

Love Your Enemies

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[0 : 00] Please return with me to Luke chapter 6 and verse 27 through 36. As we ask the question, who is our enemy and how should we react to them?

Who is our enemy and how should we react toward them? The conflict between Syria and Lebanon has been ongoing for decades.

Lebanese Christians have often been at the very forefront of attacks by Syrian special forces. One particular Lebanese pastor's father was shot dead by the Syrian special forces.

So for many years after, this pastor lived in fear of the same fate and he hated every Syrian he met. But then Syria itself exploded into civil war and millions of Syrians fled for their lives.

Many fled to Lebanon and this Lebanese pastor faced a challenge. Thousands of enemies on his doorstep.

[1 : 16] In what is an outstanding example of loving our enemies, this Lebanese pastor opened up his church to house Syrian refugees.

He organised a food programme to feed them and a church school to educate their children. This pastor, whose father the Syrians had assassinated, loved his enemies.

His church, which once numbered 40 Lebanese Christians, now also contains 800 Syrians who have become Christians also.

And all because these Lebanese Christians and their pastor loved their enemies. Who is our enemy and how should we react toward them?

If we were living as Christians in the first century, the answer was obvious. The Jewish ruling authorities and the Romans. At their hands, Christians were persecuted and terrorised for no other reason than that they dared to call Jesus Christ Lord.

[2 : 27] The apostles, whom Jesus had appointed to continue his ministry, would all, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, die for their faith in Jesus.

Even today in many parts of the world, to be a Christian invites suffering and death. How should these apostles react to their enemies? Rather than militant opposition, Jesus commands them saying, Love your enemies.

Love your enemies. In no greater way is the gospel of Jesus Christ expressed than in this. We refuse to hate those who hate us. We do not do harm to those who harm us.

We pray for those who curse us. When such love is demonstrated, even our enemies are amazed. Luke, who wrote this gospel, was heavily influenced by the apostle Paul.

The same Paul who was once called Saul, who had held the coats of those who had executed the first Christian martyr, Stephen. So Saul witnessed Stephen's execution, and he heard, therefore, the last words that Stephen ever spoke.

[3 : 44] Stephen said, even as the stones were raining down on him, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. I wonder what kind of impact Stephen's love for his enemies had upon Saul.

Could it have been at least partly responsible for Saul's conversion to Christ? This passage is set in the context of conflict.

On account of their faith in Christ, the first Christians are to expect the hostility of the world, especially hostility from the Jewish religious authorities and the Romans.

How are these first Christians to respond to such hatred? It is to love their enemies. It is to do good to those who hate them.

It is to bless those who curse them. It is to pray for those who abuse them. This surely is an otherworldly standard which only the gospel of Christ can equip us for.

[4 : 46] Anyone can hate those who hate them. Anyone can love those who love them. But it takes the gospel to love those who hate us. Who then is our enemy?

And what should our response to them be? Jesus' command is this. Love your enemies. Let's consider three things from Luke 6, 37 through 46 this morning.

First, why should I love my enemies? Second, what does it look like for me to love my enemies? And third, how can I love my enemies? Each one of us, let's picture an enemy in our mind's eye. Someone we consider to be an enemy. Or a group of people we consider to be an enemy. And then ask ourselves the question, how can I love them?

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[5 : 52] Amen. Why should I love my enemies, first of all? Why should I love my enemies? Luke 6, 27 through 36 is densely packed with Jesus' teaching, each word, each clause, each sentence, filled with powerful meaning application.

But as we read through this section, we get three reasons why we should love our enemies. Reciprocity, reward, and reflection. Reciprocity, reward, and reflection.

With our enemy in our mind's eye, whether our enemy is a person or a group of people, this is why we should love them. Of course, the number one reason, never mind the three we're going to consider, is that Jesus commands us to.

That should be enough for us as Christians. But our three reasons for loving our enemies, reciprocity, reward, and reflection. Reciprocity, first of all. In verse 31, Jesus says, As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

As you wish that others would do to you, so do to them. For generations, this has been the moral code of our nation. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Funnily enough, this never applied to loving our enemies.

[7 : 11] I wonder whether it was used, I think it probably was, to mean, if you're nice to me, I'll be nice to you. If you won't harm me, I won't harm you. Which is actually the exact opposite of what Jesus is teaching here.

Jesus is teaching in the context of loving our enemies. Of loving those who are harming us, and aren't being nice to us. And he says, Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Let's go back to that Lebanese pastor who found himself flooded with Syrian refugees. The Syrians who had assassinated his father. He had a choice to make. Turn them away or welcome them.

Now, if this situation had been reversed, and this Lebanese pastor had had to flee to Syria for refuge, how would he have wanted to be treated? Turned away?

Or welcomed? He did to others that which he would have had them do to him. He loved his enemies.

[8 : 15] He did good to those who hated him. Look very carefully at what Jesus says. He says, As you would have them do to you. Not as they are doing to you.

As you would have them do to you. As you want them to do to you. Not as they are doing to you. How then is the early church to react toward the Jewish religious authority and the Romans in an ideal world?

They'd all be kind and tolerant of Christians. The reality was different. But the command remains, how should the enemies of the gospel be treated? Jesus says, Love them.

Do to them as you wish they would do to you. He'll later go on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan to emphasize this point.

But throughout the gospel and the book of Acts, there are many occasions where Jesus, the apostles, and the early church love their enemies. They heal Roman soldiers.

[9 : 20] They welcome Gentiles into the church. They accept Saul, a former persecutor, as an apostle.

Let's picture that enemy we have in our mind's eye. Whether it's a person or whether it's a group of people. Ask, how can we do to them what we would wish them to do to us?

We do not want them to curse us. So we will not curse them. We don't want them to harm us. So we will not harm them. We want to pray for them and bless them with our words because this is how we ourselves want to be treated by them.

Even if at current, even currently, we are not being treated that way by them. Nobody's assassinated our parents, I don't think. And yet that Lebanese pastor did to the Syrians what he would have had them do to him.

If he can, by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, love his enemies this way, so can we. Reciprocity. Reward, secondly.

[10:35] Reward. In verse 35, Jesus says to those who love their enemies, you will be sons of the Most High for he's kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

God promises a reward to those who love their enemies, that reward being they'll be sons of the Most High. It's not as if they're going to earn their divine sonship by loving their enemies, but they shall be recognized as God's children by the way in which they love their enemies. Sons look like their fathers. Sons behave like their fathers. Unfortunately, in my case. We read that our Heavenly Father is here called the Most High and he is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. Here's a family trait. If we're also kind to the ungrateful and the evil, we are demonstrating that we are sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father and we possess his spiritual DNA, as it were. This is our reward as Christians, not something pie in the sky when you die, but a solid demonstration of our relationship to God and the here and now for what greater privilege can there be than to be known as children of God.

[11:53] The church has not always demonstrated this love. Let's be honest. Even today, we are way quicker to curse those with whom we do not agree rather than pray for them.

Is that true? We're far quicker to curse those with whom we do not agree than pray for them. Let's think of that Lebanese pastor.

Can we think of a more God-like thing for a man to do than he did? He proved himself a child of God bearing the family resemblance by welcoming his enemies into his family and into his home. Having our enemy in our mind's eye, whether that's a person or a group of people, the question for us is how can we demonstrate to them that we are sons and daughters of the God who is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil?

Perhaps we need to be far quicker to pray for our enemies than to curse them. And then thirdly, the third reason we should love our enemies is reflection.

[13:12] Reflection. Jesus closes off this section in verse 36 by saying, be merciful even as your father is merciful. To be merciful is not to treat another person as he or she deserves.

He or she has wronged us. They've hurt us. They've miscalled us. To show their mercy is not to do the same to them they have done to us. We will not wrong those who have wronged us.

We will not hurt those who have hurt us. We will not miscall those who have miscalled us. At the hands of the Syrians, this Lebanese pastor had received only grief and harm.

They had after all killed his father. But he chose to show mercy to these Syrians even as his heavenly father had shown him mercy. We're going to come back to this last verse in our final point where we'll explore how we can love our enemies.

But in this is the greatest reflection of our heavenly father. Just as he is merciful to his enemies, so we can be also. When the world sees mercy in operation, it sees a reflection of what God is like.

[14:23] We will not treat our enemies as they are treating us. We will show mercy. We will be kind to them even when they are being unkind to us.

We will bless them even when they are cursing us. It is not the power of our argument which will overcome their enmity toward us. It is the power of showing mercy.

A Christian couple in Indonesia moved into a predominantly Muslim neighborhood. To be good neighbors, the Indonesian Christian lady cooked her neighbors cakes.

Her Muslim neighbors cursed her and they threw her cakes onto the rubbish sheep. But she persisted in baking cakes for them.

Eventually, after four years of baking cakes for her Muslim neighbors every single day, they began to accept her and treat her as one of their own.

[15:29] Her long-term demonstration of mercy, refusing to treat her neighbors as they treated her, won them over. Again, let's think of an enemy person, group of people.

How can we bake them cakes? How can we show them mercy? How can we treat them well even though they treat us badly? Why then should we love our enemies?

We love them because we would have them do to us as we are doing to them. We love them because we want to be sons of God, want to be known as sons of God. We love them because we want to reflect the mercy of our Heavenly Father.

Second, what does it look like for me to love my enemies? What does it look like for me to love my enemies? The command of Jesus is this, love your enemies.

No getting away from Jesus' commands, is there? But have you noticed that all of Jesus' commands have love at their center? love your enemies.

[16:37] Love for God, love for others, yes, love for the self, and love for your enemies. Love is always at the center of God's commands.

Yes, even the Ten Commandments, the so-called moral law, is summarized by Jesus when he says, love the Lord your God with all your strength, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, we may feel today that as we picture that enemy in our mind's eye, I have no love for that person. I have no love for that group of people. I neither like them, nor do I feel any love for them. That's okay. Jesus doesn't command us to like them, nor does he call us to feel all sentimental love toward them.

The great C.S. Lewis once said, don't waste your time bothering whether you love your neighbor. Act as if you did.

[17:44] Don't waste your time bothering whether you love your neighbor. Act as if you did. Jesus follows the command to love our enemies by explaining to us how to act as if we did love them.

He says three things. Do them good, bless them, pray for them. This is how we may love our enemies. Not by trying to be like them, or trying to, not by trying to like them, rather, or trying to work up some kind of sentimental feeling on the inside, but by doing them good.

By blessing them, by praying for them. Doing them good, first of all, Jesus says. Our enemies may hate us, just like the Jewish religious authorities hated the early church, but we are to do them good.

They may harm us, but we are to do them good. Jesus gives three positive examples in this passage of how doing good works works in practice.

The first concern is what happens when we're victims of violence and abuse. We are struck on the cheek. This is not a slap. It's a hard punch.

[18:53] Our expensive clothing is ripped from our backs. To do good in that situation is to turn the other cheek so our enemies can punch that one as well. To offer the one who has ripped our expensive clothing away our shirt also.

The second concern is those who beg from us. We are to do good to them by giving to them even if that begging becomes abusive in and of itself. The third concern is those who borrow from us.

The words Jesus uses here correspond to lending with interest. We are not to lend to one another expecting a lucrative return.

In fact, it may be that Jesus is commanding us here to give without expecting anything in return. Now in practice Jesus is using hyperbolic language here.

To love a beggar might mean to give him no money at all lest he chooses to spend it on drink or drugs. To love someone who wants to borrow money from us may mean adding to their rising problem of debt and putting more stress into their lives.

[20:05] But the point is we are to do good to those who hate us. Jesus refers to possessions and money here because the time will come when the persecuted church will be impoverished by persecution on account of their faith in Jesus and at that stage they'll become hungry and poor.

Then they will rely upon the charity of others to meet their needs. The question is this governed by the principle of love how can we do good to those who hate us?

How can we bake them cakes? What welcome can we give them? Second doing good first doing good second blessing them blessing them our enemies may curse us insult us and miscall us but we're to respond by blessing them.

This is a reference to the use of our words you know they say sticks and stones will break my bones but words but names will never harm me. We remember that from when we were kids. Now we've grown up it wasn't now we've grown up we know it wasn't true then and it is true now our words can build up or destroy.

For the Christian modelling her use of words on the life of Jesus Christ we see he never returned insult for insult his words always dripped with invitation and blessing.

[21:30] in the same way we must be careful not to trade insults with those who miscall us. Different Bible translations offer insight here.

In 1 Timothy 3 when the qualifications for eldership in the church are listed one of those is he must not be quarrelsome he must not be quarrelsome the American Standard Version translates that

word quarrelsome by the rather more visual word pugnacious he must not be pugnacious now we all know the dog a pug we all know what a pug looks like fierce faced as if it's always ready for a fight an elder must not go looking for a fight with his words he must not be pugnacious I know of nobody who has ever been battered into the kingdom of God through a war of words but I know of many who have been won for Christ through the gentleness of a Christian who refuses to trade insult for insult but uses his words lovingly instead and again this is a big challenge for us as we think of those who are enemies of the church they may use harsh belittling words to describe us but we must be very careful not to respond in like manner rather we respond in gentleness humility and love for in so doing we are loving our enemies and we are showing them the mercy of Christ the third way in which we love our enemies is by praying for them love your enemies do good to those who hate you bless those who curse you pray for those who abuse you now on the surface of things this may seem the most straightforward element of what it means to love our enemies but just because it's straightforward doesn't mean to say it's easy the kind of prayer

Jesus commends is that which he himself prayed in the cross when he said of his executioners father forgive them they do not know what they are doing it's kind it's thoughtful it's inviting and it's filled with love let's think of those enemies we have in our mind how can we pray for them more than just the standard oh lord bless so and so you know it takes a Christ like heart to pray for specifics in their life and to pray God's blessing into their lives perhaps praying for their marriages their jobs but most importantly for their relationship with God after all the enemies to which Jesus is referring aren't those within the church there is no Christian who was our enemy there is no Christian who should ever be our enemy we may not always get along as we should but we're family we're not enemies so if that enemy in your mind's eyes is another Christian then just swore it out very disappointed this week to hear of a fellow minister who was unwilling to shake my hand or meet with me what are we enemies no the best thing we can pray for our enemies is that it would come for themselves to experience the love of God and the cross of Christ that they by faith in Jesus would pass from being enemies to being family through faith in Jesus so here there are three practical examples given by Jesus of what it looks like in real life to love our enemies let me remind you of C.S. Lewis quote don't waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor act as if you did act as if you did

Jesus called to love our enemies as a call to action well thirdly and very briefly how can I love my enemies how can I love my enemies do I do I do I have to pretend to love my enemies this is perhaps one of the hardest teachings of Jesus it cuts most against the grain of our fallen humanity because we want to return insult for insult and evil for evil when the early church is persecuted for its faith in Christ it would only be natural for it to adopt a militant attitude toward the state and to engage in acts of hatred and violence to riot and cause trouble as we see in many parts of the world today with other religions you see for the early church Jesus teaching here is not hypothetical it's a daily reality for them to be hated cursed and abused for us it is largely hypothetical but for them it was a lived experience how can we love our enemies the answer is here in the last verse be merciful even as your father is merciful there was a time when we were

God's enemies when we hated him when we cursed him when we abused him before we came to faith in Christ this was our natural state we were rebels we were far far away from him Luke's mentor the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5 verse 10 while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son here then is the most important part of the sermon every one of us here were once enemies of God on account of our sin and unbelief but God rather than hating and cursing us loved us so much he sent his one and only son to the cross to reconcile us to himself God made peace through the death of his son here we have the mercy of God he did not give us the curse we deserved he gave us the blessing of salvation through the cross of his son we did not deserve the gospel of

[27 : 49] Jesus Christ is the answer to the question of how we can love our enemies let's picture that enemy in our mind's eye particular person particular group of people they are not Christians how can we love them how can we show mercy to them by meditating on how God has shown mercy to us he sent his son to die for us not when we were his friends but when we were his enemies if God had not shown us such mercy we'd be condemned to the eternal punishment we rightfully deserve but God sent his son to die on the cross for us it is as we live in and live out the mercy of God on the cross of Christ that our lives can be like that of that amazing Lebanese pastor and that amazing Indonesian couple and we can love our enemies just as

Christ did us let's hear sound