

Jesus Shows Us How to Love Our Enemies Romans 5:1-11; Luke 6:27-36

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HPC Morning

[Intro]



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The passage that we just read from Luke 6 is probably one of the most famous passages from the Bible. Anyone who has been in Sunday School or church for even a short time knows that Jesus said "*Love your enemies.*" But how many understand what He meant when He said this?

Some will probably be like the ones in this cartoon. When Jesus commands us, "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*" in the back of their minds, they instantly say to themselves, "I hope not." "Certainly he doesn't mean the Romans."

Some will wonder, "Does Jesus teach pacifism? Should we just be like 'doormats', that anyone can step on, do whatever they want to abuse us?" Some ask, "Does Jesus mean that we should not join the military to defend our country?"

Some might ask, "Who are my enemies? I don't have any enemies, I am a nice guy, I never argue with anyone. I live in a peaceful country, no one here will persecute me for being a Christian who comes to church every Sunday. I don't know how I can apply this passage."

[pause]

Well, I can assure you this passage has nothing to do with changing our government's policy on national defense. Nor is it promoting the peace movement. But if we seriously apply this passage, it will have a revolutionary impact on the way we relate to one another. Jesus turns the worldly definition of "love" up-side-down. Jesus demands us to love in a radical way - "Love your enemies!"

As we go through this passage, there are three points I’d like us to pay attention to:

1. Who are our enemies?
2. Tough Love vs. Easy Love
3. Imitating God’s Love

[Context]

This “love-for-enemies” passage is part of Jesus’ Sermon On the Plain in Luke. Jesus is teaching us how to live as Christians in our daily living. To begin, Jesus reassures His followers that by God’s grace the faithful ones will be blessed. Then He teaches that the followers of Jesus are to live and look different from the rest of the world. Believers are called to LOVE unconditionally, and that includes our enemies.

Now, as Jesus commands us, “*Love your enemies*”, the first question we need to ask: **Who are our enemies?**

Last week at the Evening Service, we prayed for our brothers and sisters who are persecuted. We know who their enemies are. These are “big” enemies. Our persecuted brothers and sisters are heroes to us. But not all Christians face big enemies, so who are our enemies?

In our daily life, we all face ‘little enemies’!

- There are those whose personalities are so different from ours that they tend to always push our buttons. They talk too much, disrespect personal space, are awkward in conversation. They are the ones who annoy us.
- Or maybe your employee or boss is insensitive, rude, and arrogant.
- Or your business competitor who is dishonest, but makes more money than you.
- Your teenage kid is disrespectful and never obeys your instructions.
- Or an elderly person who you care for is always whining and demands many things when you are in a hurry.
- The teacher at school always picking up on your child, and never encouraging them.
- The neighbor who has held a grudge against you since you moved into the neighborhood.
- Some insecure people in your office who resent you and try to tear you down even though you’re no threat to them.

The list goes on and on. There are many “little enemies” that Jesus commands us to love. What’s the usual reaction that you have to those who are offensive, or maybe even rude? What about if there are enemies who go to the same church? How do you deal with them? Perhaps you ignore them, and leave by different doors. Or maybe you cross the street when you see them approaching, or find an excuse not to invite them to any of your social gatherings. Even if you bump into your enemy accidentally, you still have your best defense and politely say - “sorry I’m busy. I have to go.” Being “nice”, after all, is all we need, isn’t it?

Sometimes, though not always, in practical terms, this love for ‘little enemies’ is more difficult than love for big enemies, for persecuting enemies. When we face outright persecution, there may be something heroic about your stance. However, there is nothing heroic about two Christians being in conflict struggling with forgiveness.

Therefore, as we read today’s Bible passage, please don’t quickly dismiss it. We all encounter different types of enemies in our life, either big or small, and Jesus commands us to love them all.

Now the next question is: *How do we love? How does God want us to love?*

We see two kinds of love in Luke's passage: tough love and easy love.

In vv. 27-30, Jesus says,

*"But I tell you who hear me: **Love your enemies**,
do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who mistreat you.*

***If someone strikes you on one cheek,**
turn to him the other also.*

***If someone takes your cloak,**
do not stop him from taking your tunic.*

*Give to everyone who asks you, and **if anyone takes what belongs to you,**
do not demand it back."*

Here Jesus is not asking us to think our enemies are lovable. The love He demands is not just some type of fuzzy feelings in the air. Jesus demands love in action - 'do good', 'bless', 'pray'! These are not passive reactions. We need to be proactively reaching out and taking the initiative to love.

Jesus' call to love the enemy is specific as well. Whether in attitude, action, word, or prayer, the enemy is to be loved. This is '**tough love**' - because it is tough on the ones who love. In order to show this tough love, we have to deny ourselves, put ourselves out there continually expose ourself to abuse. This 'tough love' isn't a love of power, manipulation, but a love of service and meekness.

This tough love is underlined by three concrete examples. First, if someone strikes you on the cheek, then offer him the other. This is tough *love over rejection*. Do you know what makes door-knocking hard? Rejection. People would slam their doors and ask you to get out of their property. You don't want to go back again. Peter Back, my lecturer at SMBC, kept doing weekly door-knocking in the Smithfield area for years. Many rejected him, but he kept going back.

The second example has something to do with *not seeking revenge*. If someone steals your jumper, give him your shirt as well. Remain exposed and be willing to take even more risks. In Acts 14 when Paul was preaching the gospel in Lystra, the crowd stoned him, nearly killing him, but when he got up, he went back into the city again, not to seek revenge, but to keep bringing the gospel to the people there.

The third example shows that tough love is *generous love*. To the one who begs, give. From the one who takes, don't seek to get it back. Jesus wants us as Christians to give and give and give. Never hold back from giving out of a love for your possessions. In other words, whether we give or withhold is determined by our love, not a regard for how much you have. I have been encouraged by many of you who give generously without asking for return. Some of you look after the sick or the needy ones years after years, never ask for reward.

These three examples present to us a vivid picture of this tough love - love your enemies regardless of how they respond. The world's standards of love is "**easy love**" but we do better than this.

Most people have their own little circle of "in" people, their own list of compatible people, their friends. We love our inner circle friends because we are sure that we will be loved by them as well. But in vv. 32-34, Jesus considers this as "easy love" -

if you love those who love you, what's so great about this kind of love? That's like the love sinners give.

If you do good only to those who do good to you, what's so special about that? That's like the love sinners give.

If you lend money only to those who will be able to repay, what's so honorable about that?

At Hurstville, we are doing very well in terms of pastoral care, in the Manse, we have a freezer filled with food. When church members are sick, many people are willing to put their names down on the roster to provide food. When Caleb was born, many church families prepared meals for us, that was very very helpful. And we've done the same to other families as well. This is what a Christian community is about - loving and caring for each other.

But, the question here is, am I willing to give to those who have no ability to return the same favour? For example, those homeless people or refugees. Once or twice, I might be able to give, but I can't keep doing this forever.

[pause]

But, what's Jesus teaching us here? - "Tough love" or "easy love"?

Jesus is saying, - the love of Christians is to be different from the love displayed by the world. We show love not only to those who deserve it but also to those who don't. If we only love those who love us back then this is no different from pagan love for pagans or from tax collectors' love for tax collectors.

So in v. 35, Jesus summarizes: "*love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.*" Tough love is true love, - a giving without demanding a giving back, no strings attached.

[pause]

At this point, you might be thinking, "Yes, I hear what Jesus has just said. But I still find it really hard. I don't think I'm able to love those people. I found it hard enough to even love my own children if they don't love me back. I can't imagine being able to love my enemies. How can Jesus demand me to do this?"

Jesus' demand is based on His own rich and costly love towards us, His enemies. "*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:6-8)

Every man, woman and child is an enemy of God. We didn't know Him. We didn't like to depend on Him. We alienated ourselves from Him. But God - in His infinite mercy - sent Jesus - sinless, perfect Jesus to lay down His life. He heals, He provided food, He rescued, Jesus has loved His enemies. In the end, He gave away all He had, even His life, to you, and me. He loves us in a radical way, now He is demanding us to do the same.

So, this naturally leads us to the third point: **Imitate God’s love.**

Humanly speaking, we can’t love in the way God loves us. We can’t even love our wives and husbands and children like that. Humanly speaking we don’t want to love our enemies. We want them to suffer, we want them to die.

But when we become Christians, God removes our hearts of stone and gives us hearts like Jesus’. His love flows into us. Then we’re enabled to love and have mercy on others just as God has loved us and been merciful. In this we show ourselves and the world that we are sons of God. We show the world the power of this radical love - the love that turns the world up-side-down.

“your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (v. 35b - 36) When we reflect who God is to the world, when we faithfully serve Jesus by imitating His love to others, God will honour us. God will reward our love, and our love will reflect our identity as God’s children. We become an audiovisual of Him.

[pause]

So now, let’s ask “what does Jesus really mean? How can this passage be applied to our own situation at HPC?”

In the Bible, we’re exhorted to love both Christians and non-Christians. I suspect it’s because this is not an easy thing to do. It’s not easy to love. I’ve mentioned that we all like to be with our own people. But from today’s passage, as Jesus calls us to love our enemies, He is telling us that Christian love must go beyond our inner circle friends to include those outside our small group. The objects of our love must include those who are from the “outside”, it must include enemies!!

In this way, the church itself is not made up of natural “friends”. Actually it is made up of natural enemies!! What brings us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs.

We come together as believers, only because we have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance. In the light of this common allegiance, in the light of the fact that we have all been loved by Jesus Himself, we commit ourselves to doing what He says - and He commands us to love one another, the enemies.

Jesus has showed us how to love our enemies - while we were His enemies, He loved us and died for us. Being a band of natural enemies, we love one another for Jesus’ sake. Our love will stand out and bear witness to Jesus.