

Love Radically Different
February 14, 2016

It is not an easy thing to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus has high expectations of His followers. Some of His commands appear really difficult to obey. Some people would say His expectations are impossible. We're going to look at one of those difficult commands today.

A few weeks ago a well-known actor and an off duty paramedic risked their own lives to pull a man from a burning vehicle. According to the police report, Brett Kyle, 32, from California, was driving his Toyota Tacoma when he plowed into a drainage ditch. His vehicle then rolled several times and ignited into flames. Two men who saw the accident occur ran to the burning truck in an attempt to free the driver. When they could not get the door open, one of them ran back to his own vehicle and retrieved a rescue tool. The two men then broke the window, cut the seat belt and pulled the driver of the truck to safety.

Have you ever daydreamed of being such a hero? Maybe you have thought of yourself as the kind of person who would jump in to rescue someone. Many people would do such a thing for a loved one. Some would even do so for a stranger as the incident a few weeks ago shows.

But how many of us would put our lives in danger trying to help an enemy? How many of us would try to save someone who was trying to do us harm?

There is an old, old story of just such an event. In 1567 King Philip II of Spain appointed the Duke of Alba as governor of the lower part of the nation. The Duke was a bitter enemy of the newly-emerging Protestant Reformation. His rule was called the reign of terror, and his council was called the Bloody Council, because it had ordered the slaughter of so many Protestants. It is reported that in the winter of 1569, one man, Dirk Willemzook, who was sentenced to die for his biblical faith managed to escape. As he was being pursued by a lone soldier, Dirk came to a lake whose ice was thin and cracking. Somehow he managed to get safely across the ice, but as soon as he reached the other side he heard his pursuer yell for help. The soldier had fallen through the ice and was about to drown. At the risk of being captured, Dirk went back onto the lake and rescued his enemy. I wish I could tell you the soldier then let Dirk go. He wanted to, but doing his duty he arrested Dirk who was later executed for his faith in Jesus.

(Elon Foster, *New Cyclopaedia of Prose Illustrations: Second Series* [New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1877], p. 296).

Would you risk your life to save someone who was trying to end your life? Most of us will likely never face such a situation. Yet, the passage we will read this morning has pointed many Christians to that kind of action.

Luke 6:27-36 (NIV) "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to

you. "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. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

I believe Jesus means these commands for his followers to follow in everyday relationships. He isn't talking about a country that is being attacked by another country. He isn't talking about people who are committing crimes.

I don't believe Jesus wants you to stand by and do nothing while someone tries to harm you or a member of your family. When Jesus speaks about turning the other cheek, He isn't talking about being passive in the face of a physical assault. He isn't speaking of leaving your doors unlocked so thieves can take all they want. Those are not the level of enemies Jesus is speaking about.

He does speak about someone striking you. But He isn't speaking of someone trying to really hurt you physically. In that culture, the slap on the cheek was an attack on your honor, not a physical assault. Maybe the person just slaps you as an insult. Or maybe he is responding to your verbal insult of him. They escalated the level of insult.

Jesus isn't prohibiting defending yourself. He is prohibiting retaliation.

The natural reaction of sinners to someone sinning against us is to do the same back at them, a little worse than they did to us. But too often this simply escalates into a real fight. We hear on the news nearly every week of arguments that turn deadly. This is how that happens. Jesus is pointing His followers to not retaliating while things are small and no one is threatening physical violence.

He mentions someone taking your cloak. This is a judgment in a lawsuit. Many people were so poor, the only thing of value they owned were the clothes on their backs. If the judgment went against you, then you should humble yourself to it and give freely to your opponent. This follows the restitution laws of the Old Testament, whereby if you injured someone else or took stole from someone, you had to repay more than you took.

He also speaks, in verse 30, of loaning to those in need. He doesn't want us to be stingy to those in need of what we have. If they do not bring your coat back, or cannot bring it back, don't demand payment to replace it. This goes along with the OT law of the year of cancelling debts. If someone did not pay you back before the Sabbath year, you were to let it go, write it off, consider the debt cancelled and paid in full, even if it was not. Jesus is applying that here even if it is not the Sabbath year. Just make it a general habit of being generous to those who ask things of you, without expecting to be repaid.

Now, we can only practice this when we know that God will take care of us. We know that if we give away our jacket, God has plenty more of them to give us.

So who are my enemies? What level of enemies is Jesus referring to?

Jesus speaks of those who hate you or mistreat you. This might be a coworker, a person at school, a neighbor, or a bully. It is the person who curses you. They may insult you to your face, gossip behind your back, or say bad things about you on social media.

Maybe at work or school you are partnered with someone on a project and your partner takes credit for your work. Maybe someone makes you late getting your work done because they are always late getting their work done. They may not be threatening you with physical harm, but are hurting you in other ways. They may be causing emotional or social harm, as in trying to ruin your reputation. There are hundreds of ways that people misbehave towards others.

King David prays to God about those critics who were watching him in hopes of discovering something to accuse him of. Jesus experienced the same thing. Maybe you do too.

These are the kinds of enemies Jesus is speaking of. What should we do about such people? Jesus has several things for us.

1. Love your enemies. Love them even if you don't like them.

How can I love someone if I don't even like them? First by learning that there are different kinds of love. There is a love we have for family or friends. This is friendship love or brotherly love. This is the kind of love where you like someone. Jesus is not speaking of this kind of love.

There is a different kind of love called romantic love. This is the special love we have for a girlfriend or boyfriend. Jesus is not speaking about this kind of love either.

Both of these kinds of love involve feelings of like or affection for the other person. You may not have any feelings of like for your enemy. Jesus is not telling us to try to conjure up such feelings in us. No, Jesus has a different kind of love in mind.

There is another kind of love where you just choose to care about what happens to another person. It isn't a feeling. It is a choice that ignores your feelings. You just decide you will do what is best for the other person. This is the kind of love God has for all people. God wants what is best for every person. God wants every person to know His love for them. God wants every person to choose a right relationship with God. God wants every person to thereby end up in heaven. Everything God does is motivated by this love. And so He provides basic good things to every person. The Bible says He sends both the sunshine and the rain upon all people, good and bad. God is working for the good of all people.

Jesus isn't telling us to create in ourselves some kind of feelings of like or affection for our enemies. Jesus is commanding us to do what is best for them, regardless of our feelings. Jesus wants us to love them like God loves them. Jesus wants us to think about what is best for our enemy. He wants us to have a concern for the well-being of our enemy.

To do that, we must think with compassion about our enemy. We must see our enemy as a person God loves and in need of experiencing God's love. Then we simply choose to help make that happen.

2. Do good to your enemies. Be helpfully kind to them.

You can be kind towards your enemy. Do NOT treat him or her like he or she is treating you.

Watchman Nee was a Christian writer and teacher in China. He tells about a Chinese Christian who owned a rice paddy next to one owned by a communist man. The Christian irrigated his paddy by pumping water out of a canal, using one of those leg-operated pumps that make the user appear to be seated on a bicycle. Every day, after the Christian had pumped enough water to fill his field, the communist would come out, remove some boards that kept the water in the Christian's field, and let all the water flow down into his own field. That way, he didn't have to pump. This continued day after day. Finally the Christian prayed, "Lord, if this keeps up, I'm going to lose all my rice, maybe even my field. I've got a family to care for. What can I do?" In answer to his request, the Lord put a thought in his mind. So the next morning he arose much earlier, in the predawn hours of darkness, and started pumping water into the field of his communist neighbor. Then he replaced the boards and pumped water into his own rice paddy. In a few weeks both fields of rice were doing well, and the communist was converted to faith in Jesus Christ.

As you think about your enemy, what needs of his come to mind? Maybe you have overheard him or his friend speak of a need he has. Maybe you have seen a need of that person. Think about what you can do to help her in her need.

Jesus also says to

3. Bless your enemies. He does not mean to "bless them out". He means to... **Praise and thank them when appropriate.**

Your enemy likely has some good in him. Try to discern what that good is and compliment him for it. Maybe he got a really good grade on a report. Tell him you are glad for him. "Congratulations. Good for you. Good job!" Maybe she is good at sports, or music, or public speaking or math. Compliment her on her ability. Ask her for advice on how you can improve. Maybe, despite how he treats you, you notice he treats someone else with kindness. Comment on that in a good way.

Praise the good you see in your enemy. Compliment the good you see. Praise your enemy to your enemy, but also speak well of your enemy to other people. You might hear some people talking about the bad things your enemy does. You can offer a comment like, "Yes, that is true, but I have also seen some good in that person." And then share the good you have seen. Noticing the good doesn't mean to deny the bad. It just means to focus more on the good. Everyone knows the bad, but not everyone knows the good. Cheer for the good.

One more thing, here, and it is a hard point. **Consider the possibility that what your enemy says about you may have some truth in it.** Pray about the comments. Ask God if maybe what they say is at least a little true of you. Ask your friends if maybe it is at least a little true of you, without telling them who said it. If you find out that there is some truth to it, thank your enemy for helping you to see something about yourself that you did not know. Your enemy may have meant it as an insult. Instead, take it as her being helpful. Thank her for pointing out something that you did not see, so you can become a better follower of Jesus Christ.

And then fourthly Jesus tells us to

4. Pray for your enemies. He doesn't mean to pray, "Get 'em Lord!"

How should you pray for your enemies? Even if you know nothing much about your enemy, you do know something about Jesus.

Ask yourself this question: Knowing what I know about Jesus, what would Jesus pray for this person? Praying like Jesus would pray is what it means for us to pray in Jesus' name.

Jesus calls us to live and love radically different from the way most people behave.

Be generous. Don't seek revenge. Don't retaliate against those who act against you. This is not the way most people behave. But it is the way Jesus calls His followers to behave to everyone. We do so out of gratitude that He has treated us this way.

A little girl one day went to her mother to show some fruit that had been given to her by a friend.

"Your friend has been very kind to you," said the mother.

"Yes," said the girl. "She even gave me more than these; but I have given some away."

The mother asked to whom the girl had given some of the fruit.

She answered, "I gave them to a girl who pushes me off the sidewalk and makes faces at me." Her mother asked why she gave some fruit to that girl. She answered, "Because I thought it would make her know that I wish to be kind to her, and she will not, maybe, be rude and unkind to me again."

The question is never who to love, because we are to love everyone. The question concerns how to love most helpfully. We are not to focus on our feelings about the other person. We are not to focus on the other person's attitude, words, or behavior towards us. We are to imitate our Savior and do what is best for every person.

God so loved all people that He sent us the Savior we need. Jesus loved all people so much that He volunteered to die for us. As His followers, we must learn to live and love like that in our gratitude to Him.