

The Sermon On The Level - Part 2

Luke 6:27-36

Pastor John Miller

The 19th century Prime Minister of Spain, Ramón Narváez, was lying on his death bed and was approached by a priest. The priest asked him, "Does Your Excellency forgive all his enemies?"

The Prime Minister said, "I don't have to forgive my enemies; I've had them all shot."

I wonder how many of us today, if given the opportunity, would have all our enemies shot. Maybe you have someone in your mind right now. We would like not to forgive or love our enemies; we would like to shoot our enemies. Then this passage today is for you.

Jesus makes it very clear, in our text, that those who follow Him live in the kingdom of God, have the Beatitudes and are not only to be marked by love but love that is also for your enemies.

In Luke 6:27, Jesus speaking says, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies." Take note. And in verse 35, He says, "But love your enemies." So it is very clear, and Jesus said it twice: "Love your enemies."

Jesus had just said in the Beatitudes that those are blessed disciples who are poor, hungry, weeping and hated. If you choose to live eternal values in the kingdom of God, you will come into direct conflict with those who live by the world's temporal values. So we have the clash of the two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Those who live in the kingdom of God will be persecuted, rejected, maligned and attacked by those who live in the kingdom of this world.

So Jesus said, in verse 27, they will "hate you"; in verse 28, they will "curse you" and "spitefully use you"; and in verse 29, they will "[strike] you on the...cheek." How persecuted you will be!

When this happens, how are we to respond? With God's supernatural love. The birthmark of a Christian is not a haircut, a bumper sticker, a cross around your neck; it is love. And it's not just love but God's agape love. And even for your enemies. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, "A new commandment..." or literally, "a renewed commandment" "...I give to you, that you love..." the word "agape" "...one another..." with a qualification "...as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Not only are you to love each other, but love as Jesus loved us. Jesus exhorted believers to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength....You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

In our text, Jesus makes it clear that His followers, His true disciples, are to be marked by a supernatural love that includes loving their enemies. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

There are two sections in this text. This first section is verses 27-31, which is love's

manifestation; the second section is verses 32-36, love's explanation.

Let's look first at love's manifestation. Jesus said, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." This is the supernatural love of God manifested in the life of true believers.

Who is Jesus speaking these words to? Verse 27, "But I say to you who hear." The word "hear" in this verse literally means in the Greek "hear with a desire to obey." So it's not just a listening and forgetting, but there is an eager willingness to obey.

I believe in expositional preaching. That's why I read the text, explain the text in its context and then apply the text to our lives. That's expositional preaching. The sermon should always be based on an exposition of the text.

But I also believe in expositional listening. You should live expectantly to hear God's Word. When you come to church, you want to hear what the Word of the Lord has to say; not what the preacher has to say. You want to hear, "Thus saith the Lord." But you also should be hearing with a readiness to obey, which is expositional listening.

But maybe you don't want to listen. Maybe you're thinking, I wish I didn't come to church today! I've got some enemies I want to shoot! I don't want to hear this!

So we, like the crowd Jesus was addressing, are the disciples, believers, Christians, who should be eager and ready to obey. And you should say, like Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10).

Here in verses 27-28, Jesus gives four commands or imperatives that we should be keeping. He says, "Love...do good...bless...pray." And they are all in the present tense, meaning believers are to be habitually practicing them.

The first command, in verse 27, which sets the theme, says, "Love your enemies." This would have blown the disciples away. No doubt they would have said, "What?! You want me to love my enemies?! That's impossible!"

It's true that this is impossible what Jesus commands unless you are born again, filled with the Spirit and have God's love poured into your heart. But whatever God commands His believers to do, God enables us to do. God does not command us to do something that we could not do.

In Matthew 5, in Jesus speaking in the Sermon on the Mount, and in Mark 12:31, He clears up the rabbinic provision where He says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In Leviticus 19:18, they had perverted the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The scribes and Pharisees had perverted God's law in three ways. They practiced omission; they took out the phrase "as yourself." They practiced substitution; they changed the word "neighbor" to the word "Jews." And they added the phrase, "but hate your enemies." So it would have read, "Love your Jewish brethren, but hate your enemies."

Be careful when you hear a Bible teacher take something out of the text, add something to the text or he twists the text in any way. That's a dangerous thing.

So Jesus makes it clear that you are actually to "Love your enemies." That's commandment number one. But what kind of love is Jesus commanding here? They had about four words for love in the Greek language. We have only one word. "I love my dog. I love my Dad. I love peanut butter and jelly. And I love my wife." I use the same word for loving peanut butter and jelly and loving my wife, but obviously the love I have for my wife has to be different and more intense and a newer dimension than my love for peanut butter and jelly.

Jesus didn't use the word "storge," which is a natural affection. He didn't just say, "Have a natural affection for your enemy." He didn't use the word "eros"; it's not used in the New Testament. We get our word "erotic" from it. It means an erotic or romantic love. And He didn't use the word "phileo," which means a friendship love. We get our word Philadelphia from it. It's brotherly love.

Jesus used the word "agape" for love, which is a supernatural, divine love. Agape is not a natural love, like the other three. It's not a motivated love by the merit of the one who is loved. It's a deep, continuous, growing and ever-giving love that comes from God the Holy Spirit.

God, commanding us to "agape," indicates that love is not an emotion. We are so twisted in our understanding of love that we think it's a feeling. This is why people fall "in love" and fall "out of love." If you can fall in love, you can fall out of love. But if you make a decision to seek the highest good of the person loved, and there are no conditions for that love, it's unconditional, then it wants to give and give and give. That's God's agape love.

I like the definition of God's agape love: it seeks the highest good of the object loved. Husbands, if you "agape" your wife, "as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25), then you seek the highest good for your wife. The husband is to have this agape love for his wife. Wives, if you "agape" your husband, then you are seeking his highest good.

So love is not selfish, is not rude, is not boastful or proud. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 gives us a definition of love. "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." When Jesus says, "Love your enemies," this is the kind of love He's describing. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13 and in Ephesians 5:25, describes this same kind of agape love.

Now how are we to "agape" our enemies? There are three more commands that tell us how.

The second command, in verse 27, is “Do good to those who hate you.” Someone said, “Love is not a passing emotion; it’s a continual devotion.” You can decide to love others; it’s a matter of the will. Then you show them by your deeds and actions. In Romans 12:20, Paul says, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” So you are to love your enemies by showing them good deeds.

The third command to love our enemies is by our words, verse 28. “Bless those who curse you.” This is amazing! And it is okay to warn people of the consequences of their sins. You’re supposed to bless those who irritate you. The word “bless” means to say something kind in return to them. Bless them with your words.

So love them, do good to them, bless them with your words, and the fourth command is to pray for them, verse 28. “Pray for those who spitefully use you.”

You say, “I’ll pray for them alright! I found a favorite verse in the Bible, Psalm 58:6. David said, ‘Break their teeth in their mouth, O God!’ I also like the doctrine of the laying on of hands! That’s what I practice!”

No, that’s not what you’re supposed to do. You’re supposed to pray like Jesus when He hung on the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Jesus was being cursed, spat upon and crucified, yet that is what He said. In Acts 7:60, when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being pelted with stones and was dying, he said, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”

I would have said, “Lord Jesus, smoke ‘em right now! Just fry ‘em with fire from heaven, in Jesus’ name!” No, no, no, no, no! That’s not what you’re supposed to do! We’re to love our enemies and bless them.

John Stott said, “If the cruel torture of crucifixion cannot silence our Lord’s prayer for His enemies, what pain, pride, prejudice or sloth could justify the silencing of ours?” Wow! Prayer for our enemies purges the poison of our anger and unforgiveness from our hearts.

Jesus now moves to illustrate loving your enemies, in verses 29-30. “To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak...” or “jacket” “...do not withhold your tunic...” or “shirt” “...either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.”

Don’t misinterpret these verses with a strict literalness. It doesn’t mean that if someone attacks you, you can’t defend yourself. Self-defense is not forbidden anywhere in the Bible. But these verses are dealing with our attitude; that we shouldn’t want to retaliate. We know the Scripture that says, “Eye for eye; tooth for tooth” (Leviticus 24:20). That was to prevent people from taking out two eyes for one eye or retaliating, but to be just in what they do. But Jesus said to turn the other cheek. And He may not be talking literally here.

There was a time when Jesus was being buffeted and beaten by the Roman soldiers when He

was being interviewed by Pilate and Herod. Yet He kept silent. "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Paul the Apostle stood before the Roman authorities and they smacked him in the face, but he didn't retaliate by violence or anger toward them either. So it's having the right heart and the right attitude. It's not seeking revenge. So Jesus is our example.

In verse 29, we have the second illustration. "And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either." It doesn't mean that if someone breaks into your house and steals your clothes and your things, you say, "Help yourself." No. What He is saying is that we should be generous and giving toward others. Verse 30 says, "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away..." or "borrows" "...your goods do not ask them back." So you're not to be worried about what you've given to others, that they'll pay you back.

Be careful how you interpret these words. Leon Morrison said, "If Christians took absolutely literal this text, there would soon be a class of saintly paupers owning nothing and another of prosperous idlers and thieves. It is not this that Jesus is seeking but a readiness among His followers to give and to give and to give and to be generous." It's so important.

But of course in a given case, it may not be the way of love to give. Someone may come up to you, and they ask for some spare change. You have no idea if they're going to buy alcohol or drugs or what they're going to use it for. I have a tendency to then ask them questions. "Where are you from? What's your name? Do you have a job? Do you have a family?" If they get angry at my questions, I'm not going to help them out.

He might say, "Well, I saw that sticker on your car; that you're a Christian!"

"Yeah."

"Well, you Christians are just supposed to give to me!"

So it's not always loving to give to someone. The Bible says, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). I've pulled up to guys with signs that read "Will work for food."

I tell them, "Okay, get in my car and I'll take you to my house where you'll pull weeds." Then they cuss me out. They just want you to throw money to them. That's not loving. That's not helpful. There's a time and place to be wise and discerning as to who we help and why, and that in itself can be a loving thing. So whether we give or withhold, we should not have a regard for our possessions.

"Give," in verse 30, in the Greek is a continuous action; it's in the present tense. So Jesus is talking about a habitual attitude, not the occasional, generous impulse.

In 1 Peter 2:23, Peter said about Jesus, "When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." So when

people revile you, when they get angry with you, when they yell at you—how about when you drive the freeways in California?!

I'd been sitting at an intersection at a red light, and when the light turned green, immediately the person behind me honked. I felt like putting it in park, getting out of my car, walking back to the honker and asking, "Is something wrong with your horn?" In this culture today, that would be dangerous to do. It's also dangerous because they might say, "Pastor Miller, I go to your church!"

"God bless you. Stop honking at me!"

I think as Christians we need a Christian horn, so when they honk at us, we push our horn and it says, "God loves you! God bless you!" We'll sell them in our chapel store.

in love.

The principle for this first section is in verse 31. "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." That's what's known as "The Golden Rule." You thought The Golden Rule was, "He who has the gold, rules." No, that's not The Golden Rule.

Back in 10 BC, Rabbi Hillel, said it in the negative: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." Even Buddha and Confucius said, "What you don't want others to do to you, don't do to them." But that's all in the negative. Jesus puts it in the positive. He said, "Do to others what you want them to do to you." Love them the way you want them to love you. So Jesus takes it to another level, and He puts it in the positive.

A remind is that none of this is the Gospel; this isn't what you do to get to go to heaven. This isn't a standard for you to keep so God will let you in "the pearly gates." You first must be born again in order to live this out. This Christian ethic of agape love is only for those who have been born of God's Spirit. So you must trust Him as Savior first.

Now in verses 32-36, the second section, we see love's explanation. Jesus said, "But if you love those who love you..." still using the word "agape" "...what credit is that to you?" What Jesus is going to do here in the closing section is He's going to contrast the love of the believer with the love of the world. The world loves its own, and it is conditional versus how God's people should love others.

Now here's the rationale. "For even sinners..." or "unsaved, non-Christian, unbelievers" "...love those who love them." Even the Mafia loves its own. So what's the big deal if you love those who love you?

And here's the second and third illustrations. "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies..." the second summation "...do good, and lend, hoping

for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." So Jesus is contrasting His new love ethic with the world's love for itself.

Number one, there is no credit for natural love, verses 32-34. What credit is there for that? If you only love those who love you, it's conditional. That's no big deal. If you only lend to those who can pay you back, that's no big deal. Unless you love even your enemies and take it to a different level, then there is no commending of your love.

Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." And in the Greek, it says it has been "constantly poured out." In Galatians 5:22-23, it says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love." Love is the top of the list. Some feel love is the entire description of the fruit. So love also results in "joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." All these are the qualities of agape love. So if you have the Spirit of God, you should have the love of God flowing through you like this. That's commendable.

There is a great reward for supernatural love. Verses 35-36 say that if you "love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great." This also means that if you lend to someone and they don't pay you back, you're not to be begging, pleading or commanding them to repay you. Lend with no expectation to get paid back. Don't be worried about your possessions.

So if you lend, not expecting a return, "your reward will be great." From this word "great," we get our word "mega." Most likely this mean in this life. There are reward in heaven, but there also are rewards in this life. If you "love your enemies" as God wants you to love them, it brings to you great reward.

Number two, if you "love your enemies," you shall be "sons of the Most High." You will be labeled as true children of God.

Number three, you will be like your Father: merciful and kind, verses 35 and 36. "For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." In Exodus 34:6, Deuteronomy 4:31, Joel 2:13 and in Jonah 4:2, the Bible says that God is merciful and kind. These are only a few verses from the Old Testament that say God is merciful and kind; there are others. So His children also are to be merciful and kind.

I've met people who say, "Well, I'm a Christian, but I'm not one of those 'loving kind,' one of those 'lovey-dovey Christians.' I'm a hard-core Christian!" No; you're not a Christian. The birthmark of a true, child of God is love. Not a "sloppy agape." A discerning love. A godly love.

Have you ever noticed that God blesses unbelievers? That He's kind to them? When it rains, it falls on the farmer's field who doesn't go to church on Sunday and who doesn't believe in God, just like it rains on the Christian farmer's field. Have you noticed that your heathen, wicked, ungodly, sinful neighbor, who doesn't go to church, has grass just as green or greener than

yours? You say, "That's not fair, God! I pray. I go to church. I'm a good person! Why aren't you blessing me?!" He is. But God is good to the just and even the unjust. "He...sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

In Psalm 73, Asaph got his eyes off God, and he began to be jealous of the prosperity of the wicked. He became upset with God. He thought the wicked never had any trials, any trouble. They just seemed to be blessed. Yet Asaph was a Christian who loved God, but he was chastened all day long.

So be careful to keep your eyes on God. He is merciful and kind, even to the unjust. That doesn't mean He won't judge them for their sin; that there won't be punishment or retribution on Judgement Day. But God blesses them. The goodness of God is meant to lead them to repentance.

But if you want to manifest your Father in heaven, then you should be kind, loving and forgiving of those who have sinned against you.

So in closing, here are some questions to apply this text. Number one, are you doing good to those who hate you and show evil to you? You say, "Oh, Pastor, this is too painful!" Jesus said He was speaking to those who hear and are ready to obey. Are you willing to be obedient?

Number two, do you "bless those who curse you"?

Number three, do you "pray for those who spitefully use you" and mistreat you? Are you praying for their salvation?

It's so easy to look at the unbelieving world as enemies. With all the political tension in our nation today, it would be so easy to get angry over what's happening. But "love your enemies." Be careful that you don't let politics create in you a hatred for the unbeliever or the unsaved. We are to love them as Christ loved them, reach out to them and share the Gospel with them. They are our mission field; we're to pray for them. We want to manifest to them "our Father in heaven."