

# Loving the Unlovable

Dear Friends,

Conflict is an inevitable fact of life. We all have people who anger, frustrate and annoy us. Whether it's the way they act or the things they say, they push all the right buttons. Resolving conflict is an art and skill. It can take years of practice to learn techniques to manage conflict with others. In Luke 6:27-36 Jesus gives us a new way to manage and deal with our enemies. We find that he challenges us to love those who hate us.

I have two younger sisters and we did not get along with each other when we were younger. We fought quite often, bickering over the smallest things. Our parents did their best to teach us how to resolve our conflict, but often it felt like it didn't work. All three of us were stubborn and arrogant. I know I found it hard to love them and I am sure that I myself was difficult to love. When I left for college our relationship changed drastically. I matured quite a bit, and my sisters did too. I have experienced many people that seem really difficult to love throughout my life. I am sure you have too.

Finding the will to love people who anger or annoy us is one of the hardest things Jesus asks us to do. In fact, finding the will is not enough most of the time. We must look to Jesus for the strength to love our enemies. Jesus is the perfect example of total submission, humility and love. He challenges his disciples to display radical, self-sacrificial love towards their enemies.

There are many aspects about this kind of love we can learn from this passage in scripture. In Luke 6:27-31, we read: 27 **“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,28bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.29If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.30Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.31Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

In the ancient Jewish tradition, it was common to hate your enemies. The Jews always seemed to have many powerful enemies who wanted to destroy them. Greeks, Persians, Egyptians and Romans have all attacked Jerusalem at some point in history. In Matthew 5:43-44 Jesus says, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”** Of all peoples, the Jews had a lot of pride in their heritage.

They went to great lengths to separate themselves from other nations around them. As the chosen people of God, they strongly disliked any country ruling over them. With a long oral tradition, they passed down the laws and commandments of God. The Pharisee sect created long lists of traditions based on their interpretation of scripture. Here Jesus is boldly claiming that to be a son or daughter of God, we must live out sacrificial love. This concept challenges us today, just as much as it did to Jesus' audience back then.

We are supposed to reflect Christ's love for the world in every aspect of our lives. If people are spiritually attacking us with curses, we are called to bless them. If people physically abuse us, we are called to pray for them. If people steal from us, we are called to give even more away. These are hard commands that call for countercultural reactions in Christians. In the United States, we champion the idea of putting ourselves first over others. Pride gets in the way of us turning the cheek.

We struggle to extend mercy because we focus on the wrong done to us. Then Christ gives us the Golden Rule. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." This concept of treating others as you want to be treated seems straight forward. Have you ever tried practicing the golden rule when the other person isn't living by it? It's hard to treat others the way you want to be treated, when they are not giving you the same courtesy.

We are called to love others, regardless of the way they treat us. Again, Christ is the greatest example of loving others well even in the midst of persecution. As disciples, we are called to follow in Christ's example. He desires us to love others in the same way he loves us. He desires us to extend the same mercy we receive from him.

We must go beyond just saying that we love others, but actually show it in how we treat them. Luke 6:32-36 says: **32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.33And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.34And 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.35But 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.36Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

Our actions often speak much louder than our words. It seems constant around the world, that you show love to those who love you. Karma is the philosophical idea that what you do comes back around to you. It's this idea that what goes around comes around. If you embezzle money from your company, the universe will pay you back by taking all you have. Counter to this idea of Karma, Jesus says love others especially when they don't love you. Our actions, our lives, the way we speak to others is supposed to reflect the love Christ displayed on the cross. If we only care for those who care for us, we do not display the life change bought by Jesus. Imagine a world in which the Church lived this out on a daily basis. I believe many more people

would believe in Christ, because they would see his love lived out. To refuse this teaching, to ignore it as something impossible to do, to refuse the call of Christ for internal change is to deny Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

From Genesis to Revelation, the book of the Bible is a story that climaxes with Jesus. Every story, every song, every prophecy finds its completion in Christ Jesus. So when Jesus says that we should love our enemies and do good to those that hate us, he says it in light of the cross. He knows that he was born to die on the cross for the sins of the world. We were all God's enemies before Jesus. As we look to him as our savior, we must recognize how much he loves the world.

It's principles like this that reveal the true heart of Jesus to his disciples. Jesus desires his followers to love others in the same way they receive love. What if Jesus only died on the cross for his followers, the ones who really loved him? The people who would enter heaven would be very few. No, he died for the sins of the whole world. Now, we have the ability to reflect that same kind of love. If we don't, we can't receive the credit bought by the blood of Christ. How is this different from the way the world teaches?

We have already talked about Karma. What is it about the United States that makes it hard to accept this teaching? Individualism is self-seeking by nature. The idea that our greatest goods are unique and personal teach us to believe that the world should revolve around us. Add that with competitive capitalism and we are easily drawn away from Christ. The Me, Me, Me mentality makes it easy to only seek out people who think in the same way we do. Social media has made this tribalism even easier to maintain and develop. As Christians, we know that community helps us fight against the idea that the world revolves around us. We know that instead of competing with others, we are called to help one another. When we live in contrast to our culture, we witness to people who don't believe in Christ. If we do not have enemies or people who hurt us, it might be because we are not living as Christ has called us to.

Jesus said in John 15:18-20 **"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."**

Following Christ means making enemies in this world. Just by following in the footsteps of Jesus, people will naturally hate you. Doing the right thing even when it's unpopular or even dangerous is exactly what Christ is calling us to do in this passage.

I had some friends in high school who I would hang out with quite often. I played sports with them, I ate lunch with them, and I shared life with them. At some point, they began drinking alcohol during school hours. This was something I definitely did not want to do. They

invited me several times, and I often refused and rebuked them. Finally, I had to let them go as friends and I quit associating with them. I made it clear to them that I cared for them and I wished that they would stop drinking. They mocked me as a puritan, a prude, and other such names. It was hard, but it taught me a valuable lesson about standing firm on principles that I believed in. This is only a very small, insignificant example of the way the world will try to persecute you. They will shame you, call you names, physically abuse you and shun you. Remember that they did all of the same things to Christ.

So what does this love look like? How are we supposed to behave? Paul gives an excellent case study of what this love should look like in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." This is what love looks like in the life of a Christian. This love gives us the power to respond to our enemies in a new way. It reflects the self-sacrificial love Christ displayed on the cross. It looks past the temporary pain to the glory and honor we will receive in heaven. This is the kind of love Jesus commanded his disciples to display.

If this message has moved you, if it has challenged you and convicted you, I invite you to ask yourself three questions:

Who do I consider my enemies?  
How do I treat them?  
How would Christ treat them?

You have the opportunity to display the love of Christ to someone else today. No indignation, no persecution, no shame that we experience on this earth can compare to what Christ experienced on the cross. Through the power of the Holy Spirit that I believe resides in all believers, I know that we can change the way we respond to our enemies. Love others deeply. Regardless of the way they treat you, love deeply.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the word of God today. My hope is that together, we can create the community of Christ that he designed us for. God bless you and your family.

Yours in Christ,



Chris Aaron Rice