

“Giving Grace To Our Enemies”
August 23, 2009 * Romans 12:14-21

I. “Bless those who persecute you...”

A. What’s our first reaction to these words?

B. What did Jesus teach about this? (e.g. Luke 6:27ff)

C. What objections might we raise against our Lord?

1. It’s _____ to love my enemies.

a. How did the Church live for the first three centuries?

2. It _____.

a. Is Jesus saying that we must let evil people get away with evil?

b. When in the past did this approach work?



“[We must] love our white brothers no matter what they do to us...Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

3. It’s the path of _____.

II. From the example of the early church, we learn what ‘loving our enemies’ looks like:

A. The early Christians spoke out _____.

B. The early Christians took full advantage of the _____ recourse at their disposal in fighting evil.

C. When all else failed, the early Christians refused to _____ their faith, but at the same time they refused to use _____ to find vindication, but accepted whatever _____ was given them.

1. Does this mean a Christian cannot defend himself when targeted by a criminal? And what about war?

2. What’s the problem though with us?

III. In practical terms, what might it mean to live non-violently?

A. To live non-violently means I must rein in my _____ (vs.14).

B. To live non-violently means I must strive to _____ in other people’s _____. (vs.15)

C. To live non-violently means I won’t lose sight of the other person’s _____. (vs.16)

D. I will surrender to God my feelings of _____ and _____. (vs.17-21)

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August 23, 2009 * Romans 12:14-21

I. “Bless those who persecute you...”

A. What’s our first reaction to these words?

Isn’t there part of you that wants to say to Paul, “Paul, what are you smoking, dude? Tell me you’re joking. *Bless those who persecute you?*”

B. What did Jesus teach about this? (e.g. Luke 6:27ff)

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

C. What objections might we raise against our Lord?

1. It’s **impossible** to love my enemies.

a. How did the Church live for the first three centuries?

It’s one of the most remarkable testimonies to the truthfulness of Christianity, to watch how the early Christians behaved in an environment of almost relentless harassment and persecution. The early Christians were a powerless minority living under a brutal regime yet they would not fight back with violence. The Jews had their so-called “zealots” who took the law into their own hands. Twice the Romans had to repulse Jewish rebellions. When Islam was born in the 6th century, it was largely spread by Mohammed’s armies. Conversions were made at swordpoint. Islamic bloodshed in the name of Allah continues to this day. But with Christianity, it was different.

2. It **doesn’t work**.

a. Is Jesus saying that we must let evil people get away with evil?

Nowhere are we being told to capitulate. Or to do nothing. Or to say nothing. We *are* to respond to evil, but what Jesus is teaching us is to respond to it in a different way than our feelings and our culture is telling us to. And Jesus way’, while not easy, does work.

b. When in the past did this approach work?

As long as Christians practiced Jesus’ teaching of loving their enemies, the hope and freedom of the gospel of Christ spread like wildfire throughout the empire. And it’s worked as recently as our own century. It worked for Mahatma Ghandi, who applied Christ’s principles in his struggle to rid India of British oppression, even though Ghandi was not himself a Christian. And it worked in the struggle for civil rights in our own nation. Martin Luther King’s commitment to loving his oppressors and praying for his enemies remained steadfast to the day of his death.



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3. It’s the path of **weakness**.

Remember the Chinese man who stood before the onrushing tank during the days of Tinnenamen Square protests in 1989? Was that weakness? Or Jesus Christ hanging from the cross, looking below at the soldiers who had crucified him, and the angry mob that was scorning him, and saying, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing.” Will anyone in this room stand and accuse Christ of weakness at that moment?

II. From the example of the early church, we learn what ‘loving our enemies’ looks like:

A. The early Christians spoke out **against evil**.

If there was no speaking out against evil, then this approach would be weak. We’re told in Scripture to speak the truth in love. Evil

needs to be exposed as evil with all the conviction and passion we can muster. Even Jesus spoke the truth at his own trial.

B. The early Christians took full advantage of the legal recourse at their disposal in fighting evil.

Paul was falsely accused and arrested by his Jewish opponents. Did he just turn the other cheek and accept their punishment? No – he appealed to Caesar. He wanted whatever justice society could give him. As a Roman citizen, Paul had certain rights which the law gave him, and more than once, Paul played this trump card to his advantage.

C. When all else failed, the early Christians refused to compromise their faith, but at the same time they refused to use violence to find vindication, but accepted whatever mistreatment was given them.

1. Does this mean a Christian cannot defend himself when targeted by a criminal? And what about war?

Bear in mind here, we're talking about persecution and oppression here; not mere criminal activity. We're talking about evil that comes despite my best efforts to speak up for what is right, and despite my every appeal to the laws of the land. You can be assured that if a thief breaks into my home and threatens my family, even though I have not swung a fist in more than 30 years, I will probably be swinging a lot more than fists at that moment. A criminal like this, acting only for self-interest, who has shut off his conscience, is no different than a wild animal, and I will not sit still and let a wild animal attack me I assure you. If I came across someone assaulting another person, I would not walk away. I haven't watched football for nothing all these years, you know.

And what about war? Is this to say that all war should be condemned? Well in the very next chapter of Romans, chapter 13, Paul teaches about the role and responsibility of government, and one thing that Paul says very clearly in verse 4 is that government is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on wrongdoers. And in these words, we see a biblical defense for law-enforcement and even in some instances for war. For governments

have a God-given duty to protect their citizens and promote what is good. Paul says they do not "bear the sword for nothing."

2. What's the problem though with us?

The problem with most of us though is we allow these rare exceptions to become the rule in our life, and we conveniently forget that Jesus' command to love our enemies is meant to be our default setting. It's meant to be the way we live. The reason Christians believe that one day swords will be beaten into plowshares, is because they've already begun doing this, supposedly.

III. In practical terms, what might it mean to live non-violently?

A. To live non-violently means I must rein in my tongue (vs.14).

There is so much violence in our voices, so much hatred in our words. We despise too many people. We pick fights with too many people. Our inner thermostat is set to confrontation. For people who claim to follow the Prince of Peace, this is shameful. And we Christians are too much like those in the world who do not have the Spirit of God within them. Let the idiot driver who just cut you off go. Why join him in his idiocy? So your boss is a moron. Do your job well, and be thankful you're not his wife.

B. To live non-violently means I must strive to walk in other people's shoes. (vs.15)

C. To live non-violently means I won't lose sight of the other person's humanity. (vs.16)

D. I will surrender to God my feelings of anger and injustice. (vs.17-21)

But giving over our feelings of anger and injustice to God whenever evil has been done to us is not solely for our enemy's redemption but it's for our own as well. For there is nothing more destructive and cancerous to the human soul than hatred.