

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Luke 6:27-42

Key Verse: 27, "But to you who are listening I say: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.'"

Today we continue part 2 of a 3-part study of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. Last week, in the first part of the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus taught about people for whom blessings and woes are destined. Blessings are for those who love and follow Jesus as of first priority. They make sacrifices and suffer in this world in order to seek God, his kingdom and his righteousness. In contrast, woes are destined for those whose lifestyle is to live comfortably for the here and now, with maximum riches and pleasures, and minimum suffering and sacrifice. So what are you living for? This week I was glad to fix my car trunk at a cost of only \$30 for an online part and about 1 hour of my time. For me, that was fun and fulfilling to fix something! Even so, I know in my spirit that fixing things for more convenience and comfort is not my true purpose of life. In my life, I have wasted too many hours in doing things like playing video games, watching TV, and fixing up my Chevy pickup. Where is that Chevy pickup now? In some junkyard. Everything in this world eventually perishes, spoils and fades away some day, including our human achievements. It has been said that only 2 things are of eternal worth: God's kingdom and the souls of people. So how are we investing in God's kingdom and the souls of people? I read an article this week about Near Death Experiences of people who had scary experiences while they were clinically dead. Many of them included visions of fire, darkness, and demons. Others expressed vast emptiness, loneliness and regret for how they had lived their lives. Fortunate for them, they came back to life, and had a chance to live again with a meaningful purpose to love and serve others, rather than amassing their own worldly wealth and ending up in eternity separated from God. That's a brief review of last week's first part of the Sermon on the Plain.

Today, in part 2 of the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus teaches us saying, "Love your enemies," and, "Do not judge." These 2 teachings are related. For one thing, they are exact opposites of what we do naturally. Naturally, we hate enemies and we judge others. So how can we live supernaturally? Let's listen to Jesus and think about why and how we must do so.

I. Love your enemies (27-36)

In the first part of the sermon, Jesus directed his teaching to his disciples. He called them blessed. Actually, they were hated and criticized "because of the Son of Man" (22). In contrast, those living comfortable lives were the wealthy and powerful. The wealthy and powerful did not respond well to Jesus, since they had too much to lose to live a life of humble repentance, trust in God, and love for others. Among the rich and powerful who accepted Jesus' words was Levi the tax collector. He repented and became Jesus' disciple.

At this point in his teaching, Jesus turned his attention to all those who were listening, which included not only his disciples but also crowds of people who had come to hear him, to be healed

of diseases or freed from demons. Of course, some came just out of curiosity or even to critique Jesus' words and actions.

Look at verses 27-30. "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one 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, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back."

What are your thoughts when you hear these words of Jesus? Let me guess. Maybe you think: "Whoa Jesus! That's much easier said than done!" Or, perhaps you think, "Wait a minute! Won't being nice and loving to enemies actually be enabling an evil person to do more evil? So how could that be good? Isn't it better to call the police and put your enemies in jail, behind bars?"

Before you disagree or argue with Jesus, let's consider his teaching. He is after all the greatest Teacher the world has ever had. So he deserves that we consider carefully what he is saying here. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

What is your honest reaction? No way! That's not how I respond in those circumstances! True. And Jesus knows that. He is telling us to do things which are quite contrary to our normal, usual reaction. Let's break it down some. "Love your enemies." Who are our enemies? Who were Jesus' enemies or enemies of his listeners? Obviously, the Romans were enemies to the Jews as a foreign, occupying force or empire, who spoke a different language and had a different way of life, culture and religion. The Romans dressed differently, talked differently, ate different foods, and had different ideals, traditions and beliefs. How about closer to home? Who were their enemies? The Samaritans were also enemies of the Jews for similar reasons already mentioned regarding the Romans: food, religion, culture, etc. So enemies could refer to those whose way of life is different than my own and could pose a threat to my desired way of life or to my freedom to live my life the way that I want to. Of course, the immediate enemies of Jesus were the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Let's see how Jesus describes one's enemies. Jesus said that enemies are those who: hate you, curse you, mistreat you, slap you on the cheek, and take your coat or something that belongs to you. To be sure, these things do happen between people due to differences in culture, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Hatred and animosity can also happen due to differences or disparities in education, social status, occupation, appearance, hygiene, lifestyle, habits, etc. But enemies can come even in the same household due to differences. People can and do hate, curse, mistreat, abuse or steal from people within the same family or home. Why?

Because of sin in the human heart. Last night I was listening to something in preparation for this message. When my wife suddenly came in to the room and interrupted me, I raised my voice in anger, which startled her. I felt bad about that. So, later I apologized. In some households, family members yell at each other. Why? Largely because of unmet expectations. Sadly, this happens in some Christian homes. If our homes are not places of peace, refuge and blessing, we will not contribute to our church as a place of peace, refuge and blessing.

There's a joke about two Christian brothers who were fighting. Someone said to them, "Why are you fighting? You are Christian brothers. The Bible says, "Love your enemies," to which they replied, "We're not enemies! We're brothers. So we can fight." Of course, they were ignoring Jesus' teaching to also "love one another."

Sin is at the root of hatred, cursing and abuse. Sins like pride, laziness, lust, jealousy, and misplaced hopes, break relationships with people. These things are contrary to the Spirit of God. They are the way of the world. Apostle John said not to love the world, which he defined as 3 things—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1Jn 2:16). He wrote, "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1Jn 2:17).

Two Buddhists wrote a book titled, "Love Your Enemies: How to Break the Anger Habit & Be a Whole Lot Happier." In their book they mention 4 types of enemies: (1) the enemy outside us, such as people who hate or anger you, (2) the enemy within us, such as fear, anger or hatred, (3) the secret enemy of self-centeredness, which isolates us from other people, and (4) the super-secret enemy, which is deep-seated self-loathing that prevents inner freedom and happiness.

Catholic, political activist Arthur Brooks wrote another book titled, "Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt." His book aims to address how political party enemies like Republicans and Democrats can respectfully disagree as human beings without vilifying each other as the evil party.

As followers of Jesus, we are commanded, that though we are hated, cursed, mistreated, slapped, or taken from, we must do good, bless, pray, and give more, even allowing them to slap us again, rather than fighting back. Jesus summarizes these actions in what has been called the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (31). This is contrary to our natural response or feeling which says, "Treat others exactly how they treat you. If they hurt you, hurt them back." Why do we feel the strong need to repay others in like manner who have wronged us? One reason is that we all have a strong sense of justice, of right and wrong. Wrongs must be punished. Doing right should be rewarded or commended.

But Jesus appeals not to the justice but to the ideal truth in each person's conscience. People know inherently what is good and right. People know it is not good to hate, to curse, to mistreat, to slap or to take from others. Even children learn this quickly from a young age. So, we should treat others the way that we want to be treated. Another reason we do not respond in like manner is to shock or surprise the offender. When people attack, they expect a response of either anger or fear (fight or run). It is quite a surprise when an offender is responded to in kindness, love and humility. And it makes them feel ashamed. Apostle Peter wrote that Christians are to suffer to do good, "keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1Pe 3:16).

Jesus had more to say about loving enemies. Look at verses 32-34. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? 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." It's easy and natural to be kind to those who are kind to us. Even criminals do that. Christians are to do above and beyond what is normal, easy and natural to do.

Then how can we just do it? We can learn from Simon Peter. After unsuccessful fishing all night, Jesus told Simon Peter to go fishing again. It didn't make good sense to Peter but he said to Jesus, "because you say so...I will do it." Even if we don't feel like it, even if it doesn't feel right, because Jesus said so, we must do it. We call this obedience. Children learn to obey what their parents say, not because they feel like it or they want to do something, but because their parents asked them, or told them, to do it: house chores, homework, say your sorry. As followers of Jesus he tells us: "Love your enemies. Bless them, Pray for them. Do to them exactly what you wish they would do to you."

Jesus repeats the command and gives a reason for it: "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" (35-36).

The reason to love our enemies, to be kind to ungrateful, wicked people is because that is exactly what God does all the time to sinners. God is merciful, kind, patient and full of grace toward sinners, not treating us as our sins deserve. When we treat others like that, we are being just like God. We are living as children of God.

Jesus wasn't just the Greatest Teacher. He was also the Greatest Practitioner—the Greatest Doer of what he taught. Even from the cross Jesus prayed for his killers, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). If Jesus prayed for even his killers with amazing grace, if he wished them well and not harm, if he has forgiven us all our ungratefulness and wickedness, then we are obligated to pray for those who hurt us or curse us, by showing love and mercy in Jesus' name. May we do so by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Do not judge (37-42)

Jesus continued, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (37-38).

Along with hating enemies, it is quite natural to judge people who have hurt us or who have done some wrong that we have experienced or observed. In saying "Do not judge," Jesus is not saying we should abolish the judicial court system. Jesus is saying we should not pass personal judgment on people, calling them "idiot" or "fool." We should not wish ill upon people. We should never wish that someone would be condemned to hell, which is eternal separation from God. Why must we not judge others? For one reason, we are not God. We don't know or see all the facts, and we don't know the motives of peoples' hearts. But God knows and sees all. Only God is qualified to make a true and right judgment of people's intentions.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." God is very fair. The way we have treated others is exactly how we will be treated in the end by others and by God. Our problem is that we tend to be very lenient toward ourselves, while being very strict toward others.

If we recognize that we are the same sinner as others, we can be merciful and forgiving. If we think we are better than others, we are unwilling to forgive others their sins. When we forgive, we will be forgiven. When we give, it will be given to us.

Jesus also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher” (39-40). It would be a bit foolish to appoint a blind guide to lead other blind people on an unfamiliar trail. Both will stumble. A seeing person is a proper guide to the blind. Likewise, a student does not teach the class. But students who learn well and study a lot become qualified to teach. Our goal is not to be better than others or even to be the best version of yourself that you can be. Our goal is to be more and more like our Teacher, Jesus.

Let’s go back to that idea of being lenient on ourselves, but harsh or strict toward others. We must not judge others because we are not God. Also, we must not judge others because we too are sinners. Jesus addresses this idea saying, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (41-42). Here, Jesus is speaking with hyperbole (or exaggeration) and humor. It’s funny to picture a person with a plank or a log sticking out of their eye. Such a person should go to the Hospital Emergency Room!

Figuratively speaking, such a person doesn’t see their own faults, even though they think they can easily see others’ flaws. Jesus is saying to us, “Hypocrite! First solve your own problem, then you can help someone else with their problem! You have to see clearly yourself, then you can help someone else to see clearly.”

So how can we remove the obstacles from our own eyes? Through repentance. There are two ways to read the Bible. One way is to find ammunition against others, to point out all their errors and faults, and then blast them with the truth. The other way to read the Bible is to see how we ourselves fall short before God’s holy standard and to humbly repent of our own sins. In this way, the Bible is like a mirror to show us our own faults that need fixing and healing.

Bart Millard hated his father. His father told him that he would never amount to anything in his life. But God changed his father, so much so, that he told Bart to pursue his dream of singing. Bart saw God transform his father from the man he hated into the man he wanted to become. Bart’s father passed away from illness. Bart wrote a song about the hope to see Jesus and his father again in heaven. The song was called, “I Can Only Imagine” and it propelled Bart’s Christian band MercyMe into national fame.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch clockmaker’s daughter. Her family was imprisoned by German Nazis for hiding Jews in their home to protect them from Nazi persecution. Corrie hated the German Nazis. But she prayed, “Lord, take this hate out of my heart and put your love in its place.” Later, she was released from prison and became a Christian speaker. At one of her speeches she saw a former prison guard at her meeting. The man came to her afterwards, impressed by her message of forgiveness, and asked if she could forgive even him. For a moment she

hesitated. But when she shook his hand to forgive him and said, "I already have," she felt the love of God flooding her heart.

Do you have an enemy who hurt you who is difficult to love? Are you holding a grudge? Maybe it's a boss or a coworker or a relative. Jesus commands us to love our enemies, bless them and pray for them. We cannot do so by our natural feeling. We can only do so by faith and obedience and the grace of Jesus Christ.

Today we heard Jesus' challenging teachings: "Love your enemies, bless them, pray for them, do good to them," and, "Do not judge; forgive; first take the plank out of your own eye." We are sinners who very easily hate and judge, just like people who don't care about God and the Bible. Jesus calls us to live as children of God and to learn as good students of the greatest Teacher in human history. May we grow, by the grace and mercy of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit, as children of God and good disciples of our Lord and Teacher, Jesus Christ.