

Christian, Love Your Enemies

I. What does that mean?

II. How is that possible?

*<sup>27</sup> “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

*<sup>32</sup> “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

*<sup>37</sup> “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup> Give, and it will be given to you. 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.”*

Can you tell me, what does love look like in your life? Maybe in light of Valentine's Day last week, love looks like a box of chocolates or a card or a nice dinner out with your sweetheart. Maybe for you, love is holding your grandson in your arms, and kissing his chubby cheeks while he giggles with delight. Maybe for you love is smelling that first cup of fresh-brewed coffee in the morning. Or maybe it's the passion you have for that favorite sports team, whether it's the one you are playing on or the one you are cheering for. Chances are, we all have things we love. Things we love to talk about. I'll bet if I ask you to pull out your phone you could show me all kinds of pictures of things you love to love.

But if we're honest, we'll admit that those are all relatively easy things to love. It's not hard to love things that make you feel good, or love people who love you in return. But today, we're not going to talk about things that are easy to love. Instead, God, in his Word, is going to turn our attention to things, or more specifically, people who are hard to love. Today, God is going to address not the love that's easy to show, but the love that's hard to show. The kind of love that maybe we don't want to even hear about, but love which God demands of us as Christians. Love which sets us apart from the world around us. Exactly what is that love that God both demands and inspires in the hearts of his children? I think you know. Jesus says, here in our text,

Christians, Love Your Enemies

Today we want to reflect on 2 questions connected to those words.'

I. What does it mean (to love your enemies)?

II. How is that possible (to love your enemies)?

Once again, as we've done throughout this season of Epiphany, we'll let God uncover his answer to those questions here in his holy word. First, exactly what does Jesus mean by the words, "Love your enemies?" It's interesting to note that in the parallel account, recorded in Matthew 6, Jesus introduces the same command with the words, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies. (Matthew 6:43,44).*" In other words, apparently back in Jesus' day, there was the idea floating around that along with the command to love your neighbor (which was certainly a Biblical command found in the Old Testament), there was also this corresponding command that you were to hate your enemies. And certainly, there's some logic to that. You know, "Love those who are on your side, and hate those who aren't. If people are opposed to you, if they mistreat you, why would you treat them any differently? No, give them what they deserve. Give them a taste of their own medicine." That's how our human reason thinks.

But that's not the way that Jesus thinks. It's not the way that Jesus lived. And therefore, it's not the way that Jesus' followers are to live either. Jesus implores us to display what the world would call a crazy love, a radically different love. Not love for our friends, but love for our enemies.

But now, maybe we need to ask, exactly who does Jesus mean by our enemies? Is he referring to the Chicago Bears? No, he's referring to the fans of the Chicago Bears. No, not that either. Notice that Jesus describes who he means by our enemies when he goes on to say, here in our text, "*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" (Luke 6:27-28). In other words, our enemies are not in the people that we regard to be our enemies (really, we shouldn't regard anyone as our enemies), but rather, Jesus is referring to the people who treat us like we are their enemy, the people who are opposed to us, or trying to harm us, who make life miserable for us.*

Now, when people hear the word enemy, they sometimes think of terrorist groups like Isis or Al-Qaeda or the Taliban. But I'm not sure how much application those groups have for our lives. I'm not sure those people are physically mistreating you or me. Now, if you happen to be a Christian living in Pakistan and the local Taliban ripped up a copy of the Koran and threw it on your front porch just so that they could charge you with a crime of desecrating their holy book, and you end up getting thrown in jail or having your church burned down, as has happened on numerous occasions to Christians in Pakistan, that would be a different story.

But chances are, our enemies live a lot closer to us than the Taliban. But that doesn't mean they are any easier to love. Think about it. In your life, who is that person who you are most tempted to revile? Maybe it's someone who regularly mocks your faith: the college professor who tells you that your Biblical worldview is out of date or who docks your grades because you're not supporting his anti-Christian theories. Or maybe it's the co-worker who calls you a fool for wasting your time sitting in church or watching sermons online. Maybe the person who has hurt you the most, the person you're most tempted to hate is the person who stole your innocence, who assaulted you in some way, and never got caught, never had to pay. Or maybe it's the person who chose to climb behind the wheel while under the influence and ended up snuffing out the life of one of your best friends. Or maybe it's the kid who won't stop bullying your daughter, or her mother who defends her child's behavior. Or what about the doctor who misdiagnosed your mom's medical condition, or the attorney who accused you of a crime you never committed, or the brother-in-law who cheated on your sister, or the neighbor whose dog keeps making a mess on your lawn. Or the guy at work who spends the whole day dropping F-

bombs. Chances are, we all have people we are tempted to hate, or at least people who are really hard to love.

In fact, sometimes the people who are hardest to love, ironically, are the people who are closest to us. Maybe it's your wife who seems to have nothing good to say about you. Or your husband who acts like he doesn't really care about you, or your kids who ignore about everything you say. What are we supposed to do when people treat us so poorly, when they act like they are our enemies?

Jesus tells us, Christians, love your enemies.

But now, maybe we'd better ask again, what does that mean, to love your enemy. Only in this case, the emphasis is not on who your enemy might be, but rather, what does it mean to love that person? Is Jesus saying that we need to fall in love with our enemy? Kind of like a crime victim writing love letters to the perp who assaulted her. No, in this case, what Jesus is calling for is not love as an emotion, but love as an action. In this case, love is not necessarily something we feel toward our enemy, it's something we do for them.

In fact, did you know that throughout the New Testament, the Greek word for love, which is *agape*, is rarely used as a noun? It is far more often used as a verb. Love is not merely something I have, something I feel. It's something I do. In fact, doesn't Jesus bear that out here in our text? What does Jesus say? "*Love your enemies.*" And immediately he goes on to tell us what that love looks like in action. "*Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*" Notice that Jesus doesn't tell you how you should feel for the people who mistreated you. But he does tell you what you should do for them. Do good to them. Bless them. Pray for them. This is a critical distinction that has a ton of application in the various relationships we find ourselves in. Whether we're in a marriage that is struggling, or we're a victim who's been mistreated or a believer was being persecuted. God doesn't demand that you feel affection for the person who's hurt you. He does demand that you do loving things for that person.

Let me give you a couple of examples of that. When you don't feel all that much love for your spouse, you can still do the dishes for her. You can still put down the phone for him. When you don't want to even talk to that person you have issues with, you can still say, "God bless your day." When you feel like you can't even look at the person who has hurt you so, you can still pray for that person. You see, in so many ways, love is not an act of the heart, it's an act of the will. It's determining that you will do something good for that person, even if you don't feel like doing it. That's what Jesus means by, "Love your enemies."

And yet, it must be said that even if we properly define the words enemy and love, does that mean that mean that we will have no trouble of carrying out Christ's command? Does that mean we are all good at showing love to those who mistreat us, those who to treat us like we're the enemy? I doubt it. If you're like me, this command to love my enemies is like a mirror that shows me how often I don't do good to those who hate me. I mean, often times, I don't even do good to those who love me, much less those who hate me.

In fact, when I look at my life, my heart, my attitude, and compare it to what Jesus is commanding me to do here in these words, "Love your enemies," I find myself wondering, "How can God expect a sinner like me to actually love my enemies? How is that even possible? That's a good question. Now that we've addressed the question "What does it mean to love our enemies?", let's take up the question, II. How was it possible to love our enemies? In other words, what reason do you and I have to do good to those who hate us? Why would you ever want to pray for those who mistreated you? How is that possible? I'll give you three reasons.

First, and most important, your ability to love and forgive the people who have sinned against you is directly tied to your appreciation for the fact that that's exactly what God did for you first. What does Scripture say? *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)*. In other words, Jesus didn't love us because we were so good to him. He loved us even though we were all acting like his enemies. What does Scripture say? *The sinful mind is hostile to God (Romans 8:7)*. By our sinful behavior, it's like we are continuing to crucify Christ. But just as Jesus said about those who we're crucifying him in his day, "Father, forgive them". so Jesus intercedes for you and me today. "Father forgive them." And ultimately, it's that forgiveness of the millions of sins that we've committed against God, that empowers us to let go of the one or two, or maybe more, sins that others have committed against us. It's only when we come to grips with how merciful God has been to us that we can in turn be merciful to others. As Jesus says here in our text, *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36)*.

Secondly, recognize that doing good to those who hate us and forgiving those who hurt us doesn't mean we're condoning what they did. What they did or said may well have been a sin against God and us. But our job is not to make those people pay for what they did. We leave the judgment in God's hands. *"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19)* The key to letting go of the sins that people have committed against us is letting God handle them.

And thirdly, we can love our enemies, because we know that God can use our acts of love, our deeds of kindness, the forgiveness that we share, especially toward those who have sinned against us—God can use all those things to bring blessing into our lives and the lives of others. Wasn't that true of Joseph in our Old Testament reading today? Rather than hating his brothers for the terrible things they had done to him, Joseph forgave them, and it brought peace and restoration to the family of Jacob. The same thing is true in our world today. How did Paul put it in our epistle lesson? *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:20,21)*

You might say that that's the standard that God has set for all of us. It's not, "Help those who can help themselves." It's not, "Do good to those who can return the favor." It's not even, "Love those who love you." Rather, it's love your enemies! How is that possible? Well, as Jesus once said, *"With God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26)*. In the end, it's God's love for you and me who were once his enemies, that in turn, empowers us to love those who are once our enemies. Or to put it another way, the way that Jesus proved his love for you by offering himself on a cross wasn't easy. But it gave us exactly what we need to love the people in our lives, even when loving them isn't easy. That my friends, is the precious and powerful truth that God uncovers for us, in his Holy Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.