

The radical Jesus way to treating others

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Preacher: Brian King

- [0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that you have not left us in the dark. Your Son is the way, the truth, and the life, and he shows us your way.
- So we pray this morning your word will do its work. We pray that you will help us to hear Jesus' word and help us to obey them. Help us not to be driven by the way the world thinks, but change us from the inside out by the Spirit who dwells in us.
- Help me to be faithful and clear and use my preaching to sharpen all of us. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, what differentiates Christianity from other forms of morality?
- Is there anything that marks out the Jesus way from other ways, whether religious or even secular? At first glance, a superficial scheme of the New Testament suggests there's not much difference.
- Now, here's a random sampling of some verses. 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 14. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.
- [1 : 22] Or 1 Timothy 4 verse 12, Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.
- Or Romans 12 verse 16. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
- Now, all worthy moral instructions, to be sure, but surely not unique to Christianity. I mean, be patient, be pure, don't be proud.
- Other religions say that too. A few weeks ago, our state had an interfaith harmony week, which included a forum that was broadcast live on TV Sarawak.
- Well, I didn't watch much of it, but I did catch a snippet. And interestingly, one of the forum participants said, as we all know, all religions in the end tell you to be good and be moral.
- [2 : 28] So there doesn't seem to be much difference. But, aha, we say, maybe what is distinctive about the Jesus way is love.
- It's not Christianity, the great religion of love. And is Jesus not famous for giving us the great commandment that the entire moral code can be summarised in love?
- Love of God and love of neighbour. But, even then, hmm, still quite bland, right?
- After all, more than half of our Hollywood movies or Netflix shows that you watch are all about what a great thing love is. They testify breathlessly to the priority of love, the power of love, the passion of love.
- So, ahiyah, if Jesus says love is the distinctive mark, still nothing special. Hang on a minute, let's not forget that this Jesus is the Jesus who has been saying radical stuff ever since his burst onto the scene in Luke chapter 4.
- [3 : 47] This is the guy who walked into a synagogue, read sacred scripture, and declared, it's all about me. This is the guy who dared to tell the Pharisees, I'm the Lord of the Sabbath, who brings true rest while you guys bring burdens.

And this is the guy who said last week, blessed are the poor, for dears is the kingdom of God. So, if there's one thing we learned about Jesus is that he is not into sentimental and meaningless cliches.

So, let's probe further. And let's take our cue from a question that the early church father, Augustine, once asked in a sermon.

Everyone loves, he said. But the question is, what do they love? We all love something or someone that's just part of being human.

But the question is, what do we love? Who do we love? And how do we love? love? And today, Jesus says, love your enemies.

[5 : 06] That's the Jesus way. Love your enemies. Now, that's a bombshell. And with that, Jesus continues his perfect record of saying upside-down things.

I mean, it's completely paradoxical, isn't it? by definition, at least on a practical level, enemies are people whom you can't love.

Enemies are people whom you hate. This week, I discovered that Wikipedia has a surprisingly long entry on the word enemy.

And these are some of the things it said. An enemy is an individual or a group that is considered as forcefully threatening. Hear the word enemy and it should invoke an intense emotional response in you.

Emotions such as anger, revulsion, frustration, envy, jealousy, fear, and distrust.

[6 : 12] They certainly don't evoke love and affection and trust. And you can see why from the checklist Jesus gives us of what these enemies are like.

In verses 27 to 28 of our passage today, they are the people who hate you, curse you, ill-treat or even abuse you.

These are the people who go behind your back and say hurtful things or spread false rumors about you. These are the people who seem to take pleasure in holding you back, perhaps by intentionally keeping you in the dark about something or maliciously obtaining sensitive information about you to exclude you or exploit you.

These are the people who seem to love working actively against your interests. They might be an especially unpleasant relative, unethical business competitor, even a totally unjust teacher.

And Jesus says, love them. Not take them down, not pay them back, not do your best to get rid of them. Love them.

[7 : 35] Love your enemies. Now, don't forget the context. When Jesus uses the word enemies here, he isn't just talking about anyone whom you have a personality clash with.

Back in verse 22, he's already told us there will be people who will hate, exclude, insult, and reject us because of him.

So, in this context, our enemies are primarily those who hate or exclude us on account of Christ. They hate you first and foremost because you follow Jesus.

At its most extreme, it names those who persecute Christians right up to the point of death, such as in places like Iran or North Korea.

But our enemies don't have to be murderers. They can be people, to use the imagery of verse 29, who slap you on the cheek or take your coat.

[8 : 44] In other words, who damage you or take something from you. And faced with enemies, we typically employ one of two strategies. We try to avoid if that option is open to us.

We try to ignore what's happening. We bury our heads in the sand. we grin and bear it. Or we try to retaliate.

That's when we say hurtful things back and lay out a detailed blueprint for revenge in our heads. That's what the world constantly champions.

Think of how many movies are based on payback. That's our nature. But Jesus says, the Jesus way is to love your enemies.

Love people who hate you, curse you, ill-treat you. Are you beginning to feel the razor-sharp edge of that statement yet?

[9 : 54] There is no statement like this in your pendidikan moral textbook. You can't even find it in the entire Old Testament. Now, there are hints here and there.

The law does say you should love your neighbour as yourself. But nowhere do we find such a direct or emphatic statement as the one Jesus makes here.

Truly, this is a new wineskin designed to burst our old wineskins. how do you feel about that?

The theologian Karl Barth was once asked this question. Is it true that one day in heaven we will see again our loved ones?

Barth responded with a smile and he said, not only the loved ones. How do you feel about that? To know that in the new creation there will be people there who would have counted as your enemies here on earth.

[11 : 08] To know that even in the present creation Jesus says the not loved ones are now to become your loved ones.

I don't know about you but in one sense I didn't look forward to preaching this passage this week because I certainly felt the sharp edge of Jesus' words.

They cut to your heart. They get under your skin. They are words that I rather Jesus not say. Words I find difficult to obey.

But we can't get away from them. Look again at the beginning of verse 27. Who is Jesus speaking to? But to you who are listening I say Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

He is saying if you want to be part of my kingdom if you desire to go on the Jesus way then listen up. Your entire way of relating to others has to be transformed.

[12 : 22] But perhaps maybe there's still some wriggle room. You know that word love has different shades of meaning doesn't it? You could say I love those cookies.

I love Manchester United. I love my wife. And each time we won't be talking about exactly the same kind of love. I don't love my wife the way I love cookies.

No wonder the Greeks had different words to describe different kinds of love. So perhaps on the spectrum of love maybe Jesus is talking about the mildest kind of love here.

Perhaps he meant love your enemies as in all. Just tolerate them. Put up with them. Nothing more. But Jesus doesn't stop at verse 27.

Instead he goes on to show us what the Jesus way of loving your enemies is like. And for Jesus, as is so common in the Bible, love is more like a verb than a noun.

[13 : 33] After all, how does verses 27 to 28 go on to describe love? It means doing good to them. It means blessing them. It means praying for them.

These are certainly not the first things we think of doing to our enemies. Are they? But Jesus says to love your enemies is not to remain passively neutral towards them.

It is to proactively think about how you can concretely benefit them. And so loving your enemies, Jesus says, means doing as much good as you can towards them.

I mean, wow, Jesus just keeps getting more and more radical, doesn't he? But Jesus says, I'm just joining the dots of Old Testament law for you.

Take Exodus chapter 23 verses 4 and 5 for instance. If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it.

- [14 : 46] If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there. Be sure you help them with it. If your enemy suffers misfortune, in other words, don't snicker and say to yourself, he had that coming.

Instead, restore them. And indeed, Jesus encourages us, go further. Bless them. Ask God to show his favor on them.

That is the heart behind the law. And add them to your prayer list. Now, that's a thought. We usually and easily pray for those whom we love.

But when was the last time you added an enemy to your prayer list? Now, obviously, that is not to pray, God, keep them sinning, keep them doing evil, keep them rejecting Jesus.

That wouldn't be doing good to them. But when was the last time you said to God, help them out of their mess, give them relief, Lord, shower them with your kindness, and tenderness.

- [16 : 06] And so Jesus shows us loving your enemies isn't a feeling. It's not even just an attitude. It's action.

It's doing as much good as you can towards them. Now, that doesn't mean you're indifferent about injustice. injustice, that doesn't mean you turn a blind eye towards evil.

But when faced with hostility, this is how you personally respond. Don't just keep out of their way.

Figure out what good you can do to them. love you. And to press this home, Jesus now gives us a number of illustrations in verses 29 and 30.

Now, when looking at these, remember, don't read them woodenly. A wooden interpretation of the bit in verse 29 about the coat and the shirt, for example, would lead you to conclude that you love by literally going naked.

- [17 : 16] That's obviously not the point. So don't take these illustrations woodenly, but take them seriously. Listen for the main point and let them get inside your heart.

So let's look at the first picture. Jesus says, verse 29, if someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

Now, Jesus isn't talking here about knockout blows or violent assault. The slap here represents an insult like those typically given when someone is being ejected from the synagogue.

It represents a misuse of authority, an abuse of power, an attempt to degrade. It calls to mind what happens later on in John chapter 18.

when Jesus stands on trial before the high priest Caiphaz, falsely accused, and an official comes and gives him a good heart slap across the face.

- [18 : 32] And what does Jesus do? He doesn't run to the official and say, oh, give me a good heart slap on the other cheek as well. So, that's not the point.

Rather, what Jesus does is he simply keeps speaking with integrity. He doesn't trade a slap with another slap. He's been despised and scorned and rejected, but he doesn't hate even when hit.

Instead, he simply remains vulnerable, ready to keep suffering, ready to receive another slap while maintaining honesty and dignity.

He's saying, even if you hit me again, well, this isn't going to turn my heart into hatred for you. That's how love works.

Think of a big argument you've had, maybe with a family member. Sometimes, as the argument progresses, you are not really arguing anymore about the presenting issue.

[19 : 47] You're just trading insults at that point. It's become about winning the fight rather than resolving the disagreement or saving the relationship. You simply want to hurt the other person as much as they've hurt you.

But Jesus says, loving your enemy is when you say to yourself, stop! Let's not get stuck into this retaliation cycle.

Someone has to absorb the blow and let that someone be me, not the other person. Then Jesus says, verse 29 again, if someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.

The context here is robbery. Such a scenario would have been plausible to Jesus' hearers who regularly traveled the roads of Israel. And Jesus says, if someone comes and takes your coat, that's your outer garment, then let them have your shirt too, that's your inner garment.

In other words, it's the same principle at work. Don't prolong the retaliation cycle. Instead, break it by starting a blessing cycle instead.

[21 : 10] And don't harden yourself. Don't say, those people, they cost me money before. They took time and energy from me before. They left me with nothing but scars and bruises on my psyche.

So never again will I open myself to them. Never again will I give myself to them. But if you love them, Jesus says, you'll still be pondering, what can I do to bring about good in their lives?

If they take my coat, can I give them my shirt too? And indeed, that is what verse 30 is all about, isn't it?

If the illustrations in verse 29 have to do with being vulnerable, verse 30 has to do with being generous.

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. And so Jesus says, what is the Jesus way of loving?

[22 : 22] It's about being ready to give always, not just when you feel like it. It's about being open-handed and not just to selected people.

It's for everyone and anyone. And that includes the very people you regard as enemies. That's what it means to love them.

It means you're ready to take risks, to be wrong, to receive nothing back, to bear the cost. Very challenging, isn't it?

And in all these, I can hear you protesting already. You know, doesn't this just expose us to being taken advantage of? There must be a limit. Where is it?

What is it? Where's the limit? So let's be clear. Yes, we must be careful how we apply these. So with regards to verse 29, for example, Jesus is not talking about situations of domestic abuse.

[23 : 32] He's not talking about a situation where someone has totally lost control over their choices. Here in Luke chapter 6, Jesus is primarily talking about circumstances where being a Christian results in hostility towards you.

So what is on Jesus' mind in verse 30, for instance, is probably more about a hostile demand being made rather than an encounter with a beggar on the street.

But a victim of domestic abuse is not simply suffering as a direct result of their choice to follow Jesus. Rather, domestic abuse is almost always rooted in the feelings of entitlement and the need for control of the abuser who are demanding that their needs be met or else.

And so these verses should not be used to justify putting a victim in harm's way. In fact, when we read the Bible as a whole, we find that God wants us to do everything within our power to restrain evil.

But there is a difference between restraining and retaliating. And it is not our calling to retaliate.

[25 : 02] So let's be careful not to misapply these verses, but let's not be too quick either to play down these verses. Let's not be too quick to ask, oh, what is the exception to verses 27 to 30 and make that our main focus?

How can I avoid obeying Jesus here? Let's not try to excuse ourselves from listening to and obeying Jesus. Because Jesus isn't putting these words in the fine print.

It's not in the footnotes. It's teaching. He's putting before us clearly. loving loving your enemies, Jesus says, means doing as much good as you can towards them, even if we are the ones suffering and absorbing the pain.

Or to put it another way, verse 31, it's to do to others as you would have them do to you. In other words, don't just do to others the bare minimum.

Don't just refrain from doing evil to others, which would be the negative way of stating verse 31. Don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you instead.

[26 : 29] So others would have said it that way, but Jesus states it positively instead. Do to others the way you would like to be treated regardless of how they actually treat you.

That's what the Jesus way is all about. Or as the founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley once said, do all the good you can by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, in all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.

But why? Why is this the Jesus way? Jesus now begins to tackle this question in verse 32 onwards. Let's follow his train of thought.

You see, Jesus says, loving your enemies is really about treating others in a like for unlike manner.

As one commentator puts it, it's about responding in ways unlike and disproportionate to the way we are being treated. And that makes us distinctive from the world.

[28 : 00] After all, verse 32, 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. And 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.

In other words, Jesus says, what's so great if you just do in kind what others do to you? Even people who don't follow the Jesus way do that.

There is nothing different about that. There is nothing distinctive about that. but what if you abandon the reciprocity framework?

What if you throw off the mindset that says, I help you, now next time you'll help me back. Now that would be different. And the Jesus way of loving others, Jesus says, is one that doesn't rely on quid pro quo.

[29 : 15] It's not one where we weigh whether we do good to others by presumed potential benefit. I'll put it this way, loving your enemies is about calculating the cost, that's verses 27 to 31, and it is not about calculating the credit, verses 32 to 34.

That's how you do the maths. Again, how countercultural is that? The theologian Miroslav Wolf says that when we sit down to think about it, we'll be surprised at how much of our gifts are given actually to ourselves.

We pay for dinner for a friend, he says, because we need a favour from high places. We want a car repaired speedily, so we bring a bottle of wine for our local mechanic.

We treat our gifts as investments, hoping and expecting them to deliver returns. But Jesus blows all of that up.

My love, he says, is about treating each other in a like for unlike manner. my love is pure gift.

[30 : 44] My love says you love your enemies, do good to them, even lend to them without expecting to get anything back. It's totally upside down.

And you do it this way, Jesus says, because ultimately, this is simply the gospel in action. That really gets to the bottom of it all.

You love your enemies because this is simply the gospel in action. As you love your enemies, you are simply showing who your heavenly father is.

And verse 35, you're simply showing your spiritual parentage because like father, like son.

Now, we've lost some of that connection now because we don't live in a world where sons often do the same things as their fathers, whereas back then, that was more common and so this would have resonated more.

[31 : 55] Everyone knew that sons reflected their fathers. same here Jesus says as you are merciful to others, verse 36, you reflect your heavenly father who was merciful towards you.

Well, let us slow down and ponder on this for a second. Look again at that list in verses 27 to 30. And did you realise that list doubles up as a description of Jesus' journey to the cross?

My friends, why did Jesus go to the cross? He went because he loved his enemies. He did it for the very people who put him on the cross, which included both Jewish religious types and Roman non-religious types.

those were his enemies, basically, all of humanity. As he went, he was hated, he was cursed, he was ill-treated, he was slapped, he was stripped of his clothes.

And he gave. He gave himself in love. Jesus didn't come to excuse our wrongdoing, but he came to pay for it.

[33 : 27] And so he could say, on the cross, Father, forgive them. He loved his enemies, absorbed the penalty for our wrongdoing, and then granted to us the mercy of God.

You see, as I've been talking about loving our enemies, I'm sure more than once, the thought crossed your mind. This is a noble ideal, but I can't do it.

It's just not possible. Plus, you don't know what my enemies have done to me. I can't. And you're right. We can't.

It's not natural. It's natural to one instant karma. It's natural, even right, to one justice. It's totally unnatural, in fact, to be kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

But come gaze at the cross. Now, at the cross, God never pretends that any wrong done to you doesn't hurt, or simply makes an excuse on behalf of the wrongdoer, because at the cross, it was Jesus, the Son of God himself, who paid the price that shows that sin is no trivial thing.

[34 : 51] such an immense price has to be paid. That shows Jesus' concern for the victim as he identifies with the wrong.

And yet, at the cross, God says, you're not just a victim, you were my enemy. Now, watch me do good, dear.

Watch as your price is paid in full. And let that cross transform you as you accept that payment made on your behalf.

Let the Spirit of God take that divine love of the cross and shape your lives powerfully in the pattern of the cross. Let your knowledge that you're part of the kingdom of God entirely by grace help you as you love your enemies.

For as you follow Jesus and love your enemies, you know that sometimes you will be poor and hungry and weeping as a result, but that you will be blessed for doing so.

[36 : 15] Because Jesus says, I want you to be defined by your heavenly Father. I don't want your life to be defined by the norms of modern society with its tribalism and its outrage and its love of shaming others into hiding.

I want you to be defined by your heavenly Father. And it's hard to imagine anything that showcases the distinctiveness of God more than his love of his enemies.

Again, to quote the theologian Miroslav Wolf, if you take away love of enemy from the Christian faith, you aren't Christian the Christian faith.

Because you are taking away the heart of the gospel that God came to justify the ungodly.

And as you love your enemies, you are not just putting the gospel on display. You are communicating how you wish to be treated by God as well.

[37 : 32] God. That's what verses 37 and 38 are really all about. If God has shown mercy to us, loving you while you were still his enemy, why be quick to heap condemnation on others?

Why use a different measuring stick for others than what God has used for you? Remember how God has treated you. It's like what takes place in a Jewish marketplace, verse 38.

A generous grain merchant would have filled a basket with grain and he would shake it and then he would press it down so that he had more room to pour in even more grain until it overflows into the buyer's lap.

But that's how God has treated us in Christ, giving us above and beyond what we deserve. That is the gospel.

gospel. So as we leave today, I don't want us to leave without wrestling deeply and thoughtfully with the words of Jesus today.

[38 : 48] I can see from today's congregation that your body language shows me that you do feel the sharp edge of these words. but I want you to wrestle deeply because these are not my words.

These are the words of Jesus. These days, as the singer pink noted recently, everyone wakes up offended.

You know, sometimes we even take pleasure in being wrong, in having an enemy because that means we can get all worked up about how terrible the other side is and we feel all good and righteous about ourselves, especially if we succeed in getting everyone on our side and bringing the other side down.

we might even justify it in the name of truth. But the Jesus way is fundamentally different. Jesus never pits truth and love against each other.

And he never says get rid of love in the name of truth. Love your enemies, he says. Full stop. So today, right now, I want you to think, who is your enemy?

[40 : 11] Who is someone you are struggling with right now? And then I want you to think, what can I do to do good to them and bless them?

Maybe your first step is simply to pray for them. Maybe before even that, you need to pray for yourselves to have the courage and strength to obey Jesus.

certainly, this means this makes me want to pray more. But don't stop there. As we've heard today, go beyond the bare minimum as Jesus did for us.

And you know what? If all of us have the courage to follow Jesus' words here, fear, I dare say at the next interfaith forum, someone might say, you know what?

I respect all religions, but those Christians, there's something really different about them, something I cannot explain, something supernatural.

[41 : 18] well, let's make someone say that. Let's commit ourselves now to the Lord. Maybe let's just take a few seconds of silence and I'll just let you individually talk to the Lord for a short while before I lead us in prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Heavenly Father, your word is living and active. I trust that it is living and active even right now. And I pray, Lord, that you would please give all of us ears to hear, minds to receive, eyes to see, hearts to believe, lives that obey your word today.

Give us the supernatural strength that can only come from you, from the spirit you have given to us, who dwells in us, to live the way you want us to today. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ.

[42 : 32] Amen.