

Much of what God calls us to do isn't easy, but difficult. Yet, these are things which God himself does. When God calls us to be holy, he isn't just tossing up some hollow ideal, he's calling us to be as he is. He tells us to be like Jesus who does all things in love according to God's will and delight. Jesus lived perfectly everything God calls us to do and to be. The "do as I say, not as I do" nonsense doesn't apply to God, he's no hypocrite. God calls us to do good to all people, as Jesus did; to pray for those who persecute, as Jesus did; to keep sinful anger at bay, to be self-controlled, to exercise restraint toward one another, just as Jesus did.

Restraint is moderating your behavior and having a degree of self-control to keep the extremes of an impassioned response in check. When do you have to practice restraint? When you are wronged unfairly, unjustly, and you begin to sense your body having a physical response to it: elevated heart rate, increased blood pressure. When our sense of pride or dignity is damaged, restraint is required to keep things from blowing up. When don't you have to practice restraint? When your response is acceptable, God pleasing. There's no law to restrain joy, patience, goodness, and self-control. When have you practiced restraint but really shouldn't have? When you knew what the right thing to do was, but didn't do it. We do that a lot, we get mixed up and bashful. God doesn't. Ever. Jesus knows the right way to act in the right moment, every time.

After he finished praying, while he was talking with eleven of his disciples, the twelfth, Judas, approached him leading a small army of Romans, Temple guards, and elders, indicating that they were to apprehend Jesus by giving him a kiss. If you saw Judas in torch light as he rounded a tree trunk or stone wall and saw him kiss Jesus, what would your reaction be? If you've ever experienced betrayal, you know the hurt and rage of seeing someone's true colors now that the mask of love has been ripped off. If you haven't, it's not hard to imagine the feeling. Judas induced such feelings.

This hurt. Jesus was a person and Judas was his friend, “*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*” **(Luke 22:48)** Jesus lets it be known that a display of affection used for evil ends was truly despicable. This hurt Jesus. This enraged Peter. Seeing Jesus treated like a violent criminal with one of their own selling him out sent Peter into rage. Asking permission and taking action at once, Peter threw restraint to the wind. “*And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.*” **(Luke 22:50)** Likely, Peter wasn’t aiming for this man’s ear. The head, the base of the neck are larger targets and this servant, named Malchus, had just enough time to dodge so the strike was a glancing one which resulted in loss of ear, not life. But blood doesn’t waste time gushing from head wounds, especially after a hike down the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. Peter didn’t restrain aggression and even though it was grounded in love for Jesus, it was completely misplaced.

Jesus didn’t join in. He could have, would have been easy. As someone who’d rebuked storms, illness, demons, and raised people to life, Jesus had options, but didn’t utilize them. He simply said, “*I am he,*” **(John 18:5)** and the rabble fell to the ground. With another word, he could have erased them, but didn’t. He restrained his disciples’ passionate rage, put a stop to the bloodshed. “*No more of this!*” **(Luke 22:51)** He didn’t need the disciples’ protection, Jesus has the power to call down unnumbered angels to his defense, and what human army can withstand them? Jesus must be arrested, so he allowed himself to be, but not before he touched where Malchus’ ear had been and healed him.

In a sense, Jesus didn’t restrain himself either, not really. Sure, he didn’t call down an angel army or wipe this mob and their false pretense out of existence. What Jesus does is remain absolutely true to himself. He let grace pour out of him, restraint-free, to heal and make a major impact on all who witnessed. When grace isn’t held back but lived, what room is there for unbridled hate and anger? There is none, it’s driven out by the practicing of gracious love most clearly seen in Jesus. Just like Jesus didn’t need his disciples then to protect him, he doesn’t need us to use physical force or intimidation to protect him, his reputation, his Word, or to accomplish his kingdom work. Jesus does not teach or model this for us, which is why he rebuked Peter as sternly as he did!

Right here, right now, Jesus doesn't need us to hit back, with fists sometimes or with words more often. The zinger response that makes a person feel small and foolish delivered in callousness as to how our words will make a person feel and negatively impact them has no place in God's kingdom or in the hearts of God's children. In many areas, not all, our culture currently encourages this and we're certainly trained to follow suit with the result that we come to think that if we don't reply with some venom, it won't look tough and people won't take us seriously. It's time to repent of this and beyond time to become counter-cultural by doing and being the opposite of the tough guy routine with all its toxicity and vitriol.

Jesus knew he didn't deserve this violent and illicit arrest. He wasn't a violent thief who needed a small army to be subdued. He was a teacher who'd been teaching, so if there was legitimacy in their actions, why didn't they arrest him during the day light, above board? His recognition of this and allowance of arrest showed his disciples who was in control, even as they fled in terror. What looked like weakness, what looked like inaction, was almighty love at work, was grace not restrained but displayed in willingly following his Fathers' will to carry out to completion his part in salvation of being the one who suffers at the hand of sinners and dies on the cross to redeem sinners from sin so that we would know only God's forgiveness, love, and goodness – so we sinners would go to heaven even though we die and decay.

The impact of Jesus showing love to an "enemy" and healing him is great. It's impacted you. Be this love, it's what Jesus has made you new to be. Imagine the impact you can have as a child of God when it so often feels that restraint or general cordiality are a lost art. You know Jesus and his love which led him to the cross for sinners like us. His Word is in you and his will is being done through you so you can be different than the many unrestrained hateful and angry voices around you. You can use your words to heal, to help, and validate rather than hurt, inflame, and tear down. You can respond graciously. This may be perceived as weakness by some, but God knows the strength of love he gives to make it possible.

His Spirit fills you and makes you a light so that by your behavior and the saving gospel behind it, others will come to know Jesus' love. Amen.