

May 6, 2007

Godliness 101 (#4) – Love, Compassion, Transparency  
Galatians 5:19-26 / Psalm 112:1-10 / Job 31:29-34

“I never rejoiced when my enemies suffered. I never gloated when disaster came their way. I never sinned by invoking a curse on them or praying for their death. I shared my food with all those who have worked for me or lived within my house—they have never gone hungry. No stranger or traveler ever had to sleep in the streets, for I opened my door to them and invited them into the shelter of my house.

Other men try to hide their sins, but I have been open and honest about sharing mine. I never let what people thought of me or said of me keep me silent or locked in my house. Fear of their scorn did not make me alter what I said or how I lived.”

Job 31:29-34 (JEV translation / paraphrase!)

If there was ever an Old Testament text which shed some significant light on what Jesus meant when He told us to “Love our enemies” — this is it! It’s not simply a text on being loving. It’s a text on loving one’s ENEMIES — which, according to Jesus, is one of the things that distinguishes His followers from all the rest.

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And that’s the **FIRST** thing I want to speak about this morning — loving your enemies as a part of what it means to be godly. Never rejoicing when our enemies suffer. Never gloating when bad things happen to them. And never calling down a curse upon them or praying for their death, as Job tells us in verses 29-30. And of course it an aspect of godliness that carries over into the New Testament as well.

Jesus, speaking to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount tells us:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I tell you: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.’”

You see, Jesus was addressing the general sentiment of many people in His day who considered it perfectly natural, wise, prudent and discerning to love ONLY your neighbor (which they often restricted to people they liked, or fellow Israelites) and to hate your enemies.

It was a sentiment actually verbalized in Jesus day by the Essences of the Qumran Community (known to us as those who wrote and hid the Dead Sea Scrolls ). They taught their members: “Love all that [God] has chosen... and hate all that He has rejected.” Or again, “Love all the sons of light... and hate all the sons of darkness.”

That is, “Love all believers and hate all unbelievers.” or “Love all moral or godly people and hate all immoral or ungodly people.”

We even know from other writings that have come down to us from that time that some Rabbis and their followers held to the notion that they should, “Love all Israelites and hate all Gentiles (or non-Israelites, which they sometimes referred to as ‘pigs’ or ‘dogs’).”

Yet, in all fairness it must be remembered that although the word “hate” can often mean “to have animosity toward,” or “feelings of hostility toward,” it can also convey the more passive sense of simply “ignoring someone,” or “being indifferent to them;” “not showing love to them” or merely “loving them less.”

Jesus used the word “hate” in this way in Luke 14:26 when He said, “If anyone does not hate his father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” And He means “love them less than Me.”

Now in terms of national enemies those rabbis probably meant it in the active sense of hating — harboring bitterness, desiring them harm or hoping and praying for their demise or destruction.

But in terms of personal enemies it was probably intended in the passive sense of simply ignoring them; pretending they didn't exist, being indifferent to them, or loving them less.

It isn't that religious teachers were encouraging people to loathe or kill their personal enemies, as much as they were encouraging people to simply "ignore them," or "not show them love" (which is a form of hatred).

Yet when Jesus says, "Love your enemies" (be they national or personal) He doesn't allow that because He uses the word **Agapé** (or the verbal imperative **agapaté**) which stresses that the "love" He is speaking of is an active love. A verb stresses action, and thus the love Jesus calls us to, must be evidenced by actively taking the initiative to reach out in love to our enemies through the things we do or how we treat them.

Even the second part of the command to love our enemies, where he goes on to say "pray for those who persecute you," does not allow for passivity. We are to actively pray for and seek the good of our enemies.

And WHY are we to love and pray for them? Jesus tells us: "That you may be sons of your Father in heaven." HE causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love only those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors (that is, sinful, criminal, traitors) doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

And how can we be "perfect in love," which is what Matthew means in the context? By loving BOTH friend and foe. It's a command the philosopher Immanuel Kant read, deemed to be impossible, and then went on to say Jesus words should be dismissed as absurd.

And he's right **IF** by the word "love" Jesus means we need to have warm and tender or intimate feelings of affection for those who are verbally maligning, physically abusing, or seeking to hurt or kill us. In that case His command IS impossible and even a little bit absurd!

But that's NOT what He means! He doesn't use the Greek word **PHILEO** which means friendship love, emotional fondness or brotherly affection.

Nor does He use the word **STORGE** which signifies the tender love or bond of affection that naturally exists between a parent and his or her offspring. Nor does he use the Greek word **EROS** which signifies romantic love, intense longing for, or physical attraction to.

If Jesus had, the command WOULD be a bit ridiculous, since no one can make their heart feel tender loving affections for a person who hates them and is actively seeking to harm or kill them!

But Jesus didn't say we must "like, have warm feelings for, or find our enemy attractive"! He said we must love our enemy with **AGAPE**.

This word, says Barclay, "indicates unconquerable benevolence, and invincible goodwill. If we regard a person with agape it means that no matter what the person does to us, no matter how he treats us, no matter if he insults us or injures us or grieves us, we will regard him with that unconquerable benevolence and goodwill which will seek nothing but his highest good. Jesus never asked us to love our enemies in the same way we love our nearest and dearest. [That] would neither be possible nor right... In the case of our nearest and dearest we cannot help loving them... it comes to us quite unsought... it is something born of the emotions of the heart. But in the case of our enemies...it is something we must will ourselves into doing. It is in fact a victory over that which comes instinctively to the natural man... Agapé... means a determination of the mind, whereby we achieve this unconquerable goodwill even to those who hurt and injure us... Agapé, someone has said, is the power to love those whom we do not like... In point of fact, we can only have agapé when Jesus Christ enables us to conquer our natural tendency to anger and bitterness [and unforgiveness] and to achieve this invincible goodwill toward all men"... The last thing agapé means is that we [do not] allow people to do absolutely as they like... No one would say that a parent really loves his child if he lets the child do as he likes. If we regard a person with invincible goodwill, it will often mean that we must punish him, that we must restrain him, that we must discipline him, that we must protect him against himself. But it also means we do not punish him to

satisfy our desire for revenge, but in order to make him a better man... All Christian discipline and punishment must be aimed, not merely at vengeance, but at cure... never merely retributive; but always remedial.”

Agapé always seeks the good of the other person — even if that person is seeking to hurt or injure us — something that does NOT come naturally!

Which means that in order to show agapé we must often struggle and go through an intense internal fight just to get ourselves to do it. We must battle our natural desire for revenge that innately seeks to hurt those who hurt us, or worse yet, destroy those who have hurt us. It is something we must mentally determine to do and volitionally force ourselves do, often making ourselves to do the exact opposite of what we “feel” like doing! No one ever “feels” like loving their enemy. Yet that is what God did with us, and that is what He in turn now calls us to do to our enemies.

And again, WHY are we to do such a difficult and seemingly absurd thing? Jesus told us — “So that we may be sons of our Father in heaven.” “Hebrew is not rich in adjectives, ” says Barclay, “and for that reason Hebrew often uses (the term) “son of...” with an abstract noun, where we would use an adjective. For instance, a son of peace is a peaceful man; a son of consolation is a consoling man, and a son of God is a godlike man.”

Thus, when Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven,” what He means is: “Love and pray for them that you may be Father-like children — children that bear the likeness of the One who by creation Fathered you, and by grace Redeemed you.

Children who are thereby “perfect,” Jesus says, using the Greek word “*telios*” — a word that means to fulfill the end, the aim, the goal, or the purpose for which we were all created – that is, to be in miniature what God is in infinite measure, and thereby reflect to the on-looking world the divine image we were originally created to bear.

When we show love to both friend and foe we become more god-like. Because God, says Jesus, makes His sun to shine on both good people and evil people

/ righteous people and unrighteous people / godly people and wicked people  
(which includes all of us at one time or another).

And because **HE** does, He expects that **WE** as His children will do the same — loving not only good people, but evil people / not only godly people, but wicked people / not only family and friends, but even our enemies (or as is sometimes the case, family or friends who can sometimes seem like enemies)! We are commanded to love them all.

In fact, in Romans 5:10 Paul gives us the other reason why we should love our enemies when he tells us: “When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him by the death of His Son.”

You see, because we all at one point resisted God’s will, and shunned His Lordship, and rebelled against His Law, and willingly embraced sin in open rebellion against Him, we set ourselves up as His enemies—enemies of His divine right to rule over us.

Yet despite our rebelliousness, and sedition, and willful opposition to God’s rightful Lordship over our lives, He responded by loving us, offering us amnesty, and reconciling us to Himself — taking defiant rebels like us into His family, and making us His beloved children — adopting His “enemies” into His family and making them heirs to all that is His!

“To love those who love you is human,” said Augustine, “to hate those who love you is demonic; but to love those who hate you is divine.” It is to reflect the character of God and the fact that we are sons and daughters of our Father in heaven. And that is precisely what Job did.

Then **SECONDLY** Job not only tells us he sought to love his enemies, he tells us he

had compassion on both his “household” (his family members and all his servants) and absolute strangers. Never did any one of his family, or servants, go hungry for he made it his responsibility to see to it that they had enough to eat. And never did he see a stranger in the street, or a traveler coming through town, without opening his door to them and welcoming them in for the night.

It's a verse that bears a resemblance to the admonition we find in the New Testament Book of Hebrews, where the author states in his "concluding exhortations to the church": "Keep on loving each other as brothers, and do not forget to entertain strangers (or 'show hospitality') to strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels unaware (or without knowing it)."

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Every time I've read that verse in the last 6 years that it has stood to rebuke me, and remind me of a time when I failed miserably at carrying out, or living out this aspect of biblical godliness.

It was a typical night in Honduras — the quiet of the night broken at about 3am by the sudden noise of our dogs barking — yet this time, unlike others, they were agitated and didn't stop.

So out of curiosity Nancy went to the door, and looked out on the porch, only to see two feet sticking up out of our hammock! "There's someone sleeping in our hammock!" she said. And in a groggy voice I replied, "Right" — only to discover she was!

So we went out and woke up our guard, who then walked across the field to our next door neighbors house (who just happened to be the mother of the President of Honduras) and got her guard and brought him over to our house because he (unlike our guard) had a 9mm semi-automatic revolver!

When he got there he walked over to the hammock, stood at the end by the man's feet, took his 9mm revolver, pointed it at directly the sleeping man's head, and then told him to wake up!

Looking at the man, and then at me, the guard said: "Do you know him?" "Yes," said the man. To which I responded, "I've never seen him before in my life." So we got him up, walked him to the street with the pistol in his back, opened the iron gate and had him step outside. And after closing the gate I said to him in Spanish "If you ever come back I'll have the police arrest you."

And with a look of sadness mixed with dismay (as if to say "What did I do wrong?") he looked into my eyes, and in perfect English he said: "But I thought you were Jesus," and he turned away and walked down the street in silence.

There are few times I have ever been so convicted. And as I walked back into my house, this verse kept haunting me: “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for in doing so some have entertained angels unaware.”

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You see, unlike Job I could never stand before God and say: “No stranger or traveler ever had to sleep in the streets, for I opened my door to them and invited them into the shelter of my house.”

On that occasion I flunked the “godliness” test miserably. Had that man actually been an angel sent by God, what could he report? “Pastor Jeff Evans, Calle Pincipal, Km. Ocho y media, El Hatillo, Tegucigalpa, Honduras — Was sent to his house as a stranger or wayfarer to see if he’d invite me in and give me shelter — but all he did was have someone point a gun at my head, usher me out of his yard with it sticking in my back, put me out in the street, and threaten to have me arrested if I ever came back.”

But that’s not all. The worst part of the story is this: Three years later I did see him again. He was building a house right across the street from ours!

He was the eldest son of our neighbor! I flunked the “love your neighbor” command too!!! [Which is why I constantly say thank God for Jesus (!) and the forgiveness we have in Him. Thank God that His righteousness and godliness “covers” my unrighteousness and ungodliness (or my un-god-like-ness)!]

Making sure that all have enough to eat, and that all (even the stranger and wayfarer) are sheltered from the elements (even if it means opening up our houses to them) is an integral part of what Jesus expects us as His people to do. It’s an integral part of godliness, or godlikeness.

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Then **LAST**, Job dispels the myth I’ve sometimes heard suggested — that he somehow thought he was perfect or sinless, by telling us, “I have been open and honest about sharing my sins — sins that other men hide for fear of what the crowd may think of them, or do to them, if they were honest enough to confess instead of hide them.

It's sad, isn't it? Confession of our sins to others is a biblical mandate. It brings healing. It takes an enormous weight off the soul, yet we are afraid to do it because other Christians may shun us, or reject us or think less of us if we do what the Bible commands!

In his book *Life Together*, Deitrich Bonhoeffer (the Christian Pastor who was martyred by the Nazi's just one month before WWII ended) said this:

“In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of the person....Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God, and finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power... He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Now he can be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him to find true fellowship with the brethren of Jesus Christ.”

But don't get the wrong idea: Despite the spiritual advantages of being open and transparent about confessing our sin, it's a SCARY thing to do! And Job tells us why: It's the fear of what others may do when they discover we are not always what we appear to be in public.

There is often a big difference between the public us, the private us, and the secret us — the us we are at church, vs. the us we are at home, vs. the us we are in our heart of hearts and secret thoughts.

Yet our goal is to be a people of integrity — that’s what Job is talking about. It’s part of what it means to be godly. And a person of integrity is to a large degree little more than a “fully integrated person” — that’s where the word comes from — from the Latin “*integritas*” meaning “whole” or “entire.”

And the way we become people of “integrity” is by striving to be in public what we are in private and even moreso what we are in secret. That’s what “transparency” is — letting people see the real us. Not using the body as a veil to hide the secret intents and motivations of the heart, but using the body (parts like the tongue) to expose it and bring it into the light!

It starts by being honest with God, and confessing our sins to Him. And it grows as we become more honest with others and confess our sins to them as well.

As James 5:16 tells us: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

It couldn’t be any clearer: There is healing in confessing our sins to one another — in being open and honest and transparent about our sins and struggles and temptations.

Bonhoeffer is right — unconfessed sin poisons the whole being of the person, while expressed, acknowledged sin loses all its power. Just as exposing bacteria to heat of direct sunlight often dries it up and kills it, so bringing our sins into the light through confession to another, helps diminish its power and increase our love for God as we experience what it means to be a sinner and yet still enjoy the grace and acceptance of God.