

Why Did Jesus Say That?

“Part 3: Love Your Enemies”

Luke 6:27-36

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on July 22, 2018, by Steve Edelman

What do you do with difficult people? I mean the ones who really irritate you. Or the people who are outright mean to you. Well, you unfollow or block them on social media. Or you give their kid a noisy toy for their birthday. Right? Maybe you introduce them to another difficult person and hope they become friends. No really. What do you do with really difficult people? When I say “difficult people” I am talking about people who mistreat you, speak evil about you or who do you harm. Maybe, your real thoughts are a little darker. Like you want to drop them in the middle of the ocean with no life jacket and leave them for dead. **I am not saying you would do it.** However, I know many of you. Because some of you are my friends. But, we can all agree that we don’t like having difficult people in our life.

STORY: When I was 19 years old I got a summer job working on a crew of a seismic company who was responsible for oil and gas exploration. The crew was around 25 to 30 guys and we mainly stomped these seismic readers (similar to tent pegs) into the ground for 12 to 16 hours a day. A number of us from Bible College got hired for the summer. The job paid well and we needed the money to pay for our tuition.

My first day on the job, I met a difficult person. I was in an SUV with 8 other guys and one of them says, “Who are you?” “Hi, I am Steve, and it’s nice to meet you. The guy responds with, “SHUT UP PRETTY BOY” (apparently I was pretty)... “you won’t last a week on the job! I will make sure of it!” This particular guy continued to mistreat me. He would continue to attack me physically by pushing me around and attacking me emotionally by calling me belittling swear words. I started to struggle inside with my own feeling of hate. I started to struggle with how I was going to react if he didn’t stop.

Eventually, it came out that a number of us were Christians. As soon as this guy finds out, he lights up a cigarette and blows smoke right in my face in front of the group. Here I am, a young guy who is training to be a pastor and I was forced to respond to this abusive person who made it his mission to be my enemy. And now everyone is watching. The spotlight is on me. So, I grabbed the cigarette out of his mouth and threw

to the ground! No, I didn't. I said something like, "hey, can you stop blowing smoke in my face? I am happy to be working with you guys on this crew. I would love to get to know you and share my story with you at some point." It was amazing how even a few words of love diffused his abuse. God was at work in my heart and I knew my response mattered. I knew it would say much about who I am as a Christian. I knew it would have communicated a lot about who God is.

As time went on, I became close friends with many members of the crew. We learned their stories of broken relationships, abuse, hate, and addiction. We learned that many of these guys grew up in brokenness and damaged homes. Their parents were alcoholics and addicts. **What I learned is, we can't expect something from somebody - something that has never been put into them.**

We also started to tell our stories of what God has done for us out our own brokenness. My Christian friends and I had many opportunities to share our faith. We even had the opportunity to lead one guy to Christ.

Just like in the story, how we respond to difficult people communicates to others who we are as Christians. It shows others what has been put into us. It also says a lot to others about who God is.

We just started a new series on **"Why did Jesus say that? Today, we are on part 3 of this series and we will be talking about why Jesus said, "love your enemies."** I want to focus on why Jesus gave such a tough commandment and I will break it into three parts. Because Jesus said, "love your enemies" we need to understand these three things:

- 1. HOW TO DEFINE OUR ENEMIES**
- 2. HOW TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES**
- 3. HOW GOD SEES OUR ENEMIES**

Because Jesus said, "love your enemies" we need to know:

1. HOW TO DEFINE OUR ENEMIES

So, Jesus just started His preaching ministry and because people were being healed and because of his kindness, people started to gather around him. Then, Jesus starts to preach to his disciples and a large crowd on a mountainside. And this is what he says to them.

Look with me at verse 27 and 28 which says, *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who **hate** you, bless those who **curse** you, pray for those who **abuse** you.”*

The first question we need to ask is - who is our enemy?

a) An enemy hates, curses, and abuses.

Jesus pinpoints the **attitudes and behaviors that a person exhibits when they oppose you. He identifies the enemy as someone who hates, curses, and abuses.** Jesus describes an enemy by their negative conduct. Notice that an enemy is not defined by race, religion, politics, status or gender. An enemy is defined by harmful behavior. An adversary can be anyone... who hates, curses, and abuses us. Frankly, it could be a son, or a daughter, a father or a mother. It could also be a neighbor or a co-worker or a fellow student.

The Latin word for “enemy” simply means “not a friend”. Of course, not everyone who is outside of your friendship circle is considered an enemy. An enemy is someone that you have decided not to give your friendship or love to because of how they treated you.

To further develop that definition, an enemy is someone who wants to harm or weaken you. It could be an individual or group who disapproves of you. It's not a friendly rivalry like in a sports team, or tug-a-war or a board game. The goal of an enemy is to oppose the other and actively try to prevent the other from reaching their goals. It's a person or a group you have a conflict with. An enemy can even present them self as a loving person when face to face and still oppose or harbor hate. Usually, it blows up and turns into a head-on confrontation.

John Piper says, “So another way to understand “enemies” in this passage is that they are people who are repeatedly going against your desires. They may not call themselves enemies. You may not call them enemies. But they resist your will. They are contrary and antagonistic. In this sense, the enemy might be a rebellious child. He might be an uncaring, non-listening, ill-tempered husband. He might be a cantankerous neighbor that complains about everything you do to your yard. Jesus says, “Love them. Love your enemies. Love them.”

An enemy can easily be created when someone has mistreated or sinned against you. **We could easily create a guidebook on this, “How to create enemies for dummies?” “Ten steps to making a great enemy.” “How to lose an enemy in ten days?”** A common visual for enemies are two people pointing guns at the other.

When we start using the word enemy it feels so official or heavy, or even unCanadian because we live in a culture of tolerance. Can't we all be friends? We don't want to call anyone an enemy unless it's Satan himself. Yet, Jesus says that we have enemies. Which means you and I have an enemy. Or you may be an enemy. Congratulations?!?! It's someone who harms or weakens someone else.

We may have good reasons for crossing someone off the friend list and moving their picture to the dartboard. **We may even say to ourselves, “If they do that one more time I will end the relationship or I will show them.”** However, Jesus doesn't even mention the specific reasons. He simply says love them.

Next,

b) An enemy persecutes those who follow Christ.

Look a couple verses back with me at Luke 6:22 which says, *“Blessed are you when people hate you... on account of the Son of Man!”* Jesus is saying that blessed are those who are hated for His namesake. **Jesus defines an enemy as someone who hates a Christian on account of Jesus. It's because of who Jesus is and what he is asking us to do.** 1 Peter 4:12 emphatically states that "we are not to be surprised" when persecution comes, or think that "some strange thing" is happening to us when we are persecuted as Christians. (See also Acts 14:22; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 3:13.) **Persecution is "part of the package" of following Jesus. In fact, it will cause you to be hated, cursed, and abused.**

How does following Christ create enemies? When we follow Jesus, our faith produces hostility from those who are saturated in the world and its values. When Christians adopt God's way in terms of how we view and live out relationships, sexuality, truth, sin, in all of life - it makes some people really angry. It causes a clash of belief systems and worldviews. Christians can be seen by many as an obstruction to the world's freedom and their ability for them to do whatever they want with their lives.

Christians are seen as backward, stupid, culturally degressive or even unscientific. Persecution can happen because Christians live out their beliefs differently than the world. It causes some people to be uncomfortable or even hostile.

For example, a person who believes that money or materialism is the most important thing in life will mock the delusional views of the Christian worldview when we give to the church or the poor. Or a person who believes in relativism (meaning what is true for you may not be true for me) will mock you taking a stand for what you believe. A pluralist will mock the claim that Jesus is the only way to heaven. They will object the idea rejects objective truth. A person who lives primarily for pleasure will despise the Christian worldview and view it as a killjoy. Unfortunately, we will create enemies when we follow Jesus because our faith could be misunderstood or a hindrance by many.

You may be labeled a freak, oppressor, judgmental person and even excluded for your beliefs.

Do you have an enemy? Who is your enemy?

Kaitlin Wernet says, "What if our reluctance to admit to having enemies is standing in the way of God working through us to bring Him glory? What if our "goodness" and pride are blocking the flow of His true goodness in our relationships? We must stop avoiding the fact that we have enemies and get to the hard, kingdom-building work of loving them."

As we have seen, because Jesus said, "love your enemies" we need to understand that our enemies are people who mistreat or oppose us. Now, what do we do with them?

Secondly, because Jesus said, "love your enemies" we need to understand:

2. HOW TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES

Jesus tells us how to love our enemies. He calls us to respond differently than the world. Notice that -

a. Jesus shows us a different model for relationships.

We see many responses listed in verses 27 to 31 which includes: love, do good, bless, pray and turn the other cheek. It's a call for us to respond to our enemies with good character. Let's look at what it means to love our enemy.

i) Love. (v27)

The instruction to love was so important that it was included in the greatest commandment. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39). Why? Because love sends a message that you belong despite differences. It shows your enemy that you affirm and respect them and wish them well, despite what has happened between you. **Love is the all-encompassing behavior that captures all of the other behaviors in one. It also captures the essence of who Jesus is.**

What are some practical things we can do to love? What if we greeted them rather than avoided them? This is one simple step we often overlook. One part of loving our enemies is to greet them graciously when we see them. **Our body language usually says anything but love. It’s usually avoidance and negativity.** But if we only greet our friends, what benefit is that? Do not even sinners greet each other? One part of loving our enemies is greeting them instead of avoiding them.

Love is also evidenced by showing mercy and a readiness to forgive. Just like God the Father showed us. The reason we run into difficulties when we try to love others is sin - both ours and of the people we try to love. Jesus also points out that loving those who love us is easy and even unbelievers can do that. In other words, if this is easy then you are probably not loving your enemy.

What really happens when someone mistreats us?

ii) Do good. (v27b)

We need to do good. Wherever possible, show your enemies kindness. However, **what we really want to do is get even and win.**

It’s interesting that both times in this passage when Jesus says, “Love your enemies,” he follows it immediately by saying, “Do good to them,” so that we won’t miss the point. **Doing good to your enemies, means seeing beyond your pain and their mistreatment of you. Note that doing good goes beyond words; it actually does something good for the person who hates. It reaches out to them through their family and friends, employment and business. It searches for ways to do good to them, realizing that he needs to be reached for God.**

Someone said, “Doing good” means that you do what will promote their healing despite the way they have treated you. The idea is, you make the first move. You send the e-mail. You pick up the phone. You make the contact. You bridge the gap.

You set up the appointment.” The believer is to go and do good, minister as Christ Himself ministered.

iii) Bless. (v28)

Next, we need to bless. Make every effort to come to know and understand them better – their hopes, their fears, concerns, and aspirations. Refuse to speak evil of them. That’s what Jesus meant when he said, “Bless those who curse you.” It means you refuse to think evil thoughts and you refuse to speak evil words against those who have wronged you. Proverbs says, “the tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21 NIV). Every time we open our mouth, life or death come out.

Someone said, **“Forgiveness in many cases is not possible because we will not stop talking. As long as we talk over and over again about how others have hurt us, we will never find the strength to forgive. At some point, we have to stop talking and start forgiving.”**

iv) Pray. (v28b)

Next, we need to pray. Loving people the way Jesus taught means praying for them, and prayer requires more than a half-hearted intention. Prayer requires truly wanting good for someone else.

“When Martin Niemoller, a German pastor, was arrested by the Nazis in World War II, he prayed daily from his prison cell for his captors. Other prisoners asked why he prayed for those who were his enemies. “Do you know anyone who needs your prayers more than your enemies?” he replied. But what if you hate the person you are praying for? Tell that to the Lord. He won’t be surprised. Then say something like this, “Lord, I hate this person, but you already know that. I ask you to love this person through me because I can’t do it in my own power. I ask you for a love I don’t have and can’t begin to produce.” God will not turn you away when you come with an honest heart, admitting you need his love to flow through you.”

This is what Jesus did as he hung on the cross: Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. ([Luke 23:34](#))

v) Offer the cheek. (v29)

Next, Jesus is saying that a believer should not retaliate when you receive a punch or a slap of hatred. Why? **Turning the other cheek disarms. You disarm them by doing the very thing they least expect by not retaliating.** The early church consistently turned the other cheek by continuing to share the gospel with those who rejected them. They have never fought back in kind, but attempted to overcome evil with good.

In summary, as you can see Jesus shows a different model of responding to our enemies in relationship. Then he continues to make us squirm by telling us how to love with our stuff.

Next,

b. Jesus shows us a different model for managing our possessions.

Look with me at verse 29b and 30 which says, *“and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.”*

i) Do not deny your enemy. (v29b)

The second illustration continues the picture of being vulnerable. **Those who take the outer garment should also be allowed to have the undershirt.** Jesus' point here is not that we allow ourselves to be robbed. The point is that we are ministers of the gospel. If it means giving away your possession to win an enemy over for the sake of Christ, do it. Doing the work Jesus can expose one to the danger of losing our stuff, but that should not stop us from making multiple efforts to win people into the Kingdom.

ii) Give. (v30)

We should also be compassionate and generous and should give to a needy enemy who harms us. Such compassion represents a fundamental expression of love. The believer is to help an enemy in need, and be ready to help. Note that Christ allows no excuse. The picture is that the believer gives and does not turn away when an enemy is in need. This will take the extraordinary love of Christ.

iii) Do not demand your things back. (v30b)

Jesus tells a disciple to not seek and get back what has been taken from him. This exhortation involves amazing restraint.

Why would you do this? This sounds crazy! It's because Jesus put people in your life that need to see the gospel. And this is how you do it! Because it's so difficult for us he says again with different words. I only want to love when there is a self-benefit.

Look with me at verse 31 and 32 which says, *"And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.* Suddenly, I hear my mother's voice, *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."* Jesus' Golden Rule gives us a standard by which naturally selfish people can gauge their actions: actively treat others the way they themselves like to be treated.

Okay, so really. How do I do this? How do I love my enemy? You want me to love that liar, cheater, abuser? Everything within wants to scream in their face! Or worse. Love just seems backward. It seems like an un-human response... It is. Jesus provides the only way out of this damaging pattern of relational brokenness.

It starts with forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't saying the hurtful actions were okay. Forgiveness is removing the weight of you trying to get even. Forgiveness invites God to work in their life and in your life. Someone said, "I believe forgiveness is the best form of love in any relationship."

Martin Luther King Jr. says, "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illumines it."

Forgiveness through love brings new life.

Jesus is telling His followers that they must show love to all kinds of people—no matter what faith, nationality, or personality—enemies included. If you love your enemies and "pray for those who persecute you," then you truly reveal that Jesus is Lord of your life.

So to summarize, we have identified that our enemies include anyone who is against us or harms us. Secondly, regardless of how they hurt us, Jesus tells us how to love them. Now let's continue to look at why Jesus wants us to love our enemies. We need to understand how He sees our enemies.

Lastly, because Jesus said, "love your enemies" we need to understand:

3. HOW HE SEES OUR ENEMIES

Look with me at verse 35b and 36 which says, *“your reward will be great, and you **will be** sons (and daughters) of the Most High.”*

The words “**will be**” are important because they indicate there is something that needs to happen for “you to become” a son or daughter of the Most High. As we talked about last week, in order to be a son or daughter, you need to be transformed by Christ and take up your cross. The key to loving our enemies is knowing who you are or become when you follow Jesus. *“You will be sons or daughters of the Most High.”* Most High is simply a title for God, that says nobody is higher than He is. What does this mean to be a son or daughter of God? **It means that we have surrendered ourselves to Jesus and become part of His family. It’s recognizing that the primary expression of God’s family is love. Are you a son or daughter of God? If you are, it means that you must join Jesus in loving our enemy.**

You see, loving your enemy confronts the core of who we are. What does it mean to be human? Why are we here? Our human condition is clearly revealed in how we want to respond to our enemies. It’s also seen in how we do respond. We are broken. We are prone to destroying or hating others when they hurt us. Someone said, “Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.” And yet we do it. Yet, there is a better way.

When we understand that we are all loved and made in the image of God:

Keli B. Trujillo says:

“• **It roots out our prejudices.** “If all people are made in the image of God and yet we see a particular group of people as an enemy or as someone to fear, then we need to ask why. What are we afraid of?” This teaching challenges believers to wrestle with how fear may be “causing us to dehumanize other people.”

• **It forces us to face ourselves.** loving enemies means “seeing them as I am—broken, confused, messed up, hurting, struggling. I can pray for the poor lost souls who are my enemy because they are, indeed, lost. As I am lost—on my worst days for certain. . . . They need Jesus just as I need Jesus.”

• **It calls us to grapple with the extraordinary gospel.** “To love our enemy is to believe that no one is beyond the grace of God—that every single human being is on the same footing before God as sinners. It is only through Jesus’ death and resurrection

that we are able to be reconciled to him. We should view our enemies as people not just made in the image of God but also potential instruments God can use for his glory.

- **It invites us to live out our true calling.** “To love our enemies we must learn to see them as image bearers . . . But first, we must learn to see *ourselves* as image bearers. **“When I remember that my *core calling* is to show what God is like and do what he would do, it fundamentally changes how I respond to my enemies because I remember how God responded to me when I was *his enemy*.”**

Thank the Lord that, as Romans 5:10 says, “Our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies”!

Recognizing being created in the image of God doesn’t magically erase negative feelings that arise because of your enemy, but it does forcibly reorient my perspective—away from my feelings and onto the Cross.

What causes Jesus to love and be merciful to his enemies? IT’S THE LOVE OF GOD! He sees us through a lens of unconditional love. A love that covers a multitude of sins. A love that was there from the day you were created. A love that created you and your enemy in the image of God. And yet, we all became the enemies of God because of our sin.

(Your enemy just might be a gift from God. A gift that changes you.) Terrorist, abuser, adulterer . . . *sinner*. For we each are made in his image—and that will never change.”

STORY – Carey Lodge told a true story titled, Meet the Christians who love their enemies, even when it's ISIS. In it, he says, “A team from the Preemptive Love Coalition (PLC), a US-Iraqi non-profit organization that's been active in the Middle East for a decade, took food and water to ISIS militants; providing respite to those who had been captured as Fallujah fell. Hundreds of suspected ISIS members were being held in the detainment compound not far from the city. Some would have been innocent men and boys; separated from their families as they fled Fallujah and sent for interrogation

by the Iraqi army. Others were confirmed, militants. All were given food to eat and water to drink by PLC.

The reason? "Love means going to the hard places."

Matthew Willingham, PLC's senior field editor who's based in Iraq wasn't able to take part in the aid drop in early August, but was watching on a video feed. The highly sensitive nature of the visit meant that only Iraqi's entered the compound. Among them was a Christian man named Sadiq.

He gave water to a bound prisoner dressed in a yellow jumpsuit, who he recognized from an ISIS propaganda video posted online. This man, a tribal sheikh loyal to Islamic State, had stood and watched as a friend of Sadiq's was brutally executed. "You killed my friend," Sadiq said, as he poured water into the man's mouth. "But I've come here to feed you."¹

Could you feed that man? When you become the a child of God He gives you the power to do so.

In Luke 6:36 Jesus continues to say, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

CONCLUSION.

WE NEED TO SEE THAT THE WAY OF JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY OUT.

So, when Christian's live this way, by God's power, we show something of what God is like. Through Jesus, God demonstrated his love and His kindness to us and His enemies. The hearts of those Christians who have denied themselves for the sake of Christ become satisfied in a close relationship with God and are no longer driven by cravings of retaliation and self-centeredness.

Because we are the children of God, we can demonstrate God's love through loving actions - by doing good, blessing, praying and turn the othering the other cheek.

WE CAN'T EXPECT SOMETHING FROM SOMEONE - SOMETHING THAT HAS NEVER BEEN PUT INTO THEM.

Jesus asks us to love our enemies. Can we actually do this? Where does the power to love like this come from? The gospel alone. What Jesus demonstrated on the

¹ <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/meet-the-christians-who-love-their-enemies-even-when-its-isis/95436.htm>

cross for you and me. Receiving the gospel puts into you the resources we need for this Spirit-driven behavior. The Word of God puts into you God's truths so that by meditating on them we might grow in believing hope and, thereby, empowered actions. Recognizing that we were once all enemies of God puts into you the truth that we are all sinners and need His forgiveness. Giving your life to Christ puts into you the ability to love your enemies. God puts into you a better way, the way of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Jesus puts into you the only way out - if you ask.