**Gold in the Rule**

**By Jeff McDowell**

**2-23-25**

**Horseheads first UMC**

Sermon theme: This little verse came from the mouth of Jesus and has become the slogan of many Christians, many churches, even hung as a plaque in many funeral homes. ***“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*** This little verse has more impact than we might think. First, we are to give more than we receive and be glad of it. Second, we are to forgive more than we have been forgiven, not selfishly but because it is the right thing. Third, we are to reflect the goodness and mercy of God. Fourth, we are to expect a radical return on our investment. This little verse is clear evidence that a person is a Christian. It also is a standard by which we can judge the actions and words of others around us. We measure, we assess, and we reject or support actions based on the rule of Christ. But we do not judge people and their worth to God. Can you walk this very fine line?

Scriptures: Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40 and Luke 6:27-38

Sermon Start

How many Bibles do you own? I have about 14 of them, in various translations and conditions. I have used some more than others, for different reasons and places: some personal reading, some “professional” purposes like Sunday morning and in funerals, weddings, etc. Many people now access the bible on their phone or computer or tablet.

But how often do we read the Bible? The less we actually read it and consider what God is saying to us, the more we make the Bible only a relic, a religious symbol of what we pretend we stand for. Confusion comes among Christians, therefore, when the bible is actually read, and preached. People get in trouble for that.

Reading the Bible is the greatest blessing we can have. Each Sunday when a part of the bible is read, we say, “The Word of God for the People of God.” We believe, as Christians, [2 Timothy 3:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Timothy%203%3A16&version=NRSVA)

***“All******scripture****is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness…”*

Paul was referring to the Old Testament, for the New was being written at that time. Later, his writings and many others became recognized as Holy Scripture, endorsed by the church as coming from the Holy Spirit.

Fred Craddock was a pastor and a teacher, once taught an undergrad course in OK on the Gospels of Jesus. He took the simple writings which recorded what Jesus had said and taught, putting them plainly in front of the students. When he got to the part about loving your enemies, a girl stood up in the back of the class, throwing her books all around. She mumbled, *“Jesus and the losers. I hate Jesus and the losers; I can’t stand this.”* She stuffed her bag and went out mumbling, *“Jesus and a bunch of losers, forgiving their enemies.”*

-The difficult sayings of Jesus are many.-

 As I said two weeks ago, (my sermons are available on our website) Jesus often went and taught in the synagogue as many young Jewish men would, and his way with words wowed the crowds. They were amazed that “someone from Nazareth” could speak with such eloquence and poise and assurance. It was not until he claimed the Bible passage from Isaiah about the coming Savior was referring to him, that the adoring crowds now wanted to ***throw him off a cliff!***

You can know the words of God, but not really know the WORD of GOD. You can own many scrolls, even have them carefully bound and kept free of dust, but if you do not have the Word of God engraved on your heart, you will be subject to immense emotional upheaval when God speaks, about **Justice, Equity, Freedom** and **Mercy,** and even yes, **forgiveness.**

When I say the church exists to reach the Last, the Least and the Lost with Good news of the Gospel, we all cheer at how great that sounds. But when the **Last kind** of person we could think of: ***the illegal immigrant***, for example, enters our doors, our fellowship, our faith, we balk at the idea that She or He should really have a seat in the pew next to us. **When the Least valued** in our society, the ***poorest*** person we know shows up, not wearing the nicest clothes, not smelling the purest because they have no shower or laundromat coins, we wonder what we can do to make them presentable first to us, then to God. **When a person who seems lost** comes to church looking for a home, solace, or even a friend, we have our guard up, wondering if we should go home and get a weapon to protect us and all we hold dear in our otherwise safe and secure fellowship.

Jesus said, ***“Be wise as snakes and innocent as doves.”***

This all-too common mistake among God’s people, is due to one thing: **knowing and living the Word of God.**

***How do we walk this fine line?***

**First, I want to help those of us who are scared today.** Whether you are scared about the future of our nation, or the unity of the church in the midst of upheaval in the capital, or scared at the insecurity of our airplanes or the horrendous weather patterns, or the volatility of the stock market, or the world stage which seems bent on war, listen: God has Got you in the Palm of God’s hand.

Psalm 37 (please open the Bible in front of you, about in the middle to psalm 37 if you can. If you have your own Bible, you can underline parts; that is up to you.)

**Action Items we can do to survive in the midst of turmoil:**

1 **Do not fret** because of the wicked;

 **do not be envious** of wrongdoers,

2 for they will soon fade like the grass,

 and wither like the green herb.

3 **Trust** in the Lord, and do good;

 so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.

4 **Take delight** in the Lord,

 and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 **Commit** your way to the Lord;

 **trust in him**, and he will act.

6 He will make your vindication shine like the light,

 and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

7 **Be still** before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;

 **do not fret** over those who prosper in their way,

 over those who carry out evil devices.

8 **Refrain from anger**, and **forsake wrath**.

 **Do not fret**—it leads only to evil.

9 For the wicked shall be cut off,

 but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

10 Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;

 though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.

11 But **the meek shall inherit the land,**

 and delight in abundant prosperity.

*[my favorite passage in this is below]*

 **23Our steps** are made firm by the Lord,
    **when he delights** in our way;
**24**though we stumble, **we shall not fall** headlong,
    for **the Lord holds us** by the hand.

The Message: ***“If he stumbles, he’s not down for long;
    God has a grip on his hand.”***

 **39**The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;
    he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
**40**The Lord helps them and rescues them;
    he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
    because they take refuge in him.

**All this friends, from one little old psalm in the middle of the Bible. It is instruction; it is encouragement; it is the Word of God for the People of God!**

Now, let’s look at the New Testament Reading for today, from Luke’s gospel. Last Sunday, my friend and colleague Anne Canfield gave an excellent sermon from the sermon of all sermons, Jesus’s sermon on the mount / plain (in Luke) containing the beatitudes. Next in that same chapter of Luke, we have this gem of a teaching we cannot ignore to become Christians.

**Luke 6**

**27**‘But I say to you that listen, **Love your enemies**, do good to those who hate you, **28**bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. **29**If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. **30**Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. **31*Do to others as you would have them do to you.***

**[This little verse has more impact than we might think, because we take it in its context! Why was Jesus saying all this? Reading it along with what he says before and what comes after, makes this golden rule clear.]**

**32**‘If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33**If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34**If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. **35**But **love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return**.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%206%3A27-38&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25174a)] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. **36Be merciful**, just as your Father is merciful.

**37**‘**Do not judge,** and you will not be judged; **do not condemn**, and you will not be condemned.

[let’s talk about judging and our role in the church, believers of Jesus. One time, I was asked by a member to use our front lawn to lay out the huge flag to be able to repair it. A neighbor and inactive member of our church stopped her car while I was out in the lawn, asking why I would violate the flag code of the USA, laying it on the ground! I explained that it was owned by Goodrich Auto works and needed repair. It is so large that there is no table large enough to lay it out; it had to be on the ground temporarily to repair it. Finally, she consented that I was not the biggest hater of America and drove away. She at least asked me the question. She began a dialogue. My response made sense. When we judge another without all the information we are sinning. Go to the person (Matthew 16 says) and speak with them, get to a mutual understanding, and hello, if there is sin,] “

**Forgive,** and you will be forgiven; **38give,** and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’

Jesus was counterculture. The Bible as a whole is counterculture. When the world says, *“go with your plans and trade and invest and plan and make yourself happy,”* God says, *“give to the poor, lend to the bad debt risks, and forgive as your heavenly father has forgiven you.”*

Pastors working in God’s church are misunderstood, as a rule.

We fill the role in the church of at least three jobs: shepherd, protecting and leading the sheep / members; Priest, bringing the people to God and God to the people; and Prophet, speaking the radical Word of God to the people of God, and that not always a comforting, mediating message! In addition, we often are expected to fulfill all five roles mentioned in Ephesians chapter 4: Shepherd, Prophet, Evangelist, Teacher and Apostle. When we fall into this trap, we set up very high expectations for ourselves and the congregations follow suit; why can’t he / she be better at …. (fill in the blanks)?

In actuality, each pastor excels at some of those roles and not at others: because it is not the role of clergy to fill all them, but the church body, the members. And the gifts of the Spirit are spread across this congregation.

But the main work of the pastor is to point people to the true words in the Word of God, teach how to read and interpret it and help them fulfill their calling to be apostles, prophets, shepherds, evangelists and teachers in the church and in the world. What did Jesus teach that can help us today in luke 6?

First, we are to give more than we receive and be glad of it. Second, we are to forgive more than we have been forgiven, not selfishly but because it is the right thing. Third, we are to reflect the goodness and mercy of God. Fourth, we are to expect a radical return on our investment. This little verse is clear evidence that a person is a Christian. It also is a standard by which we can judge the actions and words of others around us. We measure, we assess, and we reject or support actions based on the rule of Christ. But we do not judge people and their worth to God. Can you walk this very fine line?

Now, here are just two examples of the Word of God making us think differently, act differently, hope differently and live differently than we otherwise would do.

Psalm 37: Peace, comfort and success promised with instructions how to attain it.

Luke 6: Instructions from Jesus himself how to live life in relation to other people.

Friends, the Word of God for the People of God**. Thanks Be to God!**