

"Am I Really Supposed to Love My Enemies?" Luke 6:27-6:36

This morning we're going to examine the question "Am I Really Supposed to Love My Enemies?" The answer to the question is YES. We really are supposed to love our enemies.

I don't know about you but sometimes that seems almost impossible to me. I know it sounds really spiritual but how in the world can you love someone who doesn't love you?

How in the world can you love someone who wants to do you harm and tear you down? It's much easier for me to love people who already love me.

I have no trouble at all loving Penny. We got married because we love each other. We enjoy being with one another. She is genuinely interested in who I am as a person and, believe it or not, after almost 27 years of marriage I still want to impress her because what she thinks about me is important.

I don't have any trouble loving my children. They're a part of who I am. There may be times when we all get on each others nerves. There are times when we have arguments and fight. But at the end of the day we still love each other.

But Jesus comes along and tosses in this monkey wrench by saying that not only are we to love those who love us but we're even to love those who don't love us! Many of us read that and think, "Are you kidding me?"

Joke: Late one summer evening a weary truck driver pulled his rig into an all-night truck stop. The waitress had just served him when three tough looking, leather jacketed motorcyclists - of the Hell's Angels type - decided to give him a hard time. Not only did they verbally abuse him, one grabbed the hamburger off his plate, another took a handful of his French-fries, and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it.

How would you respond?

Well, this trucker did not respond as one might expect. Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his check, walked to the front of the room, put the check and his money on the cash register, and went out the door.

The waitress followed him to put the money in the till and stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night.

When she returned, one of the bikers said to her, "Well, he's not much of a man, is he?" She replied, "I don't know about that, but he sure ain't much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles on his way out of the parking lot."

That sounds like justice, doesn't it? When someone wrongs us our first instinct is to get them back! Our first instinct is to make them hurt as much as they hurt us.

That is the world's answer to being wronged. But Jesus gives His followers a different response they're to have. He tells us we're to love our enemies.

Today in our text we're going to see Jesus sharing with His followers how they're to respond to those who are their enemies.

Now some of you might think, "I don't have to worry about this because I don't have any enemies." Just to be truthful, if you don't have any now you're going to have some pretty soon.

It's one of the unfortunate things in life that there are some people who are never, ever going to like you no matter what you do.

So the question becomes "How are you going to respond to people like that?" Jesus answers that question for us today.

Lets' read Luke 6:27-6:36

27 "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.'

Let's pray:

Once again this passage is known as the Sermon on the Plain, which is recognized as probably the greatest sermon ever preached. And it's in this section where Jesus lays out the foundational truths for Christianity. And one of the foundational truths of the Christian faith is that we are to love our enemies.

I'm going to be honest with you. That's a bizarre and hard teaching. So the question we're going to answer is "How am I to respond to my enemies?"

Jesus shares with us 3 responses we're to have towards our enemies.

The 1st response you're to have toward your enemies is

DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU verse 27

'But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.'

I don't think it's too hard to imagine this was a teaching that was totally foreign to the society of this day. It's even foreign to our society as well. Even the religious leaders were confused by this teaching of Jesus.

The rabbis were teaching at this time, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." Makes sense to me. My guess is most of us would be pretty good at following this law.

But you know what? It doesn't take any supernatural power to do that. Jesus said in v. 32 *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them."*

When Jesus calls us to love those who hate us, He's calling for us to do something that's totally contrary to our human nature. Human nature tells us to get revenge! Human nature tells us when someone messes with us we're going to lay the hammer down on them.

We're to run over their motorcycles right?

The thought is if we get back at them they'll know not to mess with us anymore. Plus we think that revenge is sweet; that it's going to make us feel better. But guess what. Hatred is a horrible tool that literally destroys us!

Hatred destroys us physically. Scientific studies have been done to show the damage hatred does. Anger causes your blood pressure and breathing rate to increase which causes a strain on your heart making you more susceptible to heart attacks and stroke. It also can trigger headaches and lead to abusive behavior. It can break down your immune system and cause you to be susceptible to various diseases.

Hatred also can destroy you emotionally. It wears you out and makes your judgment less effective leading to bad decision making. Often times the result of hatred is outbursts that can cause us to be embarrassed. This can lead to feelings of guilt and depression. Another side effect of always being angry and having intense hatred is not many people will enjoy being around you.

Of course, hatred destroys you spiritually. We're told throughout the Bible that the essence of God is love. And if we are harboring hatred in our hearts then we're living contrary to God's command to love each other. The result of that is a disconnect from God.

Psalm 66: 18 says, *"If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."*

I imagine there are probably some of us who feel disconnected from God, who feels distant from God because we're harboring things in our lives that aren't supposed to be there.

Have you ever noticed when you're angry at someone it becomes the focus of your life? It doesn't matter what's going on around you, your thoughts and focus are totally upon the person who's wronged you and you become trapped in that hatred to where it's hard to function properly as a person and as a follower of God.

So how can we gain freedom from being imprisoned by anger? Jesus said it's by doing good to those who hate you. One thing we all have control over is how we're going to respond.

If you make the choice to respond to those who hate you, to those who are angry at you by doing good to them, you're going to diffuse a tense situation.

It will totally confuse the one who hates you because they're expecting you to respond in anger. It will also diffuse some of the anger they have toward you. It's really hard for someone to continue to hate you when you do them good. Kindness and love change people.

Romans 2:4

'The goodness of God leads to repentance.'

In practice, here's what this might mean for you: mowing the lawn of a hateful neighbor; volunteering to fill in for the mean-spirited co-worker who drives you nuts; or being helpful and kind to an ex-spouse. It may mean providing for a parent who was mean to you as you were growing up. But this is what it means to do good to those who hate you.

If you do these things you'll be surprised by the freedom you feel from not being tied down to the anger you have towards those who've been mean to you. You may even be surprised by the impact you have on the life of your enemy.

President Abraham Lincoln said he destroyed his enemies by loving them. You know: kill them with kindness. How many enemies have you destroyed like that?

So the first response you're to have toward your enemies is do good to those who hate you. The second response you're to have toward your enemies is

BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU verse 28

'bless those who curse you.'

We've all heard the phrase *"Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me."* I'm here to tell you today that is an absolute lie. There aren't too many things that carry more power in life than the way we communicate with one another.

The Bible tells us over and over again the great power that's in our speech. Unfortunately, it's so much easier for us to use our speech in a negative way than a positive way. It's so much easier to lash out at people than it is to use our speech to build them up.

But when we choose to use our speech to lash out at people who've harmed us or hurt our feelings, all we're doing is throwing gas on a fire. All we're doing is rubbing salt in a wound.

We all know what happens when you put salt in a cut! It stings! It hurts! It typically causes a bad reaction! That's one reason Jesus tells us that one of the best ways to respond to our enemies is by blessing them! Kind speech has a way of working as a salve to heal wounds in people's lives.

Proverbs 12:18 *"Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."*

Can you think of an example in your life when someone said something to you that brought encouragement to you; that brought hope to you?

Some of you may have experienced the wonderful joy of making a mistake that you knew would cause your spouse to be angry with you. But instead of responding in anger they came up to you and said, "I love you." Isn't it great when something like that happens? It totally changes your mood. It causes you to put down your defense mechanism and just relax!

As a matter of fact a kind word, a word of encouragement, can actually remove the anger a person has towards you.

Proverbs 15:1

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

I really believe most of us probably would have fewer enemies if we learned how to speak in a way that built people up instead of tearing them down. Harsh words put people in a fighting mood. Kind words soften their spirit.

The next time you see a person who just automatically ticks you off, think of a kind word or deed to share with him and do it because you want to be more like Jesus. I bet you'll be surprised at how good you feel for doing it and surprised by how the person reacts.

The first response you're to have toward your enemies is do good to those who hate you. The second response is to bless those who curse you. The final response you're to have toward your enemies is:

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO MISTREAT YOU verse 28

'pray for those who mistreat use you.'

This might take some work! Have you discovered that those people who mistreat you have a way of dominating your thoughts? Not only do they physically abuse you but they can also mentally abuse you because it's hard to get our minds off of what they've done to us!

Have you ever been there before? I can think of times when people have wronged me and instead of just moving on I dwelt on what they did to me and it just consumed my thoughts. It made me miserable and I got tired of being dominated by them in my mind.

Jesus has a solution to that problem for us. You know what it is? It's to pray for those who mistreat you! Now before you get too excited, Jesus isn't talking about us praying for our enemy to get run over by a truck. He's not talking about us praying for revenge upon our enemies.

He's referring to us praying for their hearts to be changed. You see, too often we waste our time dealing with symptoms instead of dealing with the cause.

For example, if I stay up late and don't get much sleep I typically have a headache and can be a little irritable. So I'll try to take care of the problem by staying away from loud noises and taking aspirin. But all I'm doing is treating the symptoms.

What I really need to do is just go to bed earlier and that'll eliminate my problems plus the medication. And typically we do the same thing with our enemies. We see them being rude to us. We see them doing things they know will make us upset. So we deal with the problem by yelling at them or by ignoring them.

But to respond in that manner is to only deal with the symptoms of the problem. The best thing we can do is to pray for them. To pray that God will deal with their heart and bring change and to pray that God will deal with our heart not to be so irritated by them as well.

Your prayers for your enemies can actually serve as a tool to keep you from being destroyed by bitterness and anger. And your prayers can also serve as a net to salvage you from being controlled by your feelings.

Prayer can keep us from going over the edge in anger. Communication with God can take the sting out of our hatred and anger towards people. That's good to know because it's in this passage we see one of the hardest commands Jesus gives us...to love our enemies.

It's so hard to do but we've been called to do it because that's what Jesus has done for us.

Do you realize it's in our nature to be at odds with God; to be His enemy? But in spite of this fact, Jesus has sought to love us anyway.

Romans 5:8 *'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'*

Do you want your life to be better? Do you want to get people's attention? Then simply love people; love ALL people whether they are your friends or enemies.

Ephesians 4:32 *"Be kind and compassionate, one to another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

Conclusion:

When you and I leave here today the question for us is going to be "How are we going to respond to our enemies?" If we're followers of Jesus we've been given three responses to have towards our enemies:

1. Do good to those who hate you.
2. Bless those who curse you.
3. Finally, pray for those who mistreat you.

Now let me ask you a question. Can you think of someone who's mistreated you; someone who's done you wrong? If you can, put into practice what we've talked about today.

I know that sounds impossible and I want you to know it is in your own power. But with God's involvement, all things are possible.

If someone at work is always smarting off to you, respond to them tomorrow by giving them a word of encouragement.

If one of your family members says hateful things to you, start praying that God will heal their heart. And pray for the Lord to allow love to well up in your heart for that family member. Ask God to show you ways you can demonstrate love to your enemies.

Remember, a kind word turns away wrath. But most importantly, loving your enemies demonstrates in a powerful way that you belong to Jesus Christ.

Am I really supposed to love my enemies? The answer is yes!