

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Let me tell you a true story of two brothers. For twenty years, they didn't speak to each other – all because of a disputed inheritance. Christmas dinners were split, weddings were awkward, and their mother's final years were spent trying to bridge an impossible divide. Then one day, the younger brother's son was diagnosed with leukemia. Without a word, the older brother showed up at the hospital, bone marrow donor kit in hand. "I'm here," was all he said. Have you ever wondered why the most profound truths are often the most difficult to practice? Today, we explore perhaps the most challenging command Jesus ever gave us – to love our enemies.

We stand here today as recipients of an extraordinary gift – salvation through God's grace, embodied in Jesus Christ. This isn't something we earned or deserved. Imagine walking into a Rolls Royce dealership in torn jeans and a stained t-shirt, unable to afford even a tire from one of their cars. But instead of being escorted out, you're handed the keys to their finest vehicle – no payment required. That's what God's grace looks like. It's pure gift, pure grace, pure love.

And yet, God asks something remarkable of us in return, as we read in Luke chapter 6. He calls us to mirror this same transformative love to others – especially to those we might consider our enemies.

Think about that person who cut you off in traffic yesterday, gesturing angrily. Or that coworker who took credit for your project. Or maybe it's more serious – the person who betrayed your trust, who broke apart your family, who hurt someone you love. God doesn't just ask us to tolerate these people or to simply avoid harming them. No – He calls

us to love them actively, to do good to them, to bless them, and even to pray for them. This isn't a suggestion; it's a command. And it's one that challenges us to our very core.

I'm reminded of Corrie ten Boom, who came face to face with one of her former Nazi guards after preaching about forgiveness in Germany. The man who had overseen the suffering of Corrie and her sister at Ravensbrück concentration camp now stood before her, hand extended in greeting. In that moment, she had to decide – would she practice what she preached? Through God's grace, she took his hand, and felt a healing love flow through her that she could never have manufactured on her own.

Jesus provides us with practical steps. We show love through tangible actions – helping those who hurt us, blessing those who curse us, praying for those who mistreat us. It might look like bringing meals to the neighbor who's been spreading gossip about your family. Or helping change a tire for the colleague who undermined you at work. When someone strikes us on one cheek, we turn the other. When someone takes our coat, we offer our shirt as well.

I think of a small church in Charleston, where family members of those slain in a racially motivated shooting stood in court and offered forgiveness to the shooter. The world watched in amazement, unable to comprehend such grace. But this is exactly what Jesus calls us to do.

Yet there's another dimension to this love – it requires us to lay down our right to judge others. How often do we catch ourselves playing God? We scroll through social media, passing sentence on people we've never met. We dissect the motives of others over coffee with friends. We maintain mental spreadsheets of others' faults and failures. But Jesus is clear: judgment and condemnation are not our business. They belong to God alone.

Consider this: while we were still sinners – while we were God's enemies – Christ died for us. Imagine a judge not only pardoning a guilty criminal but taking their punishment himself. That's what Jesus did for us. He didn't wait for us to become lovable. He didn't wait for us to clean up our act. He loved us at our worst, died for us at our most undeserving moment.

I recently heard about a father whose teenage son was killed by a drunk driver. Instead of pursuing maximum punishment, this father advocated for a restorative justice program. Today, he and the driver work together speaking at high schools about drunk driving prevention. That's what enemy-love looks like in action.

Jesus promises rewards for those who follow this difficult path. Think of it like farming – every act of enemy-loving kindness is like planting a seed in heaven's fields. We may not see the harvest immediately, but God promises it will come – pressed down, shaken together, running over.

Jesus himself demonstrated this perfectly. Picture the scene at Calvary: Roman soldiers gambling for his clothes, religious leaders mocking him, crowds jeering. Yet through cracked lips, he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." In that moment, he wasn't just teaching us – he was showing us what God's love looks like in action.

As we close today, I want you to imagine what our communities would look like if we truly embraced this teaching. What if the next time someone posted an angry political rant, you responded with kindness instead of criticism? What if, when that family member brings up that painful topic at dinner again, you offered grace instead of grievance? What if, in your workplace, your neighborhood, your school, you became known as the person who returns cursing with blessing?

Remember, we're not called to do this in our own strength. Just as a branch can't produce fruit unless it remains connected to the vine, we can't produce this kind of love unless we stay connected to Jesus. The Holy Spirit works within us, gradually conforming us to Christ's image. Each time we choose love over hatred, forgiveness over condemnation, we take one step closer to reflecting Jesus to our world.

So today why not embrace this challenge. Start small – perhaps with that person who irritates you at work. Pray for them. Find one way to show them kindness this week. It's important to acknowledge how difficult it is, but let's also remember that we serve a God who specializes in doing the impossible through ordinary people like us. He can cause His love to flow through us, even to those we consider enemies.

God grant us the grace to love as He loves, to forgive as He forgives, and to show mercy as He has shown mercy to us.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

Pastor Ron Breight

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