

Christians must love even their enemies in merciful, unselfish, and overabundant measure to be sons of their heavenly Father who richly blesses those who love like him. Any less measure of love is of no credit to disciples, because such “love” makes one no better than sinners who know nothing of the gospel.

Introduction – Story of uncle Johnny asking his relatives what political party they voted for. Rejection!

Background – The immediately preceding context is the beginning of Jesus’s Sermon on the Plain where he pronounces beatitudes and woes (Luke 6:20-26). Living anything less than according to Christ’s law is acceptable for a Christian to claim his right by grace to the blessings enumerated in the beatitudes.

I. The Doctrine of Love

A. Love your enemies (vv. 27-28, 35a)

Believers in Jesus are to love not only their friends, family, and fellow believers, but even their enemies! The particular enemies Jesus has in mind are those who persecute the disciples (Luke 6:22). The Jews hated their Roman occupiers and overlords, considering them enemies of the people, the state, and their God. Jewish teachers of the law said you must love your neighbor but you are allowed to hate your enemy (Matthew 5:43). Jesus came to tear down these barriers of hate so the love of God might pour into the hearts of men.

B. Be as merciful as your heavenly Father (vv. 31, 36)

In the Old Testament, the imperative “be merciful” refers to God’s faithfulness to his covenant people (1 Chronicles 21:13; Psalms 25:6; 69:16; Isaiah 63:9; Daniel 9:9, 18). In the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew’s version of this sermon in Luke), Jesus substitutes the call to be merciful with the call to be perfect because God is perfect (cf. Matt. 5:48). Jesus summarizes his doctrine of love in what has been named “The Golden Rule”: Do to others as you wish others would do to you (v. 31).

II. The Difficulty of Love

A. But what about: do I get credit for just being a nice guy? (vv. 32-34)

I love my family and friends, I treat good people well, and I lend out my stuff to neighbors—isn’t that love good enough? The world has standards of morals and ethics that are motivated and guided by self-interest. Sociologists label this often observed human behavior “reciprocity”. Followers of Jesus must go beyond this worldly standard, and must ultimately reject the self-interested motive behind it. The standard of initiating love must replace the principle of responsive reciprocity. Jesus calls all disciples, even you, to love those who don’t have your best interests in mind. A real life application: Christians ought not make lending calculations based on whether someone can or will likely repay. Instead, lend freely, not expecting repayment. Otherwise you’re no better than “sinners”.

B. But what about: doesn’t hyperbole get me off the hook? (vv. 29-30)

1. Turn the other cheek? Isn’t that enabling my abuser? A blow on the right cheek would be a (right-handed) backhand slap, an insult that challenged one’s honor and a finable offense in court (cf. Matthew 5:39). Jesus is not advocating anyone cooperate in passively receiving violent bodily abuse. Rather, he says if someone insults your honor, humbly refuse to strike back. Stay in control of the situation by offering your other cheek too, which may serve to disarm and even shame your enemy, leading him to repentance. Love them instead as Christ loved you when you were still in your sins (Romans 5:8).

2. *Give to everyone? Even the shirt off my back?* Regarding possessions, a creditor could seize most things, but not a person's coat, because the poor might only have one. So why does Jesus instruct his disciples to surrender both their outer and inner garments—exposing one to nakedness? Sure there is an element of hyperbole in this instruction. Hyperbole is meant to shock you out of complacency, not soothe you to sleep. The point seems to be not that you should allow yourself to be robbed, but that ministry in the context of rejection requires repeatedly allowing yourself into vulnerable situations. Prudence reigns in such instances. Sometimes God calls us to give our very life to the attacks of our enemies (Stephen in Acts 7:60); other times God calls us to withdraw for protection and regrouping (Paul in Acts 16:40; 17:10, 13-14).

C. But what about: don't you know what I've been through? (v. 27)

Let go of my anger? I can't, and I won't, because as the victim I want revenge and vindication. A lot of people will tell you to just stop being angry and be more loving. Get over it! But that is not what the Bible says at all. Anger in response to sin—either committed against you or someone else, is good anger. Many times Jesus, without committing sin, gets angry and then does something about it. Anger is not evil in itself. It's what you do with your anger that makes you good or evil.

III. The Delight of Love

A. The gospel: God is merciful and kind to the ungrateful and evil (vv. 35-38; cf. John 3:16-21)

Why must Christians initiate love and not give our enemies what they deserve? Most importantly because God loved first (Exodus 34:6; Isa 63:15; Jon 4:2). God so loved the world of sinners! God's love in Christ for you is bigger, deeper, higher, wider, and stronger than any love you can imagine (Romans 8:31-39). Delight in and meditate on his love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness—embodied in action at the cross of Christ. His life for yours, his righteous life for your sin, his justification for your condemnation. Christ and all that is his, in your place so you might be called a son of God, and live a life of love in faithful obedience to him as your spiritual and tangible sacrifice of thanksgiving.

B. You will have an exalted identity: son of the Most High (v. 35)

But Christian, you can never “love your enemies” unless you are first transformed by the love of God in the gospel of his Son Jesus. The love, grace, and mercy of Christ melts your heart and compels you to love others as God has loves us as sinners. Sons of the Most High is another way of describing the people in covenant with the LORD (Ps 112:4-5). In the NT, sons of God are the holy nation of the new Israel: all those who respond by faith to Jesus. God will regard Christ's disciples as true sons because they imitate the Father's mercy by showing mercy to the undeserving. Unselfish love for enemies does not make disciples sons of God, but it does prove they are sons to the watching world.

C. You will have a great reward: a proportional “good measure” (vv. 35, 37-38)

There might not be an obvious earthly reward for loving enemies, but there probably will be! Here's the illustration. Shoppers and merchants in the ancient world were acquainted with a typical measure of grain in the marketplace: pour some carefully into the pocket/pouch that is formed by an outer garment as it drops from the chest over the belt (cf. Ruth 3:15; Psalm 79:12; Isaiah 65:7; Mark 4:24). In contrast, a “good measure” of grain would be abundantly generous: settled, topped off, and overflowing. Imagine such a ridiculous mess welling up in carefree joy and laughter! That's the picture of reward for loving your enemies—partly in this life, and fully in eternity. We will reap what we sow and in the amount that we sow. And because the Lord Jesus is an extravagantly gracious God, you'll reap even more. Christians who love their enemies will live the abundant life.

Conclusion – Listen to how the apostle Paul urges you and me to live by Jesus' difficult doctrine of love. [Romans 12:1-3, 14, 16-21]