

**Bible Passage****Luke 6:27-36**

<sup>27</sup> “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. <sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> “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. <sup>35</sup> 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.

**Outline**

1. **Cultural Tendencies and Historical Lessons**
  - a. Tendency Towards Tolerance and Conflict Avoidance
  - b. The Dangers of Moral Relativism
  - c. Learning from History: The Crusades as a Cautionary Tale
2. **The Core Message: Balancing Conflict and Love**
  - a. The Inevitability of Conflict in Beliefs
  - b. Choosing Love Over Hatred or Violence
  - c. The Journey from Uncertainty to Clarity in Faith
3. **The Nature of Spiritual Warfare**
  - a. Beyond Physical Battle: Embracing Love, Grace, and Mercy
  - b. Holding Firm in Faith While Responding with Kindness
  - c. The Challenge of Proactive Love Against Opposition
4. **Dealing with Opposition and Hatred**
  - a. Embracing Jesus as the Way, Truth, and Life
  - b. Responding to Hatred with Love and Grace
  - c. The Example of Saul’s Transformation to Paul
5. **Jesus’ Teachings on Love and Mercy**
  - a. Loving Beyond Agreement: Embracing Jesus’ Approach

- b. Turning the Other Cheek and Blessing Those Who Curse
- c. Understanding the Power of Loving One's Enemies

#### 6. Identifying Allies and Enemies

- a. The Discomfort in Recognizing Opposition
- b. Shaping Identity in Christ Through Response to Opposition
- c. The Challenge of Treating Disagreement with Love

#### 7. The Church's Role and My Vision

- a. Addressing the Church's Shortcomings in Loving Enemies
- b. The Need for Practical Demonstration of Christ's Love
- c. A Vision for a Church Known for Love in the Face of Hatred

### Notes

In my reflection on this passage, I'm struck by the challenge it presents to me. It delineates two distinct groups of people that I find myself oscillating between. On one side, there are people like me who seek approval and avoid conflict at all costs, leading us to question the relevance of loving our enemies. For us, the absence of conflict is paramount, and we interpret religious teachings with a bias towards maintaining peace, often focusing more on loving our neighbors and avoiding the recognition of having enemies.

Then, there's the other group, distinct from my usual stance, where individuals readily identify and confront their enemies. They accept conflict as a natural part of relationships, especially when beliefs and opinions diverge, leading to a clear demarcation between what they perceive as right and wrong, 'us' versus 'them'. I see our culture leaning towards tolerance and conflict avoidance, which sometimes dilutes the essence of standing for truth as taught in Christian principles. This cultural tendency challenges the idea of moral relativism. The historical events like the Crusades serve as a stark reminder to me of the dangers of misapplying religious teachings, illustrating how the concept of 'enemies' can lead to actions that contradict Christian values of love and peace.

The core message that resonates with me is about finding a balance between acknowledging conflict and adhering to the

command to love my enemies. It's a call to understand that while conflict and disagreement are inevitable, my response should not be hatred or violence, but a reflection of Christ's teachings. This balance is crucial for me in navigating the complexities of human relationships while staying true to Christian principles. I recognize the key to this concept in the transformative journey from uncertainty about truth and knowledge of God to a clear understanding brought by the revelation of Jesus. This revelation illuminates the distinction between allies and adversaries in my faith.

I also notice a tendency within religious communities, including mine, to become insular. This desire to protect oneself from the perceived dangers of the outside world often leads to an 'us versus them' mentality, where engagement with the world is seen as a combative endeavor to defend one's beliefs. At the heart of my understanding is the concept of spiritual warfare, approached in a manner that diverges from traditional combative stances. It's not a physical battle but a spiritual one, where my weapons are love, grace, and mercy, rooted in the teachings of Jesus. This kind of love means holding firm to my faith while responding to opposition with kindness and prayer. It's proactive love that seeks to do good, even to those who oppose.

This leads me to the inevitable conflict that arises from adhering to my faith. Holding onto the belief that Jesus is the only way, truth, and life can lead to opposition and hatred from others. My response, as taught by Jesus, is not to retaliate with aggression

but to demonstrate love and grace. This approach is counterintuitive and challenging for me, as it involves extending compassion even in the face of hostility.

I feel called for a bold and courageous approach to my faith. I am encouraged to remain steadfast in my convictions, understanding that following Jesus might attract opposition and hatred. This path is not about seeking conflict but about staying true to my faith while responding with the love and grace exemplified by Christ, even when it leads to personal cost or suffering.

In my journey of faith, I've come to understand the complexity of dealing with those who oppose my beliefs. There's a part of me that wants to confront and fight, to prove that I'm right, especially when others are upset by what I believe. This feeling often leads to a desire for conflict, a battle to establish dominance in beliefs, which seems necessary to coexist. Yet, there's another part of me, deeply influenced by my Christian faith, that resists this approach.

I've come to realize that my response to those who view me as an enemy shouldn't be aggression, but love. Even when I'm faced with hostility for my beliefs, I choose to respond with kindness and prayer. This isn't about being passive; it's about actively choosing to love as Jesus did, even in the face of persecution. My calling isn't to change my beliefs to avoid conflict, but to stay true to them while responding with compassion and understanding.

I understand that following Jesus means that I will face opposition. Just as the world hated Jesus for speaking the truth, I too might be disliked for my faith. However, I am reminded to be courageous and bold in my faith, following Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life. This might lead to hatred from others, but I remember that Jesus faced far greater hatred and still chose love and sacrifice.

The story of Saul, who became Paul, is a vivid example for me. His transformation from a persecutor of Christians to a key figure in Christianity shows that even those who seem like enemies can change. This story teaches me the power of God's love and forgiveness, and the importance of extending that same love to others, regardless of their past actions.

My understanding of how to interact with those who oppose me is continually shaped by the teachings of Jesus. He taught love, mercy, and kindness, even to those who declared him an enemy. This approach is counter to what the world often expects or practices. The world often operates on the principle of hate and retaliation, but Jesus demonstrated a different way - a way of turning the other cheek, blessing those who curse, and loving those who hate.

In my walk of faith, I am learning to recognize who my allies are and who my enemies might be. This isn't comfortable, as it goes against my natural inclination to avoid conflict. However, I understand that my identity in Christ is shaped not just by who stands with me, but also by how I respond to those who stand

against me. My response to enemies isn't about accepting everything they believe as true, but about showing them the same love and grace that God shows to all of us.

This understanding challenges me to look at the world differently. While it's easy to align with those who agree with me, the true test of my faith is how I treat those who disagree, who might even hate me for what I stand for. Remembering how Jesus responded to his enemies gives me the strength and guidance to love in the face of hatred, to offer prayer instead of retaliation, and to embrace my faith with more boldness and conviction, even when it's not easy.

I've come to realize that identifying my enemies is just the beginning. Initially, I felt ready to confront them, to hit back hard because they're wrong, and I'm right. I believed I was on the side of Jesus, and they were on the side of the world. But then I understood that the real challenge is not in identifying enemies but in how I choose to respond to them.

The way I'm called to 'attack' is not through physical confrontation or verbal aggression, but through love, kindness, and mercy. It's about showing love not just in words but in actions. The way God deals with His enemies is not through wrath but through compassion, patience, and self-sacrifice. This is a stark contrast to the world's way of dealing with opposition.

I've learned that true strength lies not in proving others wrong or retaliating in anger, but in maintaining the truth without

wavering, and simultaneously responding with love. It's about countering hatred with love, even when it's challenging. This approach requires discipline and training. I need to learn to respond to hate with the understanding that my God is real and that His way is love.

I've also come to see that hatred can be holistic, consuming all parts of a person. The world tries to trap us into hating others completely, but as a Christian, I must resist this. Instead, I aim to respond to hatred and anger with God's mercy and love.

I see a failing in many churches today, including my own. While we are good at preaching the truth, we often fall short in actively loving and serving those who oppose us. This is especially true in my community, where there's a need to demonstrate Christ's love in practical ways, even to those who don't share our beliefs. In my journey, I've been inspired by Jesus' teachings and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. He loved the world, even when the world was against Him. He chose to respond not with anger or vengeance but with submission to God's will. This is the example I strive to follow. My vision for the church, and for myself, is to be known for our love, even in the face of hatred. When people ask why I love those who hate me, I want my answer to be clear: it's not because I am good, but because Jesus is. He loved unconditionally, and I strive to live like Him. This is the kingdom I want to belong to, a kingdom of love, grace, and truth, forever and ever.