

A Different Bill of Rights

Luke 6:27-36

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for August 29, 2021

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Summary: Early in His ministry, those who followed Jesus had expectations for Him. They expected their messiah to wage war against Rome, free Israel, and bring God's kingdom to earth during their lifetime. But Jesus had different intentions, and He challenged His followers to conform to His will, not try to make Him conform to theirs. Jesus' sermon on the mount, transcribed in Luke's Gospel, will be just as difficult and challenging for us today as it was for the Jewish patriots and nationalists in Jesus' audience.

In His sermon on the plateau, the Lord Jesus is in the process of turning everything upside down. If I correctly preach His sermon today, I am going to do the same thing.

In each short, brief statement, one following another, Jesus rocked the expectations of Jewish patriots who longed to be free from Roman oppression.

He took the sword of truth and cut through centuries of religious tradition; He demanded that motives and attitudes be given a higher priority than rituals and religiosity.

As one author wrote many years ago, Jesus delivered a series of bombshells.

He was making shocking, uncomfortable, even bizarre demands for those who would follow Him as His disciples.

He was effectively delivering the constitution for the citizens of Heaven.

I couldn't help but compare Jesus' description of what a believer should surrender with our own constitutional rights today.

We have our constitution in this country and the opening amendments are called the Bill of Rights, ratified in 1791.

I'm very grateful for that Bill of Rights. I'm grateful to be in a country that has a democracy and a constitution like ours and listen: I am proud to be an American.

The Bill of Rights is a wonderful, just document. But the problem is—and it's becoming more and more apparent—the church at large seems to have baptized the Bill of Rights into church doctrine.

The average Christian today believes, I fear, that God has guaranteed us those rights; that those rights should now be fought for and argued over by Christians; that the Bill of Rights are now biblical rights for believers.

Now don't misunderstand, we have the tremendous benefit of this Bill of Rights; many countries around the world would be greatly benefited by having these same personal liberties given to them.

However, as this Bill of Rights is being debated and rewritten and eroded, the reaction of the Christian and the church is revealing to me. I'm hearing from Christians and Christian leaders about everything from the creation of communes to taking up arms to withholding the payment of taxes.

The anger and the rhetoric and the demands are revealing some deeply held errors in church doctrine.

One leader of a movement to renew America quoted Matthew 16:18 where Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." He went on to interpret that text to mean that Jesus was calling Christians to band together and fight against the forces of Hell now entrenched in government and education and other places for the church to survive.

That's not what Jesus said. What Jesus said was nothing less than a promise that He will successfully build His church and that Hell *has already* lost.

I have come to believe that what Jesus preaches here in His sermon on the plateau would be absolutely unwelcomed in many congregations and by many ministry leaders today.

I'm convinced that Jesus would not be invited back to speak after dropping these bombshells here in Luke chapter 6 on His deeply patriotic, nationalistic, Jewish audience.

They wanted a change in government; they wanted Rome removed; they were tired of being taxed, ridiculed, and marginalized. They were ready for a leader and a message they could rally around that would uphold their personal rights and their religious freedoms.



Have you ever had an expectation for God, but later learned that expectation was not part of God's plan? How did you deal with the disappointment that came from that?

Well, hold on to your hat! Jesus is about to deliver a different bill of rights to them, and to us.

If you have your Bibles, turn to the **Gospel by Luke, chapter 6.**

As we work through this next paragraph, I want to structure our thoughts around eight different rights that Jesus promised His followers.

Here are your rights as citizens of His kingdom; as Christians who follow as Christ as disciples.

You have the right to love those who disagree with you.

He says here as verse 27 opens:

*“But I say to you who hear,
Love your enemies...”*

Luke 6:27a

It’s as if Jesus knew that at this point, most of His audience would start tuning Him out, so He begins by addressing those who are willing to listen to what He’s about to say.

The reason Jesus’ sermon isn’t creating much of an impact among Christians today is either because we really don’t know what Jesus said, or we don’t think He was speaking to us.

But everything Jesus delivers here is affirmed by other passages throughout the New Testament.

And this first right for believers sets the stage for all the rest.

Here it is: ***Love your enemies.***

The verb is from agape—which is why it can be commanded. It is the word for willing to love, choosing to love. It is loving someone who has no merit for that

love. They don’t even necessarily deserve it.

This is the word the New Testament authors used to describe the:

- love from God toward sinners (***Romans 5:8***).
- love Christ has for His church (***Ephesians 5:25***).

We haven’t merited His love—we don’t deserve it—yet He has chosen to love us.

So, Jesus uses that verb here to say that the believer has the right to love those without merit.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 156

And Jesus uses the word “enemies” here; ***love your enemies.***

You could translate that term “hostile ones.” These people don’t merely *seem* unfriendly to you, they really are.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 157

Now to Jesus’ Jewish audience, the law made it clear that you were to love your neighbor (***Leviticus 19:18***), and the Jewish world defined someone’s neighbor as someone who had a similar opinion.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1* (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 588

And that would be convenient. That’s easy! I can love people who share my opinion. In fact, I think they’re smart people.



Who are your enemies in your life, and how can you demonstrate genuine love to them this week?

But the idea of enemies here, one New Testament scholar noted, is that this applies to anyone who does not share our opinions personally, religiously, and politically.

Adapted from David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 279

So, let's be honest: *that* person will be hard to love.

But this happens to be your right, as Jesus delivers a rather different bill of rights.

You have the right to serve those who hate you.

Jesus says here in **verse 27**, "**Love your enemies**," now notice:

"Do good to those who hate you."

Luke 6:27b

Notice the progression: first comes the right attitude, then comes the right action.

He's essentially telling you that you don't get to avoid these people. You don't change classrooms to avoid them; you don't quit your job to get away from them.

Have you ever thought about the fact that it's impossible to physically serve someone that hates you unless you're next to them? They may hate you, but you find ways **to do good** to them: a cup of coffee; a kind hello; a ride home; help with homework; a bag of groceries, whatever.

The Old Testament effectively said the same thing. Moses wrote, "***if you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it***" (***Exodus 23:4***).

You might be tempted to rejoice that they lost their donkey—it got out of the barn and is wandering off; well, they deserved it! Serves them right!

Or put it in today's context, you're driving to work, and you see your enemy—that guy who really hates you—up ahead on the side of the road with a flat tire. You drive by, honk and wave, and then sing, "God is so good."

That would be so natural.

Jesus is saying, the citizens of my kingdom have supernatural ability, by means of the fruit of the Spirit produced within them, to love someone who hates them.

You have been given the right to serve those who hate you.

You have the right to be gracious to those who curse you.

Jesus says here in verse 28:

“Bless those who curse you.”

Luke 6:28a

The word here for curse refers to calling down divine affliction on someone.

Swindoll, p. 157

I have seen in the Middle East fragments—little pieces of parchment dating back before the time of Christ where people wrote out curses in the form of prayers and placed them in the temples of their gods— specific curses where they asked their gods to ruin the crops, bring disease or even death to their enemies.

This is like someone today effectively asking God to damn you. They essentially are wanting that curse to bring you misfortune.

Garland, p. 279

And Jesus says: you might be tempted to yell back. As Howard Hendricks use to say to us in seminary, you might be tempted to give them a piece of your mind you cannot afford to lose!

We have been given, instead, the right to respond with blessing. Bless those who curse you. Bless—*eulogete*—which gives us our word for eulogy. You speak well of them.

But wait a second. I’ve got a Bill of Rights that gives me freedom of speech; I’ve got the right to say anything I want to say; I’m allowed to speak my mind; that’s my first amendment right!

Jesus says, I’ve got a different bill of rights for citizens of My kingdom. You now have the right to bless those who curse you.

You have the right to pray for those who hurt you.

Jesus goes on in verse 28 to say:

“Pray for those who abuse you.”

Luke 6:28b

The word here for *abuse* refers to mistreatment, most likely related to religious persecution. Jesus says our reaction to mistreatment, discrimination, and persecution is not to shout louder, demand our right to the free exercise of religion and the right to peaceably assemble. That’s in our American Bill of Rights.

That’s true—it is. But it is not in the Bible. And Christians today around the world are meeting in secret.

Jesus’ words will be deeply encouraging to Christians today. My Mandarin translator is leading an underground church in China today. At the time Jesus said these words, Christians would soon be hiding in the catacombs of Rome as the lions were carted into the arenas. Our focus is to be on the eternal destiny of those who abuse us, persecute us, and mistreat us.

We need to be concerned for them.

Listen to one of the most persecuted believers ever as he wrote to a young

pastor; listen to his perspective which is eternal; he mimics the bill of rights delivered by Jesus. Paul writes:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Does that sound like your Facebook posts? Your Twitter account? Your online response to somebody who hates what you believe as a Christian?

Can they say, “You know, I disagree with you, but you amaze me with your peaceful, godly, dignified response. I can tell, you’re actually praying for your leaders, and for your country.”



Do the words “gentleness” “quietness” “dignity” and “graciousness” describe your interactions? If not, what do you need to change about the way you communicate with others? Is “winning” more important to you than “loving”?

You have the right to pray for those who hurt you.

You have the right to refuse taking revenge.

Jesus says now in verse 29:

“To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.”

Luke 6:29a

Matthew chapter 5 adds the words, **the right cheek**—this is a reference to being insulted.

And the idea of offering the other cheek isn’t a recommendation that you let the neighborhood bully have at it; this has to do with reacting supernaturally instead of naturally.

The natural thing to do is strike back. Especially if you’re bigger than the other guy. If he slaps you, well, you can knock him out. He had it coming.

This is essentially a command to refuse to hit back—physically or verbally; you’re not to get even; you’re not to top their insult with an even bigger one; to be vindicated when wronged.

Jesus effectively says, “You have the right to live with never being vindicated anywhere on earth, but in the sight of God alone.”

You have the right to be robbed of personal possessions.

Jesus says at the end of verse 29:

“And from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.”

Luke 6:29b

The cloak here is the robe that reached to the ground; the tunic was the undershirt worn next to the skin. Jesus could be referring to robbery here or even legal action taken against the believer.

Mark Straus, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 380

This term is still used metaphorically to this day as someone who's lost their shirt—they've been left out in the cold.

Now we have a Bill of Rights that protects our privacy and our possessions, our houses, papers, and property. Those are amendments IV and V in the Bill of Rights.

But again, Jesus is delivering a different bill of rights; He says we have the right to lose everything and keep nothing.

Now you need to understand that He's not diminishing the blessing of just law. What He's essentially telling His disciples to do is to live with the attitude that personal possessions are temporal, that they might not be treated justly after all, so hold on to their possessions loosely.

And by now you can imagine the energy and excitement just evaporating here on this plateau. Thousands of people, who couldn't wait to see Jesus and hear Him preach, are now not so sure about Him. Many disciples will leave Jesus after this sermon and no longer walk with Him.

And Jesus isn't finished yet.

You have the right to be generous to those who don't pay you back.

Now in verse 30 Jesus gives the worst financial advice on the planet, He says:

“Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.”

Luke 6:30

The term for **beg** here is understood in the context of borrowing.

Bock, p. 593

But there is this element of desperation; it could be borrowing food, as it were, or money.

In this culture, people were commonly poor. One historian said that they were one bad harvest away from total ruin, so lending from one poor person to another was risky.

Garland, p. 282

But the Lord adds here that if someone uses your possessions and won't return them, don't demand them back.

It might have been your toolbox, your table, your milk cow, your plough; and they just can't afford to give it back. So let them keep it.

But wait a second: The Fifth Amendment in our Bill of Rights gives us the right to never be deprived of property without just compensation.

Jesus isn't suggesting here that we ignore the basic rights of property and possessions, but He is holding us to an entirely new standard of compassion for other people's needs.

He's effectively saying, "People are more important than possessions." So, you have the right to be generous, even though it brings you great loss.

You have the right to never see, in your lifetime, many of your wishes come true.

This is originally called the Golden Rule, dating back to the 16th century.

Bock, p. 595

Jesus summarizes these statements by saying here in **verse 31**:

"And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

Luke 6:31

And as you wish that others would do to you (and they do not), press forward in doing those kind deeds and speaking those gracious words and praying those faithful prayers and performing sacrificial services to them.

Now at this point I imagine somebody out there in the audience is beginning to think, "You have to be kidding; everybody knows that the world won't work that way."

The golden rule we live by is: "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

Adapted from Bock, p. 601

That's the way life works.

Jesus knew their hearts and He knows ours.

So, he makes his point even clearer and more convicting in verse 32 and following:

"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return."

Luke 6:32-35a

Jesus basically says, I know how the world works. I know how unbelievers act. But I'm not asking you to uphold your Bill of Rights, I'm asking you to uphold Mine; yours are well and good, but they come naturally; Mine are supernatural.

I'm not calling you to imitate humanity, I'm calling you to imitate Deity.

Notice verse 35 again:

*“Your reward will be great,
and you will be sons of the
Most High, for he is kind to
the ungrateful and the evil.
Be merciful, even as your
Father is merciful.”*

Luke 6:35b-36

“Sons of the Most High” is a Jewish idiom that means your actions reveal the family to whom you belong.

For instance, Jesus will refer to **the sons of this age**, they belong to this world (**Luke 16:8**); **sons of those who murdered the prophets**, that is, they bear the family resemblance of those who rejected the prophets (**Matthew 23:31**).

Adapted from Garland, p. 282

Jesus essentially says here: “If you will live by my bill of rights, you will be recognized **as sons of the Most High**—belonging to the family of God. You will be acting just like your Heavenly Father who is gracious and merciful.

Even Seneca, the Roman philosopher who lived during the time of Jesus, said, “If you wish to imitate the gods, do good deeds to the ungrateful.”

Strauss, p. 380

Everybody recognizes supernatural, divine-like behavior.

So, if you are citizens of Heaven, act like your Father who is in Heaven. Although He is ignored, He is merciful; although He is blasphemed, He sends rain to their front yard just like He does yours;

although His followers are persecuted around the world and marginalized in many places, He offers to forgive the world.



Which of these eight new “rights” will be the most challenging for you, and how can you actively seek to honor Jesus in that way today?

And with that, let me make three very practical applications.

Reject the rhetoric.

What I mean is this, reject the messages you’re hearing today that Christians need to fight for their personal and religious rights.

We can (and should) voice our objections and claim our legal rights as citizens, just as the Apostle Paul claimed his right to a fair trial (**Acts 25:11**) and He avoided a beating by reminding the jailor that he was a Roman citizen (**Acts 22:25**).

However, Paul never viewed his Roman rights as God-given guarantees; if that were true, Christians in China and North Korea would want some answers from Paul. And Paul, in fact, will soon be martyred, without ever receiving the fair trial he was owed.

I believe the average Christian in our country feels angry and threatened because they think the Bill of Rights are

biblical rights for the believer. “This is how we should be treated!”

Look at the model of Jesus Christ who gave up all His rights. He gave up the right to act like God; He gave up the right to live like God; He gave up the right to be treated like God. Every single one of His rights were demolished to give us the one right we *must* claim: ***For as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).***

Reject the rhetoric of your world, even the Christian world that seems more concerned about their freedom than being a follower of Jesus.

Secondly, rise above the arguments.

Especially on social media and in the classrooms and hallways of your workplace.

Do your social media posts reveal to others that you’re praying for your civil leaders; that you are concerned for the progress of the gospel? Or is it clear that you want to make sure your political and religious perspectives need to be delivered on every issue out there?

Let me encourage you to rise above—get beyond—the arguments.

If necessary, step away from social media and for the next 30 days, dive into this sermon in Luke chapter 6; and then come back refreshed with grace toward fellow believers who disagree with you.

Come back with a new compassion for unbelievers; they are not your enemies; they are your mission field.

Don’t forget where they are heading!

And with that in mind, here’s my third encouragement:

Remember the great commission.

This is our commission—to make disciples of all the nations. And that mission hasn’t changed for the past 2,000 years.

Our commission isn’t to replace political leaders—although we vote our conscience and take advantage of our freedoms for the sake of righteousness.

But let’s remember, our greater mission isn’t temporary; and I’ve lived long enough to learn that winning at the ballot box is a temporary victory.

Our mission is not to get our country to return to more conservative roots. Listen, I would be thrilled if the moral digression of our culture slowed to a crawl, because today it seems to be infused with rocket fuel.

I rejoice when Christians win seats on school boards and judicial benches and political positions. That may be God’s calling for you, and there you can bring great influence as salt and light for the sake of righteousness. And ***righteousness always exalts a nation and sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34).***

But let's remember that returning our country to more conservative roots is not our mission; conservatives can die and go to hell just as quickly as liberals.

Remember, the mission of the church is not to make someone a conservative; it is to make someone a Christian—a disciple who follows Jesus Christ.

I hear more and more Christian leaders today essentially preaching that we must return America to Judeo-Christian ethics; we need to save America.

Beloved, our mission is not to save our country any more than it is today for German Christians to save Germany or Iranian Christians to save Iran or Chinese Christians to save China.

Our mission is to remind the citizens of the countries where we've been assigned as ambassadors, the countries that might silence us, insult us, hate us, defraud us, and persecute us:

We have been assigned to remind them, with compassion and grace, of the gospel:

- that there is another country.
- there is a greater citizenship.

- there is a higher allegiance.
- there is an eternal Kingdom.
- and there is a coming King, to whom they must surrender, for He shall have the final word.

He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So, let's entrust ourselves to Him and imitate His mercy and grace to our lost world and to one another:

Let's refuse the rhetoric.

Let's rise above the arguments.

Let's remember our assignment from the Lord who promised us a very different Bill of Rights.



How do you get bogged down into the issues, debates, and culture wars of earth? Ultimately, how can you keep your perspective on the eternal pursuit of God, and His commission for you to make disciples?

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