

Love your Enemies

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[0 : 00] The passage hasn't changed since Andre read it to us. It still says, love your enemies. I was saying to someone before at 745, one of the advantages of what Andrew wants us to do here is expository teaching, where we teach right through passages of the Bible.

It's a protection device on the congregation. That means we just preach whatever comes next. We don't avoid it, because obviously I would never choose to, if given the choice, this is not the passage that I would want to preach to you and that we'd want to hear.

But expository teaching works right through the Bible, and so we don't get to pick and choose. The Holy Spirit sets the agenda. But like last week, this week is not hard to understand, but incredibly difficult to do.

But did you notice that right before Jesus says, love your enemies, did you notice what he says first? He says to you who are listening. It's as though he sharpens his focus and prepares us for this really tough thing that's about to follow.

For three weeks, we're thinking about discipleship. A disciple is one who listens to Jesus. And not so words go in and out and wash over us.

[1 : 20] Let's call that hearing. Hearing will be the temptation in a passage that says, love your enemies and turn the other cheek. Maybe as soon as you heard those words, you've already put this in the too hard box, as though it was an optional extra just for the keen being Christians.

And so whatever comes next is just going to, you know, go in and out and just wash over you. Jesus begins today. He says to you who are listening. Next week, he says, everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a man who built his house, not on the sand, but upon the rock.

And so throughout this sermon today, as we hear Jesus' words, the question will be, are we listening? Are we listening?

Because real disciples listen when Jesus speaks. So let me pray first. Please join me in prayer for something really tough. Father God, please make us not just hearers, but listeners of Jesus' words, especially today.

Would his words not go in and out and wash over us, but deep into us so that we can put them into practice. Amen. Verse 27, love your enemies.

[2 : 45] And it's here like a heading for the whole passage. But what does love look like? And Jesus says, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you.

Pray for those who mistreat you. And perhaps when we hear these words, our inner lawyer, our inner lawyer who fights for our rights, he immediately thinks, well, it can't mean this and it can't mean that.

But these commands are very open-ended. So an enemy could be that neighbor who you're happy to have the big fence between. It could be the colleague who mistreats you and makes your life hell at work.

It could be the church member who can't stand the sight of you and always avoids you. An enemy here is the family member who you don't speak to, maybe because of inheritance issues or because of a fight decades and decades ago.

I reckon an enemy here could even be a husband or wife married on the outside, together in public, but actually enemies for all intents and purposes because of years of abuse or neglect and resent.

[4 : 02] This past week, a few politicians have been sick. Daniel Andrews was in intensive care just to prove that God doesn't show partiality. Greg Hunt, the liberal minister, was also in hospital.

And maybe you see those politicians' sickness as an answer to your prayer. Maybe you see politicians left or right as the enemy.

Maybe you prayed this week that God would finish them off in hospital. But did you pray or would you pray for God to heal them?

For God to do them good? For them to be saved? The ultimate good. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you.

Pray for those who mistreat you. Are we listening? And people might excuse themselves from these verses because love is, it's just so subjective, isn't it?

[5 : 03] What is love? But love, as Jesus describes it, it isn't a superficial thing. It isn't done through gritted teeth. It isn't love so the other person feels guilty about what they have done.

His love is always 100% positive, always caring, always loving to those who are considered enemies. Not hard to understand, is it?

Really hard to apply. And so, baby steps are wise. So, as a first baby step, when faced with an enemy, why not try not reacting as you normally would?

just try the reversal of what you normally do. So, no words, no actions, just don't do anything as a first baby step. And once you've done that the first time and the next time, maybe your next step will be praying for them.

Maybe you won't have the emotional strength to pray out loud. Just pray silently in your heart. If that's too difficult, maybe ask your Bible group or church friend or family member to pray on your behalf for them.

[6 : 20] All the time, ask the Holy Spirit for His help. These are baby steps, but they are steps in the right direction. If you have been praying for your enemy, well done.

Why not ask the Spirit what the next step will be for you and wait for His prompting. Along the way, our inner lawyer will be jumping up and down, objecting that the whole issue was their fault to begin with.

After all, the passage just says for those who mistreat you, for those who hurt you. If that's the case, then maybe you will have to be like Jesus to them.

That is, the one who makes the awkward first move. our inner lawyer will object. How far do you expect my client to go? And I think the next few verses show us how far.

Verse 29. If someone slaps you on the cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you.

[7 : 29] And if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. There's something unrealistic about these verses because no one who has been slapped on the cheek turns the other one and says, give me another serve.

No one who's had their coat stolen chases the thief down the street and says, hey, you forgot my shirt. They are picture language of how far love should go.

Notice in each example how costly love is. Insult me. Slap me. I won't defend myself. For the sake of love.

Take my stuff. I won't demand it back. Love might cost us our dignity or our money or our right to be right. Jesus says sacrifice them.

Love doesn't stop at an inch, does it? It goes the extra mile. And if you're like me, you're already running through the many ways and the many people that this applies to.

[8 : 34] Our minds are quite legalistic. Perhaps we've all got an inner Pharisee. We're already thinking of the terms and conditions, the legal limits and the caveats to what love looks like.

And so the guiding principle, verse 31, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I added the unto bits because this verse is so famous.

It's how I remember it from my childhood. Even non-Christians know this passage. It's called the golden rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

And back in Bible times, the golden rule was the opposite. It was do to others as they do to you. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

That is justice after all. And I reckon that is the golden rule in our city as well. That seems to be how things work in Australia, in Melbourne. Treat people as they treat you.

[9 : 32] But notice how Jesus turns that on its head. Do to others as you would have them do to you. So, think of the enemy who gossips behind your back.

How would you want to be treated if you were the one caught out doing the gossiping? Wouldn't we want to be forgiven and treated graciously? A little bit of mercy, please.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Are we listening? And of course, this passage doesn't forego justice. It doesn't forget about equity.

It's just that the Christian looks for justice at another time and through Jesus on that last day. And so here is a radical example.

This happened to a lady in my extended family. She looked after her elderly parents. So she invited the elderly parents to move in to their home to live.

[10 : 35] And she looked after them for years and years until they died. When the estate was being divided up, siblings from interstate flew in and pounced on the good jewellery and the good furniture and that sort of stuff.

And I reckon that by rights, this lady, for all her years of care, the cost, having her live in the house, the parents live in the house, I reckon by rights, she should have got the first say for the jewellery and the good furniture and that sort of stuff, the real keepsakes.

I reckon she should have at least had a say in the conversation as to how things were divided up. But the brothers from interstate were strong types and they just steamrolled over the whole situation.

and she said that the reason she didn't stand up for her rights was for the sake of love and family peace. That's radical stuff, isn't it?

Here is an everyday example. A member of the 1030 congregation who I meet with to pray pretty regularly, he has a colleague who doesn't like him at all, who always makes his daily job difficult.

[11 : 47] One day they had a fight because the colleague, she was being really horrible to him and unreasonable about this work situation. The next day instead of going into the office and treating her as he was treated and just cold shoulder and all that sort of business, he decided he would walk up to her and be really friendly and happy to her.

And he said she was taken back by how pleasant she was. She was really struck, not expecting him to treat her that way. The guiding rule for what love is and how far love should go, do to others as you would have them do to you.

How would we want to be treated if the roles were averse and we were the guilty party? You see, a love of enemies is not common, but there are many common ways to show it day to day.

And it's easy to think of radical, what ifs, scenarios that might occur once in a blue moon. But there are many common everyday opportunities. It is distinct.

It will be noticed in a city like ours where love has a lower standard. Verse 32, have a look at verse 32. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

[13 : 12] Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid in full. You see, loving, likable people is easy. Doing good to those who are good, that is a piece of cake.

You don't need a sermon about that sort of stuff. But that displays nothing, does it? Jesus says, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

He says, the idea in these verses is about being distinct. And so, in what ways are Christians distinct from everyone else in our culture?

What is the difference between a Christian and a moral middle-class Australian? Is it love? Is it doing good? No. Even atheists.

[14 : 09] There are plenty of lovely atheists out there. The difference is how far Christians are willing to go. See, the moral middle-class person, he loves others, he does good to others, but only if they're loving in return.

See, that's as far as his inner lawyer allows him to go because he only has one life to live. And so, all he can afford is a love of the loving, to treat people as they treat him.

But Christians listen to Jesus, don't we? Do good to those as if you were the one doing bad. Lend your money to those as if you were the one with bad credit and needing a favour.

He says, love your enemies as if you were the enemy. And that will be costly. But Christians have another life to live. We can give this life in love to others, even though it costs us now because we have our real life waiting for us in Jesus.

The difference between Christians and moral middle class Australians is how far we're willing to go for love. We have another life and so we can give this life and that will stand out in a culture like ours.

[15 : 32] Again, we don't have to shoot the lights out every time. Baby steps are wise. Why not begin by not responding how you normally would?

Just as a baby step, but at least it's in the right direction. But as we go through today, all I've done is basically give you do's and don'ts.

Do love and don't hate, all that sort of business. What is the motivation that will enable you to do that? What is the logic that will change how we think about enemies so we can make a good decision?

And the answer is verse 35. But love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Be merciful just as your father is merciful. You see the idea in this passage today is which would you rather? We had one last week and today is another.

[16 : 39] Which would you rather? Be like every other sinner in Australia or be a child of the Most High God? Which would you rather? Because behind all these verses today you can see God's own character.

It's obvious to see. You can tell what he's like. Our first reading he said he was compassionate and gracious slow to anger abounding in love. That's what we learned when he was on top of the mountain with Moses and behind these verses today we can hear our own testimony of the love he showed to us.

Romans 5 it says if while we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his son. You see at Easter on the cross that is where Jesus did verse 27 he loved his enemies it's where he did good to those who hated him it's where he blessed those who cursed him where he prayed for those who mistreated him father father forgive them he said they know not what they do even as he was dying for his enemies for us to do the same it's more than just obeying some do's and don'ts it is bearing the family resemblance you will be children of the most high because he is kind and ungrateful sorry kind to the ungrateful and wicked you see in your family maybe everyone has the same eyes and that's how they know that you're a lampard or a smith maybe it's the nose that gives you away and shows that you're your father's son but for

Christians it's the love of our enemies that bears the family resemblance imagine a Christian this is made up but imagine a Christian who's in the workplace she's teased because she doesn't want to gossip behind the boss's back about the boss with the colleagues and so the colleagues make her life agony and even though it would be better for her if the colleagues all resign that's not going to happen and so she prays for her colleagues she prays for their work performance to go well she even prays that they would come to know Jesus yeah she's got her every in

Jesus how God seemingly seemed to set aside normal rules of justice and the innocent got punished and for us go and do likewise rather than seeing a tense situation think of it as an opportunity to walk in the footsteps of Jesus as a chance to become more like him the family resemblance will be undeniable so verse 35 then your reward will be great and you will be children of the most high because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked be merciful just as your father is merciful so let's pray for God's help to do this really hard thing father God would we bear the family resemblance would we love our enemies the way you did to us the way Jesus does as well and father please help us when we're tempted to think of caveats and legal limits and all these sorts of things father help us to treat people as we would want to be treated to love them as though we were the guilty ones help us to remember what you have done for us the lavish love that you have shown us so that we would go and do likewise help us by your spirit to think of the baby steps that we need to do in

[21 : 19] Jesus name Amen