He “woes” all of them because of their hypocrisy, false teaching and sin. So they are the blind leading the blind, and they both will fall into a ditch.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). If you want to get to heaven, you can’t go around the Cross. So don’t be blind and follow blind leaders, or you’ll fall into a ditch.

They sure had a lot of blind people in those days—more than we have today. They didn’t have modern medicine, or the things we have to help people with eye issues. And they had a lot of ditches, pits or open cisterns. They didn’t have OSHA. Walking down the street, if there was a big hole in the street, they could fall into it; it was dangerous. So they needed someone to guide them.

Don’t follow blind leaders! You’ll end up in a ditch.

Secondly, the false teachers are spiritually empty, or you could say they are worldly. They have no spiritual substance. Verse 40 says, “A disciple...” or “learner” “...is not above his teacher.” In other words, you can’t learn more than your teacher. You can only go where they take you. “But everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” You can only be like your master when you are fully taught. Then you will arrive at an understanding like your teacher.

But if your teacher is false, that’s a dangerous thought. If you are following a false teacher, a

false preacher or a false prophet, they can only take you as far as they've gone. And if they have no life in them, if they don't have the Spirit, they're sensual. Later on in this chapter, Jesus said they are evil, like a bad tree producing bad fruit. Good trees produce good fruit; bad trees produce bad fruit. So don't follow false teachers.

I cannot tell you how many so called "preachers" are not faithfully preaching the Word of God. Pep talks, speeches, psychology, philosophy, but not the Bible. The preacher's job is to preach the Word, 2 Timothy 4:2-4. "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." The reason is, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..." which is "teaching" "...but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." They don't say, "Preach it, brother, preach it!" Rather they say, "Tickle it, brother, tickle it!"

When you listen to a preacher, ask yourself, "Is he saying what the text says and means?" Back up and look at the context, and ask yourself, "What is the author's intention in the verse?" All Scripture, every text, has only one meaning. They don't have multiple meanings from which you can pick and choose; it's not a smorgasbord. It's called "authorial intent." What did Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, Jude say and mean? When they wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit, I know what they said, but I want to know what they meant by what they said.

When you listen—as well as when I preach—you should be asking yourself, "Is that what this verse means?" And if the preacher is not saying what it means, it's not Biblical. It may be something that is true, but it's not what the text says. Another problem I see sometimes is when the pastor will read a verse, he'll then give a sermon, but the sermon has nothing to do with the verse he just read. He's taken it out of context.

So be very, very discerning. We need people in the pews who are discerning when they listen to the preaching. "Is that what it says? Is that what it means? Is that how it should be interpreted? Is that how it should be applied?" That's Biblical preaching.

So false teachers are blind leaders of the blind. They are empty. Jude 12 says, "They are clouds without water." Jude 18-19 says that they "walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit." Jesus said that they are wolves "in sheep's clothing."

Thirdly, false teachers are hypocrites. It's interesting that this section starts with "Judge not, and you shall not be judged." Then Jesus says that they are "hypocrites." Let's look at verses 41-42. "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive..." or "you're not away of," being self-righteous or blind to your own sin "...the plank in your own eye?" This "plank" was a huge beam used for the flooring or ceiling in a house.

I believe that Jesus is using a ludicrous, humorous picture here to cause people to laugh. Picture a guy with a six-foot board, a four-by-four, protruding from his eye. And he walks up to

someone who has a piece of sawdust in his eye, hits him with his board, and says, "Let me help you get the sawdust out of your eye."

He'll say, "No thank you, dude! 'First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in [my eye].'"

These false teachers don't judge themselves; they're hypocrites. That's why Jesus says, in verse 42, "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." How ludicrous is that. First deal with your own sin, and then you'll see clearly to be able to deal with the sin in others. The analogy is that of David. He saw the sin of others, but he didn't see his own sin.

The word "hypocrite," is the Greek word "hupokrite." It means "actor" or "one who speaks from under a mask." On the Greek stage, actors were called hupokrites, because they held a mask on a stick and put it over their faces to play a role depicted on the mask. Then they would change masks to play a different role. So a hypocrite is one who has a phony façade or one who isn't who he appears to be. But God looks on the heart. And we must look at our own hearts first before we can help or minister to others.

What defense do we have against false teachers? The whole letter of Jude is warning us of the dangers of false teachers. First, Jude says that you should build up your faith on the Word of God. Jude 20-21 says, "building yourselves up on your most holy faith." You should get grounded and growing in God's Word. Second, you must be "praying in the Holy Spirit," and third, you must "keep yourselves in the love of God" by walking in fellowship with God, so there's nothing between your soul and the Savior. Fourth, you're to be "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," or looking for the coming again of Jesus Christ. That is, living in the light of the Lord's return. And fifth, trust Jesus to keep you from falling. I like that benediction at the end of the book of Jude. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...." Trust Him to save you.

So build yourself up on the Bible. When you know the truth, "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). If it's true, it's not new; if it's new, it's not true. Pray and rely upon the Holy Spirit. Look for Jesus Christ to come back. Trust His grace to keep you.