

Luke 6:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

Analysis

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. This verse introduces one of Jesus' most radical ethical teachings, directly challenging natural human inclination and conventional morality. The emphatic "But I say unto you" (alla hymin legō tois akouousin, ἀλλὰ ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούουσιν) asserts Jesus' divine authority to establish moral standards. The phrase "to you which hear" distinguishes genuine disciples who receive and obey from those who merely listen without commitment.

The command "Love your enemies" (agapate tous echthrous hymōn, ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἔχθροὺς ὑμῶν) uses the verb agapaō (ἀγαπάω), indicating self-giving, volitional love that seeks the other's highest good regardless of feelings. This is not philia (friendship) or eros (romantic love) but agape—unconditional, sacrificial commitment to another's welfare. The noun echthros (ἔχθρος, "enemy") refers to active opponents, those who oppose and seek harm. Jesus commands love toward those who have earned hatred.

The parallel command "do good to them which hate you" (kalōs poieite tois misousin hymas, καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς) specifies concrete action. The verb miseō (μισέω, "hate") indicates active hostility and malice. Jesus requires not merely emotional restraint but active benevolence toward those who harbor malice toward us. This teaching transcends Old Testament law, which commanded love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) but permitted vengeance against enemies. Jesus establishes a new ethic that reflects God's character—He "makes His sun rise on

the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

Historical Context

Jesus spoke these words during the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49), paralleling Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This occurred during His Galilean ministry, approximately AD 28-29, after choosing the twelve apostles. The audience included both disciples and a large multitude from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon (Luke 6:17), representing diverse geographic and social backgrounds.

First-century Jewish ethics, while compassionate toward fellow Jews, distinguished sharply between treatment of Israelites and Gentiles. The Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls) explicitly commanded, "Love all the sons of light...and hate all the sons of darkness." Some rabbinic teaching permitted hatred of Israel's enemies. Roman law and Greco-Roman ethics generally endorsed retaliation and revenge—enemies deserved punishment, not love.

Jesus' command to love enemies was thus revolutionary in its cultural context. For Jews under Roman occupation, "enemies" included not only personal antagonists but the oppressive political system. Zealots advocated violent resistance; Jesus advocated active love. This teaching would become foundational to Christian ethics and eventually influence Western moral thought, though its full implications remain countercultural in every age. The early church's practice of loving enemies, including praying for persecutors, distinguished Christians dramatically from surrounding culture.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' command to love enemies reflect God's character and His treatment of sinners?
2. What is the difference between tolerating enemies passively and actively loving them as Jesus commands?
3. In what practical ways can believers 'do good' to those who hate them without compromising convictions or enabling evil?
4. How does enemy-love challenge nationalism, tribalism, and political partisanship within Christian communities?
5. What does this command reveal about the nature of agape love and its distinction from emotional affection?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ' ὑμῖν λέγω τοῖς ἀκούουσιν ἀγαπᾶτε

But unto you I say to them which hear Love

G235 G5213 G3004 G3588 G191 G25

τοῖς ἔχθροὺς ὑμῶν καλῶς ποιεῖτε τοῖς

to them which enemies your good do to them which

G3588 G2190 G5216 G2573 G4160 G3588

μισοῦσιν ὑμᾶς

hate you

G3404 G5209

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 5:15 (Good): See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

Luke 6:35 (Love): But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

Proverbs 24:17 (Parallel theme): Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:

Galatians 6:10 (Good): As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Mark 4:24 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.

Acts 10:38 (Good): How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Acts 7:60 (Parallel theme): And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Luke 8:18 (Parallel theme): Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

Luke 8:15 (Good): But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

Luke 23:34 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.