

Scripture Reading

Luke 6:27-42

²⁷ *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

³² *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

³⁷ *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

³⁹ *He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?⁴⁰ The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.*

⁴¹ *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*

Morning Message
Jesus > Religion
Friends & Enemies

Identity formation demands it.

For you to grow up and understand who you are, requires you to discover who you are not, it requires the ability to critique and to evaluate yourself against others.

- To choose a style of clothing that “is you”, you need to castoff others.
- To decide on a haircut that reflects your personality, you need to say “no” to a mullet cut. (And thank God you did!)
- To identify with a group of friends, you have to pass on other options.

To discover your identity you need to wrestle with what you are not.

Do you remember your teenage years when those people (aka, your parents) whom you once model yourself after because of their love for you, suddenly became adversaries; “lame”, “stupid”, & “embarrassing” people because you needed to form an identity separate from theirs. And in trying out those identities that make you distinct from them, you needed to, at least for a time, believe that you were right and they were wrong. And then, when they use their parental voice to oppose your choice of clothes, your hair style, the time you needed to be home, or the friends with whom you hung out, those once-beloved models felt like enemies. Do you remember that? How often have teens said to their parents, “I hate you!” and parents wonder to themselves, “What’s happened you my little boy/girl?”

Identity formation demands it; we need to compare and contrast ourselves with others to come to know who we are. Unfortunately, in the process of understanding who we are, our sinful nature causes us to create enemies.

But this is not just a teenage thing. Adults keep doing it throughout their lives. It's almost as if sin has trained us to make enemies.

- North vs South
- Blacks vs Whites
- Conservatives vs Liberals
- Rich vs Poor
- Republicans vs Democrats
- "Americans" vs Illegal Immigrants
- Red Sox vs Yankees

Born out of arrogance, our sin-nature is training us to assert ourselves above and against others. Rather than looking for similarities or "common ground" we look for differences that make us feel superior or that somehow give us the moral authority. And when that happens, others become enemies; people and nations become enemies because they oppose what is "right" and "moral". People and nations become problems we need to address.

I wish I could say that the Church stands apart from the influence of such sin. But if we hold up a mirror and carefully examine ourselves, we will see within our Christian religion:

- Protestants vs Catholics
- Calvinists vs Arminians

- Independent Churches vs Denominational Churches
- Evangelicals vs Social Reformers

Religions are not above making comparisons that can cause them to view others as adversaries or even enemies.

These days Americans are on a steep learning curve because of our increased involvement in the Middle East. And one of the things we are learning is that not all Muslims are alike; some are even enemies of other Muslims and for decades, if not centuries, have been arguing and killing one another over their differences.

Now Americans have been labeled as enemies by extremist Muslims. Some courageous Muslims have come forward to publically label these extremists as “heretics” to the Muslim faith, and I’m sure they are now enemies to the extremists as well!

People and nations become problems we need to address when we view each other as enemies.

But this is not the way of our Lord Jesus Christ. And today I would suggest that this is but one way in which Jesus is greater than any religion; for

1. Jesus saw sin as the enemy and people as friends.

Let me give you a quick example that contrasts Jesus & religious people:

John 8:3-11

³ *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group* ⁴ *and said to Jesus,*

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

How many different stories could we read about Jesus’ love and respect for people? The religious people of His day would lift themselves above the tax collectors and prostitutes by looking down upon them. But, Jesus would call a tax collector to be His disciple, and Jesus would not stop a prostitute from washing his feet with her tears and pour fragrant oil over his head because of her love for Him.

Jesus saw sin as the enemy and people as friends. And he calls those who would follow Him to make sin the enemy and not people.

As we heard the Word of God in Luke 6, Jesus tells us that even those we’ve already labeled as “enemies” we are to love!! Jesus understood that enemies we love would not stay enemies very long.

Sinners were drawn to Jesus because he loved them. Jesus saw sin as the enemy and people as friends. And Jesus understood that salvation from sin would only come through acts of love, not through derogatory labels. But...

2. Religion has always found that hard to accept, even Christian religion if it is based on self-righteousness.

And that's because self-righteousness fuels "enemy" formation, while the cross levels the playing field of humanity; where we all see ourselves as the same; sinners in need of God's grace.

Let me dare to offer as example using a truly "hot-button" issue in Christianity today:

Homosexuality has become a divisive issue within Christianity.

- Episcopal Church in N.A. vs Episcopal Church in Africa
- Methodists, Presbyterian

Homosexuals have been labeled as enemies by many Christians; problems Christians/churches/denominations must find a way to deal with.

After all, doesn't the Bible say:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ ... *wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men* ¹⁰ *nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

Many Christians label homosexuals as “enemies” and a “problem” to be dealt with. But let me ask: “Have we equally labeled as “enemies” swindlers, slanderers, greedy people, thieves, or others who are sexually immoral like adulterers or those who have sex outside of marriage? They’re all listed here in 1 Corinthians 6.

One author makes this point by writing:

Ever had a lustful thought? Looked at porn? Guilty.

Ever wanted something more than God? Yep.

Ever looked at or engage with someone else besides your spouse? Ouch.

Ever stolen? I have.

Ever had an insatiable desire for more money? Check.

Ever been drunk? Double check.

Ever reviled? I don’t even know what that means, but I’m sure I’m guilty of this too.

Jefferson Bethke

So why are homosexuals “enemies” to Christians, sinners who cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and not the rest of us guilty of our own sins?

And, regarding entrance into God’s Kingdom, didn’t Jesus say...

Matthew 5:20

... unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

When we live by the Law with a self-righteous attitude, we die by the Law.

When we play the self-righteous game and see others as “enemies”, we are being religious, and we are not following Jesus who sees us as friends; companions in need of God’s love and grace, and views sin as the enemy.

We who play the self-righteous game, and so quickly label others and enemies of God, simply don’t understand our equal need, along with that of our “enemies”, for God’s grace

It is worth noting that after Paul listed those sins in 1 Corinthians 6; sins that kept us out of God’s Kingdom, he then wrote:

¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

When we depart from the self-righteousness of religion and walk in the ways of Jesus Christ we stop seeing people as enemies and begin to see sin as the enemy; an enemy that Jesus met at the cross. And...

3. While we may still be tempted to focus upon the sin of others, Jesus points us to the greatest enemy; the sin in ourselves.

Isn’t that when Jesus concluded in our Luke 6 reading,

- after he warned us not to judge, and
- after He told us to be like Him, our teacher?

Jesus teaches...

Luke 6:41

⁴¹ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye?

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

The reason Jesus is greater than religion is that rather than making people enemies, He points us to the real enemy with ourselves; our sin, and He empowers us to battle that enemy with the love and grace we have been given in Christ.

So the Apostle Paul writes to encourage us in battle with sin:

Colossians 3:1-11

¹ Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

When we recognize that our enemy is sin; sin in the world and sin within us, we can begin to shift from seeing others as enemies to seeing them as equals; and as friends we want to rescue from sin by pointing them to God's love & grace and transforming power.

One person I have always been tempted to call an enemy, because of his public Christian bashing, is the TV pundit Bill Maher. But a few years back he said something worth hearing; a challenge, if you will, for Christians. He said:

New rule: If you're a Christian who supports killing your enemies and torture, you have to come up with a new name for yourself...

... "Capping thine enemy" is not exactly something Jesus would do...

... I'm not even judging you. I'm just saying logically, if you ignore every single thing Jesus commanded you to do, you're not a Christian. You're just auditing.

You're not Christ's followers. You're just fans.

Bill Maher, New Rules, Real Time with Bill Maher, 213, HBO, May 13, 2011.

Friends, Jesus invites us to follow Him by seeing sin as the enemy and people as friends. Let us follow Jesus?