

## Learning to Love Enemies: Part 1

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The way of Christ invites the disapproval and hostility of an unbelieving world. Expect the looks and stares; don't be surprised by the insults and even aggression. It's been happening since the dawn of time. In the introduction to Jesus' teaching in Luke 6 he said (vs. 22-23), "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; *for so their fathers did to the prophets.*" Did you catch that last part? This is what happened to the prophets; this is what happened to the faithful followers of God from of old. God's ways have always been opposed. God's people have always been mistreated. Jesus himself said, "Count on it." That comes from John 15:20 where Jesus said, "Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours." The Evil One works in this world in such a way that God's Gospel, God's Kingdom and God's people are opposed.

The passage we are beginning today deals with this question: "How should we relate and treat people when they oppose us for following the way of Christ?" If people take advantage of us because of our faith, what should we do? If people intimidate or threaten us because of our association with Jesus, how should we treat them? If we get marginalized and trivialized on account of Christ, how should we respond?

That's probably what's most likely going to happen. There are places on the globe where being a Christian can cost you your life. That's not happening where we live; systemic, governmental threats on life. But what's already happening is the marginalization, the mockery. Our influence and status in society is being threatened.

The problem, of course, is we don't like that; that doesn't feel good. We don't want to be marginalized or trivialized. Jesus says, "Leap for joy, Christian!" We say, "This stinks!" Such marginalization is unjust. Someone losing their job because of faith is unjust. Being ridiculed and mocked by students at school is wrong (just like it's wrong to marginalize or mock anyone based on religion, ethnicity, gender or disability). And when we experience something that's wrong, we want to fight back, right? We want to repay evil for evil. If they are going to call me narrow-minded, then I'm going to make sure I tell them they are narrow-minded, too. If they mock me, I'm going to mock them. Even, if they are going to hit me, I might just hit them first. That's what our flesh wants to do, doesn't it?

Or we might run. Instead of fighting we might take to flight. Run as fast and as far away as possible. Maybe not physically; maybe we don't run for the hills with our legs and bodies and start a new monastic community. But, we might run for the hills intellectually or culturally. We might just check out. We keep faith private. We make sure nobody really knows what we really

think about God, Jesus, the Bible, this culture, our ethical perspectives. In fact, that's what a lot of us have already done. Do your neighbors, co-workers, friends at school know what you really think about Jesus? Do they know you're a *born again* Christian? Or do you wear the Christian label in a culturally acceptable way so you don't stand out? I confess, I'm tempted to do that. I'm a pastor; a baptist one nonetheless. I'm very aware that some people have certain thoughts about that. I don't want to feed the beast. So, I'm tempted to polish that image so people don't think I'm the nut they already suspect I am. Friends, we can't escape it: if we follow Jesus like he ought to be followed, it will be odd to an unbelieving world. And that oddity invites ridicule, mockery and hostility. So, how do we relate to others if others are harsh to us? Turn to Luke 6:27-36 (READ).

Here's what we are going to do. Jesus gives us two guiding principles, two guiding truths in this passage that shape the life of a follower of Jesus. If you miss these two governing points or truths, you'll miss the kind of life Jesus has called you to live. If you get these two and you apply them, you'll be able to treat others the way God would have you treat them even if they are hostile to you because of your faith. So, I'm going to give each of these points their own sermon and then on the third Sunday, we'll speak practically how this works (as Jesus shares in the text). So, we are going to spend at least 3 weeks on these two paragraphs.

Before I get to the first big point, pay close attention to Jesus' opening words; "But I say to you who hear." Do you hear, FBC? Are you hearing the Lord Jesus? Not everyone hears! Not everyone accepts this teaching. That's what hearing means. Acceptance. Submission. Obedience. If you obey you hear; if you do not obey you don't hear. Not all do. Friends, you and I must come to grips with this. You can listen, you can take it in, you can even think it's a good idea, but if you do not obey you do not hear. We'll talk more about this at the very end of his Luke 6. But friends, I want to plead to you: hear!

The first guiding principle Jesus brings up is found in vs. 31, "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them." If you read that paragraph carefully you'll notice how Jesus uses a lot of specific examples. "This is what you do when someone hits you; this is what you do when someone begs you for something; this is what you do when someone takes something of yours." And then in vs. 31 it's like Jesus lays down the guiding principles behind all these specific scenarios: "As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

Jesus says something very close to this in Matt. 7:12; listen, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Notice the additional phrase; *for this is the Law and the Prophets*. Now what does that mean? That phrase, "the Law and the Prophets," is a reference to the Hebrew Bible, what we call the OT. It was Jesus' Bible. It was the Apostles' Bible. The Law and the Prophets were the writings of God. So, Jesus is saying doing to others like you wish they'd do to you is following the Law and the Prophets; it's doing what God requires in the law.

Now, there is something very significant with what Jesus said there in Matthew 7:12, but we have to put this together somewhat like a puzzle. Let me read for you another passage from Matthew 22 (READ Matt. 22:34-40). What does Jesus say about the Law and the Prophets? He says that love, love for God and love for neighbor is what the Law and the Prophets, what the OT is really about. that's the summary of Jesus. Love others.

Did you know there are 613 commands found in the Law (the portion of the OT called the Torah which was to govern the life of every follower of God)? That's a lot of commands. But Hebrews felt it was an insufficient guide; it didn't cover all the bases. So, around 200 AD, rabbis started putting together a book called the Talmud, a collection of further sayings and teachings that tried to explain and teach God's law in greater detail. The complete Talmud is over 6 times larger the OT. And guess what, the Talmud doesn't cover all the bases either. Because there are always other factors to consider. Did you know the Talmud has nothing about Twitter or Facebook? Does that mean we're lost; does that mean we don't have a reliable guide from God when someone insults us on social media? What if a friend slams you on facebook with an angry emoji? There will always be a "what about this" and a "what about that?" And God, in his infinite wisdom attends to this problem by saying, "Let me summarize what it means to love other people: do you know how well you take care of yourself, how you help yourself, how you watch out for yourself? Do that to others. As much as you do for you, as you wish others would treat you, that's how you treat them."

Now that's hard for several reasons. First, it's hard because of the commitment it takes to do it. Do you know how well we take care of ourselves? We take care of ourselves really well. Don't buy into the popular notion that we need to stop caring for others so much and start caring for ourselves. The Bible tells us the exact opposite happens. The Bible tells us that without God's grace causing us to be born again, we live for ourselves, we prioritize and privilege ourselves. And it's a full-time job and we are committed to it.

Lamarcus Aldridge (PIC) is a basketball player. He's a pretty good one, meaning he's a pretty rich basketball player. And he apparently has a lot of shoes. His massive walk-in closet in the master suite of his new mansion isn't big enough for all of his shoes so he said in an interview that he's building another house behind his mansion to store his shoes. Aldridge is taking good care of himself. And we do the same thing. We buy clothes, we eat food, we give ourselves little treats, we watch favorite TV shows, we take retreat days because we love ourselves. I'm not saying doing those things is necessarily wrong; it's just a picture of our commitment to ourselves. But, we aren't so crazy and quick to love others in the same way; in fact, we don't do it. That's why Jesus has to command us to do it.

But something else is needed to love others like we love ourselves; it takes more than a commitment and sacrifice to treat others the way we would want to be treated. Here's what else it takes: it takes awareness and compassion. Here's what I mean.

To treat others the way you would want to be treated if you were them requires awareness. It requires to become aware of what it's like to be them. How can you treat a single mom the way you would like to be treated if you were a single mom unless you are aware of what it's like to be a single mom? How can you treat a person with a different color of skin than you the way you would like to be treated if you don't know what it's like to have different colored skin? How can you treat an alcoholic the way you would like to be treated if you were an alcoholic unless you are aware of what it's like to be an alcoholic? How can you treat someone in poverty the way you'd like to be treated if you were in poverty unless you know what it's like to be in poverty? Do you get what I'm saying?

Many of us don't care enough and don't slow down enough to become aware of what it's like to be *other* than us. But we must. What's it like being a single mom (some of you know)? What's it like being divorced? Being widowed? Losing a child? Having chronic pain? Being fired? Struggling with depression? How can we love others who have gone through such things, who struggle with these challenges if we don't want to stop and ask, "What's it like?" We're often too lazy; we're too into ourselves. But that's what love does.

What's required to become aware? Listen. You have to listen. Stop talking and start asking questions and just listen. And learn. And as you become more aware you'll start being able to put yourself in their shoes and begin to think, "That's how I'd like to be treated if I were them."

Compassion. You need compassion, too, to have neighbor-love. Compassion is to feel the pain of another. In fact, the NT word for compassion literally means, "to have your bowels yearn." That's an interesting word-picture; your bowels yearning. Compassion is to feel an ache deep inside of you for another person. To see their suffering, their lack, their need impact you to the point of feeling the suffering of others. It's not your suffering; but you can feel it. Are you going to treat others the way you would want to be treated without compassion? No, not really; at least not sacrificially.

Awareness and compassion. Are you willing to put in the hard work, the time, the money, the energy to become aware of what others are going through and care about their suffering? That's what love looks like.

Now, go back to the issue at hand: can you love your enemy like this? That's what Luke 6 is about. Those who mock you, ridicule you, abuse you; treat them as you would like to be treated if you were them - "love them," Jesus says. "Impossible!" And yes, it is impossible without the grace of God. But with grace it is possible. So, how does it work? How does God's grace actually work in me and in you to love our enemies? Through awareness and compassion. Listen to how it works.

First of all, you are already aware of what it's like to be hostile to the ways of God. If you are a follower of Jesus, if you are a believer in his promises, you once were not. You were once

lost; you were once alienated from God. You were once his enemy; you were once dead in your sin. You once rejected God, too. Listen to just this one verse.

- Titus 3:3, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”

Do you know how ISIS hates the gospel and hates the people of God? They are killing Christians and opposing his kingdom. You were once like that; so was I. Maybe we didn’t behead anyone, but the hatred to the things of God were in us. We know what it’s like.

Friends, we can relate to an unbelieving world hostile to God. That’s who we were! We are aware; we can relate. We once hated; we once were foolishly lost in sin. We were once slaves to our passion. Now, are you thinking, “Really, Brian! You’re comparing me to ISIS? You’re comparing me to some of the vicious mockers of the faith in our own country? I’m insulted!” Well, good... that’s my job. Here’s the point: the seeds of hostility, mockery and opposition that birth the ugliest of opposition in the fiercest opponents of the gospel that we are seeing, say, in the Middle East are the same seeds that are in every person who hasn’t been born again to a living hope in Jesus. And we know what it’s like. That doesn’t mean we should stop listening, but may it never be to be detached from this truth.

But also, friends, along with awareness comes compassion. How can we not hurt and suffer for those lost in sin even though they hate us at the same time? We know the misery of being stuck in sin. We know the ruin of being trapped in a self-absorbed life. We can remember the death of addiction. Look at that Titus passage again; consider the pain of a foolish, disobedient life trapped in slavery to sin with hatred flowing every which way. It’s terrible; that was once my life. A true mark of Christ living in you is having compassion on those stuck in sin. Yes, such sin and hostility is wrong and we should never condone or approve of such things, but compassion is also present from those of us born of God.

Brothers and sisters, God has given us a gift in our salvation. Not only has God in heaven provided us the exceeding joy of being born again from our ugly sins to a living hope, but he also gives us an awareness and a compassion towards others lost in their sin so that we would dare treat them like we would like to be treated. When God performs that miracle of grace in our lives (and it is a miracle) we will be poised to make the commitment to love others, even enemies of the gospel, with the love of Jesus. Let’s pray that God does this work in you and in me.

#### Questions for the week

- What’s hard about relating to others who reject, ridicule or are hostile to the ways of Christ?
- Pastor Brian said to have neighbor-love to others, we need commitment, awareness and compassion. What do you need more of?
- How does God’s grace bring commitment, awareness and compassion?