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



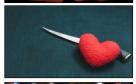




There's no greater reward! Noah talked about Jesus becoming like us, so He could grow in wisdom, and obedience by the things He suffered. (Lk 2:52; Heb 5:8) So, how was He both fully God yet fully man? It's mostly a mystery; but it might help to picture a normal person, like yourself, but with a conscience 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 <u>His own</u> ... 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

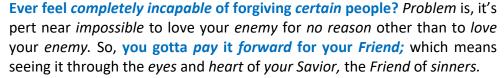
Which is from Psalm 41, which in part, says:

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













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!

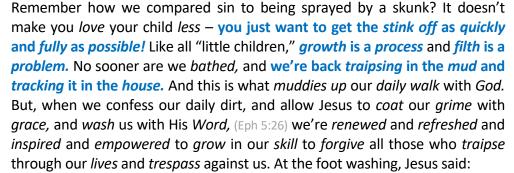


Little children, make sure no one *deceives* you; the one who *practices* righteousness *is* righteous, *just* as *He* is righteous ... – 1 John 3:7-8 NAS



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







"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*. ... <u>As I have loved you, so *you must love* one another</u>. [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?

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.