

Love Your Enemies  
Luke 6:27-36  
March 21, 2021  
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CenterPoint Church

Read Luke 6:27-36

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)*

### **Introduction: I Hope She Cheats Like You Did On Me**

There's a song that has come on the radio when I'm in the car with my girls that has really nice lyrics: *"I hope she makes you smile the way it made me smile on the other end of a phone in the middle of a highway driving alone. I hope you hear a song that makes you sing along and gets you thinking about her then the last several miles turn into a blur."* That's really sweet, right? It continues, *"I hope you both feel the sparks by the end of the drive, I hope you know she's the one by the end of the night, I hope you never ever felt more free, tell your friends that you're so happy... I hope you spend your last dime to put a rock on her hand, I hope... she's everything you're ever gonna need."* Wow, this is such an encouraging song, right? I'm feeling all the feels.

*"And then I hope she cheats!"* What? *"Like you did on me."*<sup>1</sup>

It's a revenge song! It masquerades as an uplifting, hopeful song only to turn into a nasty curse. The basic premise of the song is: "You hurt me when I was so in love with you, I will only feel good if you get hurt in the same way when you've completely fallen for someone else."

Another song, called "Long Walk" by Brandy Clark, has these lyrics: *"If I was Jesus, I'd turn the other cheek, if I was Eastwood, my cool is what I'd keep, if I was raised Southern Baptist I'd say 'bless your heart,' if I was privileged and practiced grace would be my art, sometimes I wish my tolerance was taller, but after all, I'm my mother's daughter, so take a long walk off a real short pier, take a cinderblock as a souvenir."*<sup>2</sup>

Clearly the writers of these songs didn't believe the message of Luke 6, even though one of them literally quoted from it. Today's passage offers the exact opposite sentiment of the world's usual reaction to being hurt and wronged. Instead of revenge and anger, Jesus suggests something radically different: love, help, and mercy.

### **I. Christian Love Suppresses the Urge to Retaliate (vv. 27-30)**

<sup>27</sup> *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.*

I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom. The teacher passed out some papers, some form we needed to take home. I was the third kid in the row and the kid in front of me was holding onto the paper, so I waited for a couple of seconds, but when he didn't hand them to me, I reached up and took them from his hand. Well, as I grabbed them out of his hand, they gave him a small paper cut. He turned around and slapped me hard on my cheek with his open hand. I was stung more by shock than pain. I had never been slapped like that before and I didn't know what to do. So I turned the other cheek,

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<sup>1</sup> "I Hope" sung by Gabby Barrett, written by Jon Nite, Zacahary Kale, Gabby Barrett.

<sup>2</sup> "Long Walk" sung by Brandy Clark, written by Brandy Clark, Jesse Frasure, Jessie Jo Dillon.

not so much because it was in great obedience to Jesus, but because it's the first thing that popped into my head. I'm so thankful that I grew up in a church where we heard the Scriptures and that this one was there when I needed it. I think the kid in front of me thought about slapping my other cheek, but the teacher jumped up and marched us both down to the principal's office where he got in trouble and I was sent back to class with no consequences. It was one of the first times where I remember thinking, "Wow, I did exactly what the Bible said to do, and it worked!"

Jesus said "Love one another" a lot, and He made a point to say "Love your neighbor" several times. But "Love your enemies"? That feels like a bridge too far, that's crazy talk. I think the best most of us can do is "Avoid or ignore your enemies." But Jesus meant it. Don't forget the four kinds of love, the four Greek words (I talked about these a few weeks ago on Valentine's Day) – *phileo* brotherly love, *storge* natural affection like parent's love, *eros* romantic love, and *agape* unconditional love. Can you guess which word Jesus used when He said love your enemies? He's not calling us to date them, He's not calling us to love them like a brother or a child, necessarily. Luke uses the word *agape* here. It's a love that gives freely no matter how it is treated; a love that is fueled by the Holy Spirit that says, "I will love this person because, by God's grace, I choose to love this person. It doesn't come naturally and they haven't really earned it, but I offer it anyways."<sup>3</sup>

And He didn't just say "love your enemies" and just leave it at that. He had to give some really concrete examples what that looked like – *do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, turn the other cheek, give to everyone who asks of you*. These are not exhaustive, we need to be able to apply that love in different situations we find ourselves in, but they remind us that we should constantly be checking our natural impulses. The impulse to strike back, to return bitter words and hatred with some of your own runs deep. What is today's favorite reaction to enemies? Cancelling them. If you disagree with someone, you want to cancel them, "de-platform" them, silence them, shame them. It's human nature not to want to have to listen or let people you absolutely disagree with air their views; we all desire to cancel people. Jesus says, "Love your enemies- do good to them, bless them." He doesn't say you have to agree with them, but you have to treat them with respect and kindness. Both sides of the political aisle love to mock and just obliterate their ideological opponents. And I'm not saying you shouldn't tell the truth how you understand it and that we shouldn't be absolutely strong in our positions. But how differently Jesus' followers should correct error gently and lovingly, not with sarcasm and anger. When you read something online that just ticks you off, do you stop and pray for that person?

I came across a great C.S. Lewis quote about how we can bring ourselves to love people who we do not naturally love: "The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as you do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."<sup>4</sup> Simply put: don't wait to "feel love" for your enemy, go ahead and start acting on love for them and the feelings will follow.

Now, I remember my dad (a pastor) talking to my brothers and me in elementary school about sticking up for one another and even about hitting a bully back. And I remember wondering how that squared with Jesus' words about turning our cheeks and blessing those who hated us. At the risk of softening Jesus' words, I think He meant that we turn the cheek to personal insults and

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1996), p. 116.

attacks, but we have a responsibility to stand up for the weak and vulnerable. We don't allow bullies and predators to attack weak people without intervening. And these words are not meant for governments necessarily, they are directed towards individuals who have been insulted or assaulted. So you don't use this passage to talk someone out of becoming a soldier, of going into the armed forces. Additionally, this isn't telling someone who is in an abusive relationship not to seek help. If that's you or someone you know, get help, contact the proper authorities; don't let these verses be twisted to justify the actions of an abusive parent or spouse or neighbor.

But even with those caveats, we are still commanded by Jesus to not only refrain from retaliating when we're personally wronged, but urged to take a stance of love towards the person who has wronged us. I had a couple instances where people stole from me when I first got to college. I had a roommate who moved next door but then came back in my room and stole money from me (he eventually paid me back when the school got involved). Then I left all my clothes at the house I would be living in my sophomore year over the summer, and when I arrived in the fall, one of the guys who used to live there had stolen them all. I was getting really tired of that. But then I was talking to a girl who helped run some ministries on campus, and she mentioned that someone had stolen some things from her. And I'll never forget what she added, "My hope is that that person just needed those things a lot more than I did." I definitely did not have that attitude or perspective, I just knew that I had been wronged and I didn't like it. But my friend had truly internalized Jesus' words about when we are wronged, and she held things very freely. That helped me rethink my attitude towards possessions – that everything I own is given to me by God, and sometimes I just have to be OK with being wronged, as Jesus said, "don't demand everything back."

## **II. Christian Love Goes Farther Than the World's Love (vv. 31-34)**

*<sup>31</sup> And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. <sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.*

This section starts with the Golden Rule. It was Jesus' unique take on the common stance towards others that was usually phrased "Do unto others what you have to do to get what you want out of them" or "Do to others before they can do to you." When the Golden Rule is given in Matthew 7, it says that "*this is the Law and the Prophets*" – in other words a great summary of key teaching in the Old Testament. If you can't remember a lot of the laws, this one short summary will get you far.

You've heard the phrase "*quid pro quo*"? It means "something for something," a position that if I help you out, I very much expect you to help me with something else, even if it's a favor I can call in way down the line; you owe me. That's the world's way of thinking. The rhetorical questions in verses 32-34 are based on the fact that most people are willing to help and love people who help them in return, but only if there's going to be something in return. But Christian love rises above that level, to an unselfish, sacrificial love that is willing to love even if there is never an earthly reward or return for it. Because, as we'll see in the next verse, when we get nothing in return in this world, then God greatly rewards us in heaven.

How easy loving other people is when we wait to see who is nice to us, who initiates conversation with us, the people who love us first and are like us. Then we love them in return, anybody in the world can love like that. Then we're not required to reach out to people who might be initially indifferent to us, or hostile to us, or worse, actually rude or angry towards us. Of course, it's easy to

be nice back to people who are nice to you; we can love people back when they've done kind things to us. But that is a reactive posture that Jesus calls us to go beyond to the hard love that is not going to get you thank you notes or merit badges.

This kind of love can be exhausting, I'm not going to lie. I've had people say something to the effect of, "Man, I've put in my time, I volunteered for lots of stuff at church, I went on mission trips, I reached out to people, I tried loving the unlovable for many years. I'm just tired, I'm ready to let other people take over; I'm just going to enjoy life." That's why Galatians 6:9 says, "*And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*" It's why we minister in God's strength, not our own. We will always wear down unless the Spirit is fueling our love.

### **III. Christian Love Looks Like God's Love (vv. 35-36)**

*<sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

In the recent movie *Light of My Life*, Casey Affleck plays a dad whose character says to his daughter, "Do you know how much I love you? To the sun and back 30,000 times. And it's not even our sun. It's a sun in a distant galaxy. And we're taking a very slow spaceship. It takes a very, very long time. And there's a lot of headwind. It's quite a trip. How much do you love me?" She responds, "Like, to the top of a tree." And he says, "What?" incredulously. So she adds, "And back down." I actually paused the movie and prayed, "God, thank You for loving me like that dad when I only love you and love others a tiny fraction of how much You love me."

The emphasis in these verses is that our efforts to be merciful, generous, and kind are ways that we emulate our Heavenly Father, even though our love will pale in comparison. We grow into our identity as His children, His sons and daughters, when we reflect His qualities. If you've ever had someone compliment you by saying "you're your Father's daughter" or "you're your Father's son" for some good way that you've acted like him, then you know what I'm talking about. We also become more Christ-like, since He is the perfect Son of God, as we change our stance towards people who hate us or that we have had friction with, attempting to return hate and anger with grace and forgiveness.

### **Conclusion**

Does "loving your enemies" really work? Can it really change people? Let's look at a few stories: I wonder if you've heard the name Daryl Davis. He's a jazz and blues piano player in Maryland who has played with B.B. King, Chuck Berry, all these great musicians. He had an unexpected conversation with a man after one of his concerts back in 1983. The man was white and Daryl is black, and as they sat down to get a drink to talk about music, the man admitted that he had never had a drink with a black person before. Later in the conversation it came out that the man was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Now, Daryl Davis had a choice – to yell at the man, tell him how ignorant and hateful he was, or to continue the conversation. He chose to continue the conversation and ask questions, and when he could, he dispelled the man's stereotypes and prejudices about black people. That encounter led to him to start attending Klan rallies and befriending one of the Grand Dragons, Robert Kelly. Because of that friendship, Robert Kelly realized that he did not believe what the Klan stood for anymore, so he shut down his chapter and gave Daryl his robe as a symbol of his change. Daryl Davis has been responsible for changing the lives of over 200 Ku Klux Klan members, including many prominent Grand Dragons who have turned away from a life of hate because a man they formerly despised sought to know them. These men now consider Daryl Davis

to be one of their greatest friends, one even making him the godfather of his daughter.<sup>5</sup> Instead of reacting in anger or returning hate for hate, he sought to show them through kindness and honest dialogue that he was none of the things they thought about him, that he was a man just like them, made in the image of God-- just like them. His Christian faith compels him to love his enemies.

The first of Jesus' followers who was recorded as being killed for his faith was named Stephen. His story is in Acts 7, and his prayer right before he died was, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (7:60). Was Stephen naïve to think that any of these people who were stoning him would repent and turn to the Lord? Does our love and bearing up under persecution really do anything in reality? Well, the verses surrounding that one say that there was a young man named Saul who approved of the execution and at whose feet the witnesses laid down their garments. And yes, he did repent and turn to the Lord and then preached the Gospel, planted churches, and wrote a fair amount of the New Testament; we know Saul as the Apostle Paul.

And Paul would learn these lessons so well that he would write in Romans 12:17-21 – "*Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'* To the contrary, *'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.'* Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

But remember that these are not just expectations God has for us; they are reflections of how He Himself acts. Romans 5:10 says that "*while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*" It doesn't say that we were just indifferent to God or that we were ignorant of God; it says that we were enemies, we hated God and didn't want Him to exist, we'd prefer ruling our own lives. But God loved His enemies so much that He reached out to them and sent His Son to make peace with them, pardoning us for our crimes against the High King by dying in our place. What were some of Jesus' last words on the cross? "*Father, forgive them for they don't know what they do.*" He loved His enemies even to the end of His life. When people whipped Him, mocked and abused Him, and placed Him on a cross to die, Jesus hung there because of His love. A love that God uses to bring us into His eternal family, lavishing His love on us, giving us an eternal home in heaven.

If this is new news to you, I want to invite you to consider that God is extending His offer of love to you – He wants to bestow grace, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation on you – it's all available through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you have already placed your faith in Christ, thank Him again for His undeserved love for you. And then think of the people that could be considered your enemies and commit yourself to overcoming evil with good, finding ways to bless them, to be merciful and kind, regardless of whether it's returned to you. You will please your Father's heart as you work towards that. Amen.

Benediction - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 – "*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.*"

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/mar/18/daryl-davis-black-musician-who-converts-ku-klux-klan-members>