

But I say to you

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany) is Luke 6:27-38. The context here is religious persecution, and not robbery etc. Jesus pictures it as an inevitable consequence of being part of the baptized community.

Jesus says: “*But I say to you*” (v. 27). This is the only “I say to you” statement in the Sermon on the Plain, and it governs the entire sermon. He overthrows the common ethics of human culture to emphasize the Father’s ways of love and mercy. The verbs are imperatives are present tense, suggesting continuing action.

Not only does Jesus overthrow some OT sayings like “*an eye for an eye,*” he sets some extraordinarily high stands of which a few will be outlined in the coming paragraphs.

- When Jesus says “*Love your enemies*” (v.27), he is giving a radical command that calls to action, not just emotion, for to love one’s enemies requires an unnatural act of the will.
- In saying that we should offer the other cheek (v. 29), Jesus is saying that we are not to have a retaliatory attitude. It does not mean that we cannot defend ourselves in case of life threatening danger.
- In giving up the cloak and the tunic (v. 29), has the Christian be willing to allow her persecutor to strip him naked.
- When the believer is stripped of his property, he should not demand back from those who take his things (vv. 30-31).
- When people typically do favors they often look to gain favors (vv. 32-36). The Roman saying “I give so that you give” perfectly encapsulates the spirit of this ethic. Jesus, however, expects more of His followers. He commands them to reflect God’s love by giving without expecting any payback.

These are pretty extreme standards. By our own power we could never meet them. However, God is the strength that surrounds us. Deuteronomy 31:8 is a time of when Joshua was getting ready to lead Israel into the Promised Land. Joshua might well be overwhelmed, but God says to Joshua: “*It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.*” He is there to forgive us when we fall short and gives us numerous other opportunities. Verse 38 points out that we receive vastly more than we have given. What a God we have!

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for calling me into your kingdom. Help grow my faith so I can exhibit self-sacrificing love. Give me wisdom and patience with yourself as you put your ways into practice. Be ever ready to forgive and strengthen me. Amen.