

BEING KIND TO THE UNGRATEFUL
Treasure in Vessels of Clay

September 29, 2019
2nd Sunday of Luke
Revision G

Today’s Gospel lesson is used for a number of different occasions both in the Eastern and Western Churches. In the East, today’s Gospel lesson taken from Matthew 5:33-48 is also used for the Friday and Saturday preceding the Sunday of All Saints (which is the First Sunday after Pentecost). In the West, today’s Gospel lesson from Luke is used either for All Saints Day (November 1st) or Ash Wednesday, and from Matthew, either for the Eighth Sunday after Epiphany or the Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Luke 6:27-36, (Matthew 5:33-48).....	1130
Showing Kindness toward the Ungrateful and the Evil.....	1130
Things We Should Do.....	1131
Love Your Enemies.....	1132
Turn the Other Cheek.....	1137
The Golden Rule.....	1141
Loans and Borrowing.....	1142
Swearing Oaths.....	1142
Lawsuits.....	1145
The Things We Should Not Do.....	1146
Be Merciful, As Your Father in Heaven is Merciful.....	1147
The Goodness of God in Restraining Evil.....	1155

Gospel: Luke 6:27-36, (Matthew 5:33-48)

Showing Kindness toward the Ungrateful and the Evil

The Gospel lesson took place in early 28 AD, or early in Jesus’ ministry (where the crucifixion took place in the spring of 30 AD). In Matthew 5:1, the “Sermon on the Mount” is called such because Jesus taught from the side of a mountain. Shortly afterward, Jesus also taught from a “level place” (Luke 6:17) after He had come down from a mountain and He used the same illustrations about the same subjects. Luke 6 is sometimes called “The Sermon on the Plain.”

The subject of the Gospel lesson is what has come to be called “the golden rule” of loving one’s enemies. It is a subject that is easy to talk about and easy to pay lip service to, but very difficult to do. But as we will see, there are some very good reasons for doing so, for He is instructing us to become like Himself as much as men are able to do.

There are several “golden rules” that exist in our culture. Among them are:

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- The golden rule in business: He who has the gold makes the rules
- The golden rule of competition: Do unto others before they do unto you
- God's golden rule from Luke 6:31, "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them"

The words of God's golden rule are spoken of as summarizing the entire Law and the Prophets, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). In this regard, God's golden rule is equivalent to the Greatest Commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39). On the Greatest Commandment also hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40); its words were part of the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18) and it summarizes the Ten Commandments. The Jewish Rabbi Hillel (the grandfather of Gamaliel, Acts 5:34-40, 22:3) also taught this, saying that the golden rule, "contains the whole Law and that all the rest is simply commentary." In the First Century Synagogue worship, the words of the Greatest Commandment were part of a Creed that was recited every Sabbath (Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, pp. 245, 101-104). By this Creed, the synagogue worship pointed to the work of Christ. By following this ourselves, we become like Christ as much as is humanly possible.

From Luke 6 and Matthew 5, there are some very specific aspects of God's golden rule; some need clarification in terms of today's culture. All of these are very difficult to do. Both Luke 6:27-36 and Matthew 5:38-48 contain a list of things we should do followed by a list of things we shouldn't do.

Things We Should Do

- Love our enemies; do good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27, Matthew 5:44). Bless those who curse us; pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Luke 6:28, Matthew 5:44)
- Do not resist an evil person; turn the other cheek (Luke 6:29, Matthew 5:39). Give to everyone who asks to borrow. If someone takes your things, don't ask for them back (Luke 6:30, Matthew 5:42)
- If someone sues you for your cloak, give him your tunic also (Luke 6:29, Matthew 5:40). Go out of your way to help; if someone compels you to go one mile, go two (Matthew 5:41)

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹ that the Apostles must have expected their persecutors to plot against them in many ways. Yet they didn't ask for vengeance or even avoid their persecutors. They had so solemn a sense of patience that they imitated Christ and Stephen.

"We need to look closely to see how the mode of life of our holy teachers was, for they were about to proclaim the message of salvation to the world. They must have expected that their persecutors would be beyond numbering, and that they would plot against them in many different ways. If the disciples had indignantly at all these vexations, and wished for vengeance on those that annoyed them, they would have kept silence and passed them by, no longer offering them the divine message or calling them to the Truth. It was necessary to restrain the minds of the

¹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 135-136.

holy teachers by so solemn a sense of the duty of patience, as to make them bear with fortitude whatever might befall, even though men insulted them and plotted against them impiously. Such was the conduct of Christ Himself above all others for our example. While hanging on the Cross, with the Jewish populace making Him their sport, He prayed for them, 'Father forgive them; for they don't know what they're doing!' (Luke 23:34). Stephen also, while being stoned, prayed, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin' (Acts 7:60). Paul also said, 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure'" (1 Corinthians 4:12).

"Someone might say, 'But Christ was God, and I am just a frail man, having a feeble mind, unable to resist the attack of covetousness and pain'. This is correct, for the mind of man easily slides into wrongdoing. Nevertheless, the Lord has not left us destitute of His compassion and love. We have Him in us by the Holy Spirit; we are His abode, and He lodges in the souls of those who love Him. He gives us strength to bear nobly whatever befalls, and to resist manfully the attacks of temptations. 'Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good'" (Romans 12:21).

The Old Testament has some things to say about the above 3 items also: loving one's neighbors was commanded and having a grudge against anyone was forbidden (Leviticus 19:18). However, there was an exception concerning the Ammonites and Moabites because of how they opposed Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). As a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6), Israel was expected to pray for the rest of the world and a third tithe was set aside every third year, in part, for strangers and aliens (Deuteronomy 14:29, 16:11-14, 24:19-21, 26:12). During Israel's apostasy, this wasn't followed very well (Isaiah 1:15-17).

Love Your Enemies

Luke said, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28).

Matthew said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43-45).

Irenaeus of Lyons pointed out² that Christ on the Cross did Himself what He instructed us to do.

"Christ exclaimed upon the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing' (Luke 23:34). The long-suffering, patience, compassion, and goodness of Christ are exhibited, since He both suffered, and Himself acquitted those who had maltreated Him. For the Word of God, who said to us, 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you' (Matthew 5:44); Himself did this very thing on the cross. He loved the human race to such a degree, that He even prayed for those putting Him to death."

² Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III, xviii, 5.

John Chrysostom addressed³ the case where we are asked to suffer in this life at the hands of evil men, or if we are robbed, vilified, exiled, suffer disease or even murdered. If we are faithful and bear these things bravely, all these things expiate sins and work righteousness. There will be a great reward for us at the Last Day.

“How is it possible, you will say, for no one to be injured when many are committing injury? Joseph’s brethren did indeed injure him, yet he himself was not injured; and Cain laid snares for Abel, yet Abel himself was not ensnared. This is the reason why there are penalties and punishments. God does not abolish penalties on account of the virtue of those who suffer; but he ordains punishments on account of the malice of those who do wickedly. Those who are asked to suffer evil become more illustrious in consequence of the designs formed against them; this is not due to the intention of those who plan the evil designs, but to the courage of those who are the victims. For the victims, the rewards are made ready and prepared; for the perpetrators the penalties of wickedness are prepared. Have you been deprived of your money? Read the word, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there’ (Job 1:21). And add to this the apostolic saying ‘for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out’ (1 Timothy 6:7). Do people speak evil of you, and have some men loaded you with countless abuse? Remember, ‘Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets’ (Luke 6:26). Also, ‘Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake’ (Matthew 5:11). Have you been exiled? Consider that you don’t have a fatherland here, but that if you will be wise you are asked to regard the whole world as a strange country (Hebrews 11:37-38). Or have you been given over to a gruesome disease? Quote the apostolic saying, ‘the more our outward man decays, so much the more is the inward man renewed day by day’ (2 Corinthians 4:16). Has anyone suffered a violent death? Consider the case of John the Baptist, his head cut off in prison, carried on a platter, and made the reward of a harlot’s dancing (Matthew 14:1-12). Consider the recompense which is derived from these things! All these sufferings when they are unjustly inflicted by anyone on another, they expiate sins, and work righteousness. So great is the advantage of those who bear them bravely.”

Irenaeus of Lyons stated⁴ that we should not grieve if someone takes our things, but we should rejoice as one who has given willingly. When forced against our will, we should oblige as a free man who is willing to help. By doing these things, we fulfill the Law and draw closer to Him, doing what He does in loving all mankind.

“The Lord, instead of that commandment, ‘You shalt not commit adultery’, forbid even lusting (Matthew 5:27-28); and instead of, ‘You shalt not kill’, He prohibited anger (Matthew 5:21-22). Instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, He told us to share all our possessions with the poor (Matthew 19:21); and not to love our neighbors only, but even our enemies (Matthew 5:44-48). Instead of merely being liberal givers, we should even present a gift to those who take away our goods. For ‘from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic

³ John Chrysostom, No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, 4.

⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xiii, 3.

either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise' (Luke 6:29-31). So that we may not grieve as those who are unwilling to be defrauded, but may rejoice as those who have given willingly, and as rather conferring a favor upon our neighbors than yielding to necessity. 'And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two' (Matthew 5:41); so that you may not follow him as a slave, but may as a free man go before him, showing yourself in all things kindly disposed and useful to your neighbor, not regarding their evil intentions, but performing your kind offices, assimilating yourself to the Father, 'He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matthew 5:45). Now all these precepts, as I have already observed, were not the injunctions of one doing away with the law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and widening it among us. Just as if one should say, that the more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our Liberator had been implanted within us. For He did not set us free for this purpose, that we should depart from Him. No one, indeed, while placed out of reach of the Lord's benefits, has power to procure for himself the means of salvation. Instead the more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him. Now the more we have loved Him, the more glory shall we receive from Him, when we are continually in the presence of the Father."

John Chrysostom spoke about⁵ how we should love our enemies, and he used the case of Moses in the wilderness as an example. Not only did Moses give up a life of nobility in the Egyptian court to be with people that the Egyptians considered the lowest among men (they smelled like their animals)! He also defended them when they were totally ungrateful for whatever he did. He even volunteered to perish with them, rather than be saved without them. All because of his love for the ungrateful and evil! Paul did the same thing as Moses and offered to be accursed if only his people might be saved. Christ had come as a suffering servant, healing everyone, only to be greeted as a mad demoniac, a blasphemer and a deceiver. Moses, Paul and Christ all show us how to love our enemies, and imitating them is how to love God.

"Let us then be followers of Christ; let us do good to our enemies, to them that hate us; let us draw near to those who turn their backs upon us. This renders us like God. 'For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?' (Matthew 5:46). What is a sure proof of love? To love him that hates you. I wish to give some example."

"The blessed Moses surpassed even those that love with the greatest human passion. How, and in what way? First, he gave up the Egyptian court, the luxury, the retinue, and the glory attending it, and chose rather to be with the Israelites. Yet is this not only what no one else would have ever done, but anyone else would have even been ashamed to be discovered a kinsman of men, who were slaves and not only slaves, but were looked upon as execrable. Yet he was not only not ashamed of his kindred, but with all his spirit defended them, and threw himself into dangers for their sake (Acts. 7:24). How? Seeing one doing an injury to one of them, he defended him that suffered the injury, and slew him that inflicted it. But this is not as yet for the sake of enemies. Great indeed is this act of itself, but not so great as

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VII, Moral.

what comes afterwards. The next day, he saw the same thing taking place, and when he saw him whom he had defended doing his neighbor wrong, he admonished him to desist from his wrong-doing. But he said, with great ingratitude, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?' (Acts. 7:27). Who would not have taken fire at these words? Had then the former act been that of passion and frenzy, then would he have smitten and killed this man also; for surely, he on whose behalf it was done, never would have informed against him. But because they were brethren, he spoke thus. When he [the Hebrew] was being wronged, he uttered no such word, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?' 'Wherefore didn't you say this yesterday?' Moses would say, 'Your injustice, and your cruelty, these make me a ruler and a judge'".

"Notice how some, in fact, say as much even to God Himself. Whenever they are wronged, they would have Him a God of vengeance, and complain of His long suffering; but when they themselves do wrong, not for a moment."

"Yet notwithstanding, after this, when Moses was sent to that ungrateful people, to that thankless race, he went, and didn't shrink back. After those miracles, and after the wonders wrought by his hand, oftentimes they sought to stone him to death and he escaped out of their hands. They kept murmuring incessantly, and yet still, so passionately did he love them, as to say to God, when they committed that heinous sin, 'Yet now if You will forgive, forgive their sin; and if not, blot even me also out of the book which You have written' (Exodus 32:32). I would rather perish with them, than be saved without them. Here, truly, is love even to madness, unbounded love. What are you saying, Moses? Are you forfeiting Heaven? I am, he said, for I love those who have wronged me. Are you asking to be blotted out? Yes, he said; what can I do, for it is love? And what happened after these things? Listen to what the Scripture says elsewhere; 'And Moses was afflicted because of them' (Psalm 106:32). How often did they grow idolatrous and licentious? How often did they reject both himself and his brother? How often did they seek to return back to Egypt? Yet after all these things he burned, and was beside himself with love for them, and was ready to suffer for their sakes. This is how a man ought to love his enemies; by lamentation, by unwearied endurance, by doing everything, by showing all favor, to aim at their salvation."

And what did Paul do? Did he not ask even to be accursed in their stead? (Romans 9:3). There is a great pattern that we must derive from the Lord, for He also Himself did this, where he said, 'He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matthew 5:45). He came to them in His Incarnation; He became a servant for their sakes, 'He humbled Himself; He emptied Himself; He took the form of a servant' (Philippians 2:7-8). When He came to them, He didn't go Himself 'into any way of the Gentiles' and gave the same charge to His disciples (Matthew 10:5). Not only so, but 'He went about healing all kinds of disease, and all kinds of sickness (Matthew 4:23). Everyone indeed was astonished and marveled, and said, 'Where then did this *Man* get all these things?' (Matthew 13:56). But the Jewish leaders, the objects of His beneficence, these said, 'He has a demon and is mad' (John 10:20), and 'blasphemes', (John 10:36) and is a 'deceiver' (John 7:12; Matthew 27:63). Did he therefore cast them away? No, but when He heard these sayings, He even more

bestowed His benefits on them, and went immediately to them that were about to crucify Him, to the intent that He might but save them. After He was crucified, what were His words? 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing' (Luke 23:34). Both cruelly treated before this, and cruelly treated after this, even to the very latest breath, for them He did everything, and on their behalf, He prayed. After the Cross itself, what did He not do for their sakes? Did He not send Apostles? Did He not work miracles? Did He not shake the whole world? Thus, we ought to love our enemies, thus we ought to imitate Christ. Thus, did Paul! Stoned, suffering unnumbered cruelties, yet he did all things for their good. Listen to his own words. 'My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge' (Romans 10:1-2). And again, 'If you, being a wild olive tree were grafted in, how much more shall these be grafted into their own olive tree?' (Romans 11:24). How tender, don't you think, must be the affection from which these expressions proceed, how vast the benevolence? It is impossible to express it, impossible! Thus, it is we ought to love our enemies. This is to love God, Who has enjoined it, Who has given it as His law. To imitate Him is to love our enemy. Consider it is not your enemy you are benefiting, but yourself; you are not loving him, but are obeying God. Knowing therefore these things, let us confirm our love one to another, that we may perform this duty perfectly, and attain those good things that are promised in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John Chrysostom also spoke⁶ of the rewards for loving our enemies; by doing so, we are doing good to ourselves, not to them. The eviler they are, the greater our reward. Just as athletes train with weights, so life is full of things that exercise us in this direction. Let us not be faint-hearted in doing this.

'Love your enemies', He says (Matthew 5:44). Therefore, love your enemy; for you are doing good not to him, but to yourself. How? You are becoming like God! Your enemy, if he is beloved by you, has no great gain, for he is beloved by a fellow-slave; but you, if you love your fellow-slave, have gained much, for you are becoming like God. Do you see that you are doing a kindness not to him but to yourself? For God appoints the prize not for him, but for you.

What then if he is evil, you say? So much the greater is the reward. Even for his wickedness you ought to feel grateful to him; even should he be evil after receiving ten thousand kindnesses. For if he were not exceedingly evil, your reward would not have been exceedingly increased; so that the reason, you say, for not loving him, the saying that he is evil, is the very reason for loving him. Take away the contestant and you take away the opportunity for the crowns. Do you notice the athletes, how they exercise when they have filled the bags with sand? But there is no need for you to practice this. Life is full of things that exercise you, and make you strong. Notice the trees also, the more they are shaken by the winds, so much the more do they become stronger and firmer! We then, if we are long-suffering, shall also become strong. For it is said, 'A man slow to wrath abounds in wisdom; but a man of impatient spirit is very foolish' (Proverbs 14:29 LXX). Do you see how great is his commendation of the one, and how great his censure of the other?

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XIX, 5.

Let us not then be faint-hearted one towards another; for this does not rise from enmity, but from having a small soul. If the soul is strong, it will endure all things easily, and nothing will be able to sink it, but will lead it into tranquil havens.

John Chrysostom further pointed out⁷ that since it is our duty to love our enemies, and he who doesn't love even those who love him is worse than the heathen. Alms were required of the people of God in the Old Testament; in the New Testament more is expected of us. Therefore, those who refuse to give alms will be condemned to the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

“Why does God threaten those who have not done works of mercy, that they shall depart into the fire, and not simply into the fire, but into that which is ‘prepared for the devil and his angels?’ (Matthew 25:41). Why is this? Because nothing so provokes God to wrath. He puts this before all terrible things; for if it is our duty to love our enemies. Of what punishment shall he not be worthy, who turns away even from those that love him, and is in this respect worse than the heathen? So that in this case the greatness of the sin will make such a one go away with the devil. Woe to him, it is said, who doesn't give alms; and if this was the case under the Old Covenant, much more is it under the New. There, the getting of wealth was allowed, along with the enjoyment and the care of it. Yet there was such provision made for the aiding the poor; how much more so in our dispensation, where we are commanded to surrender all we have? () What did not they of old do? They gave tithes, and tithes again upon tithes⁸ for orphans, widows, and strangers! Whereas someone was saying to me in astonishment at someone else, ‘Why, such a one gives tithes!’ What a load of disgrace does this expression imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the Jews has come to be so in the case of the Christians? If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now.”

Turn the Other Cheek

Luke said, “To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back” (Luke 6:29-30).

Matthew said, “You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Matthew 5:38-39).

John Chrysostom took a close look⁹ at turning the other cheek and on what it implies. By doing so, we not only act like Christ Himself did, but we actually gain a victory over our assaulter in different ways. First, we receive a reward from God. Second, those who hear what we did will praise us and hate our assaulter as being as fierce as a brute beast; he caused us pain without being

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, Moral.

⁸ There were three tithes under the Old Covenant: The First Tithe was used to support the Levites (Numbers 18:20-24). The Second Tithe was used to support the Festivals, where people rejoiced before the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:11-19). The Third Tithe was collected every 3rd year and set aside for the aliens, orphans, widows and Levites (Deuteronomy 14:29-29; 26:12-13)

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v. 13.

at all wronged. Third, by smiling at our assaulter, we acquit ourselves of all suspicion with those who are present of being guilty of anything our assaulter might accuse us of having done.

“Christ asks us to be ready to get beat up, but even to go further, and to get the better of our enemy’s utmost madness by the overflowing of our own Christian spirit. For what He says is not, ‘If a man punches you on your right cheek, bear it nobly and hold your peace’; but He adds to this the yielding to him the other cheek also. He says, ‘I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also’ (Matthew 5:39). This then is the brilliant victory, to yield to him even more than what he wishes, and to go beyond the bounds of his evil desire by the profuseness of one’s own patient endurance. In this way you will put a stop to his madness, and also receive, by turning the other cheek, the reward from God, besides putting a stop to wrath against him. Notice how in all cases it is we that have it in our power not to suffer evil, and not they that inflict it! Or rather it is not avoiding suffering evil alone, but even having benefits done to us that we have in our own power. And this is the truest wonder, that we are so far from being injured, if we are right-minded, that we are even benefited, and that too by the very things that we suffer unjustly at the hands of others. Reflect then; has such a one affronted you? You have the power of making this affront redound to your honor. For if you affront him in return, you only increase the disgrace. But if you bless him that did you the affront, you will see that all men give you victory, and proclaim your praise. Do you see how by the things wherein we are wronged, we get good done to us if we are so minded? This one may see happening in the case of money matters, of blows, and the same in everything else. For if we repay them with the opposite, we are but twining a double crown about us, one for the evils we have suffered, another for the good we are doing. Whenever then a person comes and tells you that ‘such a one has affronted you, and keeps continually speaking evil of you to everybody’, praise the man to those who tell you of him. Even if you wish to avenge yourself, you will have the power of inflicting punishment. Those who hear you will praise you, and hate him as being fiercer than any brute beast, because he, without being at all wronged, caused you pain; but you, even when suffering wrong, repaid him with the opposite. You will have it in your power to prove that all he said was to no purpose. He who feels the tooth of slander, gives by his vexation a proof that he is conscious of the truth of what is said. But he who smiles at it, by this very thing acquits himself of all suspicion with those who are present. Consider then how many good things you cull together from the affair. First, you rid yourself of all vexation and trouble. Secondly (rather this should come first), even if you have sins, you put them off, as the Publican did by bearing the Pharisee’s accusation meekly (Luke 18:11-13). Besides, you will by this practice make your soul heroic, and will enjoy endless praises from all men, and will divest yourself of any suspicion arising from what is said. But even if you want to take revenge, this too will follow in full measure, both by God’s punishing him for what he has said, and before that punishment by your heroic conduct standing to him in the place of a mortal blow. For there is nothing that cuts those who affront us so much to the heart, as for us who are affronted to smile at the affront. From behaving with Christian heroism, so many honors will accrue to us; from being little-minded just the opposite will befall us in

everything. For we disgrace ourselves; also, we seem to those present to be guilty of the things mentioned; we fill our soul with perturbation; we give our enemy pleasure; we provoke God; and we add to our former sins. Taking then all this into consideration, let us flee from the abyss of a little mind, and take refuge in the port of patient endurance. Here we find rest as Christ said, ‘Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’” (Matthew 11:29).

John Chrysostom also stated¹⁰ that someone who replies to an affront (i.e. does NOT turn the other cheek) responds like someone who was stung. This gives witnesses suspicion that he is guilty of whatever the accuser suggests. By not responding or by laughing at the affront (turning the other cheek) witnesses do not suspect any guilt; further, the accuser gets vexed that his accusations do not gain any hold on the victim. By doing this, we gain the reputation of a wise man, while our accuser appears like a noisy beast.

“Christ did not say, ‘you shall take vengeance’ but, ‘you will heap coals of fire on his head’. Then, he further declares him victor, by saying, ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’ (Romans 12:20-21). And he gives a kind of gentle hint, that one is not to do it with that intention, since cherishing a grudge still would be ‘being overcome by evil’. But when he had disburdened a man of his anger, then he proceeded to say, ‘overcome evil with good’. This would be a victory. The combatant then becomes the conqueror, not when he brings himself under to take the blows, but when he withdraws himself, and makes his antagonist waste his strength on the air. In this way he will not be struck himself, and will also exhaust the whole of the other’s strength. This takes place regarding affronts also. When you return affronts, you have something worse; something far more disgraceful, you are overcome by the slavish passion of anger. But if you are silent, then you will conquer, and erect a trophy without a fight, and will have thousands to crown you, and to condemn the slander of falsehood. Someone who replies to an affront seems to be speaking in return as if stung. And he that is stung, gives reason to suspect that he is conscious of being guilty of what is said of him. But if you laugh at it, by your laughing you do away with the sentence against you. If you would have a clear proof of what has been said, ask the enemy himself: when is he vexed the most? When you are heated, and insult him in return? Or when you laugh at him as he insults you? You will be told the latter. For he is not pleased to avoid an insult in return; he is vexed because his abuse was not able to gain any hold on you. Have you ever noticed men in a passion, how they make no great account of their own wounds, but rush on with much violence? They are worse than very wild boars for seeking the hurt of their neighbor; they look to this alone, and are more given to this than to being on their guard against getting harmed? When you deprive him of what he desires most, you bereave him of everything; you show him to be easy to be despised, and a child rather than a man. By doing this, you have gained the reputation of a wise man, and him do you invest with the character of a noisy beast. Let us do this also when we are struck; and when we wish to strike, let us abstain from striking again. But, would you like to give a mortal blow? ‘Do not resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXII, vv. 20-21.

cheek, turn the other to him also' (Matthew 5:39), and you will smite him with countless wounds. For they that applaud and wonder at you are more annoying to him than men to stone him would be. Before them, his conscience will condemn him, and will exact the greatest punishment of him; and so, he will go off with a confused look as if he had been treated with the utmost rigor. In a general way we have a kind of sympathy with those who suffer; but when we also see that they do not strike in return, but even give themselves up, we not only pity them, but even feel admiration for them."

John Chrysostom further pointed out¹¹ that even dogs respect a man who turns the other cheek. If dogs bark and attack a man, but he lays down and does nothing, the dogs back off. Similarly, with men! If we turn the other cheek, bystanders will condemn our enemies and admire us, which will cause more grief to our enemies than if we had replied to them in kind.

"Have you suffered evil? Then do good, and thus avenge your enemy. For if you go about resenting it, all will blame both you and him alike. Whereas if you shall endure it, it will be otherwise. You they will applaud and admire; but him they will reproach. And what greater punishment can there be to an enemy, than to behold someone he hates admired and applauded by all men? What is more bitter to an enemy, than to behold himself reproached by all before someone he hates? If you avenge him, you will both be condemned, and you may be the sole avenger; whereas, if you forgive him, everyone else will be avengers in your place. And this will be far more severe than any evil he can suffer, that someone he hates should have so many to avenge him. If you open your mouth, they will be silent; but if you are silent, not with one tongue only, but with ten thousand tongues of others, you will smite him, and you will be more avenged. If you reproach him, many again will cast imputations (for they will say that your words are those of passion); but when others who have suffered no wrong from him thus overwhelm him with reproaches, then is the revenge especially clear of all suspicion. For when they who have suffered no mischief, in consequence of your excessive forbearance feel and sympathize with you, as though they had been wronged themselves, this is a vengeance clear of all suspicion. 'But what then', you will say, 'if no man should take vengeance?' It cannot be that men will be such stones, as to behold such wisdom and not admire it. Even if they don't wreak their vengeance on him at the time, still, afterwards, when they are in the mood, they will do so; and they will continue to scoff at him and abuse him. If no one else admires you, the man himself will most surely admire you, though he may not admit it. For our judgment of what is right, even though we approach the very depth of wickedness, remains impartial and unbiased. Why do you suppose our Lord Jesus Christ said, 'But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also?' (Matthew 5:39). Is it not because the more long-suffering a man is, the more the benefit he confers both on himself and on the other? Because of this He charges us to 'turn the other also', to satisfy the desire of the enraged. For who is such a monster as not to be at once put to shame? Even dogs feel this; if they bark and attack a man, and he throws himself on his back and does nothing, he puts a stop to all their wrath. If they then reverence

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVI, Moral.

the man who is ready to suffer evil from them, much more will the race of man do so, inasmuch as they are more rational.”

The Golden Rule

Luke said, “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit 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 credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back” (Luke 6:31-34).

Matthew said, “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:46-48).

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹² that Christ has set a higher standard for us than was present in the Old Testament. We do not just tithe, but share our possessions with the poor. We do not grieve for something taken from us, but give it willingly. We show kindness to our neighbor, in spite of his evil intentions. The more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him.

Instead of the law commanding the giving of tithes, Christ told us to share all our possessions with the poor (Matthew 19:21); and not to love our neighbors only, but even our enemies. We are not merely to be liberal givers, but we should even present a gratuitous gift to those who take away our goods. For ‘to him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise’ (Luke 6:29-31). We are not to grieve as those who are unwillingly defrauded, but may rejoice as those who have given willingly, and as rather conferring a favor upon our neighbors than yielding to necessity. ‘And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two’ (Matthew 5:41). We do not follow him as a slave, but as a free man going before him, showing ourselves in all things kindly disposed and useful to your neighbor. We do not regard their evil intentions, but perform our kind offices, assimilating ourselves to the Father, ‘who makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). Now all these precepts were not the injunctions of one doing away with the law, but of one fulfilling, extending, and widening it among us. Just as if one should say, that the more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our Liberator had been implanted within us. For Christ did not set us free for this purpose, that we should depart from Him. No one, indeed, while placed out of reach of the Lord’s benefits, has power to procure for himself the means of salvation. But that the more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him. Now the more we have loved Him, the more glory shall we receive from Him, when we are continually in the presence of the Father.

¹² Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xiii, 3.

Loans and Borrowing

Luke said, “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36).

Loans were treated much differently in the Mosaic Law than they were after the captivity and during the time of Christ. At the time of Moses, commercial loans were unknown and loans were solely for the purpose of helping a poor brother through a time of difficulty (due to bad crops, etc.). From this point of view, any charging of interest was forbidden (Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-37), although interest could be charged to a foreigner (Deuteronomy 23:19-20). During the time of Christ, commercial business ventures were common and a reasonable interest rate for business investment was an allowable practice (Matthew 25:27, Luke 19:23). In this context, the implication is that someone is refusing to pay back a loan. According to Roman Law, the creditor could have the debtor put in prison (Matthew 18:28-30). According to Hebrew law, debtors could be made slaves (Leviticus 25:39, Exodus 22:3). However, debts older than seven years were automatically forgiven under Hebrew Law (Exodus 21:2, Leviticus 25:39-42, Deuteronomy 15:9) as also in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). However, the Lord said, ‘Don’t put someone in prison and don’t make someone a slave; forgive the loan instead’ (Compare Matthew 18:32-35). This certainly runs against the grain of modern capitalism, but its emphasis is on spiritual rather than material values.

Should we allow ourselves to be taken advantage of? Our enemy will certainly use this against us. John Chrysostom stated it¹³ as follows:

“‘What then?’ It might be said, ‘Ought we not to resist the evil one?’ Indeed, we ought, but not in this way, but as He has commanded, by giving one’s self to suffer wrongfully. For thus you shall prevail over him. For one fire is not quenched by another fire, but fire by water.”

“For nothing so restrains wrong doers as when the injured bear what is done with gentleness. And it not only restrains them from rushing onward, but works upon them also to repent for what has gone on before, and, in wonder at such forbearance, to draw back”.

Swearing Oaths

Matthew said, “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matthew 5:33-37).

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVIII, 1.

Basil the Great noted¹⁴ that we are directed and sworn to keep the righteous judgments of God. Oaths are unnecessary and swearing of any kind is forbidden. Instead we are directed to help change the mind of someone who swears so that he doesn't persist in confirming his impiety.

“It is especially desirable that attention should be given to the case of persons in power who threaten on oath to do some hurt to those under their authority. The remedy is twofold. In the first place, let them be taught not to take oaths at random. Secondly, not to persist in their wicked determinations. Anyone who is arrested in the design of fulfilling an oath to injure another ought to show repentance for the rashness of his oath, and must not confirm his wickedness under the pretext of piety. Herod was none the better for fulfilling his oath, when, of course only to save himself from perjury, he became John the Baptist's murderer (Matthew 14:4-11). Swearing is absolutely forbidden, and it is only reasonable that the oath which tends to evil should be condemned (Matthew 5:34). The swearer must therefore change his mind, and not persist in confirming his impiety. Consider the absurdity of the thing a little further. Suppose a man swears that he will put his brother's eyes out. Is it well for him to carry his oath into action? Or to commit murder? Or to break any other commandment? ‘I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments’ (Psalm 119:106); not to sin, but to ‘keep your righteous judgments’. It is no less our duty to undo and destroy sin, than it is to confirm the commandment by immutable counsels.”

Ambrose of Milan used¹⁵ the beheading of John the Baptist as an example to encourage his people to avoid the swearing of oaths. Herod swore an oath that he did not want to keep; but to save face he kept his oath anyway, adding murder of a prophet to a careless oath.

“A banquet of death is set out with royal luxury by Herod, and when a larger concourse than usual had come together, the daughter of the queen, sent for from within the private apartments, is brought forth to dance in the sight of men. What could she have learned from an adulteress¹⁶ but loss of modesty? Is anything so conducive to lust as with unseemly movements thus to expose in nakedness those parts of the body which either nature has hidden or custom has veiled, to sport with the looks, to turn the neck, to loosen the hair? Fitly was the next step an offense against God. For what modesty can there be where there is dancing, noise and clapping of hands?”

“‘Then’, it is said, ‘the king being pleased, said unto the damsel, that she should ask of the king whatever she would. Then he swore that if she asked he would give her even the half of his kingdom’ (Mark 6:22-23). See how worldly men themselves judge of their worldly power, so as to give even kingdoms for dancing. But the damsel, being taught by her mother, demanded that the head of John should be brought to her on a dish. That which is said that ‘the king was exceedingly sorry’, is not repentance on the part of the king, but a confession of guilt, which is, according to the wont of the divine rule, that they who have done evil condemn themselves by their own confession. ‘But for their sakes which sat

¹⁴ Basil the Great, *Letters*, 199, 29.

¹⁵ Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Virgins*, III, vi, 27-28.

¹⁶ John the Baptist had criticized King Herod for marrying his brother's wife Herodias, thus making her an adulteress. See Mark 6:16-29.

with him', it is said. What is baser than that a murder should be committed in order to avoid displeasing those who sat at table? 'And', it follows, 'for his oath's sake'. What a new religion! He would have been better to have rejected his oath. The Lord therefore in the Gospel bids us not to swear at all, that there be no cause for perjury, and no need of offending. So, an innocent man is slain that an oath should be not violated. I don't know which has the greater horror. Perjury seems more endurable than the oaths of tyrants."

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁷ that in ancient times, people took oaths by idols. To correct this, they were allowed to take oaths by the things of God. However, any taking of oaths can be a tyrannical habit, and we should avoid it completely.

"I do not want to hinder you from keeping God always in your mind; this I even desire and pray for, only that you should do this, so as to honor Him. Great good would this have done us, if we had called upon God only when we ought, and for what we ought. Why were such miracles done in the Apostles' times, and not in ours? And yet it is the same God, the same Name. But no, the case is not the same. For then they called upon Him only for holy purposes, such as Stephen (Acts 7:59) and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:10); whereas we call upon Him not for these, but quite other purposes. If a man doesn't believe you, and that is why you swear, say to him, 'Believe me': however, if you need to make an oath, swear by yourself. I say this, not to set up a law against Christ's law; God forbid; for it is said. 'Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one' (Matthew 5:37). I say this to come down to your present level, that I may more easily lead you to the practice of this commandment, and divert you from this tyrannical habit. How many who have done well in other respects, have been undone by these practices! Shall I tell you why it was permitted the ancients to take oaths? For to take false oaths, was not permitted to them either. Because they swore by idols. But are you not ashamed to rest in laws, by which they in their infirmity were led on to something better? It is true, when I take a Gentile in hand, I do not immediately lay this injunction upon him, but in the first place I exhort him to know Christ. But if the believer, who has both learned about Him and heard Him, craves the same forbearance with the Gentile, what is the use, what the gain of his Christianity? But the habit is strong, and you cannot detach yourself from it? Well then, since the tyranny of habit is so great, transfer it into another channel. And how is this to be done, you will ask. What I have said often, I say also now; let there be many monitors, let there be many examiners and censors. If you happen to put your clothes on inside out, you allow your servant to correct your mistake, right? Are you ashamed to learn from him, although there is much to be ashamed of in this? And here when you are getting hurt in your soul, are you ashamed to be taught better by another?"

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, X, v. 1.

Lawsuits

Matthew said, “If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away” (Matthew 5:40-42).

Old Testament lawsuits were much different than modern lawsuits; the closest modern equivalent is a small claims court where each plaintiff represents his case personally. In the wilderness, Moses heard each case personally until his father-in-law, Jethro, suggested he appoint lower courts to hear minor disputes (Exodus 18:12-27). This Moses did. If these lower courts could not decide a particularly difficult case, it was brought to Jerusalem to the Levitical priest or judge in office then (Deuteronomy 17:8-12). If he had difficulty deciding, he could always inquire of the Lord in the Temple using the Urim and Thummim. Anyone not accepting this decision of the Lord in the Temple was executed for treason (Deuteronomy 17:12).

A lawsuit over a cloak or a tunic (as in our Gospel lesson) was definitely not a major matter to be heard in Jerusalem; but it was a big deal for a poor farmer whose only clothes were the ones he wore. His cloak was also his bed roll and Hebrew Law did not allow one’s cloak to be held overnight even if it was given as a security pledge (Deuteronomy 24:10-13). Most poor people wore only three articles of clothing: a loincloth (or under-tunic), a tunic and a cloak. The cloak was usually a thick, rough, blanket-like material and was carried over the shoulders in hot weather. Clothing was expensive, so most poor people owned only what they wore.

In the Gospel lesson, if someone took your cloak (this is illegal according to Hebrew Law), to then give up your tunic also (Luke 6:29) left one very poorly clad. On the other hand, if someone sued you for your tunic, (this is legal and was often done since the cloak couldn’t be taken) giving up your cloak as well left you very poorly clad also. Yet this is what the Apostle Paul tolerated on his various missionary journeys (1 Corinthians 4:11, 2 Timothy 4:13) where he was often very poorly clad.

A good summary of all this is that we are commanded to love our neighbor as our self in an active manner and not just as a theological concept. Regarding the things we should do, John Chrysostom delineated¹⁸ nine steps:

1. Do not begin with injustice (i.e. becoming an evil person yourself)
2. After beginning, do not vindicate yourself with equal retaliation (i.e. turn the other cheek)
3. Be quiet (don’t go to court)
4. Give yourself up to suffer wrongfully
5. Give up yet more than the other who did the wrong wishes (let him have the cloak also)
6. Don’t hate him
7. Even love him
8. Do him good
9. Entreat God Himself on his behalf

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVIII, 4.

Chrysostom continues¹⁹: “He also sets up a reward unlike as in the Beatitudes. For He makes no mention of earth (as with respect to the meek) nor of comfort, mercy, or of the kingdom of Heaven, but of that which was more thrilling than all: our becoming like God in such a way as men might become so. For He said, ‘That you may become like your Father which is in Heaven’”.

As an example of this, Chrysostom spoke²⁰ of the way physicians treat the mentally ill: “For so too the physicians, when they are kicked and shamefully handled by the insane, then most of all they pity them, and take measures for their perfect cure, knowing that the insult comes from the extremity of their disease. Now I bid you also to have the same mind touching them that are plotting against you, and do you so treat them that are injuring you. For it is they above all that are diseased; it is they who are undergoing all the violence. Deliver him then from this grievous insult and grant him to let go his anger, and set him free from that grievous demon of wrath”.

The Things We Should Not Do

We get no credit for reciprocal love. For example, if we only:

- Love those who love us (Luke 6:32, Matthew 5:46)
- Do good to those who do good to us (Luke 6:33)
- Lend to those from whom we hope to receive back (Luke 6:34)
- Speak to or greet only our brethren (Matthew 5:47)

What credit is that to us? Even sinners and publicans do that (Luke 6:32-34, Matthew 5:46-47). Earlier, Jesus had said, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Both Jesus and John the Baptist referred to the Scribes and Pharisees as a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 12:34, Matthew 3:7); surpassing their righteousness shouldn’t be too difficult. To their credit, they did try to obey the Mosaic Law and the Ten Commandments for the most part or at least gave outward pretense of doing so. Today many people don’t even pretend to obey the Ten Commandments. By way of contrast, our society prizes disobedience, and being cunning is considered good.

John Chrysostom categorized people’s righteousness in terms of three levels: that of the Scribes and Pharisees (the lowest); that of the publicans and heathen (who love those who love them); and finally, that of the Gospel lesson where we are to emulate God and be kind to the unthankful and the evil (Luke 6:35). Chrysostom states²¹:

“What then can we deserve, who are commanded to emulate God, and are perhaps in a manner of life, hardly even equal to publicans? For if ‘to love those who love us’ is the part of publicans and heathen; when we do not even do this (and we do not do it as long as we envy our brothers who are in honor), what penalty will we not incur? We are commanded to surpass the Scribes, but we take our place below the heathen! How then will we behold the Kingdom, pray tell? How will we set foot on that holy threshold, who do not surpass even the publicans? Bearing

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVIII, 4.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVIII, 6.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XVIII, 9.

in mind all the things that have been said, let us then show forth great love even towards our enemies”.

Be Merciful, As Your Father in Heaven is Merciful

Being merciful as human beings is akin to being as much like God as humans can become. This is such an important concept to embrace and the benefits are huge. This is more important than wealth, since nothing is more characteristic of a Christian. In Orthodoxy, this is called theosis, and it is greatly rewarded by God. To not do this is to become like animals that have no understanding. To maintain mercifulness takes humility. But if God clothes the grass of the field, we can at least imitate Him and show love to those around us in response to His grace. As we progress in theosis, we begin to recover some of the things that Adam lost in the Fall. When we don't do this, God threatens to try to recover us from our downward spiral. To make this easier for everyone, we pray for kings and rulers, whether they are Christians or not, to help establish the peace that promotes mercifulness. Heretics have twisted theosis into saying that we can become just like God in nature by being merciful. We can never assume the Divine Nature, but we can love these enemies of God and encourage them to repent.

John Chrysostom stated²² that God wants us to be merciful above all. It is His mercifulness that has so powerfully attracted human nature to Himself. But this has to be voluntary. Robbing one person in order to show mercy to another is not mercy; it is inhuman cruelty. It is like offering God a gift with filthy hands.

“God has not said, ‘you shall be like your Father, if you pump your fists’, nor ‘if you are virgins’, nor ‘if you pray’. None of these things can be applied to God, nor are they His acts. But what? ‘Be merciful, just as your Father in Heaven is merciful’ (Luke 6:36). This is the work of God! If therefore you don't have this, what have you? He says: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings’ (Hosea 6:6). God made Heaven, earth and the sea. Great works these, and worthy of His wisdom! But by none of these has He so powerfully attracted human nature to Himself, as by mercy and the love of mankind. That indeed is the work of power, wisdom and goodness. But it is far more so that He became a servant. Do we not for this more especially admire Him? Are we not for this still more amazed at Him? Nothing attracts God to us so much as mercy. The prophets from beginning to end speak of this subject. But this is not mercy that is accompanied by covetousness. That is not mercy! For it is not the root of the thorn but of the olive that produces the oil; it is not the root of covetousness, iniquity, or plunder that produces mercy. Do not slander almsgiving. Do not cause it to be evil spoken of by all. If you commit robbery that you may give alms, nothing is more wicked than your almsgiving. For when it is produced by plunder, it is not almsgiving; it is inhumanity; it is cruelty; it is an insult to God. If Cain so offended, by offering inferior gifts of his own, shall we not offend, who offer the goods of another? An offering is nothing else but a sacrifice, a purification, not a pollution. If you dare not to pray with unclean hands, do you offer the dirt and filth of robbery, and think you do nothing wrong? You don't allow your hands to be dirty when you offer; yet that dirt is no charge against you,

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VI, Moral.

while the other deserves reproach and blame. Let us not consider how we may offer prayers with clean hands, but how the things offered may be pure. If someone, after having washed a vessel clean, should fill it with unclean gifts, would it not be ridiculous mockery? Let the hands be clean; and they will be so, if we wash them not with water only, but first with righteousness. This is the purifier of the hands. But if our hands are full of unrighteousness, though they be washed a thousand times, it avails nothing. ‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean’, He says, but does He add, ‘Go to the baths, the lakes, the rivers?’ No; but what? ‘Put away the evil of your doings before My eyes. Cease to do evil’ (Isaiah 1:16). This is to be clean. This it is to be cleansed from defilement. This is real purity. The other is of little use; but this bestows upon us confidence towards God.”

John Chrysostom also pointed out²³ how mercifulness is such an important thing to embrace. Christ asked us to do this in imitation of His Father. The benefits to are huge! By being always merciful, the gates of heaven open to us as if we were the Queen entering a castle. Mercifulness is like a beautiful dove covered with silver and gold. When we are judged, this dove flies in rescuing and sheltering us. We need to prize mercifulness before wealth, since nothing is so characteristic of a Christian.

“Mercifulness is a most excellent art, and a protector of those who labor at it. It is dear to God, and ever stands near Him readily asking favor for whoever it will, if only it is not wronged by us; and it is wronged, when we do it by extortion. So, if it is pure, it gives great confidence to those who offer it up. It intercedes even for those who have offended, so great is its power, even for those who have sinned. It breaks the chains, disperses the darkness, quenches the fire, kills the worm, drives away the gnashing of teeth. The gates of heaven open to it with great security. As when a Queen is entering, none of the guards stationed at the doors dares to inquire who she is, but all immediately receive her; so also indeed with mercifulness. For she is truly a queen indeed, making men like God. For, he says, ‘Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful’ (Luke 6:36). She is winged and buoyant, having golden pinions, with a flight which greatly delights the angels. There, it is said, are ‘You will be like the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold’ (Psalm 68:13). As some dove golden and living, she flies, with gentle look, and mild eye. Nothing is better than that eye. The peacock is beautiful, but in comparison to her, is a crow. So beautiful and worthy of admiration is this bird. She continually looks upwards; she is surrounded abundantly with God’s glory; she is a virgin with golden wings, decked out, with a fair and mild countenance. She is winged and buoyant, standing by the royal throne. When we are judged, she suddenly flies in and shows herself, and rescues us from punishment, sheltering us with her own wings. God would have her rather than sacrifices. Much does He discourse concerning her; so, He loves her. ‘The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow’ (Psalm 146:9) and the poor. God wishes to be called from her. ‘The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy’ (Psalm 145:8), and true. The mercy of God is over all the earth. She has saved the race of mankind (see Psalm 145:9). For unless she had pitied us, all things would have perished. ‘When we

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXXII, 7.

were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life' (Romans 5:10) us, she wrought innumerable blessings; she persuaded the Son of God to 'empty Himself, taking the form of a slave, *and* being made in the likeness of men'" (Philippians 2:7).

"Let us earnestly emulate her by whom we have been saved; let us love her, let us prize her before wealth; and apart from wealth, let us have a merciful soul. Nothing is so characteristic of a Christian, as mercy. There is nothing which both unbelievers and all men so admire, as when we are merciful. Often, we are ourselves also in need of this mercy, and say to God, 'Have mercy upon us, according to Your lovingkindness' (Psalm 51:1). Let us begin first ourselves; or rather it is not we that begin first. For He has Himself already shown His mercy on us; yet at least let us follow second. For if men have mercy on a merciful man, even if he has done innumerable wrongs, much more does God."

Athanasius of Alexandria, in disputing with the Arians, outlined²⁴ Orthodox Theosis, where men can become like God as much as is humanly possible. We do this by being merciful, not for men's sake, but for God's sake. Thus, we will be rewarded by God. To do otherwise is to become like draft animals which have no understanding, and must be harnessed by bit and bridle.

"Taking patterns for man from divine subjects, Christ says; 'Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful' (Luke 6:36); and, 'Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). He said this, not that we might become such as the Father; for to become as the Father is impossible for us creatures, who have been brought out of nothing. But He charged us, 'Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule, *which* have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle' (Psalm 32:9). We should not become as draft animals; we should not imitate their lack of reason. It was not that we might become as God, that He said, 'Be merciful, just as your Father', but that looking at His beneficent acts, what we do well, we might do, not for men's sake, but for His sake. This way we may have the reward from Him and not from men. Although there is one Son by nature, True and Only-begotten, we too become sons; not as He is in nature and truth, but according to the grace of Him that calls. Though we are men from the earth, we are yet called gods (John 10:34, Psalm 82:6), not as the True God or His Word, but as has pleased God who has given us that grace. So also, as God do we become merciful, not by being made equal to God, nor by becoming in nature and truth benefactors. But in order that what has accrued to us from God Himself by grace, these things we may impart to others, without making distinctions, but largely towards all extending our kind service. For only in this way can we become imitators, and in no other, when we minister to others what comes from Him."

Clement of Rome²⁵ stated that humility before God is the key to being merciful in keeping with Christ's words.

²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses against the Arians, III, xxv, 19.

²⁵ Clement of Rome was Bishop of Rome from about 88 to about 99 AD.

“Let us therefore, brethren, be of humble mind, laying aside all haughtiness, pride, foolishness, and angry feelings; and let us act according to that which is written. ‘Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty *man* glory in his might; nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this: that he understands and knows Me, that I *am* the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth’ (Jeremiah 9:23-24). We need to be especially mindful of the words of the Lord Jesus, teaching us meekness and long-suffering. For thus He spoke: ‘Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Judge not, and you shall not be judged, 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’ (Luke 6:36-38). By this precept and by these rules let us establish ourselves, that we walk with all humility in obedience to His holy words. For Isaiah said, ‘But on this *one* will I look: on *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word’” (Isaiah 66:2).

John Chrysostom emphasized²⁶ the work of His Father in everything we do, even to the detail of clothing the grass of the field. Why should we worry about anything, when He does so much for us? Our natural response to such a loving God should be to imitate him and show love for even the most unlovable around us.

“Christ used many words to set the Father before us, admiring His wisdom, His providence, His tender care extending through all things, both great and small. When He was speaking of Jerusalem, He called it ‘the city of the Great King’ (Matthew 5:35); when He mentioned Heaven, He spoke of it again as ‘God’s throne’ (Matthew 5:34). When He was speaking of His economy in the world, to Him again He attributes it all, saying, ‘He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). In the Lord’s Prayer too He taught us to say, ‘For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen’ (Matthew 6:13). In speaking of His providence, and signifying how even in little things He is the most excellent of artists, He said, that ‘He clothes the grass of the field’ (Matthew 6:30). He doesn’t call Him His Own Father right away, but theirs; in order that by the very honor He might reprove them, and that when He should call Him His Father, they might not be displeased. Now if for bare necessities one is not to take thought, ‘Will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?’, (Matthew 6:30), what pardon can we deserve, who take thought for expensive things? Or rather, what pardon can they deserve who deprive themselves of sleep, that they may take the things of others?”

“‘Therefore, do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things’ (Matthew 6:31-32). Notice how again He has both shamed them the more, that He had commanded nothing grievous nor burdensome? As therefore when He said, ‘If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them’ (Luke 6:32). It is nothing great which you practice, for the Gentiles do the same. By the mention of the Gentiles He was stirring them up to something greater:

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXII, 2-3.

so now also He brings them forward to reprove us, and to signify that it is a necessary debt which He is requiring of us. For if we must show forth something more than the Scribes or Pharisees, what can we deserve, who so far from going beyond these, even abide in the low estate of the Gentiles, and emulate their littleness of soul?"

Irenaeus of Lyons emphasized²⁷ that our Father treats everyone equally: the just and the unjust. Everything depends on our choice and on how we respond to His grace. Those who respond to His grace, He welcomes into His Kingdom; those who don't are sent into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

"If the Father does not exercise judgment, it follows that judgment does not belong to Him, or that He consents to all those actions which take place. For Christ 'sets a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law' (Matthew 10:35). And 'in that night there will be two *men* in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two *women* will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left' (Luke 17:34-35). Also at the time of the end, Christ orders the reapers: 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn"' (Matthew 13:30). But He 'calls the sheep into the kingdom prepared for them, but sends the goats into everlasting fire, which has been prepared by His Father for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:33-34, 41). And why is this? Has the Word come for the ruin and for the resurrection of many? For the ruin, certainly, of those who do not believe Him, to whom also He has threatened a greater damnation in the judgment-day than that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 10:11-12); but for the resurrection of believers, and those who do the will of His Father in heaven (Matthew 21:31). If then the advent of the Son comes indeed alike to all, but is for the purpose of judging, and separating the believing from the unbelieving, since, as those who believe do His will agreeably by their own choice. Also, agreeably to their own choice, the disobedient do not consent to His doctrine. It is clear that His Father has made all in a like condition, each person having a choice of his own, and a free understanding. He has regard to all things, and exercises a providence over all, 'that we may be sons of our Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'" (Matthew 5:45).

Cyprian of Carthage pointed out²⁸ that by aiming to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect, the divine likeness that Adam lost is displayed by our actions. What glory and happiness we have by trying to be like God!

"We need to more fully understand, beloved brethren, that patience is a thing of God, and that whoever is gentle, patient and meek, is an imitator of God the Father. When the Lord in His Gospel was giving precepts for salvation, bringing forth divine warnings, and instructing His disciples to perfection, He said: 'You have heard that it is said, you shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those

²⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, V, xxvii, 1.

²⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IX, 5.

who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:43-48). He said that the children of God would thus become perfect. He showed that they were thus completed, and taught that they were restored by a heavenly birth, if the patience of God our Father dwells in us. That is, if the divine likeness, which Adam had lost by sin, is displayed and shines in our actions. What a glory it is to become like God! What and how great a happiness, to possess among our virtues, that which may be placed on the level of divine praises!"

John Chrysostom addressed²⁹ a question: "If God is our friend, why does He threaten hell and vengeance?" He loved us when we hated Him, and continues to send His rain on the just and on the unjust. He tries to recover us from our downward spiral, but we, in turn, mock what He says. Children who are sick get frightened when a physician needs to use a knife. Adults do also, and they would rather continue to have a festering wound than to endure temporary pain.

"For this also I count the incorporeal powers blessed, because they love Him, and in all things, obey Him. And on this score David also expressed his admiration of them. 'Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word' (Psalm 103:20). Isaiah also extolled the Seraphim (Isaiah 6:1-6), setting forth their great excellency from their standing near that glory, which is a sign of the greatest love. Let us then emulate the powers above, and be desirous not only of standing near the throne, but of having Him dwelling in us who sits upon the Throne. He loved us when we hated Him, and also continues to love us. 'For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matthew 5:45). As then He loves us, do we love Him? For He is our Friend. And how is it, some will say, that one who is our Friend threatens hell, punishment, and vengeance? It is owing to His loving us alone. All He does and is busied with, is aimed to strike out our wickedness, and to restrain with fear, as with a kind of bridle, our tendency to the worse side. By blessings and by pains, He recovers us from our downward course, and leads us up to Him, and keeps us from all vice, which is worse than hell. But if we mock what is said, and would rather live continually in misery, than be punished for a single day, it is no marvel. For this is but a sign of our unformed judgment, drunkenness and incurable disorder. Little children, when they see the physician going to apply burning or the knife, flee and leap away screaming and convulsed. They choose to have a continual sore eating into their body, rather than to endure a temporary pain, and so enjoy health afterwards. But those who have come to discretion, know that to be diseased is worse than submitting to the knife, as also to be wicked is worse than to be punished. For the one leads to being cured and to be healthy; the other leads to the ruin of one's constitution and to be in continual feebleness. Now health is better than feebleness; surely this is plain to everyone."

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, IX, v. 11.

John Chrysostom pointed out³⁰ that it is to our advantage to pray for kings and all who govern, since they create security for us, whether they are believers or not. They help us lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, since God makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. He who prays for his neighbor's good is also bound to love him and be kind to him.

“We offer prayers for the whole world, for kings and all that are in authority. But someone perhaps will say, he meant not for all men, but for all the faithful. How then does he speak of kings? For kings were not then worshipers of God, for there was a long succession of ungodly princes. And that he might not seem to flatter them, he says first, ‘for all men’, then ‘for kings’; for if he had only mentioned kings, that might have been suspected. The soul of some Christians might be slow at hearing this, and reject the exhortation, if at the celebration of the holy Mysteries it was necessary to offer prayers for a heathen king. Paul shows them the advantage of it, to reconcile them to the advice, ‘that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence’ (1 Timothy 2:2); as much as to say, their safety is a security to us (Romans 13:6-7). Paul also exhorts them to obey their rulers, ‘not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake’ (Romans 13:5). For God has appointed government for the public good. When therefore they make war for this end, and stand on guard for our security, isn’t it reasonable that we should offer prayers for their safety in wars and dangers? It is not therefore flattery, but agreeable to the rules of justice. For if they were not preserved, and prospered in their wars, our affairs must necessarily be involved in confusion and trouble; and if they were cut off, we must either serve ourselves, or be scattered up and down as fugitives. For they are a sort of bulwark thrown up before us, within which those who are enclosed are in peace and safety.”

“Paul says, ‘Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority’ (1 Timothy 2:1). For we must give thanks to God for the good that befalls others, as that ‘He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). Observe how he would unite and bind us together, not only by prayer but by thanksgiving. For he who is urged to thank God for his neighbor's good, is also bound to love him, and be kindly disposed towards him. And if we must give thanks for our neighbor's good, much more for what happens to ourselves, and for what is unknown, and even for things against our will, and such as appear grievous to us, since God dispenses all things for our good.”

Gregory of Nyssa stated³¹ that some heretics made a great mistake when they said that we could be one with the Father just like the Son if only we were merciful like He is. Many of the saints became very merciful – and were renowned for this trait – but that doesn't mean that they became one with the Divine Nature of the Father.

“When Christ said, ‘I and My Father are one’ (John 10:30), He conveys by that confession of a Father exactly the truth that He Himself is not a first cause (The

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, VI, vv. 1-4.

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, I, 34.

Father is the first cause!). At the same time that He asserts by His union with the Father their common nature; so that these words of His secure our faith from the taint of heretical error on either side. Sabellius has no ground for his confusion of the individuality of each Person³², when the Only-begotten has so distinctly marked Himself off from the Father in those words, ‘I and My Father’. Arius finds no confirmation of his doctrine of the strangeness of either nature to the other³³, since this oneness of both cannot admit distinction in nature. For that which is signified by the oneness of Father and Son is nothing else but what belongs to them in their actual being. All the other moral excellences which are to be observed in them over and above their nature may without error be set down as shared in by all created beings. For instance, Our Lord is called ‘merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy’ (Psalm 103:8), and He wills us to be called the same. ‘Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful’ (Luke 6:36), and ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’ (Matthew 5:7), and many such passages. If anyone by diligence and attention has modeled himself according to the divine will, and become kind, merciful and compassionate, or meek and lowly of heart, such as many of the saints are testified to have become in the pursuit of such excellences, does it follow that they are therefore one with God, or united to Him by virtue of any one of them? Not so. That which is not in every respect the same, cannot be ‘one’ with him whose nature is different from it. Accordingly, a man becomes ‘one’ with another, when in will, as our Lord says, ‘I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one’ (John 17:23), this union of wills being added to the connection of nature. So also, the Father and Son are one, the community of nature and the community of will running, in them, into one. But if the Son had been joined in wish only to the Father, and divided from Him in His nature, how is it that we find Him testifying to His oneness with the Father, when all the time He was separated from Him in the point most proper to Him of all?”

Ignatius of Antioch stated³⁴ that heretics and dissenters who separate themselves from the Bishop are dangerous to associate with. We need to regard them as enemies and exhort them to repent. Yet we are to love and be kind to them as our Father does, who makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good.

“Keep yourselves from those evil plants which Jesus Christ does not tend, but which are that wild beast, the destroyer of men, because they are not the planting of the Father, but the seed of the wicked one. Not that I have found any division among you do I write these things; but I arm you beforehand, as the children of God. For as many as are of Christ are also with the bishop; but as many as fall away from him, and embrace communion with the accursed, these shall be cut off along with them. For they are not Christ’s husbandry, but the seed of the enemy, from whom may you ever be delivered by the prayers of the shepherd, that most faithful and gentle shepherd who presides over you. I therefore exhort you in the

³² Sabellius was a heretical 3rd century priest and theologian who taught that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were just three different modes of the one God, and that they were not three persons.

³³ Arius was an early 4th century priest who taught that the Son was created by the Father, and that the Son is not God like the Father.

³⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, To the Philadelphians, 3 Longer.

Lord to receive with all tenderness those that repent and return to the unity of the Church. Through your kindness and forbearance may ‘they come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil’ (2 Timothy 2:26), and becoming worthy of Jesus Christ, and may obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of Christ. Brethren, don’t be deceived. If any man follows him that separates from the truth, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and if any man does not stand aloof from the preacher of falsehood, he shall be condemned to hell. For it is obligatory neither to separate from the godly, nor to associate with the ungodly. If anyone walks according to a heretical opinion, he is not of Christ, nor a partaker of His passion; but is a fox³⁵ (Song of Solomon 2:15), a destroyer of the vineyard of Christ. Have no fellowship with such a man (1 Corinthians 5:11), lest you perish along with him, even should he be your father, your son, your brother, or a member of your family. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him’ (Deuteronomy 13:6-8). You ought therefore to ‘hate those that hate God, and to waste away [with grief] on account of His enemies’ (Psalm 119:19-22). I do not mean that you should beat them or persecute them, ‘like the Gentiles who do not know God’ (1 Thessalonians 4:5). But you should regard them as your enemies, and separate yourselves from them, while you admonish them, and exhort them to repentance; they may listen; they may submit themselves. For our God is a lover of mankind, and ‘who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Timothy 2:4). Therefore ‘He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). From His kindness the Lord, wishing us also to be imitators, says, ‘Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect’” (Matthew 5:48).

The Goodness of God in Restraining Evil

If God tolerated evil with no consequences, men would become like beasts. While God is good to those who hate Him, that doesn’t go on forever. As sons of God, we need to show mercy ourselves since we ourselves are sinners. As we pray for those who injure us, we become more like God as a human being can in this life. If we seek entertainment, such as the theater, we get injured from what we see in subtle ways. On the other hand, people who just get out of prison are not generally subjected to the same temptations. Therefore, we should have a respect for prisoners and try to reach out to them. In doing this, our life displays our Faith and light dispels darkness. In all this God the Father constantly works in many ways to hold together all that He has made.

John Chrysostom spoke³⁶ about the goodness of God and why there needs to be punishment associated with rejecting His goodness. If God didn’t call men to account for their evil, He wouldn’t be good. Men would become like beasts in ravaging one another’s possessions. But if men fear the threat of punishment, they will order their lives in a purer fashion, and this is a mark of God’s great care for mankind. If God only threatened, but never followed through on the threat, men would grow very lazy.

³⁵ More accurately, a jackal.

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philemon, III, Moral.

“God made the Heaven, the earth, the sea, all things that exist, for our sake. Are not these marks of goodness? Many things one might mention; but to cut short the matter, ‘He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). Is not this a mark of goodness? No, you say. For I said once in conversing with a Marcionite, are not these things a mark of goodness? He answered, ‘If He did not call men to account for their sins, that would be a mark of goodness. But if He calls them to account, it is not goodness’. Let us repeat what was then said, and more beside. For I will show that if He did not call men to account, He would not be good; but because He does call them to account, therefore He is good.”

“If God did not call us to account, would human life then have endured? Should we not then have fallen into the state of beasts? Now we have this fear impending over us, the giving account and judgments; yet we have still gone beyond fishes in devouring one another, we have thrown wolves and lions into the shade in ravaging one another’s possessions. If He did not call us to account, and we were persuaded of this, with how great tumult and confusion would life be filled? Would you not see numberless indecencies and disorders? Who then would have respected his father anymore; or who would have spared his mother? Who would not have attempted any pleasure, any wickedness? That the matter is so, I will endeavor to show you from one house only. You who have servants; if I could make it clear to the servants, that if they should destroy the family of their masters, if they should insult their persons, if they should plunder everything. If they should turn things upside down, if they should treat them as enemies, their masters would not threaten them, correct them, punish them, nor even grieve them with a word, would this be any proof of goodness? I maintain that this is the extreme of cruelty, not only because the wife and children are betrayed by this unreasonable kindness, but because the slaves themselves are destroyed before them. They will be drunkards, wanton, dissolute, and more irrational than any beasts. Is this, tell me, a proof of goodness, to trample upon the noble nature of the soul, and to destroy both themselves and others beside? Do you see that to call men to account is a proof of great goodness? But why do I speak of slaves, who more readily falls into these sins? Let a man have sons, and let him permit them to do everything they want, and let him not punish them; will they not be worse than anything? In the case of men then, it is a mark of goodness to punish, and of cruelty not to punish, and is it not so in the case of God? Because He is good, therefore He has prepared a hell.”

“It is not only this, but He does not allow the good to become bad. This also significantly consoles the good. Listen to the Prophet, ‘The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance on the ungodly, he shall wash his hands in the blood of the sinner’ (Psalm 58:10 LXX). If a man fears lest he should suffer the same things, he will render his own life purer. This then is a mark of God’s great care. Yes, you say, but He ought only to threaten, and not to punish also. But if He does punish, and still you say it is only a threat, and on that account become more slothful, if it were really only a threat, would you not become lazier? If the Ninevites had known it was only a threat, they would not have repented; but because they repented, they caused the threat to stop at words only. Do you wish

it to be a threat only? You have that in your control. Become a better man, and it stops only at the threat. But if you despise the threat, you will come to experience it. The men before the flood, if they had feared the threat, they would not have experienced the execution of it. And we, if we fear the threat, shall not expose ourselves to experience the reality.”

Chrysostom also encouraged³⁷ us all to become sons of God and to do what He does. He is good to those who hate Him and merciful to those who blaspheme Him. Since we all sin many times every day, we need to show mercy ourselves. This is easier for a poor man than for a rich man, since the rich man’s creature comforts get in his way.

“Timothy was Paul’s son from goodness and was called ‘my true son’ (1 Timothy 1:2); but of Paul’s sister’s son we do not even know his name (Acts 23:16). Paul’s sister’s son was by nature related to him, and still that didn’t help the boy. But Timothy, being both by nature and country far removed from him (as being a native of Lystra), still became very closely related. Let us then also become the sons of the saints, or rather let us become even God’s sons. That it is possible to become sons of God, listen to what Christ says, ‘Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect’ (Matthew 5:48). This is why we call Him Father in prayer, not only to remind ourselves of the grace, but also of virtue, that we may not do anything unworthy of such a relationship. How is it possible to be a son of God? By being free from all passions, and showing gentleness to those that wrong us. For our Father is so to those that blaspheme Him. Yet in no case does He say that you may be identical to our Father. When He says, ‘Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44), then He brings in being like God as the reward. For there is nothing that brings us so near to God, and makes us so like Him, as doing good. Therefore, when Paul says, ‘Be imitators of God as dear children’ (Ephesians 5:1), this means that we should do good as He does. We need good deeds; chiefly, however, love to man and gentleness, since we need so much of His love to man ourselves. For we commit many transgressions every day. Wherefore we need to show much mercy. But much and little is not measured by the quantity of things given, but by the amount of the givers’ means. Let not then the rich be high-minded, nor the poor dejected as giving so little, for the poor often gives more than the rich. We must not then make ourselves miserable because we are poor, since it makes alms-giving easier for us. He that has much is seized with haughtiness, as well as a greater lust beyond what he has. But he that has but a little does not have either of these domineering passions; hence he finds more occasions for doing well. For the poor man will go cheerfully into a prison house, and will visit the sick, and will give a cup of cold water. But the rich will not take upon himself any office of this sort, being pampered by his riches. Don’t be downhearted at your poverty. For your poverty makes heavenly business easier for you. And if you have nothing, but you have a compassionate soul, even this will be laid up as a reward for you.”

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XIX, vv. 34-35.

Chrysostom further pointed out³⁸ that we become like God when we pray for those who injure us and don't take vengeance on them in any way. Similarly, the Lord did not take vengeance on Judas for betraying Him, but did the very opposite: He washed his feet; rebuked him sparingly; allowed him to share his table, etc. Similarly, for Noah, who spent 100 years³⁹ building the Ark in spite of the jeers of the people; Noah very humbly obeyed God for many years without complaining.

“Our Lord asks that we don't bear malice towards those who injure us; but rebuke them and weep for them. The fit subjects of weeping are not they who suffer, but they who do the wrong. The grasping man, the false accuser, and whoever works any other evil thing, do themselves the greatest injury, and us the greatest good, if we do not avenge ourselves. For example: someone has robbed you; have you given thanks for the injury, and glorified God? By that thanksgiving you have gained ten thousand rewards, just as the robber has gathered for himself fire unspeakable. But if anyone says, ‘How then, if I could not defend myself against him who wronged me, being weaker? We could have put into action our discontent, our impatience, praying against him, the uttering ten thousand curses against him, the speaking ill of him to everyone. He therefore who has not done these things shall even be rewarded for not defending himself, since it is clear that even if he had had the power, he would not have done it. The injured man uses any weapon that comes to hand, when he defends himself against one who has injured him, by curses, by abuse, by plotting. If you don't do them, but will even pray for him, you have become like God. For, ‘pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven’ (Matthew 5:44-45). Notice how we are the greatest gainers from the insolence of others? Nothing so delights God, as the not returning evil for evil! Surely, we are asked to return the opposite: benefits, prayers. Christ also repaid him who was about to betray Him with everything opposite. He washed his feet, convicted him secretly, rebuked him sparingly, tended him, allowed him to share His table and His kiss, and not even by these was he made better; nevertheless, Christ continued doing His own part. But let us look at the example of servants, and to make the lesson stronger, those in the Old Testament, that we may know that we have no ground of defense when we remember a wrong. The more ancient the instances that can be pointed out, the more are we surpassed. Why so? Because virtue was then more difficult. Those men had no written precepts (Scriptures), no patterns of living, but their nature fought unarmed, by itself, and was forced to float in all directions unballasted. When praising Noah, God called him not simply perfect, but added, ‘in this generation’ (Genesis 7:1); signifying, ‘at that time’, when there were many hindrances, since many others shone after him. Yet he will have nothing less than they; for in his own time he was perfect.”

Chrysostom then compared⁴⁰ people who come from the theater with people who just got out of prison. People who come from the theater have many wounds from what they see there, whereas people who just got out of prison will not be subjected to the same temptations. We

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXI, 3.

³⁹ Compare Genesis 5:32 to Genesis 7:11.

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LX, 5.

should therefore not neglect to visit prisoners. We can't help them materially, but we can encourage them with our words. We can be like our Heavenly Father, who sends rain on the just and on the unjust, remembering that we have our sins also.

“Even though punishments hang over them, there are many who go over to the side of wickedness. If you wisely observe these things, you will be more ready-minded towards alms-doing, and will reap much pleasure, far greater than those who come down from the theater. For when they come from the theater, they are inflamed and burn with desire. Having seen those women hovering on the stage, and received from them ten thousand wounds, they will be in no better condition than a tossing sea. The image of the faces, the gestures, the speeches, the walk, and all the rest, stand before their eyes and besiege their soul. But they who come from a prison will suffer nothing of this kind, but will enjoy great calm and tranquility. For the guilt arising from the sight of the prisoners, quenches all that fire. And if a woman that is a harlot meets a man coming from among the prisoners, she will work him no mischief. He will thus not be taken by the nets of her countenance, because instead of that wanton countenance there will then be placed before his eyes the fear of the Judgment. On this account, Solomon, who had gone over every kind of luxury said, ‘It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. For that *is* the end of all men; and the living will take *it* to heart’ (Ecclesiastes 7:2). Let us then not neglect visiting prisoners. Although we are not able to bring them food, nor to help them by giving money, yet shall we be able to comfort them by our words, and to raise up the drooping spirit. We can help them in many other ways by conversing with those who cast them into prison, and by making their keepers kinder, and we certainly shall affect either small or great good. You may say that the men there are neither men of condition, nor good, nor gentle, but man-slayers, tomb-breakers, cut-purses, adulterers, intemperate, and full of much wickedness. By this again you show to me a pressing reason for spending time there. We are not commanded to take pity on the good and to punish the evil, but to show this loving-kindness to all men. ‘Be like your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). Do not then accuse other men’s faults bitterly, nor be a severe judge, but mild and merciful. For we also, if we have not been adulterers, tomb-breakers or cut-purses, yet we have other transgressions which deserve infinite punishment. Perhaps we have called our brother ‘fool’, which prepares for us the pit; we have looked on women with unchaste eyes, which constitutes absolute adultery; and what is more grievous than all, we partake not worthily of the Mysteries, which makes us guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ. Let us then not be bitter inquirers into the conduct of others, but consider our own state, so shall we desist from this inhumanity and cruelty.”

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁴¹ that just as darkness is dispelled by light, so Christians need to have their life display their Faith. Like Zacchaeus, Matthew and Paul, we should display our Father’s characteristics, as He make His sun rise on the evil and on the good.

“For as darkness is dispelled by light, and black disappears as whiteness is spread over it, so the old man also disappears when adorned with the works of

⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Baptism of Christ”, Oratorical Works.

righteousness. Notice how Zacchaeus, by the change of his life, slew the publican, making fourfold restitution to those whom he had unjustly damaged. The rest he divided with the poor — the treasure which he had before gotten by ill means from the poor whom he oppressed. The Evangelist Matthew, another publican, of the same business with Zacchaeus, at once after his call changed his life as if it had been a mask. Paul was a persecutor, but after the grace bestowed on him, was an Apostle, bearing the weight of his fetters for Christ's sake. This was as an act of amends and repentance for those unjust bonds which he once received from the Law, and bore for use against the Gospel. Such ought we to be in our regeneration: so, ought we to blot out our habits that tend to sin; so, ought the sons of God to have their conversation: for after the grace bestowed we are called His children. Therefore, we ought narrowly to scrutinize our Father's characteristics, that by fashioning and framing ourselves to the likeness of our Father, we may appear true children of Him Who calls us to the adoption according to grace. For the bastard son, who belies his father's nobility in his deeds, is a sad reproach. Therefore I think, it is that the Lord Himself, laying down for us in the Gospels the rules of our life, uses these words to His disciples: 'Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matthew 5:44-45). For then He says they are sons when in their own modes of thought they are fashioned in loving kindness towards their kindred, after the likeness of the Father's goodness."

John Chrysostom stated⁴² that God the Father works constantly holding together all that He made; we notice this by watching His sun rise on the evil and on the good. The same applies to Christ, since He is equal with the Father. When Jesus called God His Father, this is what He was saying.

"When there was need to make excuse for the Disciples, Jesus brought forward David their fellow-servant, saying, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry?' (Matthew 12:3) But when excuse was to be made for Himself, He went to the Father, showing in two ways His Equality, by calling God His Father particularly, and by doing the same things which He did. Why did He not mention what took place with the blind men at Jericho? (Matthew 20:30-34) Because He wished to raise them up from earth that they might no longer think of Him as only a man, but as God, and as one who ought to legislate. If a viceroy who had altered a royal law should, when charged with so doing, excuse himself, and say, 'Yes, for the king also has annulled laws', he would not be able to escape, but would thus increase the weight of the charge. But in this instance, since the dignity is equal, Christ's defense is made perfect on most secure grounds. 'From the charges', He said, 'from which you absolve God, absolve Me also'. Therefore, He said first, 'My Father', that He might persuade them even against their will to allow to Him the same, through reverence to His clearly asserted Sonship. If anyone should say, 'And how does the Father "work", who ceased on the seventh day from all His work?' (Genesis 2:2), let him learn the manner in which He 'works'. He cares for, He holds together all that has been made. Therefore, behold the sun rising

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXVIII, 2.

and the moon running in her path, the lakes, fountains, rivers, rains, the course of nature in the seeds and in our own bodies and those of irrational beings. Notice all the rest by means of which this universe is made up, then learn the ceaseless working of the Father. 'For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matthew 5:45). And again; 'If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven' (Matthew 6:30); and speaking of the birds He said, 'Your Heavenly Father feeds them'" (Matthew 6:26).