

### **13 - RELATIONSHIPS WITH ENEMIES AND BENEFACTORS**

The next section (6:27-35) may have caused Luke's audience considerable discomfort. It still does for us today. The normal human reaction to one's enemies is to show them hostility; and one does good to one's benefactors. It must have been quite a surprise for Luke's or Jesus' audience to hear the general counsel given here: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

This section makes the distinctive point that the behaviour of another person does not determine one's own behaviour. Each one of us is responsible for our own actions in response to another's action toward us.

It would have been even more surprising for the respective audiences to hear the specific details that follow from this moral principle. Slapping another person's face would have been as common then as it is now. It is a normal response to excessive rudeness, especially for women. Men are more likely to punch another man in the jaw. Often regarding themselves as victims, Jewish people of that time, would have had a well developed argumentative character. Assault would be more verbal than physical.

A second, really astonishing instance Luke gives has to do with thievery. Many folk of that time would possess many fewer garments than we do. A cloak was necessary for the colder weather. Only the more affluent would have had more than one. To give to a thief, or anyone who makes such a demand, was

to put the giver in a state of almost certain privation. The enormity of the situation is made worse by the added directive to give one's shirt as well, thereby leaving the donor virtually naked.

Derived from this exaggerated example is a truly universal ethical teaching: the Golden Rule. It exists in similar form, both positive and negative, in all main religious traditions from a wide variety of cultures and historical periods. It states unequivocally that one not only has a right to be treated justly, but a responsibility to ensure that others receive justice too.

The second set of teaching in this passage emphasizes relations with one's benefactors. Repaying a favour with another simply perpetuates a dependency that can be carried to extremes. In many cultures, this developed into a system of patronage that still dominates many aspects of life. Social, economic and political spheres of human relationships all have complicated systems based on a very basic concept. Who owes what to whom? In Jesus' time this principle undergirded a destructive system of landownership in rural Galilee and to the poor urban dwellers the Roman Empire in Luke's time toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

The good news Jesus sought to bring in his teaching is that all such systems based on power and status are ended. Although stated in economic language of borrowing and lending, the old ways are replaced by relationships based on generosity, respect and equal treatment for everyone. This way of living mirrors the uncalculated generosity of God.