

Loving Devils

Conquering Enemies with Compassion

November 5, 2023

Today we're learning to **love and forgive to the fullest extent** ... or at least to admit to ourselves what it *looks like*. So, **are you living up to the full extent of the agreement?**

Jesus first *laid out* His commanded arrangement with us, at the Last Supper, saying:



My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. – John 15:12 NIV

Okay. Got it. But *how* is that, exactly? Well ...



At just the right time, [which was] when we [ungodly sinners] were still powerless, [to help ourselves] Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own [all-surpassing] love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:6-8 NIV



... because of His own unique love for weak, ungodly sinners. But *why* die?



Because He is [supremely] kind to the ungrateful and wicked. [So, to keep up your end of the bargain, you must] Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. – Luke 6:35-36 NIV

... by **showing the utmost kindness in the face of ungratefulness and wickedness**. So often we think of *other* people's *wickedness* as **an excuse or a pass to react with our own wickedness**. But:

Whoever does not love [like God] does not know God, because God is love. [God isn't defined by love; love's defined by God] ... so we know and rely on the love God has for us. [Cuz] God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. – 1 John 4:8, 16 NIV

[So] love your enemies, do good to them ... without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and [here it is] you will be children of the Most High – Luke 6:35 NIV



Chickening Out



There's no *greater reward!* Noah talked about Jesus *becoming* like us, so He could *grow* in *wisdom*, and *obedience* by the things He *suffered*. (Lk 2:52; Heb 5:8) So, **how was He both fully God yet fully man?** It's mostly a *mystery*; but it might *help* to **picture a normal person, like yourself, but with a conscience of perfect love**. Now, *imagine* young Jesus, when a *playground bully* begins *harassing* a *helpless* child. With *little* if any *regard* for His own safety, the *boy* with the *conscience* of *God* is immediately *between* them, His *righteously angry*, but *immature*, *fist reflexively* drawn back. But, **the closer He comes to striking the bully, the further away He can sense He's retreating from defeating their actual enemy: the adversary** – who has *tormented* and *tempted* this *playground bully* into *defying* God's own love.



And, **any unrighteous reaction to righteous anger will actually empower our adversary.** And now, because of His *hesitation*, He's suddenly become the *victim* of the *bully's abuse*. And yet, **there's something oddly satisfying in this suffering:** He's *accomplished His goal!* **His heart drove Him to save the weak.** And He *has*, by *taking his place*. And now, even as He's *suffering*, **His heart aches to save the even weaker child – the bully** – from their *shared enemy*: the *anti-Father*. And, on the cross He *crushes* that *bully of bullies*. Because **the real enemy – ours and God's – is only conquered by compassion.** This isn't *weakness*, it's *Godliness*. Because **this enemy uses those around us to worm its way in us.** Because, **the battleground is in our heart.** And this *nemesis* of our soul has a name: *hate*. And hatred is *deceptive* and *disguises* itself and *hides*.

He who *hates*, *disguises* it with his *lips*, and lays up *deceit within ... in his heart*; [and] though his *hatred* is covered by *deceit*, [even from himself] his *wickedness will be revealed* – Proverbs 26:23-26 NKJ

But, how's Jesus get *those* on the *battleground* to *fully grasp* what He's *deeply sensed* since the *playground*? Show 'em. Remember when He said:

“Have I not *chosen* you, the *Twelve*? Yet *one* of you is a *devil!*” [Judas!] – John 6:70 NIV

So, **why'd Jesus choose a devil for a disciple? To show us the full extent of His love for us!** If you *host* a dinner, and *discover* that *one* guest had *betrayed* you, but you *continue* to treat them with the same *sincere kindness* as the *rest* of your *guests*, **that one (unknowingly) receives the greatest extent of your love.** And the only way the Lord could *fully* demonstrate the *full extent* of His love, was to be *fully rejected* by *all* His *guests*, whether *denied*, *betrayed*, *persecuted*, or *executed*.

[At the Last Super] Having loved *His own* ... He *now* showed *them* the *full extent* of His [own] *love*. [By loving *one* who *wasn't* His own] ... The *devil* had *already* prompted *Judas* to *betray* Jesus ... [But, He] began to wash His *disciples' feet* ... “You do *not realize now* what I am doing,” ... For [only] He knew who was going to *betray* Him ... I have set you an *example* that you should do as I have done for you. [“The *Twelve ... yet one of you is a devil!*”] ... I know [each of] those I have *chosen*. But *this [choice, to love My enemy]* is to fulfill the Scripture: ‘*He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.*’ – John 13:1-18 NIV

Which is from Psalm 41, which in *part*, says:

My enemies say of me in *malice*, “When will he *die* and his name *perish?*” ... He speaks *falsely*, while his heart gathers *slander*; then he goes out and *spreads* it abroad. *All* my enemies *whisper* together ... [saying] “he will never get *up* from the *place* where he *lies.*” Even my *close friend*, whom I *trusted*, *he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.* But *You, O Lord ... raise me up, that I may repay them.* [How? With the *full extent of God's love!*] I know that *You* are *pleased* with me, for *my enemy* [in his *hateful wickedness*] *does not triumph over me* [in *My loving kindness*]. – Psalm 41:5-12 NIV

Make a *list* of your *enemies*, and *realize this: your enemy list is your prayer list!* How do we *love* 'em? By *praying* for 'em while *they're* still *ungodly sinners*. When Jesus *chose* His *Twelve*, He said:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ... [Because] If you love [only] those who love you, what reward will you get? [Beyond the easy love of those you love] Are not even the tax collectors doing that [Matthew]?” – Matthew 5:44-46 NIV



Ever feel completely incapable of forgiving certain people? Problem is, it's pert near impossible to love your enemy for no reason other than to love your enemy. So, **you gotta pay it forward for your Friend;** which means seeing it through the eyes and heart of your Savior, the Friend of sinners.



It's like rescuing raccoons from a forest fire. You don't expect cooperation, let alone appreciation. **Salvation is your motive and rescue your reward.** And you know going in, it's gonna bite and claw you terribly unfairly, but you don't retaliate. You forgive. And **you try to find a way to convince those babies of your love.** And afterwards, **you victoriously display any wounds you received in the effort.** Like Jesus did. The only difference between bullies and raccoons is that raccoons are way easier to love! But that's only because you're not a raccoon! “If you love [only] those who love you, what reward will you get?” Nothing surprising. Nothing astonishing. Nothing inspiring. So, don't limit your reward by only loving a sure thing, or **you'll cheat yourself out of Jesus' selfless love, working and growing, in and through you.** Loving our enemies raises quite a few questions regarding **forgiving versus excusing or downplaying or enabling or even encouraging their sin.** And when we forgive 'em, do we have to trust 'em?



I can grasp loving the unlovable when we compare 'em to saving those cute but oblivious raccoons. But, **how do I forgive intentional, inexcusable, violations?** That's where the raccoon analogy breaks down. Ever try to forgive someone? Thought you had. But then encountered them, and found yourself hit with a big ol' wave of **anger** and **anxiety** and **resentment?** Well, **what do we do when our forgiveness don't take?** “If I'm not perfect, am I breaking the arrangement with Jesus?” Yes. But don't panic. Right after supper, Peter went out and cut off the ear of one of their bullies! But, as we talked about a couple weeks back: practice makes perfect!



Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous ... – 1 John 3:7-8 NAS



[Because] By one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. – Hebrews 10:14 NIV



Remember how we compared sin to being sprayed by a skunk? It doesn't make you love your child less – **you just want to get the stink off as quickly and fully as possible!** Like all “little children,” **growth is a process** and **filth is a problem.** No sooner are we bathed, and **we're back traipsing in the mud and tracking it in the house.** And this is what muddies up our daily walk with God. But, when we confess our daily dirt, and allow Jesus to coat our grime with grace, and wash us with His Word, (Eph 5:26) we're renewed and refreshed and inspired and empowered to grow in our skill to forgive all those who traipse through our lives and trespass against us. At the foot washing, Jesus said:



“A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; ... and you are *clean*, though not every *one* of you. [i.e. Judas (Jn 13:11)] ... Now that I, your *Lord and Teacher*, have washed *your feet*, you *also* should wash one another’s feet. [Your own and your Judases’] I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ... As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [Because that’s the agreement between us; and] By this all men will know that you are *My disciples*, if you love one another.” [As I have loved you] – John 13:10, 14-15, 34-35 NIV

Even as He hung, suffering, at the hands of *His mortal enemies* ...

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” – Luke 23:34 ESV

Talk about *love* and *forgiveness* to the *fullest!* He set the *bar* as *high* as it can *go*; and then *hung* on it – all the while hanging onto His *love* for us. What an example! **We’ve been spectacularly forgiven, but we’re ridiculously unforgiving in light (and in spite) of it. Forgiveness doesn’t mean dismissing or downplaying or excusing or rationalizing or trusting. It just means loving.**

Our *Father* doesn’t do *any* of those *former* things with the *ungrateful* and *wicked*. In fact:

Many people put *their* trust in [Jesus] when they saw the powerful *works* He did. But Jesus did not trust them because He knew *all* men. – John 2:23-25 NLV

And that *all* would quickly *turn on* or *away from* Him. And yet, He *showed* His *love* for ‘em by *forgiving* ‘em while *dying* for ‘em ... *because* of ‘em! So there’s our *example* and *expectation*. **“Well I can’t get anywhere near that!”** Well, let’s *add* the word “yet”. Cuz **that’s the purpose of practice.**



You *shoot* the ball till you *learn* to *get* it in the *hoop*. Same with that wave. You know how **we rehearse a grudge over and over**? That’s practicing *unrighteousness*. But it’s the *same way* we *release* a *grudge*. First, **we forgive ‘em for the offense**; and then **we forgive ‘em for the painful memory whenever it returns**. That’s practicing *righteousness*.

Just **don’t see it as your generosity toward them**. Or it’ll *never last*. They’re not *raccoons*.

Under *your power*, it’ll “ *peter out*” and you’ll end up *lashing out* in *someone’s ear*!

No. **See it as gratefulness toward Him**. Your *Friend* and *Forgiver* and *Savior*.

Because, **forgiveness is a direct expression of our gratitude to God**.

Our *debtors* more than likely *don’t deserve* our *forgiveness*; but *Jesus* sure *does!*

So, **we just gotta love Him more than we loathe them**.

Questions *is, are you grateful enough for Him to love and forgive them* ... to *your fullest extent?*