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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“LOVE YOUR ENEMIES”

Luke 6:27-36

□ Please turn with me to Luke 6:27-36.

Visualize the face of an enemy. Envision that adversary who cut you to the bone with their evil words and evil deeds, the foe who intentionally set out to harm you, the wrongdoer who took perverse delight in wounding you.

What does the world tell us to do? Get even. Inflict equivalent injury, {Mt 5:38} **“Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”**

What does our old nature tell us to do? Nurse a grudge. Ruin their reputation. Physically assault them. Take it a step further and murder them.

What does Jesus tell us to do?

■ **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”** (Luke 6:27).

¶ **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbors and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”** (Matthew 5:43-44).

It is imperative to note that the Law of God does not endorse hatred of an enemy. Leviticus 19:18 commands, **“love your neighbor as yourself.”** The strictest faction of the Pharisees inferred that this also implied the opposite: *“hate your enemy,”* and added it to the command. That is what Jesus is reacting against when he says, **“You have heard that it was said... But I tell you, love your enemies.”**

Love the enemy you just visualized, the enemy against whom the world urges you to take revenge, the enemy your old nature incites you to hate.

○ This is not a suggestion. It is a non-negotiable directive, the inevitable corollary of the two-part Greatest Commandment: {Mt 22:27-40} **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

Someone might say, “Aha! The law speaks of neighbors, not enemies.” That reasoning is clever but unsound, and those who take refuge in it are with the Pharisees. The Lord is absolutely clear on this: human enemies fall into the category of neighbor.

Let us first clarify what this does *not* mean.

When the Lord Jesus says **“Love your enemies”** he does not use the word *στοργη* [storge], so this is *not* the gut level bond of a family connection. We do not have to develop familial relationships with our enemies.

He does not use the word *φιλία* [filia], so this love is *not* the warm affection of friendship. We do not have to feel for our enemies as we do for our friends.

He does not use the word *ερωσ* [eros], so this love is *not* the passion one feels for a lover, nor the zeal one has for a cherished ideal. We do not have to experience deep intimacy with our enemies.

Emotions are relevant (we cannot very well say we love our enemies while actively feeling hatred toward them), yet they are not at the center of biblical love for enemies. This love can involve feelings but it is not defined, energized, or sustained by them.

Of course, the best way to destroy your enemy is to turn him or her into a friend. But that is not always possible, and it is not a prerequisite for loving them.

When the Messiah says, “**Love your enemies**” he is *not* insisting that we must experience certain feelings. Does this come as a relief to anyone? It does to me!

As for **what this “love” is**, the Lord Jesus uses the verb *αγαπη* [agape]. *Αγαπη* has particular qualities:

- ☆ It depends, not on the worthiness of the receiver, but on the work of God within the giver.
- ☆ It is selfless, not because the giver devalues her- or himself, but because she or he highly values the receiver.
- ☆ It is oriented not toward getting (much less taking), but toward giving.
- ☆ It is holistic, for it is concerned with meeting material, social, and spiritual needs.
- ☆ It is practical, and it finds expression in words and deeds of justice, mercy, and humility.

○ Hence, obedience to Exodus 23:4-5 is a demonstration of *αγαπη*: “**If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help your enemy with it.**”

○ Likewise the law of Proverbs 25:21, which takes it up a notch: “**If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.**”

And so on. Yet this love cannot be reduced to a finite set of actions that we can check off our “to do” lists. Deeds of *αγαπη* are intertwined with attitudes of *αγαπη*. The apostle Paul puts it like this {1 Co 13:4-7}:

Αγαπη is patient, *αγαπη* is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Αγαπη does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Each quality and action pertains to love for enemies, but let me highlight a single one: “**does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.**” Those who love this way: ① do not take pleasure *over* an enemy when disaster strikes them; ② do not perpetrate evil by retaliating *against* an enemy; and ③ do not participate in evil *with* an enemy.

Number 3 speaks directly to abusive relationships. The command to love unequivocally requires the abuser to immediately and completely end all mental, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse.

As for the victim, *αγαπε* for the enemy does not mean maintaining a familial connection with them, feeling warm affection for them, or experiencing deep intimacy with them. It does mean seeking what is truly

best for the enemy by forgiving them, praying for them to be saved and transformed, and refusing to “**delight in**” (or submit to) “**evil**” by escaping when it is safe to do so, and then breaking the silence and speaking the truth.

This teaching has broad application apart from abusive relationships. But I share this example because far too many so-called “Christians” use Christ’s holy command for the unholy purpose of aiding and abetting the evil of domestic violence.

■ Luke 6:27-28: **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you....”**

Do you think this is impossible?

☑ Patrick lived as the son of wealthy parents in Roman Britain, and he was a nominal Christian at best. But when he was 16 years old he was kidnapped and carried off Ireland. He was a slave there for the next six years, nearly naked even in winter, poorly fed, alone for months at a time as he tended sheep.

Yet it was during his bondage that Patrick learned how to pray. Biblical faith took hold and grew until it filled him with life and love.

When he was 22 years old a voice spoke from heaven, telling Patrick it was time to leave. He trekked 200 miles to a port at the opposite end of the island, found passage on a ship, and was reunited with his family.

In time Patrick was ordained as a priest. With his family connections he could have settled somewhere safe and comfortable; but God gave him a vision of a man pleading for him to come to Ireland.

Return to the land of his slavery? Serve the barbaric pagans who had inflicted such external suffering and internal anguish on him?

He did. For the rest of his life he evangelized pagans, built up the Church, and worked against slavery. He loved his enemies, sometimes at great risk to himself.

■ Patrick took to heart the words of verses 32, 33, and 35:

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting 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.

“Kind to the ungrateful and wicked” indeed!

○ **“While we were still sinners”** God the Son {Jn 1:14} **“became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** He {Php 2:7-8} **“made himself nothing, taking the... nature of a servant... he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”** {1 Th 5:10} **“He died for us so that... we may live together with him.”**

○ {Ro 5:8} **“While we were still sinners”** – {Ro 5:10} **“when we were God’s enemies,”** at the time when

our {Ro 8:7-8} **“sinful [minds] [were] hostile to God,”** and we were **“controlled by the sinful nature”** and unable to **“please God”** – {Ro 5:8, 10} **“Christ died for us” “that we might be reconciled to [God] through the death of his Son.”**

Praise God! Isn't his love incredible?!

○ Not only so, it is God's great and amazing love for us that transforms his love command from unbearable burden into liberating blessing! {1 Jn 4:19} **“We love”** – even our enemies – **“because he first loved us.”**

○ We do not do this alone, in our own inadequate power. {1 Jn 4:13} **“He has given us of his Spirit,”** and (Galatians 5:22) **“The fruit of the Spirit is αγαπη...”**

○ {1 Jn 4:16b} **“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”**

Do you still think it is impossible to love your enemy? The issue is not what you can do; it is what God can do in you. The question is not, are you able? It is: who is your God? What is your God like?

Visualize your enemy.

The world says, “Get even.”

Our old nature says, “Take it up a notch.”

Christ Jesus says, **“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”**

This is the Word of the Lord.