

## Distinctive Love

Luke 6:27-36

### Introduction:

Sometimes we get in trouble in communicating even when we make our best attempts. One of the words that can be misconstrued in relationships (*at least mine*) is the word “few” (maybe for you its “some”, “ish”, or “a little bit”) For me, the word few is an open-ended word that means less than a lot, but to my wife (rightfully so), it means 3 or less. “I’ll be home in a few minutes, honey”, “There are a few people coming over”, or “this sermon only has a few more points” means two completely different things to each of us, even when we are saying the same word.

This is the same plight we have with the word **love**. Love is known, appreciated, and sought after universally. One would be hard pressed to find anyone who hates the concept or idea of love. We were created to love and be loved. Because of this, defining love is of the utmost importance, since all loves were not created equal, and are clearly not the same thing. When God tells us He loves us and we must love Him, it is categorically different than the love the world craves.

In this second point of Jesus’ sermon he continues to make a point of who is a true disciple and who is not. In His first section, he made it clear that only those who were spiritually poor and thirsty could know salvation. Here, He tells of two different loves: **one of a true disciple, and one that is characteristic of sinners who have not been redeemed.**

### I. **Supernatural Love’s Radical Redefinition (27-31)**

Every so often a book comes out that stirs the evangelical pot, and swings a pendulum that gets people buzzing, thinking that something new has been discovered that holds the key to pure and true Christianity. A few years ago a faithful pastor and theologian named David Platt wrote a book called **Radical** which had the subtitle: *taking back your faith from the American dream*. It was a call away from cultural Christianity to one that took seriously the commands of Christ on our lives, particularly in the areas of money and missions. The book became popular quickly because it was definitive, clear, and Biblical. When a friend was asked about what he thought about the book, he said, “we used to call that being a Christian”. Being a Christian, a true disciple, means that we have been called by an infinitely loving God, who miraculously died and rose again to become our substitute, and now calls us to live a radically transformed life that is nothing like we did before. That is the essence of what Jesus talks about in this sermon.

#### A. Supernatural Love Defined

**Luke 6:27-28** "But I say to you who hear, **Love** your enemies, **do good** to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> **bless** those who curse you, **pray** for those who abuse you.

Jesus begins this next section of His sermon with a contrast: *but I say to you*. This was one of His favorite or at least often used phrases in this sermon (especially reading Matthew 5-7), as He would contrast what the people had been taught, wrongly or incompletely about the realities of God’s Kingdom. He also continues to address those “**who hear**”, or those who “hear His words and does them” (Luke 6:47, 49), or those who knew their spiritual poverty, thirsted for God’s righteousness, wept over their sin, and were willing to enter into persecution for a greater future reward (6:20-23). In other words, this definition of love is being given to those who were transformed by Christ, not merely an ethical path to hope for. The definition is so extreme, so radical, so counter to our normative thinking that it HAD to come as a result of something SUPERNATURAL. This kind of love was not intended to be

played out by everyone on earth, but it is specifically true of those redeemed by Christ in the gospel. Jesus gave **4 descriptions of love to define it**, and each description had the same distinction:

- **It was to be done in the midst of antagonism** – Each of these was to be played out to **enemies, those who hate, curse, and abuse**. Love as a command was not given under the easiest circumstances, but the worst imaginable
- **It was to be done continually** – Each command is a verb given in the present and active – meaning they are to be done in an ongoing, regular, repeatable basis, not simply a one time event. It means we do not face opposition by staying silent nor by isolation, but by being proactive.
- **It was done AGAINST US** – Each has a personal pronoun attached to it – *your* enemies; hate *you*...in other words, this was not a teaching in theory or potentiality, but about the reality of life on this earth.

To even know what a distinctly Christian love looks like, Jesus defined it 4 different ways:

**WARNING:** This is not going to sound easy, and we may be tempted to explain this away: DON'T DO IT

#### In attitude

**Love your enemies** – There are many words to describe love. “*Storge*” means natural affection. “*Eros*” is romantic. “*Philia*” has the idea of friendship. But *agape love*, which is used here, is a **deliberate love rooted in the will**. This type of love supersedes our natural emotions and affections and can even help direct them. This love is one of choice, a free choice that one who has been freed from the bonds of sin can make and is not based on the merit of the person being loved. A willful, choice driven, volitional love like this acts with the right action but also the right attitude.

#### In action

Since the “love” used here is a verb, there is action to it. We are to “do good” to those who hate us. The word good means to do inherent good, not superficial good. This is not a call to token niceties, but to seek to benefit the one who hates us. Notice how proactive this kind of love is. It does not mean avoid or isolate from those who hate, but approach and actively pursue that person’s good.

#### In word

Love also encapsulates our words. We are to bless those who would curse us. Blessing here means to “*speak well of, to extol or praise*”. So often we engage in self-preserving verbal judo with people, and when words are thrown around, we not only want to get the last one in, we want to win the oral sparring session. Again, this kind of love does not simply stay silent in the midst of verbal abuse, but seek to answer it with blessing.

#### In intention

Love calls us to **pray** for those who abuse us. This part of love roots out our true intentions toward others. We may be able to “fake” some of the other areas, but not prayer. No prayer for an enemy will be a true test of if we love, and *what* we pray for will be a test of how we love. We not only pray for God’s blessing, but pray for God’s salvation. In the Old Testament, many Psalms are known as *imprecatory* in nature (see Psalm 55, 56 for an example), meaning the author is calling for God’s judgment to come on the wicked and those who treated the righteous with hate. When we pray for our enemies, we pray in light of the fact that God’s justice *has been* poured out on Christ, and can thus pray for the salvation of our opponents, abusers, enemies, and those who hate us. Supernatural love

compels us to pray for the souls of those who hate us and calls for God to make them our brothers and sisters.

### B. Supernatural Love Illustrated

**Luke 6:29-31** To one who **strikes** you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who **takes away** your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup> **Give** to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods **do not demand** them back. <sup>31</sup> And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

As Jesus did so often and so well, He went on to illustrate these definitions by putting our love of enemies into practice. As we approach these scenarios, we must be wise to resist *wooden literalism* and *explaining away* difficult mandates. There is a spirit of what Jesus is picturing, and we must apply wisdom and faith to understand exactly what point Jesus intends to make.

#### It Takes

The first two illustrations have to do with physical and material harm. Love compels us to accept mistreatment that does not seek a *quid pro quo* response. The OT law gave the limits of retaliation – eye for eye, hand for hand, etc (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20), but Jesus command went beyond that. Instead of firing back in a ten fold way (he sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue – that’s the Chicago way), or even in a limited way, Christ’s love compels us to take the abuse rather than inflict it. NOTE that this does not prevent use of self-defense mechanisms set up by God, like the government yielding the sword to prevent anarchy and to punish evil (Rom. 13:3-4), but gives a supernatural ethic of how we treat people that was given to us by our Savior (see John 18:22-23 – Jesus did not turn to be struck again, but pointed out the injustice of the act, but did not retaliate). The OT also specified about ones coat. Most wore an under and outer garment, and the outer could double as a blanket. This outer garment could be borrowed or used as collateral, but had to be returned by sunset (Ex. 22:26, Deut. 24:13). Failure to do so would be seen as serious abuse. Instead of seeing this as abusive, an act of love would be to offer the undergarment as well as a blessing, rather than fighting to keep ones property.

#### It Gives

The next illustration has to do with giving to those who are in real need. This does not mean indiscriminately or without thought, nor does it mean that it is always wise to simply use money to solve problems (for a great book on this issue, read *“When Helping Hurts”* by Fikkert and Corbett). This has everything to do with giving freely to those in need and not expecting payment in return. If you are taken advantage of in a situation, view it as an opportunity to bless rather than an opportunity to exact justice and have it returned.

#### It Demands

The final illustration has to do with things being **taken away or stolen** from you. If this happens, the recourse is not to demand the items back nor to retaliate, but to let them go.

**This rule is golden** – Other religions have versions of the Golden Rule, but they tend to focus on the principal negatively – don’t do to others what you would not want done to you. But Jesus flipped that idea to encapsulate the positive: **as you wish others would do to you, do so to them**. Jesus does not put qualifiers on this statement but simply calls us to look how we view love for ourselves and direct that toward others, regardless of how they act. When we think about how we want to be loved we seldom base it on whether we deserve it or not, we simply want what we want.

**Two thoughts before we move on:**

- **If this causes tension with us, it should** – If you did not think at some point, “well, that doesn’t mean we can’t \_\_\_\_\_, does it. It would be ridiculous if we lived that out”, then you weren’t paying attention. This type of love is wrought with tension that absolutely forces us to stay dependant on Christ and in His love to begin to grapple with the implications, but grapple we must.
- **Jesus’ call to love others like we want to be loved applies to all relationships** – Jesus specifically applies this to our enemies, but this is also speaks to our relationships. In marriage, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:28). Husbands by nature know how to nourish his own body, and he is to turn that same love from self-seeking to selfless, from selfish to sacrifice. Often we can be hurt by those that we love the most, and the closest to us can end up being our enemy. This love should be applied in all relationships as well, particularly our marriages.

**II. Natural Love’s Ruined Realities (32-34)**

**Luke 6:32-34** "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For **even sinners** love those who love them.<sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For **even sinners** do the same.<sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? **Even sinners** lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

Definitions of words matter, and Jesus made it abundantly clear that using the same word to describe different attributes. The concept of love is known, used, and embraced by the world, but the concept is foundationally and categorically different. Jesus sought to differentiate the type of love He just defined with the way that the world, or “sinners”, or unbelievers, or how those who reject the gospel view and practice love.

**A. Its self-reciprocating**

*“Even sinners reciprocate love to those who love them” -*

This is typical of every human relationship. Mutual love and affection is the foundation for every romantic relationship, until one party decides to leave or change the union, and then love goes. Love in a family is there but sometimes a parent decides to leave and break the covenant union, and though there can be overtures of love, true love fails to continue .

**B. Its self benefiting**

*“Even sinners do good to those who do good to them” –*

Worldly love asks, "what's in it for me?" There is a sense of obligation to pay back those who do good to us, and we are more prone to appreciate, respect, and have affection for those that give us things.

**C. Its self expecting**

*“Even sinners lend to those with whom they receive back” –*

This is the principle on whose back capitalism lives and breathes. It makes no sense to do business with someone who won't pay up, or with whom there is no benefit in return. I was watching *Newsies* with

my girls last night and there was a line that said, "A man who does not operate from self interest is a fool". That is absolutely the worldly credo that Jesus was identifying.

Each of these three principles or illustrations had the same thread: self. Love is defined by the self being the highest goal and good, and if you help me attain that, you will have my love. The love that Jesus brings is the opposite, breaks us free from self rule and self worship, and allows us to turn self love into selfless, directed at even our enemies.

### III. **Supernatural Love's Realized Revelation (35-37)**

**Luke 6:35-37** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

<sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. <sup>37</sup> "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

#### A. **Love's Reward**

- **Great testimony among men**

When we love the way Jesus called us to, there is a reward. It is a reward that is future, but here Jesus does not say it's heaven, the way He did in verse 23. This either means that He is reiterating our future reward with God in Christ, or is reinforcing another type of reward, a reward that will be effective from our actions, words, prayers, and love, that others will see this type of love and be astounded (John 13:35). This love would be so categorically different that though some may hate us, some will see it and ultimately see Christ, and that would be the prize.

- **Be like our Father**

The other benefit to selfless, supernatural love is that we will be called sons of the Most High. This means that we will be like God Himself, like Christ. When we proactively love our enemies and are even willing to lay our lives down for them, we are like Christ. When we pray for those that abuse us, it's exactly what Jesus came to do. When we suffer righteously, we are following the example set by Jesus, who continually entrusted Himself to the Father (1 Pet. 2:18-25)

#### B. **Love's Source**

- **God's kindness**

When we love those who are our enemies, who have nothing to offer back, who are by nature unlovely, ungrateful, and evil, we exemplify the love God had for each of us. It is His kindness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). His kindness and forbearance gives us each ample opportunity to see our sin and repent.

- **God's mercy -**

Finally, we are to be merciful, as our Father is merciful. Mercy is an interesting concept, because it means we don't give something to someone they deserve. We withhold retribution, angry words, wrathful prayers, and a quid pro quo mentality because we know that God has withheld His judgment from us by pouring it out on Christ. When we fail to offer mercy from others, when we want our pound of flesh, when we feel like someone else needs to pay beyond what Jesus already did, we do not understand the mercy that was given to us.

#### **Concluding Thoughts:**

- **The calls is high - but the grace is greater**
- **The call to love our enemies reminds us of our poverty to truly love our enemies**
- **We take our cue from Jesus - who actively entrusted Himself to the Father, who judges righteously.**

1. Of the ways Jesus commanded to love our enemies, what are the most difficult for us and why?
2. Why is it so hard to differentiate the love Jesus talks about and that the world has? What is so dangerous about never making that distinction?
3. Are there limits to loving our enemy? What are they? How do we make those determinations?
4. Who are people that are our enemies? What would it practically look like to love them this way?