

# An Impossible Love (Part 2)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>27</sup> “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup> And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

<sup>32</sup> “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27–36)

### Have You Ever Been Hated, Cursed, or Abused?

- A. Using the words that Jesus uses here in vv. 27-28, let me begin by asking you a question: Have you ever been hated, cursed, or abused?
- B. As painful as this exercise might be for some of us, I want to humbly, gently ask you to identify one person, whether from years and years ago or from just yesterday, who’s really hurt you—one person, where even just the thought of him/her makes your heart start to beat a little faster, your palms start to sweat a little more, your blood pressure start to rise, and your eyes start to water.
  - 1. It could be your dad, your mom, your spouse, your child, your old boss, your old pastor, that kid from middle school, whoever. I just want you to identify one.

### Pain Makes Profound Impressions

- A. Pain makes profound impressions. For most things in life, we need help remembering, right?
  - 1. We take notes at the meeting because, in a week, we’ll have forgotten it all. We set up reminders on our calendars for events, birthdays, anniversaries, because life gets going so fast sometimes we can forget these things. We put sticky notes on our desk to remind us of critical tasks we need to accomplish that day.
    - a. But pain makes profound impressions. It’s not easily forgotten. We don’t need any reminders. In fact, we usually try to stuff it down, but it just keeps coming back up.

- B. So my guess is that, as you consider this one particular person who hurt you, you can recall it all. Even as you think of them right now, I imagine, what they did to you is replaying in your mind in High Definition.
1. You remember what she said to you, even the tone of her voice, as her words cut into your soul and have left you scarred to this day.
  2. You remember how it stung when the back of his hand connected with your face. You can still smell the whiskey on his breath.
  3. You remember the sound of your peers' mocking laughter when your best friend betrayed you and publicized some of your most embarrassing secrets.
    - a. You don't need any help remembering these things. You live with them every day.

### “Love Your Enemies”

- A. But now, with this person and the pain they caused you at the front of your mind, I want you to hear the call of Jesus in our text: “Love your enemies” (v. 27; cf. v. 35).
1. Does that sound crazy? Does that sound impossible? It should. And yet Jesus is calling us to it nonetheless!
- B. And I want to ask why? And how? (1) Why Does He Call Us to Love Our Enemies? (2) How Does He Enable Us to Love Our Enemies?
1. These two questions will essentially serve as my outline for this sermon.

### The Positive Charge of Our Enemy Love

- A. You might recall that this is actually my second time dealing with this text. Last time we focused primarily on vv. 27-31. This time our focus will be on vv. 32-36.
1. But before we move into them, let me say one more thing about the verses that precede—particularly about the nature of this enemy love we are called to.
- B. I said last time that, in the first part of v. 27, Jesus gives us the 1 Master Principle in play here: “Love your enemies . . .”
1. What follows in the latter part of v. 27 into v. 28 is the fleshing out of this 1 Master Principle into 3 Basic Expressions: <sup>27b</sup> “[D]o good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”
- C. The point that I wish to bring out here is quite simple but it might otherwise escape us. When Jesus fleshes out for us what love for enemies looks like, we must note that these basic expressions are positively charged.
1. Here is what I mean. When someone hurts you, certainly we understand that our reactions should not be negatively charged: You hurt me, I hurt you. Though in our flesh we are so prone to this, we understand that this is not the Christian ethic.

2. But some of us, however, might be satisfied with an enemy love that stops at a neutral charge. Meaning: You hurt me, but I bite my tongue, I walk away. I don't do good, or bless, or pray for you, but I don't do evil or curse you either. It's neutral, right?! Wouldn't so many of us count that as a major win?!
  3. But Jesus won't let us stop there. He wants our love for enemies to have a positive charge. We are not just not doing evil, we are doing good. We have welling up from within us a love, a compassion, a desire to bless them, intercede for them, pray for them.
    - a. Can I just say: You know you're in a bad place if you can't pray for the person who hurt you.
      - i. And I'm not talking about: "God change them, because I can't take their nonsense anymore." I'm talking about praying for them where you are legitimately concerned for their good: "God help them. Forgive them, save them, change them, for your glory and their good."
- D. Can you pray for your enemies? Is there a positive charge to your reactions? Do you truly love them? That's what Jesus is calling us to!
1. Now we ask: (1) Why?!; and (2) How?!

## (1) Why Does He Call Us to Love Our Enemies? (vv. 32-35a)

### Benefit and Reward

- A. The reason may surprise you, but the text is unmistakably clear: Jesus calls us to love our enemies because there is great benefit and reward for us in it.
- B. Let me just read His words to you again and I'm sure you'll see it: "<sup>32</sup>If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit [or, same Gk. word, "benefit"] is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount" (vv. 32-34).
  1. He gives the same rationale three separate times—"what benefit is that to you"—and then He comes out in v. 35a and summarizes it with more positive phrasing: "<sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great . . ."
  - a. And, regarding this "reward", we can connect the dots back up to v. 23 and be sure that Jesus is talking about the reward that is waiting for the saints "in heaven" to be given them in the presence of God.
- C. So there is no benefit to us, if we don't love our enemies. And there is great benefit and great reward for us if we do.

## A Surprising Equation

- A. Does this surprise anyone here? That this whole discussion of loving our enemies turns on the issue of benefit and reward?! Here's why it surprises me.
1. Certainly, I must admit, I approach relationships based upon how I perceive they will benefit and reward me. But my conception of this leads me to precisely the opposite of what Christ calls us to here. Let me explain.
    - a. The whole reason I love those who love me, do good to those who do good to me, and lend to those who will pay me back is because I feel like I benefit from those relationships. I scratch your back, you scratch mine.
    - b. And the whole reason I avoid my enemies, resent those who do evil to me, and close my hand to those who can't pay me back is because I don't see any benefit for myself in these relationships. They just hurt me and take from me. Therefore, you're out!
- B. But Christ comes to us here and says: "You've got the whole equation backwards. And that's because you haven't factored eternity into it. You're living like this world is all there is.
1. It's all about your reputation, and your possessions, and your immediate satisfaction. And so, yes, you've got to surround yourself only with those people who make your here and now a little better. And those people who get in your way, who make things difficult, who hurt you, who take from you...you've got to cut them off.
    - a. But in your attempt at accumulating and securing treasure for yourself here and now, you are robbing yourself of treasure there and then, which will be yours in heaven forever.
      - i. So no matter how hard it feels today, I'm calling you to love your enemies for your benefit—for your eternal benefit."

## I Know Where Christ Is Taking You

- A. Can I just stop right here and say: I know you have a lot going on. I know that your life is hard in so many ways. I know that some of us are still waiting for that raise, or waiting for that spouse, or waiting for that lab report to come back. I know that being a mommy is exhausting. I know that being a spouse is trying. I know that people have wounded and hurt you.
1. But hear me: Whatever you are dealing with right now, I know you're going to be okay. Because I know where Christ is taking you: "<sup>1</sup>Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-3).
- B. When we live in light of that—eternity, the blessedness that awaits us in His presence, the security we have in Him—we are free. We don't have to preserve our reputation, our stuff, or whatever else. He's doing that.

1. Because our hope is in heaven we can love our enemies on this earth. We don't have to fight back. We don't have to hold that grudge. Instead, we get a wonderful chance to show them what God and His love is like.

C. And this actually leads me to my second question...

## (2) How Does He Enable Us to Love Our Enemies? (vv. 35b-36)

### It Does Not Come from Us

A. How do we actually become this type of person? Where does the power to live this out actually come from?

B. Well, I can tell you straightaway, it does not come from us. That's the whole burden of Jesus' logic back in vv. 32-34. Again, three times He says essentially the same thing: "even sinners love those who love them" (v. 32); "even sinners do the same" (v. 33); "even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount" (v. 34).

1. By "sinners" here He simply means natural man—man as he is by nature.

- a. So He says: "Listen. The kind of love that you typically show, not only is there no lasting benefit for you in it, It requires no special regenerating work of God. Everyone loves those who love them. Everyone does good to those who do good to them. Everyone would be willing to lend to those who will pay them back. There's no power of God in these things."

C. We all naturally relate to one another as if on a scale.

1. You scratch my back, I scratch yours. You give to me, I give to you. You text me, I text you. You stop texting me, I stop texting you. You start giving me attitude, I start giving you attitude. You hate me, now I hate you. And on it goes.

- a. And Jesus is asking us to break the scales. But how do we that?!

### It Comes from God

A. Well it's quite simple really: God breaks them for us!

B. That's the point of vv. 35b-36: " <sup>35b</sup> and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

1. God calls us to break the scales in our relationships with one another because He has broken the scales in His relationship with us. He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. He is merciful to the undeserving sinner.

- a. As Jesus would say in Matt 5:45: " [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

- i. God doesn't pick favorites. He doesn't give sunshine to those who said their prayers the night before and hailstorms to those who didn't. He blesses them all. That's the heart of our God. He loves His enemies.
- C. Let me give you an illustration on this point. Have you heard of Richard Dawkins? He's probably one of the most outspoken atheists of our day. I was reading some of the things he's written. Let me read a few lines to you:
  1. "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, . . . megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."
  2. "Presumably what happened to Jesus was what happens to all of us when we die. We decompose. Accounts of Jesus's resurrection and ascension are about as well-documented as Jack and the Beanstalk."
  3. "We cannot, of course, disprove God, just as we can't disprove Thor, fairies, leprechauns and the Flying Spaghetti Monster."
- D. So here is one of the most vitriolic atheists alive today. And yet here's what I want you to realize:
  1. While Dawkins was penning these slanderous things, the God whom He was slandering was upholding him, giving him breath and life and strength to strike the pen.
  2. And after Dawkins penned these things, he would walk out from his office and feel the warmth of sunshine on his face. And he would come home and enjoy a glass of wine and a nice steak for dinner with his wife.
  3. Then he would be granted the grace of a good night's rest so that he could wake up refreshed in the morning, ready to pen more blasphemous words against the very God upon whose mercy and grace he relies for everything!

## His Blood Doesn't Boil, It's Shed

- A. Did the statements Dawkins made above cause your blood to boil? They did mine. "How dare you talk about my God and Savior that way?!"
  1. And yet these statements don't cause God's blood to boil, they cause His blood to be shed.
    - a. Christ comes for the God-hating, for the God-belittling, for the God-slandering. Christ comes for His enemies, and He dies in love for them. He dies for Dawkins, and He dies for you and me: "[W]hile we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10).
- B. God's love breaks the scales! He takes a sinner like me and makes me a "son of the most high" (v. 35).
  1. And then I take this kind of love into my marriage, and my parenting, and my workplace, and my neighborhood. And I love even when it's hard.

- a. The cross changes everything! The cross changes me!
- C. Keep the cross ever before you Mercy Hill. That's why I said back in our Covenant Membership series: I want to be a one-issue church. I want to be a church that just can't get over the cross.
  - 1. If we get that center right, we get all the stuff that flows out from it—one of those things being: we'll love our enemies.

## Conclusion

### Robert Godwin Sr.

- A. Let me show you what this kind of love looks like in heart-wrenching reality.
- B. There was an article recently in the Washington Post about the man whose brutal and mindless murder was recorded and uploaded to Facebook for all to see. The long title given to the article reads: *His Murder Was Put on Facebook. But His Family's Message of Forgiveness Could Be His Legacy*. And its contents are as follows: "He was walking home from an Easter meal on Sunday when a man walked up to Robert Godwin Sr., . . . and then shot him in the head. To add to the horror, the killer recorded the shooting and uploaded it to Facebook. Thousands of people saw the slaying before it was removed over an hour later.

The family's grief, particularly that of Godwin's children, was on display, too. But so was their love. In a baffling demonstration of grace, three of his children publicly forgave their father's killer the next day. His daughter Tonya Godwin-Baines said, "each one of us forgives the killer, the murderer. . . . We want to wrap our arms around him." Godwin's son said, "I forgive him because we are all sinners."

What seemed like an impossible act was the fruit of faith. "Our father . . . taught us about God," Godwin-Baines said. "How to fear God, how to love God and how to forgive." In the aftermath of his gruesome death, Robert Godwin Sr. is still teaching people about the fear of God and forgiveness, and his audience just got a lot bigger.

### One Thing

- A. Now, as we close, I want you to think about that person that came to mind back at the beginning of this sermon. And I want you to ask God for help in loving them. What's the positive charge going to look like in this relationship? What's the broken scale going to look like in this relationship?
  - 1. Ask God to help you do just one thing: Maybe you buy her flowers. Maybe you send him a text. Maybe you finally get down on your knees and truly say a prayer for the person. But may God help us do something! May God help us love our enemies as He has loved us!
- B. I wanted to summarize and conclude this sermon now with four simple lines of poetry (I hope, perhaps, you find it memorable):

Look back and see your Savior's cross, where His blood was shed for you.  
 Look forward and see the place in heaven that He is bringing you to.  
 Look up and see your Father's mercies, raining down each morning new.  
 Now go look for ways to love your enemies that they might see these things too.