

SERMON

Luke 6:27-31

Love your Enemies

Nunawading and Waverley, 20-2-22

Dear friends in Christ,

To you hearing what I am saying to you, love your enemies. How hard is this command! When our feelings are hurt, we are abused or attacked, then we become angry and want to settle the score and strike back. In the film, "The Help", an Afro-American servant gets back at her stingy boss by putting some of her human excrement in a cake! Justice requires this law of retaliation as in the Old Testament but not in the time of our Lord Jesus. His command to love your enemies is based on the gospel not on law. After all, he lived amongst human beings and suffered injustices. Though innocent, his enemies persecuted him and plotted his execution on a cross. In doing so, they fulfilled his Father's plan, to use all their hatred to bring about the redemption of the world and to usher in God's love for all. Therefore, this way of our Lord Jesus has to be his way of life for us. **We love because he first loved us;** and love has no boundaries.

First, our Lord Jesus tells us to **love our enemies**. Notice that Jesus speaks of love in the heart. The love in the heart should motivate the way we behave towards people who harm us. Imagine that you have a horrible boss. He growls at you to do something and you do exactly what he says but while you carry out the task you are hating him in your heart. It is just a show and not a genuine, loving act to follow your boss's instruction. In this situation, we need to come back to Jesus and ask him to send the Spirit into us so that our hearts would change and we would see our boss in the way God sees him, as someone he died for and someone he wants to know him.

Our Lord, then, turns to actions: **do good, bless and pray**, he says. When insulted or cursed, we bless. When a person hates us, we think of something kind to do. You might bring in a rubbish bin for a noisy and annoying neighbour, for instance. If someone is treating you unfairly, you are being pushed around and treated like a piece of dirt, then we are to pray and intercede to God for that person. We ask our Lord to prosper them, to bring happiness, to help them in their difficulties and ask him to give them success in all they do. The actions of praying, blessing and doing good, and speaking well of them, can shift our attitude from strong dislike to love.

The next section does not seem to make sense. **Offer the other cheek to the striker, give your undergarments to those who take away your coat. Don't demand back** any of your possession when taken from you and **always give** when your money is requested. This would mean never ending abuse. However, our Lord Jesus is not saying this to a woman

suffering under an abusive husband or partner. Where you have a legal right to redress, then you may take it. To defend oneself, is a godly action.

However, love and forgiveness must still be offered. When abused, that will take time but there are some exceptional Christians who do forgive their attackers. Tony and Leila Abdullah who live in Sydney, stunned the world when they said they forgave the drunk driver who killed their three children and their niece.

When Jesus spoke of **offering the other cheek** and so on, he had a persecuted church in mind. Richard Wurmbbrandt, a Rumanian Lutheran pastor was imprisoned for 13 years under the communists and on his release returned to his evangelistic activities and was incarcerated and tortured for a further six years. Christ offered himself for the world, offered his cheeks for slapping, his back for scourging, his hands and feet for nailing, his beautiful head for thorns. Why would you go back for more punishment? Only to the bring the gospel to the lost.

These amazing statements from Jesus apply to us generally. The narcissist, psychopath or bully have to be resisted; that's godly work. However, medical staff, police, teachers, parents, and aged-care workers, sometimes face physical and verbal abuse from troubled people. Because of Christ's love for all, you might choose to endure this very unfair treatment, which is real cheek-turning behaviour.

We represent Christ to others and that will come at a cost. It is hard and could mean suffering. When our love is tested, we have to keep coming back to Jesus and to the prayers and the support of his church.