

Love Your Enemies

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[0 : 00] Every single one of us here, you know our situations, you know our joys, you know our sadness, you know our trials, you know every experience that we're going through.

Because you came and lived among us, you're a God of compassion and you understand what we are going through and what we will experience.

So Lord, we pray for everyone this morning here. Lord, we thank you, we can worship you this morning in Beklue. We pray for James and pray for his throat that he'll be able to get through this service.

Lord, we pray for those who are leading or singing. Lord, we thank you for them. And we pray that we indeed praise you joyfully this morning.

We thank you again for that psalm which Max read. And Lord, indeed, we thank you for your blessings to us in so many ways this morning. So continue with us now, pardoning our sin in Jesus' name.

[1 : 10] Amen. Thank you, Roddy. Now we're going to sing another psalm, Psalm 130.

A psalm that closes on a great note of redemption, a great reminder of God's forgiveness. So again, as we're able, let's stand together so that we can sing this psalm.

Lord, from the depths I go to you.

Lord, hear me from on high. And give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry.

Lord, in your presence who can stand if you our sins record.

[2 : 35] But yet forgiveness is with you.

That we may fear you, Lord. I wait. I wait.

My soul waits for the Lord. Lord, my hope is in his word.

More than the watchman waits for dawn. My soul waits for dawn.

My soul waits for the Lord. Lord, my soul waits for the Lord. O Israel, put your hope in God.

[3 : 42] Your hope in God. For mercy is within.

And for redemption from their sins.

His people will redeem. Amen. Amen.

So let's hear God's word together. You have heard that it was said, eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

But I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

[5 : 11] Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your father in heaven.

He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Amen. So we're thinking about this theme of loving our enemies.

And I want to begin with the story of Eric Liddell. Eric Liddell, very famous Scottish Olympian last year. The Paris Olympics kind of picked up the story.

[6 : 17] It was 100 years since he had famously refused to run the 100 meters because it was on a Sunday he wanted to worship God. Instead, he ran the 401 gold. And so lots of people know his

sporting legacy.

And he's Scottish. I imagine most of us, we know his sporting legacy. But I think there's something even more impressive about Eric Liddell. And it's what he did after his sporting career. It's his legacy as a Christian missionary.

So Eric Liddell kind of left fame and fortune behind to go and serve God in China. And he was there in China teaching children, teaching elderly folks when the war broke out, the Second World War. And when Japan invaded China, Eric Liddell ended up in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Grim conditions. Overcrowding, hunger, disease.

You know, lots of fighting over precious resources. And lots and lots and lots and lots of survivors from that prison camp told stories about Eric Liddell and his legacy, his example.

[7 : 20] He was known in the camp as something of a peacemaker. He always sought to discourage people from expressing bitterness and hatred towards the people who were holding them hostage.

He is someone who would rather suffer wrong himself instead of seeking to gain revenge or seeking to get resources for himself. In his Bible teaching, he often taught on kindness and humility and forgiveness.

And he spoke about Jesus' command and the importance of loving one's enemies. And his life had a massive impact in that camp.

Because he was able by God's grace to put into practice the words that we've just been reading.

These words are some of the more famous of Jesus' teaching words.

The phrase is still in the English language usage. You know, the idea of turning the other cheek. Of going the extra mile. Of loving your enemies. We are familiar with these phrases.

[8 : 29] But as we listened, I'm sure that we recognized that to take Jesus' words seriously is both incredibly challenging. But also, if we were to take them seriously, it would create a life and a community that would be really compelling and beautiful.

The principles of not retaliating. The principle of positively showing love for one's enemies. So, the words of Jesus, those spoken 2,000 years ago thereabouts, are words with truth and with power today.

I think they present a striking contrast to what maybe we're familiar with. The lots of encouragement to stand on our own rights. The instinct to fight fire with fire.

If somebody wrongs us, it seems fairly normal now to cut that person out of our lives or cut them down to size. Jesus' words are very different. He brings the kingdom of grace that he's been teaching about right into the heart of all of our interpersonal relationships.

And especially, I think, into our conflict here. And maybe it's something that immediately resonates with some of us. The kid in school who mocks us or bullies us, perhaps because of our faith.

[9 : 50] But maybe it's in the workplace, the colleague who has it in for us. And maybe you've had to live with some social media abuse because you shared some personal views, perhaps some Christian views.

Maybe you've known what it is to be part of a circle of friends and then a whispering campaign began against you. And lots of times where we need to hear Jesus' teaching as he calls us to love our enemies.

And he teaches us that in helping us to recognize that this is the way that God the Father has shown love to us. And it's the extraordinary love that he then wants us to shine and to share in the world.

So we're going to look at three questions today. First, to think about what are we to do? Because there's a lot of important things to recognize. Why are we to do it? And thirdly, how can we do it? So the first question is what are we to do? The first thing that we need to see, Jesus' teaching in verse 38 to 42, is this idea of bringing grace, not justice, into our personal relationships.

[11 : 03] And so if you've been here for the last few weeks, you'll have recognized that Jesus is always targeting the false teaching of the Pharisees. And the Pharisees, again, have been guilty of abusing the law. So verse 38 are words straight from the Old Testament.

You have heard that it was said, eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But they belonged in a certain place. That was a principle for the law courts. The goal here was that in a law court situation, you could ensure justice.

That a punishment would fit the crime. That it wouldn't leave room for personal revenge or escalation and retaliation. But the problem is that the Pharisees have taken this courtroom principle into everyday life.

And so their personal dealings are on the basis of, well, I demand justice. And my rights come first. And if you wrong me, I can demand vengeance of you.

And the result of this false teaching is it goes absolutely against God's law of love. It leaves little or no room for reconciliation.

[12 : 20] It's a very harsh and divisive way of living in community to say, you're on trial and I am your judge. I think we can probably recognize that.

Well, Jesus, well, he's so different. But I tell you, he begins in verse 39. And what he tells us in effect is to bring the gospel of grace into our relationships, not the courtroom.

And so he gives us four scenes, four little images of selfless love, of a person being willing to adopt a servant posture, of someone being willing to return good for evil.

So there in verse 39, I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other also.

So in Jesus' day, if you gave someone the open-handed slap, it was a great insult. Obviously, instinct would be to fight back. But Jesus says, as one of my followers, be willing to bear that insult.

[13 : 25] Don't strike back, show grace. As an aside, maybe some of you noticed Will Smith's reflection. It's been 10 years since the slap at the Oscar ceremony.

And he was reflecting on the fact that he has had to live with brutal public disapproval ever since that moment, if you remember it. I have no grace there. So there's the slap then in verse 40.

There's the talk about the shirt. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. And the idea here, Jesus is saying, is don't stand on your legal rights.

So in Old Testament law, you could never take someone's coat as a pledge overnight because they might need it to sleep on. But Jesus is saying, don't insist on your legal rights in all your personal relationships.

Rather, be willing to show grace. Verse 41 takes us to the conflict where the Roman Empire is ruling over Israel.

[14 : 32] Israel, verse 41, if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. So a Roman soldier within their law could force someone to carry their bag for a thousand yards.

And Jesus is saying, be willing to volunteer to go above and beyond in order to surprise people by grace.

Not justice, but grace. And then verse 42. Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

So it's borrowing and begging. And it's the idea, not just do no harm to someone. Here again, Jesus is emphasizing the positive of practicing gracious generosity.

And so Jesus corrects the false teaching and he says to us, don't stand and insist on my rights.

Don't be the Shakespeare Shylock insisting on getting my pound of flesh.

[15 : 40] Rather, in our personal dealings with others, even in our conflict situations with others, don't retaliate.

If someone acts towards you like an enemy, we are to act towards them like a friend. Don't bring them into the courtroom. Rather, bring to them God's grace.

So that's the principle of the first section. Bring grace, not justice, into your personal relationships.

And then in verse 43 to 48, this challenging principle of practicing love without limits in our personal relationships.

So you see in verse 43 that the Pharisees have done some more twisting and they've also done some adding to God's law. Verse 43, you have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

This is what the Pharisees were teaching. Okay, so they, remember they want a nice easy tick box. How can I please God? Let me make the law as easy as possible for myself. And so they've done two things.

[16 : 46] They've narrowed the standard of love that is expected. So what God's law actually says is love your neighbor as yourself. They've taken out that as yourself bit.

If we think about how much effort and time and energy we put into caring for ourselves, the Bible says that's how much we're to apply to others. The Pharisees have removed that to make it that bit

easier.

But they've also deliberately narrowed the objects of love. And because they've given this untrue addition, okay we should love our neighbor, we should hate our enemy.

They're very concerned to have the list, well who is my neighbor? And if I understand my neighbor is the people who are like me, then we are free to hate the people who are unlike us.

Again, it goes entirely against God's law of love and God's design, God's whole design for the storyline of salvation. He always intended, even as he chose Abraham, even as he chose Israel, was that his love would extend to all nations.

[17 : 51] And so they're misrepresenting God, and we also misrepresent God if we restrict our love to those who are like us and those who like us. And think about what this kind of false teaching does.

So in Jesus' day, the Jews are saying, well I love my fellow Jews, but those guys, the Samaritans, they're outsiders, they're kind of a bit like us but not really, so we hate and despise them.

And the rest of the world, they're just Gentiles and we really hate them. Segregation, racism, and we recognize, don't we, the ugly impact that this kind of thinking has for communities and for societies in our own day, just as in Jesus' day.

And so Jesus deliberately, powerfully corrects. What does Jesus say? Verse 42, here's the heart of the law. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Choose love. Don't choose hate. Don't choose separation. What words should we use? Let's take prayer to God, not choosing anger and slander against the other.

[19 : 09] And notice that Jesus refuses to place limits. Love your enemies. The story of the Good Samaritan is one of the famous ones that Jesus taught.

The build up to that is of a religious leader who wants to know what he can do to earn eternal life and then he asks Jesus the question, who is my neighbor? And Jesus tells the story, giving the teaching that what's really important is that we learn what it looks like to be a good neighbor.

To recognize that when anyone is in need, when anyone is in need and we are able to help and we have the resources, then we are to act to make life a little bit better for the other person.

We love our enemies, Jesus says. And part of that is Jesus calls us as the people of God to pray for our enemies.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor, calls this the supreme command. He says this, through the medium of prayer, we go to our enemy, stand by his side and plead for him to God.

[20 : 24] As we pray, it creates love in our hearts. We recognize that hate and love cannot coexist in the one heart.

And so Jesus teaches us that one way that we drive out hate is by praying and seeking the best for that person who's made themselves an enemy towards us. Do we sense the compelling power and beauty of this way of life by God's grace saying no to retaliation and saying yes positively to loving someone even when they're an enemy?

And somebody was reflecting, a pastor was reflecting on it being 10 years since a church shooting in Charleston in the U.S.

And that awful night when a white supremacist went into a black majority church and sat through a service and then killed nine worshipers.

But what really caught the world's attention in the days following that was the attitude of the survivors. When many of them offered forgiveness to the gunman, called them to repent and to put their trust in Jesus.

[21 : 45] There was one man called Anthony Thompson who went to the courtroom hearing to offer personally forgiveness to the gunman who had killed his wife, Myra.

It's the compelling power and beauty of Christian love. Maybe you're familiar with the words of Martin Luther King. His Christmas sermon in 1957 included these wonderful words.

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate. Adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness.

Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that. And this is the compelling power and beauty.

Not just of what Jesus teaches but of Jesus' way of life. Because he practiced what he preached in the supreme demonstration of love and grace towards enemies.

[22 : 51] We think about the hours leading up to Jesus' death. And we see that he allowed himself to experience injustice. And he didn't throw insults when he was insulted.

He didn't call down legions of angels to wipe out his enemies, though he could have. When people mocked him and hurled insults at him, he stayed silent.

And on the cross, Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing. He met human hate with God's gracious, sacrificial love.

And when, as his followers, you and I seek to walk in his footsteps. When we don't send back the angry, cutting response to the critical message or email.

When we hold back from slandering that person in our schoolroom or in our office space that's making life difficult for us.

[23 : 57] When we move forward in love, refusing to place limits on kindness. When we seek to bless when others would seek to curse. And we put into practice the unique power and beauty of this kind of Christian love that Jesus calls us to.

So that's what we are to do. Next two points, much shorter. Secondly, why are we to do it? So I imagine, even just to think about what Jesus is saying, we're getting that sense that what Jesus is calling us to do is absolutely to swim against the tide.

The tide of his culture, the tide of our culture. Where our instinct perhaps is, if someone hits me, I want to hit back harder. Where perhaps we're much more likely to hear, cancel your enemy.

Abuse the one who persecutes you. Where you know that to practice this way of not retaliating and instead trying to show loving kindness, you may be labeled as weak or as weird. And so we need to ask, why should we do it?

Jesus gives us the answer in here. He says, as followers are to love our enemies, to show to them the incredible love of our Father in heaven. So look at verse 45.

[25 : 12] Jesus says, love your enemy because it's what your Father does. Love your enemies that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

So we know the fact that in our families, that there are some traits that we share with our parents that are genetic.

We just can't help it. Perhaps the way that we walk, we look like our parents. But there are some traits that we learn by imitation.

And in the Christian family, Jesus is saying, we should learn to imitate our Father's love. That principle, like Father, like Son, should be seen in this way.

That as the Father loves his enemies every day, we should do the same. Jesus points out that God the Father gives good gifts every day.

[26 : 18] Rain and Son to the righteous and to the unrighteous. It's in his nature to show love and kindness to his enemies.

The example here is of God's dealings within creation, where his kindness is extended to all. But you could go through the Bible and you could recognize time and again, Jesus shows and God shows mercy to the outsider, to the enemy.

It's the kind of principle we hear in Leviticus 19. Love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

We see it when God has mercy on the wicked city of Nineveh, when it repents. We see that same patient love extended to rebellious Israel as they turn time and time and time again away from God. And of course, the perfect example of this like Father, like Son principle is Jesus himself. Jesus, the Son of God. To read his story, to read the Gospels, is to recognize he is one who is always practicing self-giving, love-choosing, wrong-bearing, even in his day.

[27 : 42] And as the people of God receive that love deep into our hearts, the power of God's grace working it into our hearts, it enables imitation.

So we can love like our Father. We can love like Jesus. The first person to die as a follower of Jesus was a man called Stephen.

Acts chapter 7 has his story. As he dies being stoned to death, he prays the same prayer as Jesus. Father, forgive them. And he died. The second reason why we are to love our enemies is in verse 46 to 48.

Because as we do so, it's how we show the Father's incredible love. So there's a more than principle here in 46 and 47. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? So Jesus is calling us to a principle of love that is more than what's normally seen in the world.

[28 : 57] This is going beyond, I love those who like me. I love those who will benefit me. And Jesus says, let your love include those who would mock me. Those who would turn others against us.

Those who would positively act towards us as an enemy. That's why we need that new principle and that new power that comes from Jesus. But we recognize that to share the Father's love in this way, it creates a very different culture.

When there are people committed to crossing divides and bearing wrongs instead of paying back with justice. Committed to practicing forgiveness and seeking the good of others.

That's where you have the building blocks for community rather than destroying community. So there's the principle that Jesus calls us to of doing more than others so that the Father's love is seen.

There's also the be perfect principle of verse 48. Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect. And when the Bible uses here this word perfect, it's that idea of being wholehearted, of being totally committed.

[30 : 12] Jesus is inviting us to be totally committed to pursuing this kind of selfless love. Sinclair Ferguson, the Scottish theologian, he says, Here's one of the marks of Christian love.

Love is not determined by the loveliness he finds in its object. So often we love others because we see something attractive in them.

That's not how God loves us. And he doesn't ask us to only love people where we see loveliness in them. Love is not conditioned upon his being loved first.

In other words, we don't stand and wait to see how someone responds to us. We make the first move. Whether that's reconciliation, whether that's positively showing love. Love is not directed only towards those whose love he can rely on in return.

This is costly. This is vulnerable. This is not what we're seeing in our day. But Jesus says, here's why we are to love our enemies.

[31 : 18] Do it to be like your father. We are his children. If we're followers of Jesus, we're to grow in maturity, to grow in grace, to grow in his character, this character of love.

And we are to do it for the sake of others. Something that we're really keen to keep developing here in our church is to have that idea of being a community of faith and love and joy in Jesus, where we're growing in those qualities together.

But we're also at the same time wanting to invite our local community in to discover the good news in God's gospel word and in the way that we treat them.

And so practicing love and forgiveness, which is costly, is a vital part of our mission.

It's showing to the world, do you know what, there is a better way. It shines the light of God's love in a context where so often all we hear and see are missiles of hate.

[32 : 32] Third question then, how can we do it? It was really interesting to read the 10-year reflection from a pastor in Charleston on the impact after that church shooting.

As those church members extended gospel grace, he said it was remarkable what happened in the city. Maybe for the first time, blacks and whites would come together to pray together.

It was this powerful moment within a city where the normal lines of politics or race, where they were absolutely broken down because they saw grace and love.

And there was that recognition, that's what this city, that's what we all need. And I imagine, whether we're Christian or not, there are certain values that all of us share.

When we think about ourselves, when we think about society, we want healing and not brokenness. We want to see reconciliation and we know it's better than fighting and revenge.

[33 : 38] We long for peace. We don't want hostility. We have those longings, but we also know that's really hard.

It's really easy at a distance to say, love your enemy. But what happens when the person right in front of me is making my life a mystery? Then we know it's challenging. It's hard.

It's what Bonhoeffer called a call to a visible participation in the cross of Christ. To practice this involves personal cost and suffering. And so maybe you're asking, well, how is it possible that the members of Emanuel Church in Charleston could practice forgiveness to the person who killed

friends and family members?

How could Eric Liddell practice kindness and love and not hating his enemies in the context of being a prisoner of war where he would die? How can you and I do it in our lives?

Only when we know Jesus, our Emmanuel, and to know that he has done it for us. And he is the one who gives us the power to do it.

[34 : 51] There's a verse, a wonderful verse, in Romans chapter 5 and verse 10 that says, Here's something we need to know about the message of the Christian faith.

By nature, we are God's enemies. We disobey God. We dishonor God.

We say to God, no, I don't want you to rule over me. I want to be in charge. And if God was to bring His swift justice, bring the courtroom into our experience, then by rights, what we deserve is eternal condemnation and separation.

But what God does in the good news and by His grace is He sends His Son, the Lord Jesus, to come and to show God's enemies His kindness and His love.

He does that through sending His Son to reconcile us, to make peace between us and God. And notice what the Bible says, that comes through the death of Jesus.

[36 : 20] God's own Son dies to show us love, to bring us peace with God. Now, how does that happen? What happens on the cross that makes this reconciliation possible?

Well, the Bible says that there on the cross, Jesus is loaded up with sin. Think about all the times that we fail to love, but instead we show anger or hate.

Jesus was loaded up with that sin. And as He goes, He takes the penalty. He faces the judgment. He is separated from His Father.

He will die in our place so that if we turn from our sin to trust in Jesus, as our Savior and as our Lord, then we receive His full and free forgiveness.

We are reconciled to become children of God. Instead of being enemies, we are now friends. And it's that love and that grace that changes everything.

[37 : 23] If our lives are controlled by this knowledge, when I was God's enemy and a sinner, the Father loved me and gave His Son for me, then more and more our love will be controlled by that too.

Here is where the power to love our enemies comes from. Not from my willpower, not from your efforts and discipline, but from the cross of Christ.

It's in seeing Jesus bearing shame and absorbing hate and not claiming His rights and forgiving His enemies.

It's His loving sacrifice that has the power to transform us. It's the cross that blocks the door to revenge and retaliation and opens our hearts to show the Father's love.

So let's pray. Thank you.