

Jesus!
“When Others Don’t Love Us”
Luke 6:27-36

Take a first look.

I. THE CONVERSION OF NORMA MCCORVEY IS QUITE A STORY. Let me remind you of the highlights of that story. Norma McCorvey is the real name for Jane Roe, the plaintiff in the suit before the Supreme Court of the United States that was decided in 1973, *Roe v. Wade*. *Roe v. Wade* and another case that was tried at the same time, *Doe v. Bolton*, are the cases that established abortion-on-demand as the law of the land in all fifty states of the Union. Ms. McCorvey had become an avid advocate of abortion, the darling of the pro-abortion movement. She was filled with hostility and venom toward anyone who opposed the practice of abortion. She came eventually to work at an abortion clinic in Dallas, Texas. She was able to out-cuss and outdrink many of the men in the tavern scene which she frequented in Dallas. And though she herself had never had an abortion, she once told a reporter, “This issue is the only thing I live for. I live, eat, breathe, think everything about abortion.”

In 1994, something providential happened. Operation Rescue (OR), the pro-life group that staged civil disobedience in and around abortion clinics during the 80’s and 90’s, moved their office into the building next door to the abortion clinic at which Norma worked. She referred to the director of OR, Flip Benham, as Flip “Venom.” He said that she was “responsible for the deaths for 35 million children” in the United States. Clashes in the parking lot often drew police to calm these folks down who were polar opposites on the issue of abortion.

Sometimes, actual conversations took place that were somewhat civil. On one of those occasions, Norma said to Flip, “You need to go to a good Beach Boys concert.”

“Miss Norma,” Flip answered, “I haven’t been to a Beach Boys concert since 1976.” That simple response shook her up. Suddenly this guy seemed human. “Before,” Norma has said, “I had thought of [Flip] as a man who did nothing but yell at abortion clinics and read his Bible. The thought that he was a real person—a guy who had once even gone to a Beach Boys concert—never occurred to me. I saw him in a new light.” Outside on the bench between their offices, Flip began sharing his past. An unlikely friendship was born. Other OR volunteers began to reach out to her. But none made such an impact as a little 7-year-old named Emily.

Norma resisted relationships with children. She had given birth to three and relinquished her rights over each one, one of those against her will. But Emily was persistent. She would hug Norma often and talk with her openly. Emily’s mother Ronda got to know Norma, too. She shared that Emily was conceived while Ronda was engaged, and she was under pressure from everyone to get an abortion in the first three months of the pregnancy. She just barely didn’t.

Norma was overcome with the personal side of the whole argument against abortion at this point. She now saw it all with a human face, little 7-year-old Emily, who almost didn’t live because of what she had given her life to promote. It wasn’t long before Ronda and Emily became two of Norma’s closest friends. Her friendship with Flip Benham was getting out, and she was more and more excluded by even supposed allies within the abortion movement. One day, Emily finally convinced Norma to attend church with them. The pastor that day gave a simple invitation at the end of the service: “Is anyone here tired of living a sinner’s life?” Norma had to look up to see if that was really her hand that was raised. It was.

God gave her a new life right then and there, brought about the most not by pro-life arguments but by followers of Jesus, old and young, who demonstrated the power of Jesus’ love in action.¹

¹ From *The Christian Reader*, Condensed from *Christianity Today* (January 12, 1998), © 1998 Gary Thomas.

II. JESUS WAS VERY PLEASED WITH THESE ACTIONS. How do I know? Let me show you, from Luke 6:27-36. He shows us clearly what we must do when others don't love us.

Take a closer look at Luke 6:27-36, NJV².

²⁷ But to you³ who are listening I say, "Love your^p enemies; keep doing well to those who hate you^p; ²⁸ keep blessing those who continue to curse you; keep on praying for those who are mistreating you. ²⁹ To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer also the other, and from the one who takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt also. ³⁰ To all who ask you⁴, give, and from the one who takes away your things do not demand them back. ³¹ And just as you^p desire that people should do for you^p, keep doing likewise for them. ³² And if you^p keep on loving those that are loving you^p, what kind of grace is that with reference to you^p? For even those "sinners" keep on loving those who love them. ³³ And if you^p keep on doing good to those who do good to you^p, what kind of grace is that to you^p? Even "the sinners" keep doing the same. ³⁴ And if you^p should lend from whom you^p hope to receive, what kind of grace is that to you^p? Even "sinners" lend to "sinners" in order that they may receive back the same things. ³⁵ Instead, you^p all must keep on loving your^p enemies and do good and lend expecting nothing in return; and your^p reward will be great, and you^p will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and evil. ³⁶ You^p must become merciful just as your^p Father is merciful.

I. WHEN OTHERS DON'T LOVE US, WE MUST STILL LOVE THEM WITH WORDS AND ACTIONS. 6:27-31

1. Jesus commands a reverse strategy toward the disciples' "enemies." "Love your enemies" is one of the most dramatic departures from moral expectation that have ever been uttered. It is completely unexpected, completely the reverse of what should happen, we often think, in response to hate and insult and injury.

2. Jesus gives the dimensions of this active love.

a. "Do good to those who hate you." This is a call to actions of love even toward those who have feelings of hatred toward us. He did not say, "*Feel* good toward those who hate you." He is calling for love-in-action, not love-in-emotion.

b. "Bless those who curse you." Here is where words of intentional blessing are called for instead of mutual curses by the followers of Jesus.

c. "Pray for those who mistreat you." How should we pray? Should we call down fire from heaven to devour our persecutors? Jesus' disciples offered to do just that on one occasion (see Luke 9:54). Luke tells us in that context that Jesus simply "turned and rebuked them." They obviously hadn't gotten what He was trying to teach on the occasion before us. Instead of calling down curses, we should call down blessings. We should pray that those who hate us will come to love Christ, Whom we love, and become our brothers and sisters instead of our enemies.

3. Jesus illustrates His own principles in action (vv. 29-30). He says, take the insults, allow your shirt to be taken even, release your grip on temporary property. Then, he lays down the general principle (v. 31): "Do to others as you would have them do to you." What a startling and fresh command that was! It wasn't completely new in moral thinking, but it was powerfully stated by Jesus.

² NJV is shorthand for my own translation of the text: "New Johnson Version" 😊.

³ The superscript "p" indicates that the pronoun is plural in the original Greek text.

⁴ Note that the pronouns "you" in v. 30 are singular, while all the rest in the paragraph are plural.

A—Are we willing to put such a line of teaching into practice? What shape will such application take?

I—In his recent book *How Small a Whisper*, Roger Carswell relates an amazing story of a Christian family’s response to tragedy: “In May 1987, 39 American seamen were killed in the Persian Gulf when an Iraqi pilot hit their ship, the USS Stark, with a missile. Newspapers carried a picture of the son of one of these seamen, a shy five-year-old boy, John Kiser. He was standing with his hand on his heart as his father’s coffin was loaded onto a plane to take him back to the U.S.A. His mother said, “I don’t have to mourn or wear black, because I know my husband is in heaven. I am happy, because I know he is better off.” Later on, she and young John sent a letter and an Arabic New Testament to the pilot of the Iraqi plane, addressed to: “The man who attacked the Stark, Dad’s ship, in the hope that it will show that even the son and the wife do not hold any grudge and are at the same time praying for the one who took the life of our father.”⁵ Now that response is not normal. It can only be empowered by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

II. WHEN WE LOVE THOSE WHO DON’T LOVE US, WE SHOW THEM A DIFFERENT SPIRIT. 32ff.

1. *Loving those who love us is no different from the world.* “Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them,” said Jesus.

2. *Doing good to those who do good to us is no different.* “What credit is that to you?” asked Jesus, “if you do good to those who are good to you.” Just about anyone can do good to those who do good to them.

3. *Lending to those who will always repay us is no different.* He calls on us to break with the spirit of our times and lend without expecting return. Then, of course, if the money is returned it is received as a gift. If it is not, then we don’t have any hard feelings about it.

The point of all three of these applications is clear: *to follow Jesus is to act differently than the world around us and differently than the normal human response.*

A—Are we ready to live the distinct life that Jesus calls for?

I—Watchman Nee [a great Chinese Christian leader of the middle of this past century] tells about a Chinese Christian who owned a rice paddy next to one owned by a communist man.

The Christian irrigated his paddy by pumping water out of a canal, using one of those leg-operated pumps that make the user appear to be seated on a bicycle. Every day, after the Christian had pumped enough water to fill his field, the communist would come out, remove some boards that kept the water in the Christian’s field and let all the water flow down into his own field. That way, he didn’t have to pump.

This continued day after day. Finally, the Christian prayed, “Lord, if this keeps up, I’m going to lose all my rice, maybe even my field. I’ve got a family to care for. What can I do?”

In answer to his request, the Lord put a thought in his mind. So, the next morning he arose much earlier, in the predawn hours of darkness, and started pumping water into the field of his communist neighbor. Then he replaced the boards and pumped water into his own rice paddy. In a few

⁵ Quoted from Roger Carswell, *How Small a Whisper* (Kregel, 2000), p. 67; submitted by Greg Asimakoupoulos to PreachingToday.com.

weeks both fields of rice were doing well—and the communist was converted.⁶

III. WHEN WE LOVE THOSE WHO DON'T LOVE US, WE ARE SHOWING THE REALITY OF THE LIVING GOD. 35-36

1. *When we act on these principles, we reap reward from God.* This is Jesus' direct promise: "Then your reward will be great." When will that reward come? We are not told. But it will surely be ours in heaven, though often a foretaste comes much sooner than that.

2. *When we act on these principles, we show our relationship to our merciful Father in heaven.* "... And you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."

A—Are we ready to be associated not with the spirit of the times but rather with a merciful and grace-filled God?

I—This is a good moment to remember the teaching from **Romans 5:8**: "... *but God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" (NJV).

I—Sometimes, the effect of such actions waits for eternity to reveal it. No matter. It is still right to be associated with God rather than with the spirit of the times. Other times, the effect of such actions is immediately clear. Take the story of this couple's surprise encounter. According to *The Roanoke Times*, On April 6, 2000, Ricky and Toni Sexton were taken hostage inside their Wytheville, Virginia, home by a fugitive couple on a crime spree. Toni had taken her poodle outside when Dennis Lewis, 37, and Angela Tanner, 20, roared into her driveway, pointed pistols at her, and yelled at her to get back inside the house.

Inside the house, the Sextons turned their hostage experience into an opportunity to demonstrate Christian love. The Sextons listened to their captors' troubles, fed them, showed them gospel videos, read to them from the Bible, and prayed and cried with them.

During negotiations with the police, Ricky Sexton refused his own release when Lewis and Tanner suggested that they might end the standoff by committing suicide. The standoff had an unusual ending. Before surrendering to the police, Angela Tanner left \$135 and a note for the Sextons that read: "Thank you for your hospitality. We really appreciate it. I hope he gets better. Wish all luck & love. Please accept this. It really is all we have to offer. Love, Angela and Dennis."

"Followers of Jesus should never forget the disarming power of Christian love," says Gary Yates of Roanoke.⁷

Take it home (applications).

I. Will we allow God to fill our hearts with such love today?

1. We need to admit we need a heart-transformation.
2. We need to believe that Jesus can give it to us.
3. We need to confess our faith in Him and ask Him to do just that.

II. To whom do we need to share such love?

[See questions at the end of the *Listening Guide* for reflection/discussion.]

⁶ From *Making Things Right When Things Go Wrong* (Howard, 1996).

⁷ From Gary Yates, Roanoke, Virginia; source: *The Roanoke Times* (4-8-00), p. A-1.