

Learning to Love Enemies: Part 2

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Two weeks ago we began learning from Jesus how to love our enemies, which in itself is a very odd thing to do (who in the world loves their enemies?) When we follow Christ and live according to the wisdom of the Kingdom of God we become at odds with the ways of the world. And when that happens our Lord said we would receive the same kind of treatment that he received. Jesus was mocked, insulted and ridiculed. He suffered violence and injustice. So, don't be surprised when it happens to you, Jesus says. And since he knows this will happen, he very helpfully and lovingly shows us how to treat people who may do those things to us. We need to know, right? What should I do with this person who mocks me? How should I treat them? Should I ignore them? Mock them in return? What should I do? Jesus' answer is, "Love them." Wow! We need help to do that. That's what Jesus has for us in our passage.

To help us know how to love enemies (and enemies simply means people who oppose us because of our association with Jesus), our Lord first told his disciples to do unto others what they would wish others would do to them. As we studied two weeks ago, living with that kind of neighbor-love is the embodiment of all of God's commands. To treat others the way you want to be treated, to treat others the way you would want them to treat you is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, which are the very words of God. That's how Jesus defines the love we should have for others. And we talked about how loving like that takes commitment, it takes awareness and compassion (make sure you pick up that sermon if you didn't listen to it).

But Jesus has more help for us. In fact, I would argue that Jesus' instruction to practice neighbor-love isn't enough. Here's why I think that: we can't practice neighbor-love simply because God told us to. Do you know what I mean by that? The power to obey God isn't found in commands. There's no power in the command to obey the command. If you remember, the Apostle Paul says in Col. 2 that hearing and trying to submit to rules and regulations has an appearance of wisdom, "but," he says, "they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." That means you might hear and know the command to love your neighbor as yourself, or to treat your neighbor the way you would like to be treated if you were them, but there's no power in that command to actually help you do it. You'll never give to others the way you give to yourself just because you were given the command to. No, the power and desire to love others (even enemies) has to come from somewhere else. It must come from sovereign grace.

What does that mean? It means that the power and desire to love others with this kind of neighbor-love must be birthed and given to you by God. It must be wrought by God; that means, it must be a work of God in your life. When God does his work of grace in you (that's why I say "sovereign grace") then, and only then, will you be able to do the impossible... to love your enemy. And that power to love others with neighbor-love comes when we know, experience and rejoice in God's love for us in Christ. Let's see how Jesus says this works (READ Luke 6:27-36).

So, there are two keys to living this kind of life where you love your enemies and you do good to them. The first is knowing what neighbor-love looks like: treating others the way you would like to be treated if you were them. The second key is finding the motivation. (READ vs. 35-36).

You get the power to obey God's commands when you see and know God's love for you. That's why Jesus says to his disciples, "Look at my Father in heaven. Consider what my Father God is like. Look at how he treats people; look how he treats you." The primary word that Jesus highlights is the word "merciful." Look at vs. 36. Your God in heaven is merciful. He treats people with mercy. So you, FBC; you, Christian, be merciful like your Father in heaven is merciful.

What does it mean to be merciful? What is mercy? Mercy is an important word for us and our faith. It's related and connected to the word grace; another important word. Often times in the Bible, God's love and care for his people is motivated by mercy and grace. Just consider these verses.

- 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Why would God cause us to be born again? What would motivate God to do this for us? His mercy towards us.
- Eph. 2:4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved." So God, being rich in mercy, overflowing in mercy, with great love, even when we were dead in sin made us alive together with Christ. All of this, Paul says, is God's saving grace.
- Eph. 1:7, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." So again, the reason why you have redemption, which is the forgiveness of your sins, is due to the riches of God's grace.

God's mercy and grace compel him, motivate him, to save and redeem his people. So, what does that mean? What does it mean for God to be merciful and gracious? Look at these two definitions.

Mercy - Not receiving what you do deserve.

Grace - Receiving what you do not deserve.

Now, let me just say: God's mercy and grace found in Christ is much deeper, much more mysterious and complex than those simple definitions. But I do believe it's at least a good place to start.

What word is common in both of those definitions? *Deserve*. That is a very tricky word. And if I could dare say: our culture has gotten that word *deserve* completely wrong. Here's what I mean. Today, most people believe (and when I say "believe" I mean hold to be true almost in a religious way) that they deserve good things to happen to them and they do not deserve bad

things to happen. That mentality is ingrained in our cultural ethos and its seeping into the thinking of followers of Jesus.

Consider some examples of how we use the word *deserve* in our culture. First, check out out this AT&T commercial (CLIP). I was on the golf course a week or so ago and a buddy of mine was teasing me when I was about to putt and he said, "You can make this, Brian. You deserve it." Joking back I quoted one of my most hated pop culture beliefs; I said, "You're right! I do deserve it!" Why? Why do I deserve to make a putt? Just because, right? That's how that word, that idea is used these days. You deserve to lose 40 pounds. You deserve to have more friends. You deserve to be debt free. You deserve to get that job. You deserve to be a starter on the volleyball team. You deserve those things.

When in reality, the opposite is the case. You're stuffing your face with McFlurries and you never exercise. You actually do deserve those 40 pounds. You're mean to people and all you do is talk about yourself; no, you don't deserve more friends. You spend more than you earn, you deserve the debt you have. You didn't work as hard as your co-workers, you didn't work as hard as your teammates; you don't deserve the new promotion and you don't deserve to be a starter on the volleyball team.

This crazy notion of deserving good things is closely tied with the ugly and deceptive self-esteem gospel. The self-esteem gospel says that I'm intrinsically and inherently a good person. And since I'm a good person, I deserve good things to happen to me. But what does the Bible say? Without the the new birth God graciously gives people, God describes us as disobedient and lawless, rebellious and conceited. We are callous and malicious. We hate people. We are God's enemies and his insolent opponents. We do wrong things and give approval to others when they do wrong things.

So, you tell me: What do we deserve? What should come our way? If we should get the consequences of our actions and dispositions, what consequences should we get? Bad kinds, right? We deserve God's judgment. His anger. His contempt and wrath. That's what we deserve.

Be amazed, FBC. Instead of contempt and wrath, judgment and anger, what does God give those in Christ? I love how Jesus says it in Luke 6; look at the end of vs. 35, "for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." Our God is kind. And to who? He's kind to the ungrateful and the evil. So, get this. Jesus doesn't say God is kind to nice people, clean people. People who have their act together and do all the things God tells them to do. No, God is kind to the ungrateful and evil.

That word *ungrateful* really gets me. You know, we don't do things to be thanked, right (or at least we shouldn't)? That's rather self-serving. In fact, that's exactly what Jesus is contrasting God's love with. Who gives, serves, lends expecting to get in return? People who don't know God. People who are dead in their sins. Sinners, unbelievers expect to get

applauses and thank yous for their service. If you keep serving and sacrificing for people who heap on you praises and thanksgivings, big deal, even unbelieving people do that.

God's way is service, giving, sacrificing for the good of other people, not for our God. But sometimes, we do get thanks, right? While we don't make sacrifices to be thanked, it sure helps, doesn't it? When you receive a hearty and sincere "Thank you" it fuels more service in your life. It makes you want to serve more. It gives you that pep in your step to keep going.

My boys like tubing; you know, getting dragged behind a motorboat at almost-illegal speeds while making hairpin turns trying to throw them off the tube violently, but not so violently that they get permanent brain damage? Round and round they go on a hot Saturday afternoon. And not just them. Me, too. For the boys to go round and round, I need to go round and round. And if I'm being honest, they're having more fun than me. I'm looking for motion sickness medicine. But, do you know what helps me keep driving in circles all afternoon while my boat is guzzling gas at the same rate my boys are drinking their Mt. Dew? A thank you. "Hey, Dad! Thanks so much. That was fun." It helps me keep driving in circles over and over again.

But what happens when we don't get thank yous? What happens when you make sacrifices and offer service and you get nothing (again, we shouldn't serve for the sake of being thanked... that is self-serving)? It's hard to keep serving, isn't it? Without any thank you, we are so easily tempted to stop getting our neighbors mail, we're so easily tempted to stop filling up the dishwasher or doing the laundry at home. Serving in the nursery or as an usher gets harder and harder. So what do we often do? We stop. We quit. We give, and we give, and we give ourselves away.... And we even justify it, right? "If that's the thanks I get!" Or "She didn't even say 'thank you'. Well, she can do it herself then."

What's so amazing about God is that he's different than you or me? God is kind to the ungrateful and evil. Can you believe God let his people into the Promised Land? That's utterly amazing to me. God comes and delivers the people from Egypt with such a mighty hand that the people of Egypt were begging them to go and the nations on the earth are afraid of the God of the Hebrews. But as soon as they left, they wanted to go back. As soon as they left, they started complaining. They didn't like the bread God provided so he gave them quail. They didn't like the rules God made so they broke them. They cried out for Egypt saying, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Only if we were back home eating stew!" And when a golden cow was given to them they were happy to abandon devotion to YHWH and worship this idol as the god who saved them from Egypt?

Why would God let his people into the Promised Land? Because our God is kind to ungrateful people; he's kind to evil people. He proclaimed this to Moses about himself (READ Ex. 34:6-7).

Did you hear? God is merciful. It's the first thing God says of himself. He's merciful; he's kind and gracious. He's slow to anger. I'm so quick to anger; I'm so quick to blow up and

demand my way. God is slow to anger. He keeps loving, he keeps forgiving ungrateful people. And here's what else he does. By his mighty Spirit he turns ungrateful sinners into appreciative sons and daughters. That's all grace.

Here's the big idea: Friends, the more you see and understand God's mercy for you, the more you will be empowered by the sovereign grace of God to be merciful to others. We're going to apply this with one more sermon, but before we do that, my brothers and sisters, see the mercy of God for you. Be amazed! Be astounded! Shake with fear that the God of the universe would show pity on you, a man, a woman who deliberately, callously, hard-heartedly, with malicious intent disobey and break God's law. But you've received mercy. Such mercy is worth singing about.

Questions for the week

- Why does Pastor Brian say loving enemies is impossible?
- What do you deserve? And how does the idea of "deserve" help you understand mercy?
- What about God's mercy most amazes you?