

Love Your Enemies, Part 1

Luke 6:27-28

Turn to Luke chapter 6, Luke chapter 6. We're embarking on a study of the main body of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And we're going to get into that this morning right into it in Luke 6:27. Last Sunday as you know, we got a broad overview of the entire sermon. But today we want to drill down into the details. Starting with Jesus' opening imperative, in verse 27, love your enemies, love your enemies. This is about practicing the full extent of divine love. This is the way Jesus commands his followers to live, to practice the full extent of divine love. So to get this in our minds so we're in the habit of doing let's start just by reading just a few verses here of this main section from verse 27 to 30: "But I say to you who hear [Jesus says], Love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. To the 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. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you do so to them."

We might put a heading on that section of verses and summarize what Jesus is teaching right here in this way. This is about extending love for all, including enemies, and enduring all for love. And make no mistake what Jesus teaches here is radical, not just in our time and in our culture, but at any time and in any culture. This is radical. This cuts to the bone, really, it pierces us to the heart, especially as we get into it more and more and unpack it, we realize we are very far from practicing this kind of love in any consistent, practical way. We need to grow in it. We've been introduced to this kind of love through Christ, we need to grow in this kind of love by the Holy Spirit. This is exactly the way Jesus loved us.

In John 13, I want to show you something if you turn over there to John 13, just by way of introduction to show you that this is exactly this kind of love. This radical love is exactly the kind of love that Jesus shows to all people and starting with his own disciples. If you look at John 13, I just want to show you something quickly as we get started. You may remember the scene there in John 13. It's the scene of the upper room where Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples one last time before the cross, John 13:1 it says "now before the feast of

Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world, to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." The end there is not just a reference to Jesus' final days on earth it is the phrase *eis telos* which means to the outermost. He loved them to complete fulfillment or to complete measure, full measure. And whom did he love the text says he loved his own. And yet you remember that Judas Iscariot was there too, among the disciples the other apostles and Jesus washed his feet too. He washed his feet dried his feet served him even though Judas had already betrayed Jesus to death. It says in John 13:2 "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" and yet verse 4, "Jesus rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, taking a towel and tied it around his waist. He poured water into a basin, began to wash the disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him." Jesus loved his own. Jesus own disciples were loved by God, to the uttermost to the full measure, and really to the salvation of their souls. Jesus death was the most profound act of love and it was a particular redeeming love by which he purchased them. And not, by the way, Judas Iscariot. That's why, verses 10-11 Jesus said, "You are clean, but not every one of you. For he knew who was to betray him. And that was why he said, not all of you are clean."

And yet, Jesus loved his enemy to didn't he, Jesus loved his own to the end, the uttermost and yet on a temporal and a superficial level, there was no discernible difference between the way Jesus treated his own and the way he treated his enemy, the one who betrayed him, the one who handed him over to death. That, beloved, is how Jesus wants us to love our enemies too. Which is what we're going to see this morning. Okay, so with that in mind, turn back to Luke 6:27. Just to set your expectations, we're only going to be able to cover two of these four verses today. So today is really a part one, we'll have to wait for part two, but I want you to think of this section not as a part one and part two, but as a, as a whole unit. If you'll allow me, I'll preach for three hours, would that be a.. not, not okay, because we have Sunday schools and kids and things like that to think of but I don't want you to think of this as a two part thing. I want you to think the section as a whole, and try to keep these, these sermons and this mess all this connected and joined together in your mind because this is a single unit. For today, though, just for practical considerations, I'm going to divide that section half, we're only going to cover verses 27-28. This is verses 27-28.

This is a single verse, or a single sentence, I should say in the Greek, a single sentence with four imperatives: love, do good, bless, and pray. And all four of those imperatives, all four of those commands, that's how we're to love our enemies, let alone our friends, our acquaintances, anyone else who qualifies in this broad, broad definition of neighbor. This is his old really is Luke 19:18, which codifies the divine ethic, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." That is the summary command about all of our interactions, all of our relations on a horizontal level with all mankind, "love your neighbor as yourself." Here in the New Testament, though, from the lips of the incarnate Son of God and portrayed in his perfect life of sacrificial love, we see the full extent of that ancient ethic "love your neighbor as yourself." What we discover is that the definition of neighbor is much broader than we would assume. It's very broad. It extends to all mankind, those who you are in a position to help those who are in your proximity, enemies, as well as friends and everyone in between. Now, if we break down Jesus main point, as I said, it's a single sentence spans two verses, but we see four simple clauses there, each one with a subject, a verb and an object.

To start out with a subject, all four clauses have the same subject, it's verse 27. Jesus directs his words to you who hear so the subject of those verbs are Christians, believers, those who are regenerate and enabled by the Spirit to hear so we're talking about true Christians, that's the subject. But then there are four verbs and four direct objects. So that's we're going to spend our time this morning to understand what Jesus is here commanding us to do. And we recognize how counter intuitive this is for us as fallen human beings. But I want to make a quick footnote to that. It is counterintuitive to us this is not something that's natural to us. It's something foreign, it's something we need to learn. But I want to say quickly by way of footnote that it's not counterintuitive to being human. Why? Because Jesus is fully and perfectly human. He has come in flesh, full humanity, full deity, but full humanity to demonstrate to us what God designed intended humanity to be. It's in Christ. That's what he wants us to be. And it's only those who are in Christ, who are enabled by God by the Spirit to do that. Jesus' life of love shows us what God intended humanity to be, lived out in a fallen world. Even in the face of sometimes vicious and pitiless enemies. Jesus' redeemed people are to practice this ethic of divine love, and that is tested, not merely by loving our friends and our families where, let's face it, we often don't even do that well. But the real test

comes in loving our enemies. Jesus' commands us to practice what he exemplified in his own life, to the greatest, most profound, most fundamental good to those who least seem to deserve it.

So, first of all, let's make sure that we understand what Jesus is, is actually commanding us to do here what these verbs mean, what do they demand of us? And the first question we ask is, we build our little outline together, just this question, write it down, what is love? What is love? It's very basic question. But it is so essential. And especially in our world that is so confused about love. Even among us Christians living in this world, we are sometimes confused about what love really is, aren't we? We who have had the love of God shed in shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us we who have been the recipients of divine love in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The forgiveness of all of our sins, the perfect righteousness of Christ, covering us as a free gift, that is love. But even those of us who've learned that love, been redeemed by that love, we even sometimes misunderstand this, don't we? So I want to start with a general overview to clarify the biblical concept of divine love. And then we're going to dig into the particulars of Jesus' commands here as he elaborates on the way we're to love our enemies. The Greek verb used here for

love is *agapao*. You're familiar with that, the noun form is *agape* probably familiar to you. We translate that word into English as love. But in the English we mean different things by the word love, don't we, we love God. We love his word. We love his people. We love our wife, our kids, we love our relatives, we love friends. But we also love ice cream. We love football season, we love many other things that are different degrees of trivial or different degrees of importance, right?

So to be more accurate in English, we should probably say we like those other lesser things. But we use the word love in English for kind of like for emphasis, kind of like an exclamation point on the end of what we really like. So instead of saying, we like ice cream, we really like football, and we really, really like Christmas time, we just simply bring that down and simplify it and use the word love, it's fine. Because we all have learned to interpret in our language we've been interpreted according to context. We understand that people don't love their wife on the same level as they love Doritos for, for instance. The Greeks though, the Greeks were not like us, they had four words to our one which describe different kinds of love. By understanding those four different words, it really helps shed light to contrast one with the other. And

we'll see our own expressions of what we say when we say I love this or I love that we'll see that in these four Greek words for love.

The Greek words are *storge*, *philia*, *eros* and *agape*. So just take a few minutes to provide some basic definitions, explanations of those, the first word *storge*, that just refers to natural affection based on close relationship often based on kinship. So you might think of it as the love that you have for your mother or as a parent the love that a parent has for children. The word *storge* is used in both classical Koine Greek, but in the New Testament *storge* only really shows up a couple times, but in the negative form, *astorge* or *astorgas* is actually how it comes across, which means unloving without natural affection. The last days according to 2 Timothy 3:3, we're going to be characterized by a lack of natural affection allow *astorgas*, which we certainly see evidenced in the world around us. Second word is *philia*. The verb is *phileo*. This is probably the most common Greek word for love. And in the Greek world it was a very, very noble, noble kind of love and noble word *philia* is the love of affection or friendship very, very close, intimate friendship. It can even describe the affection within a marriage. You all know the City Philadelphia that's *philia* and

adelphos out of Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. That's where that comes from. *Phileo* describes the virtue of loyalty within a close intimate friendship. You may remember back to John 21 is why Peter was so grieved and John 21 when Jesus question Peters love, Jesus said, Peter, do you *agapao* me? Do you love me with the kind of love that he's commanding right here? Do you *agapao* me? And Peter said, I *phileo* you. When Jesus questioned even that, though, he said, do you *phileo* me? Peter is grieved because his lack of loyalty, in light of his defection, Jesus greatest hour and darkest hour of need. Peter's *phileo* was shown to be less than what he professed, to be less than what he thought, it grieved him. So that's *phileo*. *Storge*, *phileo*, there's a third word *eros*, *eros* describes a romantic love and the word, our word erotic comes from the word *eros*. It is really what we have come to associate with that word. It's passion, it's sensual desire, it's longing. The key in *eros* is it's driven by the natural senses. It's driven by just natural attraction. So these are like the, the passions driven by impulses of, of biology, impulses of what we personally prefer. The passion of *eros* expresses itself in sometimes in extremely jealous longing, a desire to get that object of desire to have it for yourself. And so sometimes, really, you could say that *eros* really is kind of a virtuous look, in the Greek society anyway, of actual sins like covetousness and lust. As our own

culture becomes more debased, more debauched, we have been losing sight of the virtues of *philia*, *storge* very hard to find examples of *philia*, a true loyalty, any longer. We've also grown quite cold in our *storge*, especially apparent in the tragic and immoral and multi-billion dollar per year abortion industry. So now all that's left is *eros*, passion, impulse, instinct, biological attraction. That's what we see most in our society. And it calls itself love.

In our world, materialism is the dominant worldview, that is to say all that exists is matter. And matter is eternal, and the chemical properties of matter, that's what gives explanation and reason for all the impulses and drives. Even the thinking and the passions and motives of human beings. People want to think of themselves as a little more than advanced animals. And that helps them to provide a false justification for their enslavement to passion, and impulse. And that is *eros*. That is the kind of love that dominates in our world. It's, it's in the media, it's in the entertainment, it sets expectations for young people as they think about their future relationships. It seems that they have to have that *eros* if they're going to get into a commitment with somebody. You only love, care for someone else, because you find that person attractive or useful or helpful in

some way. We hear that all the time when someone says they've fallen in love that is the telltale language of the Greek concept of *eros* when someone loses that loving feeling, though they take off they're ensnared by whatever else is attracting their attention at the moment. And sadly, they abandon commitments all the time.

That characterizes love in the Western world even shows up though in the church. It even shows up in Christian homes. It shows up in all of our homes you know that I know that and what Jesus here, teaches here corrects all of that, confronts it, it provokes it, reveals it. Listen to the surface so we can look at and see it in all its ugliness. And we can actually pursue the final Greek word which is *agape*, which is here in our text. The Greek word for love that Jesus uses here it's very different than *eros* and in fact it's almost the exact opposite, it's *agape*, has nothing to do with biological attraction or romantic feeling. The word *agape*, the verbal form is *agapao*, it's also not it's also not like *storge* because it's not natural to the physical condition. *Agape* is supernatural, *agape* is manifest in God and it comes from God. And so it's not natural. It's not part of our fallen condition. It's supernatural. *Agape* is different than *philia* as well, because even though *agape* is, by

nature loyal and true, the prerequisite bond of friendship is not required for *agape*. It doesn't need to be some previous connection in order for it to come out. *Agape* is the foundation, *agape*, is the prerequisite, *agape* is the commitment of the will. So basically, *agape* is and this, as I said, is the word that Jesus uses when he commands us to love our enemies. He said *agapate* your enemies. That's the command. Basically, at its most essential the virtue of *agape* is expressed without condition without merit, and seeking the greatest and highest good of the object loved. *Agape* doesn't ask what's in it for me. *Agape* doesn't come in and say, hey, how's this arranged so that I'm actually best served? *Agape* comes in and says, "how can I give? How can I serve? How can I love? How can I sacrifice for your greatest good for what's best for you?" *Agape* is such that it's awarded unconditionally. It's given without regard for merit or reward. It's not given to get back, seeks the greatest, the highest good of the object, love.

When you show *agape* for someone else, you're seeking the best for that person. And I mean, not your conception or their conception of what's best, but biblically, what's best, God's best for that person. Whereas *eros* is selfish, *agape* is completely unselfish. And in fact, it's, it can be utterly and

ultimately self sacrificing, as we see in Jesus Christ. Unconditional, self sacrificial, seeking the highest and best for the other person now, that conception of love is foreign to us, isn't it? It's completely and utterly alien to our fallen world. People seek what's best for themselves first, and not others first, the greatest and highest good of other people biblically, is pretty far down the priority list for most people. Not just in our culture, but to all cultures and throughout human history *agape* love is a foreign concept.

In fact, going back into the biblical world of first century time commentator, Harold Hoehner, noted that outside of the Bible, you cannot find the noun *agape* in classical literature before the New Testament era. Why is that? Why is it that it's so it's, it's there in the language, but it's so absent from so much literature. Because it wasn't until Jesus Christ came. It wasn't until he demonstrated what *agape* actually looked like, by dying on the cross for the sins of his enemies. His love for us was utterly sacrificial, it was not based on his attraction to us. It's not based on anything good found in us. And God has been demonstrating that kind of love ever since the beginning of time for all people, all sinners. Jesus reminds us of that there in verse 35. If you look there, God the Most High

has loved all men being kind to all even the ungrateful and the evil. Over in the parallel count, Matthew 5:45, we understand God's common grace, an expression of that *agape* love, he showers that grace on all of mankind, indiscriminately. Without exception, Jesus said "your Father who is in heaven, he makes his sun, [I like how he says that his sun, it's like kind of pulls out his pocket, hey, here's my sun,] and gives it to rise on the evil and the good." The crops of evil men grow alongside the crops of good men. He sends his rain on the just and the unjust. That's common grace. That's what we're to show to all people.

For us as believers, though, that *agape* love has been shed upon us in the form of redeeming grace. Not only does God love us by shedding that common grace upon us, along with our evil, ungrateful neighbors. He also loves us by saving us eternally. With his particular grace, his saving grace, it has nothing to do, as I said, with our own attractiveness has nothing to do with our merit or any prior relationship. In fact, just the opposite is true. Romans 5 says, God loved us in Christ when we were weak when we were ungodly while we were sinners and yes while we were God's enemies. So while the word *agape* did exist in the Greek language, it really wasn't until Christ came that

the concept of *agape* was understood, you might think of the word of God, babe. Prior to Christ it was really a shell, the word itself was kind of like a shell and Christ's atoning work, injected that shell inside with meaning with substance, with understanding. It's because of Jesus Christ that we now know what *agape* love is, it's because of God's saving grace. And because of the regenerating sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within us, that we can practice this *agape* love toward other people. I want you to turn for just a brief moment over to Ephesians 5:1, and take a look at what the Apostle Paul commanded there in this regard to the Ephesians.

And over in Ephesians 5, he's, he's really, Paul is not teaching something new. He's just simply reinforcing what Jesus taught here in the Sermon on the Mount. He writes, in Ephesians 5:1 and 2, "therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love. [How Paul? well,] as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering the sacrifice to God. Notice the way Paul has summarized the love of Christ. We're to walk in love as Christ walked in love as Christ loved us. How did he do that? Four things we see there first, he took action. Christ loved us and gave. Giving is a part of love. It's active, it's action oriented. Secondly, he sacrificed. What did he

sacrifice, Christ gave himself up. Thirdly, he sought the highest good of somebody else, our highest good. It says there, that Christ gave himself up for what, for us. All that describes his death on the cross for our sins, to purchase us for God to redeem us for God. But there's more in *agape* love for Christ, he pleased God fully, he satisfied all God's righteous demands, fulfilling all his perfect will. It says Christ loved us gave himself up for us. And here's the pleasing part, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. That's Old Testament language. That's the language of sacrifice. It alludes and points to the sacrifices offered to God on the altar. God required the sacrifice, he commanded the sacrifice, he stipulated how it was to come exactly the form all its perfections. And Christ brought it sacrificed of his own body, in an offering and a sacrifice to God literally unto a pleasing aroma to God. And God received that sacrifice. He was pleased. He demonstrated his approval by raising Jesus up from the dead, he brought him to heaven, he seated Jesus Christ at his own right hand bodily. Christ's love is both fundamentally and ultimately focused on pleasing God first.

So Paul commands here, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love and how do you do that? Like this,

take action, sacrifice yourself, seek the highest good of the object you love and as you love, number four, conduct yourself according to the will of God. That's divine. That's, that's agape love that's what he's saying. Okay, now with all that in mind, go back to Luke 6:27&28. And I hope you'll see how this comports with what Jesus commanded. Jesus says, to all of us who are hearing to all of us true disciples, to all of us who are recipients of God's grace, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, saved by faith in Jesus Christ, his finished work on the cross. He says to us, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." That is the *agape* love in action. That is the *agape* love of personal sacrifice. That's the *agape* love that seeks the highest good according to God, the highest good of the object of love. That's the *agape* love that is only *agape* love when it is rightly aligned with the revealed Word of God. This is not warm sentiment or squishy emotion. The more technical word for that is sloppy *agape*. The *agape* love Jesus commands here, it lines up with the revealed will of God. It's instructed by the knowledge of God and it's conducted in the righteous wisdom of God, that's love. Okay, so let's drill down into these commands and see how Jesus said it here.

First of all, for all four of these commands, verses 27 to 28 you need to understand these are present tense verbs. Verbal tense in Greek verbal aspect in the Greek language, it's basically describing not, not tense isn't necessarily time. First and foremost, it's describing the kind of action portrayed. And in this case, Jesus is commanding a present tense kind of action. It's a habitual action. It's a continuous action, continuous kind of action. That is, we are to love continuously this way, we don't do it once and then leave it, leave it behind and keep on moving. There's a habit of life. We do this habitually, we, we love continually we do good habitually, we bless repeatedly, we pray constantly. We're to make these commands our regular habit, our continual practice, this is in other words, this is our lifestyle as true Christians, followers of Christ. Secondly, just an observation of all of them, notice the progress in these commands? How they move from one to another, the overarching concept is love. The other three words elaborate how we portray love, you could say, the fundamental motivation in the heart is love. And the other three words unpack how we portray it, we can see that Jesus starts with heart motive. It starts with the intentionality of the will "love your enemies," it gets right to the heart. And then he moves outward, and immediately commands our action, whether it's in what we do that is "do good," or in what we say

that is "bless." Notice also how the public outward action of doing good and blessing that involves our behavior and our speech, both of which can be seen heard by others as they observe us. But Jesus final command is to private action. This is an action, prayer is an action that's hidden from others. This is a love that only God knows that only God can see that only, that prayers and only he can hear. Prayer is what truly brings love to its fulfillment and its culmination, as we combine our action, and our words of blessing into the regular habit of intercessory prayer for others, and oh, by the way, intercessory prayer for your enemies. It starts with the hidden motives, intentions, the thoughts of the heart. Jesus said, "love your enemies." That's at a level that only God can see, whether you truly love or not. It's also something only God can produce, by the Holy Spirit in you. Whom as Romans 5:5 says, we already have, we have the Holy Spirit, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. And so for every true Christian, we have this love. It's just a matter of are you exercising it or not?

Now we all need to put this into action. How do we do that? Next command, verse 27, "do good to those who hate you." Do good. Practicing the love Jesus commands, not only involves the

cooperation of our thoughts and our wills, it moves outward. It comes outward if it stays internal, and doesn't move outward, you know what it's not this. It's not true love. It must come outward, it makes demands on our actions as well. James explains that he says what kind of love is it that sees someone in need and says, oh, Go in peace be warmed, be filled. Without giving that person the things needed for the body. What good is that? It's not love. That's the cruelty of utter indifference. Not only that, but it's made more hideous because it's dressed up in religious language. Go in peace my brother be warmed and be filled while you make your way over to the restaurant while this person is starving. What is that? When Jesus says do good, he's commanding us to do what is beneficial for the other person. He's telling us to demonstrate practical benevolence to those in need to show kindness to people. And again, even those who hate us. Again, this is loving action. It's initiated by a decision to love, it's prompted by an opportunity to show compassion. It's expressed in practical kindness to fulfill needs. The word do translated do there, it's *poieo*, You could legitimately translate word that word as practice. This is how we live.

Think about it. If you were to go down to the, I don't know Greely mall or Centerra or something like that some guy comes

running in and he's screaming, "Allahu Akbar" over and over and over, what are you going to do? Duck, right, you're going to get behind something solid because something's about to blow up. Let's say the bomb does go off. But it, it malfunctioned. It didn't go off high order, it just, it just did enough to cause that guy to sit there wounded and bleeding on the sidewalk. Here's what love does, goes up and helps that person. It helps that person in need to apply first aid, to call 911 to get somebody over there to make sure that this person lives. Why? Because this deceived person who went and tried to blow himself up and everybody else in murder and suicide clearly needs Christ. While there's breath, there's hope. Don't be of those who would say go put a bullet in his head and let's move on. No. While there's breath, there's hope. And that act of kindness could open up the doorway for you to bring the gospel to that person. You see how radical this gets for us? Again, this command is to love neighbor, including that guy who just tried to blow you and everybody else up, hurt himself doing so. It's as old as Leviticus 19:18. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. So is the command though not just to love neighbor, but also to love enemies? That's also very ancient. Proverbs 25:21&22 says this. "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat. If he's thirsty, give him water to drink. For you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord Yahweh will reward you."

Look what Jesus is teaching here, it is radical I know. It confronts our hearts doesn't it? But this is consistent with all of Scripture. God has never said anything different. And Jesus came to exegete, to explain the heart of God to us.

John 1:18. "No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side, [who's that? Jesus Christ] he has made him known." He comes to interpret him to us. Look at third command verse 28, "Bless those who curse you [...] Bless those who curse you." This obviously has to do with our speech, audible words, the word you *eulogeo*, that we get the word eulogy from, this verb it can mean to commend it can mean to confer a blessing on someone to praise to extol. This doesn't mean when someone curses you, you respond by saying "hey, good job with that curse. That's nice. What? What amazing descriptive adjectives you are using just wonderful vocabulary." No, this is not about that direct reply to a curse, that it's you kind of have to bless them in response right there. This is not about the direct reply, but it is about the heart of our reply. It does get to the heart of the one who was cursing us and it gets to our heart of response to that is about a measured, loving response to cursing. And Jesus here commands a love for our enemies that's revealed not only the way we think and our motives not only in

the what we do practically, but also in the way we talk about them. Also in the way we speak about them. That is to say we don't slander people. We don't back bite, we don't gossip behind their back. We don't, we don't wish them ill. Instead, we, when we speak to others, we bless those people we speak graciously. We don't tell lies. We don't sugarcoat the evil that they do. We don't sugarcoat the curses of our enemies. We call it what it is. But we don't join them in reviling speech. Rather, we speak words of blessing. We speak as those who are asking God for a blessing upon those who curse us. That's the idea of blessing in this context. But here *eulogeo* has to do not just with blessing others but actually asking God to bestow a blessing a favor on somebody else as in to grant this person a blessing. That's the idea and our love for enemies is expressed finally there in prayer. This takes us to the final command verse 28, and this honestly really does confront our self-centeredness. Jesus here in this whole section intends to replace our natural selfishness with supernatural love. And that is most evident in our prayer life.

Verse 28, "Pray for those who abuse you". Look, our spiritual maturity or our spiritual immaturity is evidenced most clearly in our prayer life. Prayer life is something really only

God can see clearly. But something we know if we'll assess ourselves honestly. We know we're loving others when we stop and treat God on others' behalf. If we make others a regular part of our prayer life, when we act as intercessors. Mimicking Christ's intercession for us, and we do that for others and for our enemies in particular, look that's how we know we're walking in love. It's very hard to retaliate in your heart and your actions, it's very hard to hate those you're praying for. That's why Jesus brings these commands full circle. He goes from the internal motive of the heart, love, to the outward public action of what we do and then what we say. Well doing, blessing, then he goes back full circle to the inward private intercession. Praying to God for the benefit of our enemies. For those who mistreat us, those who abuse us. What Jesus commands with regard to our enemies, loving well doing, blessing, praying, this goes deep within. It confronts and exposes our true affections. It confronts what we truly love, what we truly hate, to see if they really are aligned with God's will, with God's love. It exposes the true nature of our love and obedience to Christ. We've got to ask ourselves, will we give ourselves for the ultimate good of our enemies? Seeking the blessing of God on their lives? Or will we have hearts of vengeance, retaliation, wishing them harm, evil, destruction?

We have clarified Jesus' commands to some degree. Now second of all let's clarify what Jesus means by our enemies. Who are they really, who are we talking about here? And that's the second question for this morning, for our outline simply, who are our enemies, who are they? Verses 27&28, Jesus identifies them with the word enemies, and then as going inside he talks about those who hate us, those who curse us, those who abuse or revile us. So he talks about a moniker, a name for them, enemies, but then the rest of the description, the other three are all actions, what they do, that's the description. So is this all enemies, is it enemies of every kind, does this refer to social or political enemies, does it refer to personal enemies, or religious enemies, what about enemies of the land we live in? Does this prohibit Christians from going to war? Who are these people we're supposed to love? The word enemies here is *echthros*, in the singular *echthras*, it has the root meaning of hostility. One who acts with hostility toward you is one who is oriented toward you as an enemy. You say "but I didn't do anything to deserve being an enemy, therefore that person is not an enemy", no, if that person is acting in an enemy like way that's an enemy. Okay, so none of this, none of this, you know, crazy speech from our politicians that doesn't want to call

enemies, enemies. They're enemies! Okay, let's just call it what it is. If they're acting with hostility toward our country that's an enemy, okay? Jesus uses a verbal form in the second description, it identifies them not just as enemies, those who act with hostility towards you, but those who have hostility in their hearts that is those who hate you? It provides a peek in to their heart motives, so an enemy is somebody who is internally oriented by hatred. This person then, because of that hatred, subjects you to hostility, to antagonism, or outright aggression. It could be verbal form or, as in the second description, it could be a verbal form, it could be non-verbal, it could be political, legal, could be organizational. It may be open outright hatred, apparent for everybody to see, or it could be more subtle, insidious, hidden, conniving kind of hatred, like the politicking that goes on in organizations. Jesus also identifies our enemies, in verse 28, not just as having thoughts of hatred but those who act out in hatred in what they say and what they do. They are those who curse you, those who abuse you, mistreat you, they may be even as we read in verses 29-30, they may even strike you, they may take away your coat, they may take away your goods. It's at this point, we know who they are, their internal attitudes manifest themselves in outward behavior. Out of the overflow of the heart, right? All the actions come, the mouth speaks, the action comes, their animosity toward us cannot

remain hidden forever. Think back to the 9/11 terrorists, they had lived in our country before the attacks. And there were people who no doubt met them prior to the attacks as they are, you know, can't speak English and they're learning how to fly airplanes and things like that. So they're in the airplane flying class, they just want to learn how to take off, not how to land. But people met them, had coffee with them, had lunch, whatever. And perhaps the Americans who had interactions with those pre-9/11 attack terrorists, perhaps they found them to be friendly people. Maybe innocuous, maybe even charming to some extent. But before the attacks, before they had exhibited hostility on the outside, were they still enemies of the United States and its citizens? You better believe they were. The disposition of their hearts was oriented toward Americans in an attitude of hatred. Did they do nice things for their neighbors? I would assume so, maybe even helped the old lady take out the trash one day as they're on their way to the flight school. Whatever the case, but all those acts of good that they were doing they're doing with a motive and a desire to eventually destroy these people. In time they proved that hatred by flying airplanes into buildings, causing great destruction, killing thousands, and that revealed them without any doubt as enemies. So again here, we want to ask, and this, I'm being intentional, I'm getting to your heart by asking about these terrorists okay?

Who are we talking about here, are we talking about all Muslims? Let's take it out of the Muslim thing, and terrorist thing, and ask this, are we talking about our political opponents? Ones who didn't vote the way we thought they should vote? Are they, all those who accept and embrace and actively pursue sinful lifestyles, are those our enemies, who are they?

I want you to look back in context, we need to interpret all things in context right? Look back in context at verse 22, and we're going to interpret this question who are our enemies in its context. Jesus said there to his disciples, remember he is describing a state of blessedness to those who are persecuted, he says blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, when they revile you, when they spurn your name as evil, and get this, why? On account of the Son of Man. Okay, so that's language that seems very strikingly similar to what we're reading in verse 27&28 right? Who are our enemies, they are those who on account of the Son of Man hate you, exclude you, revile you, and spurn your name as evil. They are those who marginalize, ostracize, slander, undermine attack or persecute. They are those who on account of the Son of Man, punch you in the face, take your clothing, take your goods and your properties. Now, could those people be religious enemies,

enemies of the Son of Man, because they're enslaved to false religion like Islam, like terrorists, who want to imprison us or cut off our heads, sure, but how often do you meet one of those in your day to day life? Could these people be the cultural progressives, enemies of the Son of Man because they love their sin and they hate anybody who stands in their way perhaps. That's a bit closer to home isn't it? That's on the horizon, actually right now in our schools. Social progressives, secular elites, some of them even self-proclaimed haters of Christians. Some of them advocating for abortion, they see Christianity as an impediment, as a throwback to ancient foolish days, unenlightened times. Christianity is an obstacle, it's something to free your mind from. Some of them are angry feminists, they hate Christianity because they believe it promotes male patriarchy and domestic abuse. Increasing numbers of Americans see Christianity as an obstacle to their idea of individualism. They believe that's what is guaranteed to them in the constitution of the United States, the right to life, liberty and, what, the pursuit of happiness. "Whatever makes me happy, don't get in my way." So they want all Christians silenced to pursue all manner of evil. Sexual impurities, perverted behaviors, fornication, easy no-fault divorces, LGBTQ whatever initials lifestyles, transgenderism, homosexuality,

transvestitism, nothing is withheld they don't want anything to be held back from them.

There's a columnist, op-ed writer for the New York Times, Frank Bruni he published an article the best, or "The Best and Worst places to be Gay in America." He quotes one woman in the article, a lesbian from Tyler, TX who testified she said "I came out at 60 and I was told I could no longer hold any positions of leadership at my church, I am or was a Southern Baptist." In an earlier article, 2015, Bruni wrote it's called "Bigotry, the Bible and lessons of Indiana." Bruni signaled the need to change that kind of attitude, that would marginalize and kick out a woman like that out of a Southern Baptist church. He cited one source for his article, a man named Mitchell Gold. Who is a gay philanthropist who founded an advocacy group for LGBT people, Mr. Gold told Mr. Bruni "Church leaders must be made to take homosexuality off the sin list." Is it possible that in an effort to make us take homosexuality off the sin list that we will have to forfeit property, pay fines, or something worse? Will we be subject to hate crime laws which try to make certain biblical passages or faithful interpretations of certain biblical passages off limits from the public preaching of the bible? It could happen. Whatever we face, and listen carefully,

whatever we face, on account of the Son of Man, it's hostility and hatred of an enemy that kicks Jesus' commands into effect. The more hostile they are, the more it reminds us, oh yeah, go back to the guide book. What does the guide book say? Love your enemies, love them. Regular, continual persistent action. Loving, well doing, blessing and praying. And doing it from the heart, doing it in public and in private, in our minds and thoughts and also with our actions and our words, we're to love them, never to hate them, never to hope for their demise.

This is what the good Samaritan in Jesus' story did for the man who was beaten and left to die, he saw before him an ethnic and cultural enemy, but a man who was in need. That's how he saw him, he saw him as a fellow human being in need. He responded with active love, *agape* love, helping someone in need. This is what Paul commanded us to do, Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them." Again it's a repetition of Jesus command here, and the same thing over in 1 Timothy 2. We're to pray for those who would be and could be enemies, particularly those enemies who have power and authority over us. "First of all then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people [that is all kinds of people]", who Paul, well for "kings and all who are

in high positions, [governors,] that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." He's not saying "Pray that the government would make decisions that give us a peaceful life" even though we do pray for that. He's saying "pray for those kings and all those who are in authority, who are wicked and evil rulers, so that we don't fight against them and form a coup and try to overthrow them." But rather in peace and godliness, and quietness and dignity, we pray, because we know the God who put them in positions of authority. This is good it's pleasing in the sight of God our savior, who desires all people, that is all kinds of people to be saved, and to come to knowledge of the truth. John Stott cites John Chrysostom, a fourth century pastor, one of the early church's most powerful bible expositors, Chrysostom, this is the quote, Chrysostom saw this responsibility to pray for our enemies as the very highest summit of self-control. It's also the highest summit of love for our enemies, to pray. However, we come to identify as our enemies, the enemies of Christ, the Son of Man, it doesn't really matter. As Christians we are to love them, we are to love them most profoundly when we long for their salvation, long for their salvation. Jesus prayed for those who crucified him, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Now that we know what love is, and who our enemies are, how in the world are we to do this, really, frankly. How are we to do this? It's not in us, that's the first thing. Yes, it's not in us. It's in God, he placed it in us, and we can do it because he has placed his Holy Spirit within us. He's given us a new nature, a nature that can respond to the Holy Spirit. So third and final question, how do we love our enemies, how do we do this, how do we love them first? We start off by remembering that at one time you also were an enemy of God and God loved you. Romans 5:10 says "while we were enemies of God], same word *ekthroi*, that's that word *ekthras*, enemies, even in that condition] God reconciled us to himself through the death of Jesus Christ." That's love, we like it when it's expressed to us. Second, remember that you're eternally loved by God and you will never fall away. Jesus has ascribed the condition of blessedness to you because you possess the kingdom of heaven, verse 20, you're going to be satisfied and laugh one day, verse 21, you'll be rewarded, verse 23, and rewarded handsomely, verse 25, you're going to be numbered with the prophets of old, you're going to be proved to be sons of God, who demonstrate the mercy of their Father in heaven on earth. Look, armed with that knowledge you can have confidence in the face of anyone who would orient themselves to you as an enemy, who treat you with hostility, why, because you're backed by God. Third thing, how

do we practice this, remember where you once came from, remember that you will never fall away, God holds you, thirdly remember that this is a command not a suggestion. This is God's will for you, that you would demonstrate love even for your enemies. Even those who are enemies of the Son of Man. You love your friends too, everyone in between, this is an argument from the greater to the lesser okay. But love for enemies defines the outmost limit for those who might be defined as our neighbors. We love God's enemies and so we might prove to be Christ's disciples. There's no concern for man pleasing here, no fear of man. But rather in the fear of the Lord with an eye of pleasing him, we obey, we obey this command from the Lord. We reach out for enemies, haters, revilers, abusers, we reach out to them with love, God always has your back. He will always take care of you, even if it doesn't go well, even if it results in more hostility. In fact there's no fear at all under the protection of God, we don't play the victim as enemies come at us, but rather we take the offensive, we pursue, this is interesting. We don't retaliate in kind, we retaliate against them but in love. We retaliate for them, in love by doing good, blessing them, praying for them, it's impossible, as we've said, it's impossible to hate or be embittered against those whom you love, do good, bless and then pray. It's the kind of love this world has never seen.

So how do we do this, remembering we were once enemies, God loved us, remembering we are eternally loved by God, absolutely safe in his love, and also being mindful that this is a command from our Lord. A lord we want to please, a Lord who gave himself for us. Let me add some encouragement to this. Number four, you're going to, how do we do this and love our enemy? You're going to succeed in loving your enemies when you remember that God's blessing rests upon you when you suffer for the sake of the Son of Man. Peter wrote to a persecuted church suffering under the growing hostility of Rome and led by the, a mad man emperor Nero, here's what he told them: "do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." Listen if it gets, goes from bad to worse, as it's doing in this country. Let's not be shocked, let's not be shocked that's what he's saying. Let's rejoice though "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, [why?,] because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." So good to hear, we shouldn't be surprised we should expect it. And if we're cleared about revealed truth, if we're clear, proclaiming biblical doctrine, if our lives clearly

reflect the righteousness of God in what we say and how we act, we rejoice when persecution comes, why, because they can see the difference in us. Peter says the Spirit of glory and God rests upon you, that's why they attack. Cause for rejoicing.

Fifthly, I want to just get you started with some practical tips for loving your enemies. How do we do this, let me just give you three tips, okay, three tips. Number one, commit to praying for them, commit to praying for your enemies. Picture that enemy in your mind and set about to praying for them, write down a prayer list. Keep them in your prayer list and pray for them. Start where Jesus ends by including the enemies in your prayer life. This is preemptive action on your part, and it's actually going to produce love within you for your enemies. It's impossible to hate those you regularly pray for. I love what John Stott wrote, in "Christian Counterculture," his book on the Sermon on the Mount. He says this "if intercessory prayer is an expression on what love we have, it is a means to increase our love as well. It's impossible to pray for someone without loving him, and impossible to go on praying for him without discovering that our love grows and matures. We must not, therefore, wait before praying for an enemy until we feel some love for him in our heart. We must begin to pray for him before we are conscious

of loving him, and we shall find our love break first into bud, then into blossom."

So pray preemptively for your enemies, picture that person in your mind, or those people in your mind. Bow before the Lord in prayer for them, for their good, God is going to produce within you that divine love for your enemies. He'll cause the love he's planted within you by the Holy Spirit to bud, blossom, bare much fruit. Second tip, not only pray for them but do good to your enemy. No matter how they treat you, no matter how they think of you, practice doing good kind things for them and your feeling will follow. Listen to what C.S. Lewis wrote in "Mere Christianity", quote "The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we will find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less. The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he likes them. The Christian trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on including

people he could not have imagined himself liking at the beginning."

That's been my experience, has it been yours? That when you pray for, when you do good to, those you may not know, maybe your enemies, maybe strangers, when we do that it changes your heart disposition toward them. You imagine standing in heaven with them praising God before his throne and seeing the remarkable work of grace that's happened in this person's life. Formerly a contemptible person in your life, but no worse than you before a holy God. Ask God for an opportunity to show kindness to that person and then take it, and soon you will see your heart softening. It will release you from the bondage to bitterness, the bondage to a desire to retaliate. You'll enter into glorious freedom in Jesus Christ, and great power of love that overcomes even enemies. Can I give you a third tip, share the gospel? If you love your enemies, share the gospel with them. God is holy, they are not, they're sinners and they stand condemned before his holy Law. But God has been gracious to send Jesus Christ, to show them love even while they are his enemies, that they might be saved. Having all their sins taken away. All his wrath completely satisfied in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. By repentance and faith, they too can know him as you do, be

reconciled. Wouldn't you like to see that for all your enemies? That they would be transformed into immediate friends, and brothers and sisters and fellow worshippers of Jesus Christ.

Well, that's verses 27&28 and now we know who our enemies are, what loving them means. We've got to realize that loving our enemies doesn't always result in singing kumbaya with them does it? Our love, our well doing, our blessing, our praying for them doesn't necessarily result in their conversion. Unbelievers falling before us, on their knees, "good sir, what must I do to be saved, your love is so remarkable, tell me more." You know they don't do that all the time right? And that's what our Lord tells us about next as he helps us to anticipate the reaction of enemies, often to the outstretched arms of love. The outstretched hand of love they bite. They're sometimes very vicious, they don't exactly warm up to us. "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. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back." And if you want to know what that means and what it doesn't mean come back next time and find out, okay? In the meantime, try to be wise in applying this. Especially if you don't yet understand what turning the other

cheek means, I don't want to see you coming in in weeks to come with bruises on your face, and all your clothes gone, and all that stuff okay? So, be safe out there and let's close in prayer.

Heavenly Father we want to thank you for Jesus Christ, this fullest expression of your love for all of humanity and your people in particular. We thank you that you have loved us with an eternal, saving perfect love in him. We thank you that we belong to him, we thank you that we are yours forever. We pray that you give us boldness, humility, meekness, before the unsaved world especially. Even before our friends and acquaintances and fellow believers we just pray that you would help us to practice this kind of love we learned about from our Lord. Thank you for his perfect example, and what he accomplished on the cross for our sin, for your glory. It's in Jesus' name we pray.