

## LOVE: A CHOICE OF THE HEART

Luke 6:27–36

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Our Scripture today is from Luke 6:27–36. The message today is entitled “Love: A Choice of the Heart.” If you’ve been a Christian for any length of time, you’re probably aware that there are many different words in the Greek language to describe the English word “love.”

One word, not the commonly known, is the word *storge* which is the Greek word to describe love within family. Natural love—love between mother and child, husband and wife. There’s a beautiful example of *storge* love in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The husband and wife are talking. They’re seeing their daughters get married off. The new generation that’s coming along is talking about things like love. In the parents’ generation, the parents arranged marriages. He asks his wife, “Do you love me?” She says, “Do I love you? For twenty-five years I’ve washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow. After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?” He says, “The first time I met you was on our wedding day. I was scared...but my mother and my father said we would learn to love each other. Now I’m asking, do you love me?” She says, “I’m your wife! For twenty-five years I’ve lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his. If that’s not love, what is?” He says, “Then you love me?” She says, “I suppose I do.” He says, “I suppose I love you too.” Then they sing together, “It doesn’t change a thing, but after twenty-five years, it’s nice to know.”

Family love. That’s the older generation kind of love. Natural love. Scripture says an age will come when people are without natural affection. It’s talking about the lack of *storge*. The lack of family love.

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Obviously another kind of love that we're familiar with is *eros* or romantic love. It's the kind of love that is sexual. It's the kind of love that's based upon attraction. It's romantic love. Since this kind of love is based upon attraction, it really doesn't last. Or it's easily transferable. If love is based upon attraction, then the one we love, as the years go by, will become less attractive.

Romantic love can be easily transferable. If we find somebody else that looks better or seems more beautiful or more handsome, then we fall in love with them.

I like what someone has said about *eros* love. It's the kind of love typified in the phrase, "When moonlight and roses becomes daylight and dishes, romantic love doesn't last." Like the guy who came into the pastor for counseling, complaining about his wife. The pastor said, "You took your vows. You took her for better or worse." The man responded, "Yes, but she's worse than I took her for." That's romantic love. It changes because the attraction is changing.

Then there's love that is *phileo*. That is the love of friends. It's a beautiful kind of love. It's based upon common interests. It needs reciprocity. If I give to you, you give back to me. Friendship kind of love cannot be built where one person is doing the contributing. It takes two people to make friendship go. That's a great kind of love.

The love that comes to be the New Testament word for love, and it's like the Christians got a trademark on the word and used it like nobody else in Greek culture, that was *agape* love. That kind of love is different than the other words. And by the way, the other words are important as manifestations of love. It's perfectly appropriate for there to be *eros* love between husband and wife. It's right that we have *storge* love. It's right that we have *phileo* love. But *agape* love is different than all other forms of love in that *agape* love does not depend upon externalizes or other people. *Agape* love is generated from the inside out. *Phileo* love takes the common interests and reciprocity of a friend. *Eros* love takes romantic attraction. And *storge* love requires

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a family. But *agape* love is independent within itself, rising out of the disposition and heart of the person who chooses to love, who wills to love.

We had a wedding yesterday. I said to a couple, as they recited their vows, that is a pledge to love in an *agape* fashion. When you're sick and you get a terrible illness, I'll not just ship you out. I remember the tragedy, several years ago, of having a neighbor who contracted MS and the husband couldn't take the fact that his wife had MS, so he began having an affair with a younger girl. Couldn't face up to the fact that the woman he loved was not physically what she was when he married her. He had *eros* love, but he didn't have *agape* love. He could not find and develop a love that originated within himself.

*Agape* love is the love of the cross because it doesn't depend upon the external circumstances. It arises out of the good disposition and heart of the person who wills to love.

Out of the four words used in the Greek language for love, only *agape* love can be used to describe love for enemies. The other three kinds of love require favorable circumstances. But since enemies are against us, *agape* love is the appropriate word because we do not find our love by looking at them and the expression on their face, or the hurting words they're pronouncing against us. We find love for them out of an inner contact we have with God through Christ.

When we think of enemies and loving your enemies, that's a little difficult to grasp. I doubt if many of us here can identify somebody who's actually out to seek our life. Maybe you have somebody who's really a negative source in your life that is out to get you. A lot of people don't have anybody who's out to get them. Obviously, when Jesus spoke these words in the Gospel of Luke, He could easily have been referring to the natural tension between the Jews and the Romans. The Romans were the occupying power. Maybe it's easy to read His words for loving the enemy with the illustrations He used to substantiate this when talking about the love of the

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Jews for the Romans. But Jesus is always reaching deeper into our hearts to find ways that we can apply His teaching.

I would like to suggest to you that some of the enemies in our life are not people of a different nationality or people who are external to us, but people who are very internal and people who are very much a part of our ongoing life. Your enemy might be your wife. Your enemy might be your husband. If you can think, for a moment, of the person in your life who is causing you the most hurt and pain, I think you can identify your enemy and it will help you to apply this teaching to your life if you get a picture of that person before we proceed. Who is it that is the burr in your side? Who is it that is the thorn in your flesh? Who is causing you grief? Is it a husband or a wife. Is it an ex? Is it a child or a parent? Maybe it's a stepchild or a stepparent and you have trouble relating to someone who is not your natural child or father or mother. Maybe it's a boss. Maybe the person who's hurting you is a fellow student who's betrayed you and walked all over you and gossiped about you at school. Maybe it's a fellow worker. Maybe it's someone who's accused you or someone who's defrauded you. I had a teenage boy come up to me after the last service and say, "You forgot one category. You forgot to say 'sister.'" Your sister could be your enemy.

Who is your enemy? Focus on that for a moment. What does Jesus tell us to do in relationship to that enemy?

#### **I. The first thing He tells us to do is to love them.**

Since He uses the word *agape*, He is not saying, "Start feeling good about them." We have a mistaken view that, in order to love somebody, we must have the tingles about them. But love in the *agape* sense has nothing to do with tingles. Love in an ethical sense, as Jesus is teaching, is to make a conscious choice to seek another person's highest and best welfare.

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I think, for me, a great example of what it means to really love a person is found in what Jesus did for the Gadarene demoniac, out of whom He cast the devils. When the villagers came, they found him sitting there, clothed and in his right mind. *Agape* love refused to let a person be locked in their mental image, at the level of behavior that they were exhibiting currently. But *agape* love reaches to want to bring that person to be clothed and in their right mind. *Agape* love is going to love a person until they're brought to that state of being in their right mind, and many times, *agape* love is willing to go through a whole lot of stuff and brush it off because *agape* love is willing to say, "If that person was the way they really were, they wouldn't be acting like this. The way they're acting is not their real self," because *agape* love takes hold of higher faith and *agape* love seeks the greater good. So Jesus tells us the first response to our enemy is to love them.

Then He gives us the specific steps of how love is applied. He says...

### **II. Do good to them.**

Again, we build romantic love on the feel state of attraction, but Jesus says, "Real love is a love that does good and talks good." If you wait to love someone until you feel good about them, in order to do good to them and to talk good of them, you'll wait a long time, you'll wait forever to find *agape*. But *agape* the feel may or may not ultimately come. Jesus says, "Start by doing concretely the things that are good."

One of our former members, a number of years ago, was living in the Midwest. She'd just come to faith in Christ. She discovered that her husband was having an affair with her best friend. The two couples spent a lot of time together in social events. The husbands worked together. As a new Christian, she was developing her faith in Christ, trying to make a very bad marriage work. Then she discovers that, on top of it all, this friend was having an affair with her husband. She

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chose, for a while, not to confront her husband with it. She began to ask the Lord to help her develop a response that He would want in her, both toward her husband and toward this friend. She felt the Lord saying to her, “This girl who is having an affair with your husband is a mixed-up soul, is much in need of Me. Rather than unloading your anger and your hurt on her, love her and witness to her in word and in deed.” So the two couples continued to get together. This friend of mine, a former member of our church, found ways to reach out and let this young lady know that she loved her and cared for her. Things didn’t work out in her marriage. Ultimately, a divorce came about. She confronted her husband and he was unwilling to change. A year or so later, this former church member met the girl who had had the affair. She was through with the affair and, in the process, she had become a Christian. My friend was delighted to discover that this person she had shown love to had become a Christian. She asked her how it happened. The girl said, “It really began with you. Because all along I knew that you knew we were having the affair. I watched your response. I couldn’t believe how you were treating me and, when you witnessed to me about Jesus Christ and you were giving me love instead of anger and hard words, I was impressed. I needed God in my life and I knew I needed God and it was your testimony that led me to seek help and find Jesus Christ.” Here is a person who, in a very difficult situation, did what is very hard to do—do good to those who mistreat you.

### **III. A third thing Jesus tells us about our enemy is that we are to speak well of them.**

The word is “bless.” In the Greek, it’s the word *eulogeo* which means “to speak well of a person.” It’s the opposite of curse. We find an example of the use of the word “curse” when Jesus curses the fig tree and it withers at its roots. To curse somebody is to wish that they wither right at their roots. To wish that they dry up and blow away and that we can say to them, “Be gone with you. I curse you!” When we are angry, we want to dip our hand into the mud pile of

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our negative knowledge of the other person and throw some of that negative knowledge at them.

That is an aspect of cursing. It is to take the dirt that I know about the other person, scoop it up and let them have it. Jesus says, “Do another kind talking. Find what is good that can be said about them. Restrain yourself from cursing and instead *eulogeo*—speak well of them.

That’s exactly the kind of love that Jesus models on the cross. When He is crucified, He does not say from the cross, “I’ll get even with you for this! I’ll send you to hell for this!” He says from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” To me, that’s one of the most remarkable statements ever made in the history of the world. These people, the religious leaders who crucified Jesus, knew exactly what they were doing. Yet Jesus Christ took the whole bunch to God for them. “They know not what they do.” Jesus is willing to speak well of them and to treat their deliberate sin as though it were a matter of ignorance.

#### **IV. Then the Lord says, “Pray for them.”**

To cease praying for a person means we have given a verdict of hopelessness upon them. If we stop praying for our enemy or that person who is hurting us, when we stop praying, it’s our giving up, saying, “God, not even You can change them. There’s no hope anymore.” But more than that, praying for our enemy will inevitably, probably bring more changes in us than it brings in our enemy. When we must pray for the person that is hurting us, that shapes our own relationship with God, it shapes our attitudes and it finds us drawing upon Him for the power to go on loving.

#### **V. Then the Lord says, “Go overboard in the opposite direction.”**

Turn your cheek, throw in the tunic. Toss over your wallet. We don’t like those kinds of things. If they hit you on the one cheek, turn the other. If they want your outer cloak, give them your inner garment. If someone asks from you, give to him who asks and don’t expect it back. We

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immediately raise all kinds of ethical objections and, well, we ought to because to build a totally ethical philosophy on these verses would be to rule out some other important verses in the New Testament. For example, we say, “If we’re supposed to give to those who ask, this means that any old lazy drifter that comes through and sticks a gun in our ribs and says, ‘Give me money!’ we ought to give to.” Probably if they stick a gun in your ribs it would be a good idea. What if your three year-old asks you for a butcher knife to play with and you say, “No, son. You can’t have the butcher knife.” And he says, “But Luke 6:30 says, ‘Give to everyone who asks you’”? You’re going to turn common sense on him at that point and say, “The Lord also talks about building wisdom,” and those kinds of things.

We recognize that sometimes these verses have been used in a harmful way toward people who have been abused. Maybe they’ve been told, when they were been abused, “Go back and take one more beating. Turn the other cheek.” Maybe you’ve had your cheek fractured three times. “Turn the other cheek—the Bible says to do that.” We need to recognize that there’s balance in the Scripture. What Jesus is talking about here is not the matter of justice in society—there are police courts and there are judicial systems. But He’s talking about taking the anger out of your own life, taking the vengeance and retaliation out of your own life and watching how you respond to people. Instead of responding in an angry kind of a way, do just the opposite, go in an unexpected direction.

I think it’s important, in fighting the devil and people like the devil, we don’t become like the devil in our efforts. I don’t know a lot about what there is to know about the Book of Jude. The book mystifies me quite a bit. I’m sure it does you when you read it. There’s this one little point, in verse 9, where Jude mentions the fact that the archangel Michael was contesting with Satan over the body of Moses and its disposition on Mount Nebo. I don’t understand that at all. But

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here's Michael, wrestling with the devil over a corpse, the corpse of Moses. Satan, we know, is the accuser of the brethren, that is, he's the person who always brings charges against God's people. Here's a chance for Michael, the great archangel of God, to tell Satan what he thinks of him, what all the angelic hosts think of him, and what all God's people think of him; one great chance to drive a blow in. Jude says that, rather than doing this, Michael—instead of bringing a slanderous accusation against him—simply says, “The Lord rebuke you.”

What's happening there is psychologically valid? What Michael is recognizing is that, when you fight with the devil, you don't use the devil's weapons. It's the Lord's position to rebuke. Jesus, teaching on love, liberates us to be people who can make a choice, from our heart, to love. So He says to us, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” He tells us to go overboard in the opposite direction when we have hurt put upon us; that rather than lobbing hurt back, we throw back healing and help.

There are two reasons Jesus gives us for loving our enemy.

The first is in verses 32–34. It's simply that His disciples are to have a higher standard than the standards of the world. The second reason why He tells us that we should love this way is that this kind of love models the character of God. God wants us to be this way because He himself is that way.

I've never been able to check out the authenticity of this story, but it may be true. The writing of the last verse of the hymn “The Love of God” was scrolled on the walls of an insane asylum in the days in which they used to be called by that name by someone who had been incarcerated for years. The words show that the man wasn't crazy, because he wrote, “Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made, were every stock on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry; nor could the

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scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.” O, love of God. God wants us to have a love that takes after His. To have a love that originates from within rather than simply being motivated by the exterior that we look for.

A true story is told of Leonardo Da Vinci, who was one of the great artists of all history. He was one of the really outstanding intellects of history. He was good, not only as an artist, but as a draftsman, as an engineer, and as a thinker. Just before Leonardo began painting this picture of “The Last Supper,” he had had a quarrel, a rather testy quarrel with a fellow artist. So enraged and bitter was Leonardo over this quarrel, that he determined to paint the face of his enemy into the face of Judas in the canvas of The Last Supper, so that he might publicly humiliate and vilify his enemy and pass down his enemy’s picture in a negative way to succeeding generations. Since he was consumed by such anger, it’s quite natural that Judas would be one of the first faces that he would finish in his painting. Anyone visiting his studio could see, in the face of Judas, the face of the artist that Leonardo had had the quarrel with.

When Leonardo came to paint the face of Christ, he found that he couldn’t make much progress. Something seemed to be baffling him and holding him back, retarding his progress and frustrating his best efforts. So at length, of a period of time, he came to the conclusion that he could not paint the face of Jesus because he had painted the face of his enemy into Judas. And if he were to make progress, he would have to paint out the face of his enemy. So with brush in hand, he painted out the face of Judas and commenced anew in painting the face of Jesus. He found this time he had great success, which the ages, of course, have acclaimed.

You cannot, at one and the same time, be painting the features of Christ into your own life and still be painting another face with colors of enmity and hatred. It will not work. Jesus puts before

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us this teaching that love is a choice. It is a choice made within the heart. For it to be real, it must be inwardly motivated, it must be ongoing.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our gracious heavenly Father, we come to You this moment seeking Your help in our life. For, perhaps every one of us in this room can identify very rapidly that person or persons in our life who have caused us harm. We do not find it perhaps as easy to believe about ourselves that we may have caused harm to someone else. Forgive us that, Lord. If we have been the enemy against another, have been selfish and ungrateful and cruel and unkind, forgive us. Let love be a choice from within us. Lord, there are relationships in this room that are in a great deal of trouble: There are marriages in trouble, families in trouble. It boils down to how we love one another, what commitments we make out of our heart toward one another. I pray for those who are being called to difficult love, that they will not be faint in well-doing, but that they will persevere with the attitudes of love and the actions of love and the words of love and the prayer of love and go the second mile. Bring healing to the trouble we have in relationships and help us, Lord, on a moment-by-moment basis, to truly be Christians, to find—welling up within us—the choice to love, even as You loved.

*As our heads are bowed, could I ask you a personal question? If this message has struck a responsive cord in your life, and you could say, “Yes, I am struggling with a person I’ve identified—rather quickly as you were talking—as my enemy. I need help from God to love as you have taught today, as Jesus taught.*

Lord, we call upon You because You can give a special kind of grace and help to love. I think, Lord, of Corrie ten Boom and the story she told of meeting her captor, the man who was the guard at the prison that she and Bessie went to. After the war, he came to her and greeted her. He

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had become a Christian. Corrie, who had taught on love and forgiveness, found herself unable to reach out and take his extended hand in a handshake. She felt she had no strength or power. The second time, she raised her hand and was unable, until she cried out to God, “O God, You told us to love our enemies. You must also, with that command, give us the power.” She found strength coming onto her arm and she was able to raise her hand and take his and shake it; and look him in the eye and tell him that she was so glad he had become a Christian. There are some commands You lay upon us, Lord, that seem impossible to fulfill. Only with Your help can we do that. We ask for that help right now...today. Help us to make love ever a choice of the heart. In Christ our Lord. Amen.