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**Title:** On the Level Part 2

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**Text:** [Luke 6:27-38](#)

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In these past few weeks, we've been looking at the ministry of Jesus through the eyes and pen of the gospel writer named Luke. Jesus has called his disciples who left everything behind to follow him. He has started raising red flags of the religious leaders of the time because he seemed so cavalier about breaking the norms of the day. Who he

eats with, when he eats with them and what he does on the sabbath were all being called into question.

Last week, we started a look at what is called the "sermon on the plain." It's called that because Jesus "came down with them and stood on a level place." (Luke 6:17). Its companion in Matthew happens on a mountain so we call it the "sermon on the mount." You can find it in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. While Luke's version is much shorter – 33 verses compared to 111 in Matthew – Luke still packs a punch. We've seen in Luke the blessings and the woes – Jesus spoke comfort to those who needed comfort and made those who were a little too comfortable squirm just a little. Jesus must have had my preaching professor who always said it is the preacher's task "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Jesus does that in the sermon on the plain.

In the first part of the sermon on the plain, Jesus directed his message first to those who were hurting and came seeking healing, and then to those who came to trip him up and just looking for a way to bring this up and coming teacher down. As he continues with the sermon, as we heard read today, he's now talking to everyone, regardless of status or standing or need. And, what he has to say today is hard to hear and even harder to do.

Jesus starts, "But I say to you that listen..." With those words, we immediately know that all those blessings and woes he just talked about aren't the point at all. They sounded backward of the way we think of the world but if we thought they were backward, we're about to get a lesson in

just how far God will go to upend our broken value systems and flip our priorities so they line up with God's priorities.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27-28). In other words, do the exact opposite of what the world expects when you're dealing with people who treat you with contempt. Instead of avoiding them or submitting to their abuse, instead of responding to their hatred with your hatred of your own – love them. The verb here is *'agapao.'* The noun for this kind of love is *'agape.'* It isn't an emotion like we celebrate on Valentine's Day - it's an action. It's a way to behave that puts another's welfare and interests above your own.<sup>1</sup>

A man who had reached his 100th birthday was being interviewed by a reporter. "What are you most proud of?" the reporter asked. "Well," said the man, "I don't have an enemy in the world." "What a beautiful thought! How inspirational!" said the reporter. "Yep," added the man, "I outlived every last one of them."<sup>2</sup>

It begs the question of us and how we approach dealing with our enemies? Is it just to avoid and ignore them, hoping that you outlive and outlast them? Maybe you secretly hope and plan and pray for bad things to happen to them. Or maybe you take a more active stance toward your enemies and go to war with them – and by "war," we go to war in many ways. We rejoice in their failures and mourn their successes. We see this now in our political dialogue and it's bled into other areas of our lives.

Jesus gets specific with how to love your enemies. Here's how you do it. Stand up to them. When people try to exert authority over you, it tells us to turn the other cheek – to give a shirt as well as our coat. How can such an action be interpreted as standing up to someone? You might be thinking that turning the other cheek and giving up both your coat and your shirt sounds like submitting to someone else's abuse, not standing up to it.

But here's why we need to understand the history and context of first-century culture when we study scripture. Bible scholar David Ewart explains it this way. Striking the cheek was the way a master disciplined a slave or servant. It was the way he asserted his authority, the way he put you back in line. At the time of Jesus, there was a proper way to do this. You would stand facing your master, and he would strike your right cheek with the back of his right hand. Striking you in any other way would mean a loss of authority and power for the master. So, imagine what happens if, after having been struck on the right cheek, you stand there and silently turn your head and, as Jesus suggests, offer your left cheek?<sup>3</sup>

Standing there offering your left cheek in that time and place would become an act of resistance. If your master is unable to discipline you in the accepted fashion – his lack of power over you is exposed for all to see – and with that, he is shamed and dishonored. More importantly, you have exposed the reality that master and slave are not in the right relationship that God wants for them.

Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God, where the rule is no longer “an eye for an eye.” The rule is now the rule of love and love alone. He goes on to give us some of those negative examples that explain this concept of loving our enemies. He says, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. (Luke 6:32-34)

This week, I read a rendition of I Corinthians 13 – Paul’s love chapter that you hear at weddings – you know, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude” – that one. But this rendition is written as if it were told from the side of hate rather than love. It was jarring to me.

Hate is impatient and unkind. Hatred is envious and egocentric. Hatred is arrogant and rude. Hate is insisting on one's way; hatred is irritable or resentful; it celebrates sin, and it mocks what is true. Hate is whiny and thin-skinned, thoroughly skeptical, always pessimistic, a born quitter. But hatred ends.<sup>4</sup>

I’m more than a little distressed that Christians today are not living this out in the world. I’m afraid that, more often than not, people are beginning to know Christians by our hate than by our love. Christians today seem to be mad at the world. The world is beginning to view Christianity as more of an angry political activist movement than a spiritual organization devoted to handing out hope and healing to a hurting world.

Yes, we are called to be salt and light in a sinful world. Yes, we are called to speak out boldly with prophetic voices calling people to follow Jesus. But truth must be spoken in love. Like Jesus, we are to be people full of grace and truth. Our culture must know us as truth-tellers, but we must be truth-tellers with love. When we interact with those we perceive as our enemies, it must not be out of hate and spite, but out of love and compassion. This is Christ’s example and instruction.

Understand though, what loving our enemies does NOT mean. It doesn't mean we support them in what they do, agree with them, or even necessarily become good friends with them. Loving our enemies means that when they hate us, we love them in return. It means that the cycle of hate, the cycle of revenge, the cycle of retaliation stops with us. You can be angry at a person for what they do, and yet still love them. Jesus was upset at the people of Jerusalem for how they abused and murdered the prophets, and yet He still shed tears over the city. Jesus, as always, is our best example for how to live out such the principles he teaches.

If you desire to follow Christ, this sermon on the level place will tell you how. It contains truths that Christ practiced and lived by, and as imitators of Christ, what we also should live by. If I were to summarize this sermon of Jesus down into three words, those three words would be "attitude is everything." As I have wrestled with this text these last couple of weeks, I have come to understand that in this sermon, and the one in Matthew, Christ is not setting out another list of dos and don'ts.

Throughout history, people have imagined that they are keeping the law if they simply do what it says. If they perform the outward actions prescribed by the law, then they are doing all that is necessary. Jesus preaches this sermon to show us that keeping the law is not so much about outward actions as inner attitudes of the heart. If you don't murder someone, but you hate them in your heart, you might as well have murdered them. If you don't commit adultery, but do think lustful thoughts, it is as if you did commit adultery. It's all about the attitude and condition of our hearts.

This sermon describes an attitude of the heart that expresses itself positively when others are negative, and generously when others are selfish. It is an inner disposition, not a legal duty. And from that inner disposition, love will flow far more than we can imagine. It's why verse 38 is there. Have this attitude – be known for your love and "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38)

In the Christian catacombs of Rome, the following story was found. A rich man named Proculus had hundreds of slaves. The slave named Paulus was so trustworthy that Proculus made him the steward over his whole household. One day Proculus took Paulus with him to the slave market to buy some new workers. Before the bargaining began, they examined the men to see if they were strong and healthy.

Among the slaves stood a weak, old man. Paulus urged his owner to buy this slave. Proculus answered, "But he is good for nothing." "Go ahead, buy him," Paulus insisted. "He is cheap. And I promise that the work in your household will get done even better than before."

So Proculus agreed and purchased the elderly slave. And Paulus made good on his word. The work went better than ever. But Proculus observed that Paulus now worked for two men. The old slave did no work at all, while Paulus tended to him, gave him the best food, and made him rest.

Proculus was curious, so he confronted Paulus, "Who is this slave? You know I value you. I don't mind your protecting this old man. But tell me who he is. Is he your father who has fallen into slavery?" Paulus answered, "It is someone to whom I owe more than to my father." "Your teacher, then?" "No. Somebody to whom I owe even more." "Who then?" "This is my enemy." "Your enemy!" "Yes. He is the man who killed my father and sold us, the children, as slaves." Proculus stood speechless. "As for me," said Paulus, "I am a disciple of Christ, who has taught us to love our enemies."<sup>5</sup>

Keep in mind that Jesus is talking to people who are on the underside of society. We might find it hard to identify with the folks in that first band of followers. And yet, that is exactly what Jesus is asking us to do – to stop looking at others as if they were somehow less than us and recognize the value and worth God places on each person we encounter. It is not easy. It goes against how we are wired in the world but it's who we are to be as Christians – it's who I want us to be as Geist Christian Church. May God be our guide in such an endeavor. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition and information found at [https://www.preceptaustin.org/love\\_%28verb%29-agapao](https://www.preceptaustin.org/love_%28verb%29-agapao)

<sup>2</sup> Illustration found at "Loving Those You'd Rather Hate," sermon by Jeremy Myers, found at [https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/luke/luke\\_6\\_27/](https://redeeminggod.com/sermons/luke/luke_6_27/)

<sup>3</sup> Found at <https://www.holytextures.com/2013/01/luke-6-27-38-year-c-epiphany-7-february-18-february-24-sermon.html>

<sup>4</sup> This attributed to a blog post from 2014, where Jared Wilson asks, "What if we looked at 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 from the reverse angle? It was found in a sermon at <http://www.cornerstonewylie.org/cornerstone-baptist-church-sermons/2018/02/06/love-your-enemies>

<sup>5</sup> Illustration found at [https://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon10/loving\\_your\\_enemies.htm](https://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon10/loving_your_enemies.htm)