

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Luke 6:27-42

Key Verse: 6:27

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you....”

When we read today’s passage, we feel that its teachings are impossible to practice. The expectation is too high to be real. Why did Jesus give such hard teachings, just after calling his disciples? Was he trying to humble them from the beginning so they would obey him without question? No. Rather, it was to give them a big picture of their discipleship. His teachings, **“love your enemies,” “be merciful,” “forgive,”** and **“give,”** reflect Jesus’ character. Usually teachers train students to learn subject matter—theories and ideas, not their character and lifestyle. But Jesus is different. In Jesus’ school, knowledge and skills are not the focus; Jesus is the focus. Jesus wants his disciples to become like him in character and lifestyle. So this passage is like a course syllabus with the title “Growing in a Christ-centered Life.” Even though these teachings are hard to practice, let’s accept them with Jesus’ hope and vision for us to grow to be like him.

First, do to others as you would have them do to you (27-36). After proclaiming blessings and woes, Jesus comes to the heart of his teaching. Jesus begins in verse 27 with **“Love your enemies”** and repeats in verse 35, **“love your enemies.”** So **“love your enemies”** is the theme of this section. Here, as verses 27-28 explain, **“love”** is dynamic and pro-active. And **“enemies”** are personal, not national. Jesus is not telling governments how to respond to enemy attacks. Rather, he wants his disciples to respond to personal enemies as he did, with forgiving love. But Jesus wants his people to love more than their enemies. The scope of Jesus’ teaching on love extends to all people. Jesus wants his disciples to be good lovers. In verses 29-36, Jesus urges them to practice the golden rule, reflecting God’s mercy. Let’s consider how to practice the golden rule in terms of two main principles.

*** Practicing forgiving love (27-28).** Let’s read verses 27-28. **“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.”** Jesus’ words were revolutionary in light of the Old Testament law. The law teaches that in the case of a serious injury, justice should be done by taking life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise (Ex 21:23-25). This sounds harsh. So someone said, “An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.” We need to understand the spirit of this teaching. God’s law sought practical justice by causing the offender to fully understand their

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victim's pain, and to prevent retaliation by the victim which would escalate conflict. For example, if someone lost an eye, they might want to kill the offender. But the law tempered their emotions and helped them to apply justice more fairly. This enabled the Israelites to live together peacefully with social order. We cannot ignore the importance of justice for social order. We need to know the standards of right and wrong and how to resolve injustice fairly. These days there is a lot of tension in our nation over issues of social justice. We should not ignore the importance of this for a peaceful and harmonious society. The issue is that the law cannot solve the problem of evil. That is why Jesus taught his disciples to love enemies as the way to overcome evil.

Jesus called his disciples to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. It is God's reign with justice, righteousness, peace and love. This should be more than a spoken message; it should come from their mindset and lifestyle. So Jesus encouraged them: **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.”** We know this very well in theory. However, in practice, instead of loving and doing good, we easily hate, hold grudges, want revenge, and become nasty. Instead of blessing, we curse those who curse us. Instead of praying for their wellbeing, we pray that God may strike them with fire from heaven. Then, how can we love our enemies? It is impossible in our human nature. However, when we accept the love of Christ, who died on the cross for us, the Holy Spirit works to transform us. Then it is possible for us to love our enemies. Recently I read the book, *“From Pearl Harbor to Calvary,”*¹ and came to learn the stories of Mitsuo Fuchida and Peggy Covell. Peggy grew up in the Philippines, with her Christian missionary parents in the 1930's and 40's. As it became likely that war would break out, her parents sent her to the USA with her siblings. Sunday morning, December 19, 1943, Japanese soldiers captured her parents and others and they were ordered to be executed. The condemned captives asked for 30 minutes to read their Bibles and pray. Afterward, one by one, singing hymns, they were escorted up a mountain and beheaded. When Peggy learned what happened, hatred for the Japanese began to burn white-hot within her. Every day she struggled. Her hatred threatened to overwhelm her faith. Then one day, she wondered, “What did my parents pray for before they were killed?” The thought came to her that it was for the forgiveness of their executioners. They were like Jesus, who prayed for his enemies, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Lk 23:34a). In light of Jesus' cross, she realized that she had to forgive also. After much struggle, she decided to serve Japanese prisoners in an internment camp in the USA. It was very hard at

¹ Fuchida, Mitsuo, *From Pearl Harbor to Calvary* (Escondido, CA: eChristian Inc., 2011).

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first. But as she began to practice forgiveness, her ability to forgive increased. Soon she became so loving and gentle that the most hardhearted men were touched. “Why do you do this?” they asked. Her gentle reply was, “Because the Japanese army killed my parents, but the Holy Spirit has washed away my hatred and has replaced it with love.” The men could not fathom such love, and were haunted by her story, even after returning to Japan, and shared it again and again. It was told to Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese hero who led the air raid on Pearl Harbor. It motivated Fuchida to search the Bible to find the source of her strange love. He read Luke 23:34a and found forgiving love in Christ. Later, Fuchida became an evangelist and shared the grace of Christ all over Japan and later in the USA. When one genuine Christian practices forgiving love, it spreads the gospel most powerfully and overcomes the world’s hatred.

*** Overcoming evil with good (29-36).** Verse 29 says, **“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.”** Shall we apply this literally? If so, we might be beaten to death and robbed of everything. Jesus seems to be using hyperbole to make a point. The point is how to respond to attacks and demands of evil people. In verse 30 Jesus says, **“Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.”** Jesus does not want his disciples to fight with evil people like cats and dogs over personal insults and material things. Rather, Jesus teaches us to overcome evil by doing good. Jesus summarized this in verse 31: **“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”** Rabbi Philo, who lived in Jesus’ time, had taught this principle from a negative perspective, saying, “Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you.” But Jesus taught this positively. Instead of just avoiding doing bad things, Jesus wants us to do good things. We can figure out what good to do for others by putting ourselves in their places. We want to be treated with respect and dignity. Then we should treat others with respect and dignity. We want others to be understanding of our mistakes and to forgive us. Then we should understand and forgive others. When we love others and do good positively, others are happy. Then they will likely be kind and good to us. This creates an environment of mutual love and respect. Would you like to live in such an environment? Let’s practice the golden rule!

In verses 32-36, Jesus explains that his disciples’ love should be distinctively different than that of “sinners.” Here “sinners” refers to those who are living in their natural selves and not by the supernatural power of God (32-34). Jesus’ disciples’ love should stand out. If we love those who love us, we get no credit from Jesus. Everybody does that. If we are kind and generous to those who are kind and generous to us, we get no credit from Jesus. Everybody does that,

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even gang members. If we lend only to those who can repay us, we get no credit from Jesus. Even greedy bankers do that. Jesus' point is that his disciples' love should make people sit up and take notice that something divine is happening.

As we practice the love of Christ, something amazing happens: we begin to reflect the character of God himself. We are recognized as children of the Most High God (35-36). God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still his enemies, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8). God bestowed everything upon us as his children, though we did nothing to deserve it. God does not demand us to pay back all the grace he has given us. God freely gives all good things to his people. Even more, God generously provides all people, evil or good, with air, sunshine and rain, among many other common graces (Mt 5:45). God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. God is merciful. Though he has great power and knowledge and wisdom, he uses it to help people in need. God is mindful of widows and orphans, foreigners and outcasts. Jesus wants his disciples to resemble God as his children. This is why we need to love our enemies, do good to them, and lend to others without expecting to get anything back (35). Especially those who have power and wealth should be very merciful toward vulnerable people. When we practice God's mercy and reveal his beautiful character in this troubled world, God is pleased and surely rewards us in heaven. So Jesus said, **"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"** (36). Let's not be overcome by the evil, but overcome evil with good to the glory of God.

Second, do not judge, forgive and give (37-42). When we want to love enemies and practice the golden rule, how we see others is very important. First, we need to overcome the tendency to judge and condemn others. Then we can interact more positively by forgiving and giving. Without overcoming a judgmental spirit, we can do nothing. Verses 37-38a read: **"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."** The words **"Do not judge,"** do not rule out legitimate use of discernment, church discipline and legal courts. The words **"do not judge"** refer to an inner attitude of criticizing and condemning others. We need to beware of such attitudes and repent of them. We tend to see others' weak points and mistakes instead of their virtue and greatness. When we see others' faults, instead of embracing them and encouraging them, we easily criticize and gossip about them. As gossip and slander spread, relationships are broken and people are damaged. Words of judgment and condemnation carry no love or hope. Critical words without love or hope are like a poison to others' souls. When children throw stones at a frog, they may be amused. But to the frog it is a matter of life and death. Why do people like to talk badly about others? It makes

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them feel better about themselves for a little while. But in reality, those who condemn others do the same things, and thus they condemn themselves. What is worse, they will be judged by God. We should respect God alone as the judge; he alone knows all things, including the motives of our hearts. We should see others with compassion and seek to build them up in the love of God.

Overcoming the tendency to judge and condemn is important. But we need to do more. As the golden rule tells, we need to seek the positive good of others. This requires forgiving and giving. When we experience personal injury and injustice, it is painful. It is hard to forgive. As mentioned previously, this is possible when we remember Jesus at the cross, like Peggy Covell and Mitsuo Fuchida did. After receiving Jesus' forgiveness, we can practice the same forgiving love, and grace grows among us. On the other hand, to have an unforgiving heart damages our relationships, and our own inner life. Someone said that having an unforgiving heart is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. An unforgiving heart leads to anxiety, stress, sleep and eating disorders, and general misery. Let's forgive so that we may be healthy and sleep well tonight. When we forgive others, it changes the environment we live in. There may be many things that we need to change and reform, but what we need most is to forgive one another.

Jesus also wants his disciples to give generously. He said, **"Give, and it will be given to you."** Everyone likes to receive a nice gift, or some award, thinking, "If I receive something I will be happy." But in reality, it is more blessed to give than to receive. When we receive something from others, we can easily become spoiled and demanding. On the other hand, when we practice giving, it requires sacrifice. But we can experience God's blessing. Jesus said, **"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"** (38b). As described, the container is filled and then shaken and pressed down so that the grain may fill every empty space and the container hold as much as possible. God is not stingy; he is rich and very generous. He is ready to bless us. Numbers 6:24-26 says, **"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."** Proverbs 11:24-25 also encourage us to give generously, **"One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever blesses others will be refreshed."**

Jesus had hope for his disciples to grow to be shepherds like himself. To motivate them to grow, Jesus told a parable. He said, **"Can the blind lead the**

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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 his teacher” (39-40). To Jesus, they were very promising; they just needed to be fully trained. These days some people have a bad connotation of the word “**training.**” But what it really means is to be with Jesus and learn from him personally until we grow to become like him in mindset, lifestyle and value system. When the disciples were fully trained after being with Jesus for three-and-a-half years, they became pillars of the early church.

In order to grow, the disciples needed to apply Jesus’ teachings and struggle to follow Jesus. But human beings tend to want to help others with their small problem instead of struggling with their own giant problem. So Jesus told them that their problems are like a plank and others’ issues are like specks. To be useful to others, they should first solve their own problem. So instead of trying to correct others, we should examine ourselves before God and repent of our sins. Then we can serve others with the mind of Christ.

We are called to be Jesus’ disciples. What he wants most is not our achievements, but for us to grow to be like him, especially in his love. Let’s come to the cross, and remember Jesus’ forgiving love for us and practice this love toward others. Let’s decide to overcome evil with good, reflecting the mercy of God. Let’s pray that this love may spread around the world and that God’s kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven.