

“The Command that Says It All”

05/13/2018

or “God’s Will for Your Life” or “The Cure for Spiritual Cluelessness”

Matthew 7:12

GCC

Introduction

One of the great questions on the minds of Christians, especially new Christians, is this: “what is God’s will for my life?” It is a very important question. Christ followers tend to devote a lot of time and effort toward discovering the answer to it. They pursue understanding God’s will as though it is an elusive thing that you have got to find in a remarkable place at a special time or in conjunction with some extraordinary experience.

I want to show you this morning that what God most wants you to know in terms of his will for your life is abundantly clear. We are looking at a command that says it all.

[Read Text; Pray]

This is one verse and it is short and to the point. However, it is staggering how much needs to be said in regard to this single verse. It may be brief, but it is huge. Remember Jesus is primarily addressing citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Men and women, boys and girls become citizens of the kingdom of God when they turn from sin and trust in Jesus Christ. The fullness of this kingdom is future in the new heavens and new earth. However, Jesus is not looking exclusively to the future. The fact that the fullness of the kingdom is future does not discount the fact that they are called to live with the righteousness of the kingdom in the present. Now we live on earth as sojourners. We are not home yet; we are passing through. The commands and instructions Jesus gives in this sermon are for the disciples of Jesus now. How we live now is a reflection of the kingdom we call our eternal home.

The reason why there is so much to say about this commandment is because this command says it all. Here is a summary of the way kingdom citizens are to live.

Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. The meaning of the command is quite easily grasped. It states that you are to behave towards others the way that you would like for them to behave toward you. How you desire to be treated is the measure and standard and guide and requirement for how you are to treat them. Yes, this command seems simple enough. But there is more to be said. So I am going to preach this text by presenting to you several important aspects of Jesus' command that are critical to rightly understanding and applying it.

First, I want you to see that this command is . . .

I. A Call to Love Selflessly.

Three aspects of the verse emphasize the act of loving selflessly

A. The command is to do to others what you would wish them to do to you. Fulfilling the command requires you to think of what you would like, not what would be acceptable or what would be tolerable but what would be pleasing to you. So there IS focus on yourself. How would YOU wish that someone else would treat you? But that is where self-focus ends. Now you are to take that knowledge and that consideration and apply it to what you do to others.

B. Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not say do unto others as they have done or as they do unto you. No. What others do to you has nothing to do with what you are to do to them. Retaliation is not approved by Christ.

Neither does Jesus say, "do unto others before they do unto you." This would be a preemptive strike so to speak. Get them before they can get to you. No. Obviously that is not what Jesus is talking about here.

Moreover, Jesus does not indicate that we should do unto others SO they will do unto us. He is not calling us to put others in debt to ourselves by our goodness to them. Our treatment of others is not supposed to be a bargaining chip for a future return. How we treat one another is not to be motivated by what we can gain from others for ourselves.

What is to guide our behavior toward others has nothing to do with how they behave or even how they might behave toward us. It has to do with

how we wish that they would treat us. This is selfless then. It does not first demand that we be treated the way we would like. It does not treat them the way they treat us. And it does not treat them the way we would like to be treated IF they treat us well. There are no conditions except the one. How would we like others to treat us?

C. Then there is this little word with a big impact. It occurs twice here in the ESV. It is the word **DO**. It is an action word. It is not a word about feeling or being but acting. It points to a work or a deed that can be performed, executed, or accomplished. The command, then, could read like this: whatever works you wish that others would perform in regard to you, perform those works rather in regard to them.

Love is commonly mistaken by our society and culture as a feeling. The Bible, however, presents love to us as an action. In the first case love acts. Think of 1 Corinthians 13. "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears, believes, hopes, and endures." What Jesus is doing here is summing up the second of the great commandments, which is "LOVE your neighbor as yourself." He is explaining that love of neighbor is manifested by what one DOES in regard to that neighbor. Love ACTS for the well-being of the other. How do we know what that well-being looks like? Well, we ask ourselves, "What do I wish that others would do to me?" That tells me what I should do for them. There is the loving thing I should do. If we say we love but we do not DO, then in truth we do not love. What does John say? "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18)

And because the action here does not depend upon the actions of the other person, the deeds done to them out of love amount to serving them. To love others unconditionally with deeds is to serve them. Galatians 5:13-14 says, "through love serve one another."

Jesus modeled selfless love of neighbor. He did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. And this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ **DID** something. He laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

In sum, then, the command of Jesus is a call to humble and selfless love. Humble and selfless love acts in the best interest of others by serving them unconditionally to the glory of God.

Now, we also need to see that this command is

II. A Call to Imitate God.

A. Notice that word SO at the beginning of the verse. We drew attention to it last time. We highlighted that it points backward. It points back to how we should and should not judge, and we will get back to that in a moment. But the SO at the beginning of verse 12 also points back to verse 11. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" In light of how your Father gives to you, you should live in this way of selfless service to your neighbor.

Your Father sets the standard. If you are a child of God, a believer in Jesus Christ, think how your Father has given to you. He gives good things! Do you deserve good things? According to scripture we have all gone astray, each one has turned to his own way. We have made ourselves enemies of God. Our sins call for his justice, for his wrath. But he gives good things to those who ask him. Our Father is a selfless servant! So this commandment that we call the golden rule is a summons to behave toward our neighbor the way God behaves toward us! It is a call to imitate God.

B. I want you to see something God has been showing me in recent days about his commands. What God commands of me is a call to imitate him. He created human beings in his image, after his likeness. And he has given us commands that correspond with our image-bearing. I am most like God when I obey his commands. The law, the word, the testimonies, the statutes of God do not only tell me rules God has made for his creatures. They actually tell me who God is.

As I heard Ligon Duncan say a few weeks ago, "When the devil pointed out the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he said to Eve, you will be like God if you eat; that is, IF you DISOBEY God. Her reply as much as anything should have been, 'NO; I am already like God. He made us in his image.'" The tragedy in the garden is that Eve and Adam believed the lie of the devil that they would be like God and disregarded the fact that they were already like God and would remain that way so long as they obeyed God's one command. Instead, they disobeyed and became very much unlike God. They didn't lose the image completely, but they died spiritually. The image was greatly defaced.

The fact of the matter is that I am most like God when I obey his word, his statutes, his commands. And the point I am making is something that rings out of Psalm 119 over and over. The commands of God are inherently good. It is because they proceed from God. They are a reflection of who he is. You do not like God's commands? You do not like God. You love God, you love his commands! Jesus said, "He who has my commands and keeps them, he it is who loves me." The further point I am trying to bring home to you is that you can't separate God from what he requires. His laws are not artificial but stream from his very heart. These laws are good. They are to be admired. They come from his mouth. They come from his heart. At this point I would love to read all of Psalm 119 to you, but let me emphasize three verses to you.

137-138 – Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules. You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness.

142 – Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true.

These three verses express that God's law, his commands, his rules, are righteous because they are his. They proceed from his righteousness and faithfulness. They are true. They are forever. His laws reveal to us what God is all about. We need to see that God's commands for us are commands that reveal God to us. So when we disobey God's commands, it is not only a challenge to his authority, it is a challenge to who he is at his core.

And I hope this helps you see a little deeper how very hostile sin is to God. And I hope this helps you see that to love God is to love his law.

C. Now bring this back to the sermon on the mount. Jesus says God gives good gifts to those who ask. That is you! You be like him! Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.

So this command to be selfless and to serve others and do them what we would wish others to do to us is a command to be like God, and like his Son Jesus Christ. Love this command. Prize it. And do it. What you have received from the Lord, imitate. That glorifies and magnifies him.

Next I want you to see that this command is . . .

III. A Call to See Yourself Honestly.

A. Here is where we look back to what Jesus said in verses 1-5 about judging. The problem with people's judgment about which Jesus warns us is self-righteous judgment. By our sinful nature we have a high view of ourselves and a low view of others. To judge rightly in respect to others we need to get the plank out of our own eye. That plank is self-righteousness. It is being consumed with ourselves. It is under-estimating our unrighteousness and over-estimating the unrighteousness of others.

Jesus instructed that we will be judged in the way that we judge. So we should judge others with the same mercy with which we should want to be judged. Having made that point, he now comes to spread the broader principle. SO whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. Here as there, you must take the plank out of your eye. That plank is an over-valuation of myself and my desires.

B. Why is it that this simple command is not obeyed? Why is that people would rather do unto others as others have done unto them? Why is it that people would rather do unto others BEFORE others do unto them? And why is it that people would rather simply ignore others? It is because we love ourselves.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, "The whole thing can be brought down to one word, 'self.' Our Lord expresses it by saying that we should 'love our

neighbor as ourselves.’ But that is the one thing we do not do, and do not want to do, because we love self so much in a wrong way. We do not do unto others as we wish them to do unto us, because the whole time we are thinking only about ourselves, and we never transfer our thought to the other person.”

Just to look at this command is to see yourself as a sinner. Our disobedience of this command puts the magnitude and ugliness of our sin on full display. It testifies to how unworthy we are of receiving God’s good gifts. Recognizing this horror is a pre-requisite to doing what Jesus tells us to do here. We have to humble ourselves. We have to repent. We have to start as a matter of fact with loving the God who gives us this command and drawing near to him for forgiveness.

This command is . . .

IV. A Call to Promote Joy, Peace, and Unity.

A. To understand this point, all we have to do is ask ourselves, “What would be the result if everyone would keep this command?”

If everyone would obey this command, the world in which we live would be totally different. Think on an international scale. If nations behaved among themselves and acted toward each other the way they would want to be treated, we would have world peace! All the conflicts would be erased. There would be no nuclear weapons and no invasions and no terrorism.

Think on a national scale. If everyone obeyed the golden rule, all lives of all colors at all stages would matter to all. We would have no abortion, no ethnic conflicts. My guess is we’d have no Democrats and Republicans. Murder would be no more, nor theft, nor adultery, nor deceit. And nobody would be in need. Too good to be true, right? Not going to be this way until we get to the new heavens and the new earth.

But think about the difference you and I can make wherever we are by living out this command of our Lord. What a difference will be made by Christ-followers in society as we are careful to obey our Lord here. And what a difference there should be within the church. This command of Jesus is born out in Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians. “I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to

which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And Jesus said this to his disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." I just urge us to look at ourselves in this family of faith and promote Jesus by living out the golden rule with each other. How can we serve one another? By having a humble mind and heart towards one another that thinks of each other and serves each other selflessly.

And finally, what a difference there should be in the marriages and families of Christian men and women! To the extent that there is a lack of peace and joy in your home is the extent to which you are not obeying Christ's command here. Let's just focus on husbands and wives. I say it from time to time, but it needs to be said again and again because of our stubbornness selfishness. Husbands and wives, are you listening? Husbands and wives, Christ-followers are not in marriage for self. Marriage is not for myself but for the other self in the marriage. You wonder why your marriage isn't fulfilling? Why there is strife? You can do one simple thing to make your marriage soar off the charts. Do unto your spouse what you wish your spouse would do unto you. Don't do it for selfish gain; do it for Christ; do it for the glory of God. Let each one regard the other's interests as more important than one's own. This is the mind that was in Christ and this is God's goodness given to undeserving sinners. Christian marriages ought to show the world the beauty God manifests through his obedient children who slay the self and worship and obey him.

Finally, I want you to see that this command is . . .

V. A Comprehensive Call.

A. Jesus asserts that this command is the law and the prophets. In other words what he presents in this command summarizes the essence of what is taught by the whole OT. It is the essence of the law consisting of commands to be obeyed. It is the essence of the call of the prophets to summons the people to repent and to obey.

B. There are two overarching commandments from God to humanity. The first and greatest is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself. When Jesus

says this command to do to others as you wish they would do to you, comprehends what it means to love your neighbor.

C. This one command shows us that we are law breakers. This one command alone to positively act toward others in the way we wish they would act toward us blows all the cover off of our presumption that we are basically good. No, we are law-breakers. And in that we have broken the law of God, we show ourselves to despise God himself. We are worthy of the wrath of God. We are worthy of death. We are not worthy to receive anything good from God. We owe a debt we cannot pay. We need help. We need a savior. We need an advocate. We need someone who can pay the debt to God that we owe. Wretched people that we are! Who will free us from these bodies of death? Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ died for sinners was buried and rose again for our justification. He is the only savior for sinners. The wrath of God is coming upon sinners. The only escape from God in his just wrath is God in his mercy who delivered up his own son in our place. There is salvation in no other one. To receive his gift of eternal life, you must turn away from your rebellion against God and trust in Jesus and his saving work. And then begin a life of living for him. The bible sums that up as going the will of God. And the will of God is summed up to love God and love your neighbor by doing to your neighbor what you wish your neighbor would do to you.