



My Beloved Ones,

When we think of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, it can be too easy to take too lightly the power of His Words. "*As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them*" (Luke 6:31) is so well-known, that many see the phrase only as a simple, but beautiful saying. In fact, while it is beautiful, it also has great power.

We must remember that our Lord came to a world that was focused on the ideas of vengeance and justice. In both ancient Pagan and Jewish law, an evildoer was expected to be punished equal to the crime. Christ Himself knows and understands this human weakness for revenge. "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (Matthew 5:38-39).

Many have struggled with this idea of selflessness, finding the denial so to be inhuman. This, however, is precisely the radical theological point: it is not in our sinful fallen nature to love everyone equally—but it is in God's nature, for, as we read in the First Epistle of John, "*...God is love*" (1 John 4:7).

Christ understands that human nature demands to give and take, but He is not asking us to behave like other people. As He wisely observes, "*...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, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again*" (Luke 6:32-34). We, who have been set apart from the world as His Disciples, have received a greater calling.

"*Be merciful,*" our Lord insists, "*even as your Father in Heaven is merciful*" (Luke 6:36). The reward for the very real struggle of following this important aspect of Orthodoxy is often mistakenly thought to be because we wish to gain entrance to Heaven. In reality, the struggle is a transformative process on our journey to becoming one with God in Heaven, and also like God. So, we can see that the struggle is, in the end, part of its own reward.

My brothers and sisters, in a world so beset by evil, with wrongdoers escaping punishment, it is only natural that the human mind cries out for some logical sense of order, one that we ourselves strive to impose. However, as Orthodox Christians, we would do well to remember that our focus is always to imitate and remain closer to our Creator, who, in His infinite wisdom and tenderness "*...is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish*" (Luke 6:36).

My hope is that we all meditate on these things. However impossible they may seem, let never forget that, "*...with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26).

+ALEXIOS
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