

Love Your Enemies

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[0 : 00] May God add his blessing to that reading in his holy word, as we see in the title of our sermon, our thoughts this evening, Love Your Enemies, and three points that we're going to progress through as we consider this passage, the love, the love that the Lord Jesus commands us to exercise, that love that's an uncompromising love, no compromise in that love, half-hearted measures in love, an unconquerable love, love that conquers all and is not conquered by the powers of others, and then thirdly, the unworldly love, the love that is so different, the love that we find in the world.

Love Your Enemies. Those of you who were at the service this morning remember our focus was, or part of our focus anyway, was on the distinction between Egypt and Israel.

In other words, between those who reject the Lord, those who will not bow before him, those who will have nothing to do with our Lord and Saviour, and the difference between, as it were, that side, and those who are the Israel of God, those who are his by grace.

And as we saw this morning, the distinction that would be very much evident in the cries of the Egyptians when the pain of death came upon them, when the angel of death visited the land, and the same that Lord passed over the homes of the Israelites through the blood of the Lamb, the details of which we'll look at more closely next Lord's Day morning.

But we recognize the distinction between those who are the Lord's and those who are not. Then when we think the more of that theme of distinction, what difference there is between those of Egypt, as it were, and those of Israel, between the enemies of God and those who are his, then we really have to ask ourselves the question, what evidence is there?

[2 : 17] What's the evidence that someone is a Christian? What points to a person being a believer in Christ, as opposed to somebody who's not?

What does a Christian look like? What does a Christian consist in in his life, in our lifestyle, in how he lives, how she lives her life? What about her words?

What about his deeds? What makes him, what marks him out as being different, as being altogether distinct from an unbeliever? Well, of course, there are many, many things that we can point to.

We can point to the profession of faith that the believer makes, and the Lord Jesus Christ as his saviour, as her saviour. The testimony that the believer gives to the grace of God in his and her life, that grace that saves and saves to the uttermost.

We can point to the practice of the believer who reads God's word and reads that word regularly.

The one who prays to his heavenly father. The one who loves the courts of God's church.

[3 : 29] The one who attends worship, who attends that worship regularly. One who gives of himself or herself to the work of the church.

Even helping and using the gifts that God has given him or curving the extension of God's kingdom. All these things truly do add up to a life that's transformed and changed.

But look at what Jesus says here in one aspect of what makes a believer different. What identifies a believer, a believer in Christ.

What Jesus saying that indicates the difference that the believer shows in being a Christian. Look at what Jesus says in his word.

It's this, well, what he says, it speaks of an extraordinary, a self-denying aspect of a life that reflects the Lord Jesus.

[4 : 27] And that person, as Jesus says, loves his enemies, loves her enemies. It's that life-giving standard, that God-centered standard that shows love, that shows self-giving love, love to others.

Others, irrespective of who these others are. It's that following Jesus, Jesus himself loved his enemies. Of course, it's seen supremely on the cross where Jesus cried out, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they're doing.

Of course, that love that the Lord Jesus showed to me and to you who know him as Savior, when we were once enemies, enemies of Christ. Jesus, pouring his love out to once enemies who are now his friends because of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

So, yes, being a Christian involved means that Jesus is Lord. He's your Lord, your Savior, the one true Savior. The one whom you follow, the one whom you follow in denying yourself and taking up your cross and following Jesus.

Following Jesus to the extent you love your enemies. You love those who, yes, hate you for the gospel. Hate you because you're a Christian.

[5 : 50] Who despise you because you follow the one Savior, the Lord Jesus. The one whom you profess and testify to. It's that revolutionary spirit, that heart that reflects the heart of the Lord Jesus.

It's that life, that lifestyle, that evidence of being a Christian, loving your enemies, that Jesus tells, identifies a person who's in the kingdom of God.

And so let's hear again this marvelous truth, this truth that Jesus proclaims here as he's preaching about the difference that being in him makes to a person.

That difference that's seen in the most extraordinary of commands that Jesus gives. Love your enemies. That love that we said, first of all, is an uncompromising love.

An uncompromising love. As Jesus is teaching his disciples, as he's proclaiming this truth before them, you know, you can just imagine the reaction, just see the reaction as they're listening and listening in silence as Jesus is telling them this, that are giving them this wonderful command.

[7 : 12] I mean, they've already heard Jesus tell of the remarkable things that God's people are blessed with, even though God's people are poor and hungry and weeping and hated and insulted and excluded and rejected, all on account of Jesus.

I mean, they've already heard of the contrast that Jesus tells between those who are blessed as opposed to those who are self-satisfied, those who see no need for Jesus in their lives.

Now the disciples hear again the extraordinary teaching that Jesus gives. This is teaching from the Savior, our Lord and Savior.

Love your enemies. And there's no compromise here. There's no indication of any kind of half-hearted love or half-hearted acceptance.

There's no teaching here that suggests that somehow we ignore those who hate the Christian. No, Jesus is telling of an uncompromising love of the believer.

[8 : 26] Jesus is saying, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Look at the commands.

Look at how Jesus words this command here. Look at the verbs, if you like, that Jesus uses here. Love. Do good. Bless.

Pray. All encapsulated in this command to love your enemies. This is Jesus teaching. This is teaching by the authority of our Savior himself.

In other words, Jesus is commanding us. He's commanding those who follow him to do something that's so contrary to our own natures.

He's giving this command that covers what we are to do to show that truly we are believers. It's not an option. It's a command.

[9 : 22] It's a command that none of us are to ignore. None of us are to somehow put to one side. This is a command. And it's not a take it or leave it command.

It's not an option. This is a command from the Lord Jesus. An uncompromising command that speaks of an uncompromising love. There's this compulsion to love your enemies.

To do good to those who hate you. To bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. As we said, it's a command. It's an order. And yes, in many ways, by our own sinful natures, these are commands that we recoil from.

This is a revolutionary attitude of heart and practice to love our enemies. Because loving enemies is something that's so unnatural to ourselves, so unnatural to the human condition, to love our enemies.

The very word enemy suggests those who are opposed to others, those who hate, those who want to see us suffer and be defeated.

[10:38] Enemy suggests, and certainly enemies of the Christians suggest, those who not just hate ourselves, but hate our Saviour. Those who want to gain the upper hand, if you like.

Those who want to reveal a so-called self-derived power. Power against the church. Power against the Christian. Power over the gospel.

Power against the Christian.

That natural urge to retaliate and to seek revenge. Jesus is saying, don't do the devil's work. Don't do the work that's been done against you.

Don't retaliate. Don't reciprocate that evil. What would do to others? What would have them do to you? Have your enemies as your friends.

[11:59] Show friendship. Show in your heart that you want them to change. That you want those who hate you to love the Saviour whom you love, who first loved you.

Show that love of the Lord Jesus. That love that truly desires their conversion. Show and bless. But show that in your heart you want what truly is best for them.

And that best being to know Jesus as their Saviour, their Lord. They who so curse the Saviour, curse the Lord Jesus. Show in your heart.

Show by your practice. Show by your love to them. You want them to know the one who first loved you. But then questions are asked.

Who are the enemies that Jesus is referring to here? Who are those that we are to give such uncompromising love to? Well, to answer that question, we really have to look at what Jesus was saying there in the first century AD.

[13:04] I mean, who were the enemies of the disciples? Who were the enemies of Jesus then? And bring that even 21 centuries beyond, 20 to 21st centuries.

How do we apply what Jesus was saying then to our situation now? Well, notice, first of all, that Jesus speaks of enemies. Not just enemy, but enemies.

So we have to consider a number of enemies that were opposed to the Lord Jesus and those who were his even in that first century. Of course, we think of those who were the enemies of Jesus, the Pharisees, the self-righteous, the legalists, those so-called arbiters of moral uprightness, those who condemned Jesus and his disciples for what they considered were breaches of the law, breaches of the commandments, those who judged the disciples, those who exercised that legalistic judgment, so much so that they cursed Jesus and cursed the disciples for breaking the minutiae of how they perceived the law to be practiced.

And these enemies are still against the church today. That legalistic mindset that, well, that prefers nothing better than to condemn and condemn and condemn again, those who profess the name of the Lord Jesus, who seek to live by grace and by faith.

Yes, the legalistic enemy of the church, the enemy of Christ. Those who would curse a believer for some perceived even transgression of the law, rather than showing forgiveness to an individual.

[14:58] So what's the Christ-honouring response to that kind of legalistic mindset? Well, it has to be to love. Love that returns cursing with blessing.

And that sense of blessing. Blessing really means, as we said earlier, wanting the best for that person. Love that returns judging with forgiveness.

Maybe you've experienced that kind of legalism in your life as a Christian. Maybe your reaction is, maybe for so many of us, just to lash out and to react, to react with, well, with hostility.

But that's not what Jesus is telling us here. That's not what Jesus is teaching. Because remember how Jesus responded to the legalistic mindset of his day, just as Isaiah prophesied of Jesus.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before her shearers as silent. So he did not open his mouth.

[16:09] So there are, we might say, the enemies of the true believer, the legalistic enemies. But then we might say there are the political enemies. Think of the time that Jesus was on earth there with his disciples, the Roman occupying forces.

You see, to every Jew in Israel at that time, well, the Romans were the enemies. They were the conquerors. They were the ones who had conquered that part of the world and brought that part of the world into the Roman Empire.

And Romans who even regarded Caesar as divine. So any sort of even suggestion of loving these Romans would be considered an affront to God and a betrayal, a betrayal of the nation of Israel.

It would have been seen as an affront to the religion of the time. Love your enemies. Love those who are oppressing you. Love those who've conquered you, your political enemies.

Jesus is saying, love those who are unlovely. Love those who are persecuting you. Love those who oppress you. Love those who seek to suppress your freedom in Christ.

[17 : 28] Now we certainly don't have the horror of even the many have today occupying forces in our land and, you know, political enemies in that sense. There still are the oppressors of the faith.

We still have those even in political authority who seek to damage, if not destroy, our faith or seek to destroy the faith of the believer.

We have those in power who seek to pass legislation that will call good evil and evil good. There are those who are oppressing believers who are seeking to influence even the way that we worship God.

what's our reaction to those even in power, even in our parliaments, north and south, who seek to oppress the church.

It has to be love. It has to be love. We're certainly not meant to say, well, we accept what's happening, but no, we still are to love those who persecute the church, whether by major persecution or we might say lesser persecution, but still persecution.

[18 : 38] But we are to love them, pray for them, to do good to them, bless them. Pray for those who have the rule over us.

Pray for their conversion. Pray that they'll have that change of hearts. Pray that they'll seek to do what might seem humanly speaking impossible. Pray that they will recognize in our Lord and Savior the one true Lord, that He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

Now, of course, there are many, many examples that we could use that tell of even that kind of love to those who oppress and persecute the church, that love that transcends ordinary love, that love that's, well, not sourced in ourselves, but loving the Savior.

After the Second World War, emotions, some of you of course know this, but emotions were still very, very raw, certainly from those who had experienced firsthand the horrors and afflictions of Nazi rule, of Nazi dominance, and so much of, certainly in so much of Europe, and particularly those who had experienced such horrors, even that the German nation itself was, it was branded collectively as, those who were to be shunned and ignored and loathed as a people, and certainly that loathing none more so than those who'd taken part in these crimes against humanity.

And we well have used this example before, but I'll use it again, those of you who remember the, or know of Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch woman, the very, very brave and courageous woman from Harlem in the Netherlands, Corrie ten Boom, who herself had been sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp, the camp north of Berlin, where female prisoners of war were kept.

[20 : 42] Her own sister Betsy had died in that prisoner of war camp. And anyway, Corrie ten Boom tells of a time some years after the war when she was speaking at a meeting in Munich.

And Corrie ten Boom tells of a time when in that, or after that meeting, that she noticed somebody whom she recognised. It was an SS guard, an SS guard who had been a guard at that camp in Ravensbrück.

And she'd been telling of the need to forgive and to love the enemies of the Lord's people. And anyway, this man came up to her and he stretched out his hand and he commended her for what she'd said about loving enemies, about forgiveness.

This man who it seems had been converted saying to her how grateful he was for your message, Caroline, to think that as you say, he's washed my sins away.

And as he stretched out his hand, Corrie ten Boom found it so difficult to stretch out her hand in Christian love towards that man. and she recognised in her heart that there was sin in her own heart and at that point failure to show love to the one who once had been her enemy.

[22 : 00] But she prayed and she asked God for that God would send to her and give to her that love to that individual. And she did this as she writes in her book.

I discovered that it's not in her own forgiveness any more than her own goodness that the world's healing hinges. But in his, when he tells us to love our enemies, he gives along with the command the love itself.

He tells us to love our enemies, he gives along with the command the love itself, that love that's sourced in God, the God of love. You see, as you follow the Lord Jesus, as you seek to live for him, he gives you that power, that enabling to love your enemies.

Now, in and of myself, in and of yourself, none of us can show that love. It's the love of the Lord Jesus that is gifted to you to love.

And think of the love that Jesus showed you when he conquered your rebellious spirit, my rebellious nature, when he gave you and gave me that new heart.

[23 : 13] That new heart to love with the love of the Lord Jesus. Because when you love your enemy, you're exercising a love that speaks of an incomparable love, an uncompromising love, an unworldly love.

That love that's conquered your rebellion against God. That love that's the love of the Lord Jesus, that love that conquered Satan, that love that set you free to love your enemy and to do good to those who hate you.

And none of us, you can't exercise that love in your own strength. But as Paul tells us in Philippians, that you can do all things to him who strengthens you.

You see, that uncompromising love, it isn't satisfied in anything less than giving of yourself, giving of yourself wholly and fully for another, irrespective of who that other person is, irrespective of the hatred that's been shown towards you and against you.

Even your strong, even the person who, as it were, hates you the most for your faith in the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus tells us, love your enemy, do unto others what you'd have them do to you.

[24 : 36] Love, show that love, even the love of the Lord Jesus, that uncompromising love. But then more fully, that love that's an unconquerable love.

See, those who persecute believers, those who hate the Lord's people, those who ill-treat those who love the Lord Jesus, what's the basis of that hatred?

It's an assumption of power. It's an assumption of a self-giving power, if you like, that seeks to hurt and abuse from a position of so-called power.

The amazing truth is this. It's those who love their enemies, those who exercise Christ's love, it's those who, as it were, are over those who hate them.

It's you who love your enemy. It's you who are the conqueror. It's you who have been given that true power, the power of Christ's love. It's that power that's greater than the power of the evil one himself.

[25 : 45] You who truly and sincerely do love your enemy, you're that true conqueror. You're not conquered. You're not suppressed by those who hate you for your faith in the Lord Jesus.

no, when you truly show that love, that love of the Lord Jesus, you're showing that that love is an unconquerable love, that love that hasn't defeated you, that love that cannot be defeated because the Lord Jesus, in his love, defeated sin and Satan, yes, and death itself.

And so we do pray for our enemies, pray for those who hate the Lord's people and the Lord's church. And you think when you are praying for those who hate you, and I pray that that will happen in your life.

Pray for those who hate the Lord's people, hate the Lord's church, those who are in positions of authority, who seek to undermine the gospel, pray for them. And bring them before the throne of grace.

Ask God to do for them what they can't do for themselves. Yes, pray for the enemies of the church or Christ. In many ways, that's another indication of where your heart truly is.

[27 : 04] You are showing love to those who hate you, who hate you, who hate the church, who hate the Lord, who hate the gospel. You're not defeated. You show that love for others and you're praying for others.

And yes, yes, the enemy may well hurt and abuse and cause pain, but you'll not be defeated. Because you have in your heart that love that conquers all.

And yes, it may well be difficult to put into practice, but then think of the Lord Jesus and his love for sinners, and his conquering love. Satan couldn't conquer Jesus.

Satan tried to tempt Jesus, as we saw some weeks ago, that temptation in the desert, these temptations. Jesus wasn't conquered by the evil one there in the desert. And Jesus showed that unconquerable love there on the cross when, as we said, he conquered sin, conquered Satan, and then from the grave three days later, conquering death itself.

And of course, Jesus has conquered you, he's conquered me. Even as you show that you are conquered in that love that conquers all, you're submitting to him.

[28 : 23] Don't give in to the hatred of others. Yes, even in your heart, seek to love others, to win others for Christ. Show that unconquerable love of the Lord Jesus in loving others.

But then thirdly, as we say, that love that Jesus commands us to show and to give is an unworldly love, an unworldly love. So we read there in the verse that we started in the passage.

Yes, of course, we know that there is such a thing as love in the world, a person is a Christian or not a Christian. There's that love for those who love in return, doing good to others.

There is that common grace that God gives to the world at large. when there are elements of love one to another. That love that Jesus is teaching the disciples, teaching you and me to show in loving your enemies, it's a love that's something that's very, very different to the world, that's something that's unworldly.

It's a love that we would say is godly love, because the source of that love is God himself. As Jesus said there in that passage, even turning the cheek, turning the cheek to another who struck you, that's an unworldly response, because we live in a world that seeks revenge and retaliation.

[29 : 56] It's all over. We see it every day. We see it in our news. We see it in our media, everywhere. Retaliation, contempt, revenge, giving to others with no expectation return.

But the person who's in Christ, you who are in Christ, I show that you are in Christ by being like Christ. Well, as Jesus said, to be, verse 35, to be sons of the Most High, to be merciful, just as our Heavenly Father is merciful.

And so, yes, be in the world, absolutely. we've been placed in the world, but not to be off the world. Yes, to engage with the world, but not in an unworldly way, but go in a way, live in a way and show love in a way that goes beyond the expectations of what the world sees as good.

Well, do the most extraordinary thing, love your enemies. Love those who don't love you. Do good to those who don't want good, good in yourself.

Give out even the very resources that God has given you and want nothing back in return. It's an ensuring act of love to those who hate you, who hate the church, who hate the gospel.

[31 : 23] Do good, Jesus says. Don't just hold back. Jesus says, do good. Perform acts of righteousness. Do good. Now, that's an unworldly love that Jesus is telling us to do, commanding us to do.

It's a love that in many respects, so many in the world will see us as weakness. But that love that loves and does good and blesses and prays for others, it's a love that mirrors the greatest love of all, the love of the Lord Jesus for sinners.

And the amazing thing is this, as Jesus says, as Jesus says, of those who love their enemies, he says, your reward will be great. Earlier in the sermon, in a previous section before the one we read this evening, verse 23, Jesus had spoken of those who are blessed when they're hated for following him.

And he said then that your reward will be great in heaven. Now, Jesus is repeating these words, he's repeating that promise of reward for those who are in him, who show that uncompromising, unconquerable, unworldly love.

He says a great reward is for you who show that love. Of course, you don't love your enemies with the expectation of receiving reward.

[32 : 52] Jesus is promising a great reward for those who follow him, who show that selfless love, even love for our enemies. What is that reward? Well, of course, we can look at that reward in many, many levels.

There's the reward of knowing the Lord Jesus, the reward of being in him, the reward of knowing the love of the Lord Jesus towards you. And of course, there's the great reward of heaven itself, the promise of heaven, the promise of eternal life in heaven itself.

There's that inheritance that's beyond price. There's that reward that is promised to the believer, of being with him in glory, sharing in all the glory of heaven itself, with seeing him, knowing that eternal relationship that you are and are in through the Lord Jesus.

Even think of the heavenly reward of the believer, because in heaven, there are no enemies. in heaven, there is no more grief, no more pain, no more tears, no more rejection, no more hatred of others, from others, of that reward in itself.

So, yes, seek even the more to live a life of love, that life that reveals who you are in Christ. Yes, show that you're a Christian, show who's you are, show it by whom you love.

[34 : 28] Yes, we love one another, we are to love one another, and that is truly important in the life of the believer, the life of the church, but love, love your enemies, show that love, that love that shows that you truly do reflect the one gave to you and has given to you, that love, that undeserved love, the love of the Lord Jesus, us, the love for sinners, such as myself, and such as yourself.

And so may you truly know that love that comes from the Saviour, and show that love even towards others, as you seek to honour and glorify your Lord and Saviour.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, you who have shown us your way, and may we truly come before you with that prayer.

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths, even the paths of love, love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse, and Lord, to do good, to do good to others, even others who would not do good to us.

Lord, give us that strength, give us that purpose, give us that will to do your will, and to delight so to do. And hear us, Lord, as we continue before you now, and we pray these things in Jesus' name.

[36 : 01] Amen.