

# Love Your Enemies

*Luke*

By Dr. R. C. Sproul

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**Host:** Today on *Renewing Your Mind*: "Even though we are his enemies, he has loved us and he has loved us when we were altogether unlovely." Reciprocating God's love for the sinner, a call to love our enemies.

It's easy to love those who are close to us like our spouse, our children, our close friends, people we know at church, but what about those who treat us poorly, people that Jesus describes as our enemies? You're listening to the weekend edition of *Renewing Your Mind* and today Dr. R. C. Sproul will be looking at a passage that is a struggle for many of us, it's our Savior's charge to love our enemies. Let me invite you to open your Bibles to Luke 6:27. Here's Dr. R. C. Sproul from the pulpit of St. Andrews Chapel.

**Dr. R. C. Sproul:** We're continuing now with our study of the Gospel of St. Luke and we are still in chapter 6 in one of the most difficult passages in the entire Gospel that we will see. I'll be reading from verse 27 through verse 36.

27 "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from

whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Here we have the heart and soul of the New Testament ethic taught to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks these commands by divine authority and I hope that you will receive them as such.

Let us pray.

*O God, if ever we needed your help to understand a difficult text and to apply it to our lives, it is this morning, and so we ask for the gentle conviction of the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, to accompany the hearing of these words, that he will take these words and cut between sinew and muscle, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

If we look at this text that you have just heard, from one perspective it stands out, I believe, as one of the most radical teachings that ever came to us from the lips of Jesus. Certainly to those who heard this mandate that he gave on that occasion, we're shocked by it and certainly the scribes and the Pharisees were utterly hostile to it. But if we look at it from a different perspective, another perspective, we will see that even in this teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ there was nothing new at all about it. When he gave his explanation, for example, of the Ten Commandments, his ideas seemed then to be shocking, but when he told the people that the law that says "you shall not kill" carries with it the implication that "you shall not even be angry at a person without just cause, and that you should not only not commit the actual act of adultery but that law against such things is violated when we even have lustful thoughts in our minds," now, Jesus didn't add new content to the Ten Commandments, rather he explained the full intent of the law of God as it was originally given. And he's doing the same thing here for the Great Commandment given by God to his people in the Old Testament was this: you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and all of your mind, and all of your strength, and your neighbor as yourself. And, of course, the Pharisees gave a most narrow interpretation to what was included in that Great Commandment and the neighbor was defined as a fellow Jew and that that mandate "to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself" did not apply to Gentiles or foreigners who were outside the camp. But they twisted and distorted the original significance of the Great Commandment and what Jesus is doing here is simply saying, "Wait a minute, this is what the Great Commandment entails. This is the full import of that Great Commandment," and I'll go even a step further, that Jesus' exposition of the Great Commandment indicates that the Great Commandment was only an exposition of the original commandment that God gave to every creature in creation when he stamped his image on every human being. That image carried with it the mandate to live in such a way as to mirror and to reflect the character of God. So in the brief time that we have this morning before we come to the Lord's Table, I want us to look at these strange sounding mandates given by Jesus and think of

them in these terms: how God relates to us. We who are by nature the enemies of God, constantly receive from him his beneficence and his benevolent love. Even though we are his enemies, he has loved us and he has loved us when we were altogether unlovely; and when we were not thankful to him, he was merciful to us; and when we sinned against him, he never returned evil for evil, but God's pattern of relating to his people is the same pattern that Jesus is teaching us to display as imitators of Christ who is God incarnate.

So let's look briefly at these things. "But I say to you who: Love your enemies." Now, what does he mean? He doesn't mean that you have to have feelings, warm fuzzies and affection towards those who are your enemies. Here as almost everywhere in the Scriptures, love is defined more by a verb than a noun. We could translate it this way, "Be loving toward your enemies." I knew a Christian counselor once who had a man come to see him and he wanted to divorce his wife and the reason he gave, he said, "No, my wife wasn't unfaithful and she hasn't left me or anything like that, but I just don't love her anymore." And the counselor said to the man, he said, "Well, the Bible says, 'Husbands, love your wives.' So you don't have an option here. This is the command of Almighty God. You have to start loving your wife." He says, "You don't get it." He said, "You don't even want to be around her. I don't want to live in the same house with her." And he said, "Well, why don't you do this, why don't you have a trial separation and why don't you move next door for a few weeks." "Well, what good will that do," he said. "Well, the Bible says, 'Love your neighbor,' and now she'll be your next door neighbor." And the fellow was really getting more and more exasperated with this counselor and he said, "You don't get it." He says, "It's not that I don't want to be near her," he says, "I can't stand the sight of her. I have nothing but enmity in my heart towards her." "Oh," said the counselor, "she's your enemy?" "Yes!" And he says, "Well, the Bible says, 'Love your enemies.'" And I think that fellow the next week went to a different counselor.

But how striking this is, how difficult it is to love your enemies but Jesus spells out what that means; it has to do with how we behave towards those who are our enemies and let's understand something: we all have enemies. Not everybody out there is our friend and so as Christian people we need to learn how to deal with those who we can identify as our enemies.

He said, "Do good to those who hate you." That's what it means to love your enemy, you do good to those who hate you; you bless those who curse you. Now, what's our flesh going to do? If somebody curses us, we want to curse them right back. If somebody wants to harm us, we don't want to do good to them because we say of them, "They're up to no good, why should I do any good for them?"

Next he says, "Pray for those who spitefully use you." You know, when I look back, I think to this day, one of the most moving funeral services I ever experienced was back in Pittsburgh when a good friend of mine who was an Episcopalian priest died suddenly in his 40s from a fatal heart attack, and we went to the huge Episcopalian cathedral for the funeral and every priest in the diocese made up the choir and the opening hymn, the processional hymn was "For all the saints who from their labors rest." I'll never forget it. I

was transported into heaven on that occasion. Tears were just running down my cheeks. What a glorious celebration of a life this was.

Well, if there was ever a man who no one expected would be an Episcopalian priest, it was that young man who died that day. He didn't have a parish, instead he was the Director, the Executive Director of an organization in Pittsburgh called "The Pittsburgh Experiment," an organization founded by the late Samuel Shoemaker. Sam Shoemaker started this group by meeting with downtown businessmen every week at lunchtime and he would give a message and he would give "The Pittsburgh Experiment Challenge," and he gave this challenge: if you don't like somebody, if you're having trouble getting along with somebody, be it a co-worker, be it your boss, whoever it is that you are against, pick your strongest enemy and he said, I challenge you to pray for that person every single day for 30 days. And this one businessman who was a tough ex-Marine drill instructor came to one of these meetings kicking and screaming against his will and when he heard that, he says, "I'd like to meet the blankety-blank man who could get me to pray for somebody that I hate." And, in fact, he stood up and said that to Sam Shoemaker and Sam said to him, "Sir, you may be right but don't tell me that until you've been on your knees for 30 days praying for your enemy. I want you to take this challenge and I want you to come back here next month and I want you to tell me what happened." Well, he did come back the next month and the month after that. He became converted to Christ. He entered into the ministry and became the Director of "The Pittsburgh Experiment" and it was Don James whose funeral service I'm talking about who learned what it meant to pray for those who spitefully use you.

Jesus goes on with other examples here when he says, "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, don't withhold your tunic. Give it to everyone who asks of you," and so on. I once gave a lesson to the Pittsburgh Steelers on behalf of the fellow who was the chaplain of the Steelers and I was at Terry Bradshaw's house and I was speaking on this text, "If somebody strikes you on the right cheek, turn the left one to him as well," and I wanted to use as an example L. C. Greenwood who was about 6'7" and I had to stand on a chair and I said, "Now, L. C., please, I'm going to show you what Jesus meant here in this text. I'm not going to hurt you, as if you're worried, but please just be calm." I didn't want him to take off on me. "And so I'm going to try to hit you on the right cheek." So I tried to reach around him with my arm and get him on the right cheek. I said, "That won't work, will it?" I said, "The only way I can strike you on the right cheek is if I'm right handed. If I'm going to hit you with my right hand on your right cheek, I have to do, what? I have to give you the back of my hand," which was the classical way that Jewish people would insult somebody. So what Jesus is saying here is, "If somebody insults you by giving you the back of the hand, turn the other cheek. Let them insult you and insult you and insult you but do not return insult for insult."

If they want your coat, give them your shirt. If somebody comes and asks you for help, help them. Now, the Bible does not deny the legitimacy of loaning money for interest, what the Bible denies is usury, that kind of interest that is so heavy and burdensome that it exploits the person in need. If you want to see what usury is, see the credit rates or the

interest rates on your credit cards. They are so ungodly, these rates of interest, that they are usurious and in direct violation to the law of God. But Jesus said if you're going beyond that, he's giving the golden rule, "If somebody needs something, give it to them even if it means you're not going to get anything back." In other words, don't use the help of your brother simply for your own profit, but what Jesus is asking us to do here is to be like God.

He goes on to say, "What good is it if you love those who love you? Even sinners do that. What good is it if you only do good to those who do good to you?" But he says, "You will be, if you follow this advice, the sons of the Most High because God is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Therefore be merciful, even as your heavenly Father is merciful." If there is a core meaning to these exhortations it's this: mercy, not vengeance. God is an avenging God, God promises to make unjust things just, God says, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay," but it's not yours. Now, again, when it comes to public matters, there's still a legitimate place for the role of the state and for the role of church courts and so all the rest that the New Testament teaches but he's talking here about Christian personal ethics and what should be the mark of your behavior is that you might be known as a person of mercy because you've been a recipient of mercy, and as God has been kind to you, so be kind to your neighbor and there is no greater kindness than this, that he has adopted us into his family.

**Host:** It's a wonderful but sober reminder, isn't it, from Dr. R. C. Sproul? It makes me think of that verse in Hebrews 4 where we're told that, "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet was without sin." I'm grateful for the privilege that my wife and I both have to sit each Lord's Day under the preaching of Dr. R. C. Sproul and Rev. Burk Parsons and let me encourage you, if you're ever in the Orlando area on vacation or business, we hope you'll come by and visit us at St. Andrews Chapel to hear God's word faithfully preached by these two men. We would be glad to have you join us.

We are currently making our way through the Gospel of Luke with Dr. Sproul and, believe it or not, this is the fourth year in Luke's Gospel. Dr. Sproul has remained faithful to this text going line-by-line through it with the same energy and sound biblical wisdom that has marked his ministry for 40+ years.

Before we close today, I want to let you know about a resource that we're offering here at Ligonier Ministries, it's a free three month trial subscription to "Tabletalk Magazine." You've heard me talk about "Tabletalk" and the impact it had on my life in helping me understand Reformed theology more than 25 years ago. I haven't missed an issue since 1990 and let me encourage you to take advantage of this resource offer. If you have a friend who might benefit, feel free to share our information with them as well. To sign up for this free three month trial subscription to "Tabletalk," just give us a call. Our toll free number is 800-435-4343. You can go to [renewingyourmind.org/tabletalk](http://renewingyourmind.org/tabletalk) as well. Or you can call us and, again, the toll free number is 800-435-4343.

Next weekend on *Renewing Your Mind*: A Monstrous Crime Worthy of Eternal Damnation. "That particular sin is not just a small sin, it's not a peccadillo, it's not a minor transgression, it's a monstrous crime, a crime worthy of eternal damnation and yet people are committing it day after day after day after day." Find out what that sin is next weekend as we continue our study through the Gospel of Luke here on *Renewing Your Mind*.