



Luke 6:36-42

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Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." ³⁹ He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Your Father is Merciful

I was in college. I was spending my summer break living in Eau Claire, WI, working a landscaping job. I lived in the dormitory at ILC during the school year, but since the dorms are closed over summer break, I was living with two of my buddies. And as happens when you have sinners living in close quarters, we started to get on each other's nerves. With one of those friends—I'd argue, and he'd win every argument. I'd debate, and he'd win every debate. He had an answer for everything, which was annoying to me. And I *started* to get the impression that he thought he was *better* than me.

And one day—I can't recall at all anymore what we were talking about—he reprimanded for something I had said. Again, I can't recall what that was, because I wasn't listening so much to what he was reprimanding me for, instead I was rubbing my palms together because I had him nailed. I had in my back pocket the perfect passage of Scripture to shut him up. He thought he was better than me?! "I'll show him," I thought. And I said, **"First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."** Yep, I got him there! Here he was thinking he was better than me, trying to pick the speck out of *my* eye, but he couldn't see past the 2x4 stuck in *his* eye!

And in using that passage against him, I revealed that I actually had the trunk of a giant sequoia in my own eye that I just could not see. In retrospect, the only reason the idea that he thought that "he was better than me" made me so mad—the reason that angered me was that I actually thought *I* was better than *him*. Because if I did *not* think that way, then I wouldn't have been upset with him at all for *possibly* having that same notion! I would have agreed with him! Instead, I was guilty of the same sin I thought he was guilty of. And so, what *I* was actually doing was trying to remove a speck from my brother's eye while a log was stuck in *my own* eye.

This is one of those passages that is often abused and misapplied. Jesus doesn't tell us this so that we go around wielding it against other people. He tells us this so that we can wield it against ourselves. And that's not the only verse in this section that is often misused. People will often quote from an earlier verse, **"Judge not, and you will not be judged."** And by saying that, they usually mean, "Don't tell me that what *I'm* doing is wrong. You can't judge me!" But that's not why Jesus says *this*.

In fact, we could take this *entire* section of Scripture and very easily misuse it and *abuse* it if we do not

recognize what Jesus is really saying here. So that we don't *do* that, I'm going to ask you a simple question, one that you should always ask yourself when you're reading from God's Word. Here's the question: "Is this Law, or is this Gospel?" Maybe you know, maybe you do not. Well, here's a couple differences between the Law and the Gospel to help you find the answer. First off, the Law is bad news—it's the proof that we deserve to go to hell because of our sins. The Gospel is *good* news—specifically the good news that Jesus has taken care of those sins, nailing them to the cross and triumphing over them! Another difference between Law and Gospel is that in God's Law, He's telling us about what *we* should be doing and what *we* should not be doing. In the Gospel, in that good news, we hear about what *Jesus* does and did for us. So, let's ask the question again.

Is this Law or is this Gospel? Is Jesus telling us here what *we* should and should not be doing, and therefore delivering to us *bad* news, since we fail at all these things? Or is Jesus telling us here about what He does for us, the good news that our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God? It's clearly the former—it's Law. This entire section is Jesus telling us what *we* are expected to do. That's *Law*! Jesus is holding up the mirror of the law here for us so that we look at ourselves and recognize that we are failing to be merciful as our Father is merciful. That's Law. And it's important that we recognize this and make that distinction!

Because, if we don't recognize that this is God's Law intended to show us that we are sinners, we could get caught up in some of the promises in the first few verses. ***"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you."*** We *don't* want God to judge us, we *don't* want Him to condemn us, we *want* to be forgiven, and we *want* God to give to us in good measure. And so, we might conclude that if we want those things, if we want eternal life, He's showing us how to guarantee them here! The pesky thing is that each of those promises comes with the *condition* that we do the same things for others.

That brings up another difference between Law and Gospel. They both come with promises from God, but those promises are different in nature. The Law gives us *conditional* promises—that is *if* we do what God expects of us, *then* we'll get to go to heaven! That's a conditional promise. The problem with the conditional promises of the Law are the "if you do this" sections. Because I can't keep up my end of the bargain. The Gospel, in contrast, gives us *unconditional* promises—that is, we get to go to heaven, no strings attached. A good example of this is, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*** (Ephesians 2:8-9) There's the promise, you have been saved! And there's *no* condition, there's no work that you must do in order to receive that. It's unconditional, no "ifs" about it.

And so, in *this* section of Scripture, Jesus is not telling us how we can earn heaven, how we can be forgiven, how we can avoid judgment. This isn't the good news! And He isn't giving us passages to wield against others to make ourselves feel *better* about ourselves and prove that we deserve heaven when others do not! No, Jesus is bringing the *full* force of the law against us, using this mirror so we can see the giant logs in our own eyes and recognize that we *do* judge unjustly, that we *do* condemn, that we *hate* to forgive, that we are *not* merciful—that we do *not* deserve anything good from God.

Not sure if that's really the case for you? Well, first, look at what Jesus is calling us here. It's a word we don't like very much. ***"Hypocrite."*** That's what He calls you and me. And typically, we might think

of a hypocrite as a person who *says* one thing but *does* another. The “do as I say, not as I do” type. But that’s not really the type of hypocrite Jesus is describing us as. Elsewhere, Jesus says, **“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.’”** (Mark 7:6) To be a hypocrite could involve doing and saying *all the right things*, but inwardly, your heart betrays you. And I’ll give you some examples.

Jesus says, **“Be merciful.”** There’s a whole lot of ways that we could *show* mercy to people. Could involve going out of our way to help someone else; could involve giving a homeless person some money; could involve returning a lost wallet to its owner. Those would be the *right* things to do. But isn’t it true that the second we show mercy to someone in such a way, we almost immediately start thinking about ourselves? We go out of our way for someone, now they owe *me* one! I give money to a beggar, hopefully someone saw me do so! I return the wallet, maybe I’ll get a reward! If that’s what’s in your heart, then it isn’t *mercy* that you’re showing. It’s self-love. Then, you’re a hypocrite.

Or Jesus says, **“Judge not... condemn not.”** Now, that doesn’t mean you should never confront someone with their sin—Jesus tells us we *are* to do that. He says, **“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault...”** (Matthew 18:15) Elsewhere, He says, **“If your brother sins, rebuke him.”** (Luke 17:3) If you know of someone who is caught up in sin, the loving and *right* thing to do *is* to go and talk with them about that sin—the goal being to deliver to them *forgiveness* for that sin. That would be the *right* thing to do. But *if*, while we are doing that, we carry with us the self-righteous attitude that *I* would never do such a thing, or if we feel pride that our sins are not as bad as *his*, then it isn’t mercy that you’re showing. It’s self-love. Then, you’re a hypocrite.

And Jesus tells us to **“forgive.”** And, of course, we know the right thing to do when someone apologizes to us is to forgive them. But, obviously, if we say the *right* thing, that is if we assure them of forgiveness, but we still hold that sin against them in our hearts—then we are hypocrites.

What does this all mean? It means that Jesus’ description of me in terms of my sinful nature is 100% accurate: **“Hypocrite!”** And it pains me to say it. But He makes me realize that He’s exactly right. In terms of my sinful nature which I have hanging about my neck and I wrestle with every day, I am predisposed to being unmerciful towards my neighbor—judgmental, unforgiving, unloving.

So, what’s the solution? Well, I think the first thing to ask is, “Why is Jesus preaching this Word to us? Why is He holding up this mirror for me?” It’s so that I can see what I am really like. It’s for the reason that Paul describes, **“Through the law comes knowledge of sin.”** (Rom. 3:20) Jesus delivers this law to us to break our pride, to humble us. To make us realize that we’re not the righteous judges we think we are, and to conclude that we do *not* deserve God’s forgiveness, we do *not* deserve to be given to in good measure, but we *do deserve* to be judged and condemned by God. Because we’re unmerciful.

Hearing this bad news of the Law, we ought to be able to respond in a simple, single word. And that word is “Amen.” Jesus preaches me the Law, showing me in the mirror what I am like, that I am a sinner. He says, “Hypocrite!” And I say, “Amen! You are quite right, Lord, that is exactly what I am.”

That’s the *bad* news. *Here’s* the *good* news. **Your Father is merciful.** That’s what Jesus says in the first verse: **“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”** We can’t do that. Because if we were to be just

as merciful as God our Father is, then we would *not* desire to judge nor to condemn, not even against the people who sin against us again and again and again. If we were as merciful as God our *Father* is merciful, then we would *forgive*—fully forgive, every single time. We would no longer hold any animosity against those who have wronged us, instead we would remember their sins no more. If we were as merciful as our Father, then we would *give*. We would give freely, without any consideration of what we might get out of it—we would give even our own *lives* up for others if we were as merciful as our Father. And the *good* news—the GOOD news is this: that is just how merciful your Father is.

That's the remarkable thing about this good news. We've already seen how we don't deserve *anything* good coming from God, because we are unmerciful servants. But because God is *merciful*, this man, the Son of God, who is preaching this law to me, showing me myself as a hypocrite—what does He do? He takes ALL of it upon Himself! He takes *all* of my ugliness and my injustice and my hypocrisy, and *yours*—and the wrath it deserves—He takes it all upon Himself. Isn't that remarkable?

This same Man who's preaching to us of what God requires, He takes it *all* upon Himself! He takes all of our failures upon His body to the cross and He puts it to death. And He makes atonement for it. And He satisfies God's wrath against all of our hypocrisy and all of our mercilessness.

And He does this so that He can turn to us now and speak a different word. And He can speak a different description. No longer is it *"hypocrite,"* now it is *"forgiven."* Completely, entirely forgiven. Even of our hypocrisy! And what does he do? He turns to us with a different look on His face, and He says, "Friend!" He calls you, "My brother," and "my sister!" And He says, "You belong to me, and I love you without measure."

And now the heavenly Father too can turn to us with a different word. And with a different look on His face, He can say, "Son! Daughter, whom I love!" And He can say, "I am yours and you are mine in peace and joy forever."

That's the measure of mercy that God shows to you. ***"Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap."*** That's expressing the idea of trying to cram every last square millimeter of space and adding more on top. And because **Your Father is Merciful**, that's the measure of mercy that *you* have received. *That's* the good news.

Now, here's the question we ought to take home with us today: If God shows mercy without measure to a hypocrite like me, could I perhaps spare some mercy and forgive my neighbor? May the Holy Spirit change our hearts so that we are able to do so. In Jesus' saving name, Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.