

Mark Twain once quipped, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand." That feels like a pretty good word for us because this text, through which I'm about to preach, is one of the most famous sections on the Sermon on the Mount. It's not too difficult to unpack, as there isn't a whole lot of "unknown."

The past two or three weeks, we've been in some thick areas of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is unpacking things like anger, desire, relationships, and commitment. It requires a heavy dose of nuance to understand Jesus' cultural understanding and bridging it into our own. How do we bring these together, all under this idea that Jesus announced that the kingdom of God is here; therefore, everything looks different. Therefore, everything about how we understand our life in this world needs to be reordered under that reality.

Now we're asking these questions around some topics that strike to the core of the human heart. It's essentially us asking what we do with hatred in our hearts? What do we do with evil? How do we interact with evil ones and evil people, and evil itself?

In many respects, today's text has been what the whole front part of the Sermon on the Mount has been pointing towards. It arrives at this epic center in which Jesus places his most radical call before all of us to love our enemy. This invitation will have something for all of us to dive into, to begin to understand and see how it is that we come to this text. The reality is we live in a hostile world that is often more organized, not by our common shared view of the good, but rather the common shared enemy that we hold in our ingroup or against the outgroup.

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. Matthew 5:38-39

This opening part is like the framework we've seen Jesus play out every week for the past few weeks. "You've heard it said," going back to an Old Testament text or an understanding of that, "But I tell you," which is his way of saying that he is going to provide the definitive interpretation of what that old text meant.

When he says you've heard that it was said, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, my guess is that this sounds familiar to you. There's a principle in this idea of the eye for the eye and the tooth for the tooth that Jesus is quoting from multiple places in the Old Testament, so we don't quite know which passage he's drawing from. He could be drawing from Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, or Deuteronomy 19:21. I want to look at each one of those because it helps to get a full picture of what Jesus had in mind when he said, "eye for eye and tooth for tooth."

"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise" (Exodus 21:23-24). This is the very baseline; it's a principle that carries into our legal system even today. It's what we would talk through with the idea of a commiserate punishment, something that is comparable to the crime that was committed. It's otherwise known in the Latin phrase, *lex talionis*, which is translated as the law of retribution. If you punch someone, they can punch you back. Even in our legal system now, the punishment must fit the crime. It's the bedrock of how you navigate conflict.

Leviticus 24 creates a broader picture and more of a theoretical expression of this same concept. *"Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury" (Leviticus 24:19-20).* And the last one, *"Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:21).*

One of the things we have to understand is that when we hear this in our modern context, we think of it as brutal and black and white. But behind it is this principle of retribution, and it communicates two things that are important. First, that justice does require retribution. Action should be taken when something evil has been done. We all feel that. We love the idea of retribution when justice is served.

What we often forget, or what we don't quite see, is that the principle of retribution was meant to keep retribution at bay or keep revenge and violence in check. You watch this with kids all the time, but you've probably seen it in your own life. What is your natural reaction when someone does something to you? It isn't just that you want to do the same thing to them. It's usually escalating it a step higher. When somebody punched you as a kid, typically the response was to shove them, and violence escalates because what happens then? That kid who's now on the ground is going to whale on you for pushing them.

The Old Testament principle is to try to maintain a level of civility to say, don't let this cycle of violence just perpetuate into a much greater escalation, but rather this law, and this principle of retribution was trying to hold together the principle that punishment must be had, but at the same time, tame it. So Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." What Jesus does next is different than the previous four instances of "You've heard it said." In each one of those, Jesus has taken the Old Testament law and pushed a layer deeper.

"You've heard it said, do not murder." Good thing. But he pushes deeper and says, "I tell you not to be angry." Do you see how it's like leveling up of that commandment? It's getting under the root. Here, Jesus doesn't necessarily go a layer deeper. You can make the argument that he sets

that principle aside. He says, "You've heard it said an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person." He seems to dismiss the concept of eye for eye, tooth for tooth. This is a change in what was said. So we should ask why? Why does Jesus seem to set aside this command? Why this command amongst all the others?

Well, Jesus understands something about the nature of the human heart that says a response to violence with violence can do nothing. At the absolute best, violence can only keep violence in check. It cannot uproot it. Gandhi is famously credited with saying, "An eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind." And Gandhi while not a follower of Jesus, was deeply moved by the Sermon on the Mount. Most of his nonviolent resistance was based on it. He was so moved by the words and teachings of Jesus that it caused this whole nonviolent revolution in his mind.

Jesus understands something about the heart of violence, that the problem of violence can only be kept in check, it cannot root out the problem of violence. As a general rule, violence begets more violence. It feeds on its own energy. Just think of the litany of examples that I just gave. History is a tale of violence after violence in which one attack causes another, causes another, causes another. This is what ethicists and theologians have called the myth of redemptive violence. The myth of redemptive violence communicates or perpetuates the story that the best way to fight violence is with more violence.

It was interesting trying to think through examples of this. You can basically watch any movie ever, and at some level, there's a sense, like in the superhero realm, in which violence is the stronger person subduing the evil through violence. There's probably a place at some point for that, but Jesus is trying to get to the heart of it and say that the reality of the kingdom of God means we live in a different way. A different principle. You could call this an ethic from beyond. It's a future reality that Jesus is inviting his followers to bring right here into the present.

But our world tends to operate on this myth of redemptive violence. So what do we do? Let's look at Matthew 5:39, because Jesus says something that seems quite odd to us, and it requires us to unpack it. He says, "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person." This is a very slippery phrase to translate from Greek to English. The word "to resist" in the Greek, seems, at face value, to mean that Jesus is saying to be a doormat. Just get bulldozed over. Don't resist the evil that's in the world.

There are two problems with that. Jesus will go on to give four examples of how to resist evil, which we'll unpack here in a second. But also, if you're at all familiar with the life of Jesus, you'll know that he was constantly resisting evil, pushing back against the evil systems of his day.

So does it mean, don't resist in the sense of just take your hands off the wheel and let it happen? Clarence Jordan, a New Testament scholar, makes a prescient point. He wrote that this word for resisting evil can either mean the evil person, so do not resist the evil person, which is how it's translated here, or it can mean do not resist by evil means, which seems important; both are valid translations of this text. When you are confronted with that, you have to look into the context and say what of the context of this text would seem to dictate which translation we should go with?

I believe the latter is better, to not resist by evil means, because what we're just about to see is that Jesus is going to offer four creative solutions to resist evil in a way that doesn't descend into the spiral or myth of redemptive violence and pushes back against that violence that's being perpetrated towards the other. What Jesus is getting at is not to retaliate or resist violently or take revenge fully by evil means.

Let's unpack a little more why this is a good translation, because as this text is unpacked and the teachings of Jesus are understood from those early Christians, what you find is a fuller expression of this phrase. Let's go to the Apostle Paul in Romans 12. You'll hear echoes of Jesus' teaching here in Matthew 5.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:17-21

I don't have time to unpack the heaping coals thing, but it's not the violence you're thinking of. That is not what's happening there. It's an idiom that has to do with essentially killing them with kindness. Love them so much in a way that it exposes their own shame and their own violent heart.

It's a much different perspective, but notice Paul's posture here. When evil happens, do not repay evil in kind. Rather, as he says, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. There's something in the life of Paul that causes him, when unpacking these teachings from Jesus, to say we're not to respond in kind. We are not to descend into the cycle of violence.

Paul says, "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else" (1 Thes. 5:15). One more brilliant theologian, Mama Sned, used to say that two wrongs do not make a right. I heard that a lot as a kid. What are we to do in the face of evil if it seems like we're not to respond in kind, that we're not supposed to perpetuate the evil that has been perpetuated against us?

I don't believe Jesus is providing us with an impossible ideal to not resist evil. The call is to resist the evil that we find in the world. Instead, I believe we're being taught to name and resist sinful patterns of retaliation that tend to pull us into that myth of redemptive violence. Jesus doesn't call us to passive surrender, but to break the cycles of evil and violence through creative nonviolent action. Resisting evil without becoming evil ourselves is the invitation of Jesus here.

How do we go about this? What I love about the Sermon on the Mount is that Jesus will often lay these heavy things like this in front of us, but he will not leave us without some practical steps to accomplish those things. So here's where we see the utter brilliance of Jesus as a teacher.

He will now detail four different ways that we can go about nonviolent engagement to resist the evil in front of us.

This is what Walter Wink, a New Testament scholar, calls Jesus' third way of nonviolent engagement. Wink roots all of this in the human response of fight or flight. He says that those are the first two ways when faced with brokenness, you can flee or you can fight and engage in that, which Jesus says aren't necessarily the proper reactions. Rather, Jesus offers a creative third way of nonviolent engagement.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Matthew 5:38-42

Turn The Other Cheek

He says the first one is if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. Now, here's where we have to do some of that cultural work to understand exactly what's happening in the first century and unpack a few things here. Jesus says if someone were to slap you on the right cheek. Jesus very specifically says the right cheek. The ancient world was very much a dominant right-handed world. So the left hand was usually used for impure things. The assumption is that the slap is going to come from the aggressor's right hand. I cannot slap him on the right cheek with my right hand with an open palm; that seems odd. It has to be a backhanded slap across the face.

Here's where Jesus gets brilliant: if you backhand slap them on the right cheek, we're dealing not with a one-to-one fist fight. We're dealing with a superior to an inferior. This is the dehumanizing action of a master to a slave, a backhanded slap of the other, outside the realm of seeing one as equals. So now let's play out Jesus' teaching more. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek. At this point, the person has two options. They can either slap them with the left hand, making the slapper impure, or one has to come back and punch them with a fist, which is then to name the other person as an equal.

In that moment, by turning the other cheek, it isn't just for the person being slapped to accept it, but rather the person slapped is reclaiming their dignity. Taking control over the situation and equally out the power imbalance. Now the slapper is left wondering what to do. Do you see the difference in Jesus? This action is not just flight, and you just run away. It's not fighting and descending into the cycle of violence, but Jesus is saying to think of a creative nonviolent solution in which you can turn the tables, where now the aggressor is put back on their heels, trying to figure out what to do. They either demand and claim that he's an equal, or they descend into an impure act.

Hand Over Your Coat

In the second scene, transport yourself into a courtroom. In the ancient world, a typical garment would've been one of an undergarments and

an outer garment because in the ancient Near East, the garments were more like a robe. So everyone would have an inner garment that would go all the way to the floor, and they likely wouldn't wear anything else underneath that. That was their inner garment. Everyone would also then have an outer garment, which is that heavier robe that would function most importantly as a coat; they would use it overnight as a sleeping bag or blanket.

So the imagery here is that you're inside a courtroom and someone is trying to sue you, most likely because they're arguing over a debt that wasn't paid, which is why it's for the shirt. It was only the poorest of the poor who would literally have only a shirt to give to the other person. So it's likely now you have someone of means who is trying to sue someone without means. They are literally trying to take the shirt off their back. You could just hand it over and walk away and hope that it was enough, and that that person would rescind. You could fight it. You could try to somehow figure out a way to get a lawyer and battle it out in court to see if you can take them down, but that seems futile given the poor person's socioeconomic standing.

What is the creative third way? Jesus says to give them the undergarment, which leaves them with nothing but the outer garment. And then he says, Give them the outer garment as well. Here's where Jesus is being funny. He's saying right there in the middle of the courtroom, just strip completely naked. Hand them everything you own.

Now that person could just take it and walk away. That's very much a valid option. Or in that moment, all of a sudden, the futility of his actions, the greed of his actions are on display for all to see, because you are exposed to this person. You're telling the person that they can take everything, and it tips the scales. Where someone is now holding onto this, not to mention, to look at a naked person in an honor-shame society, it is a shameful act. He's putting that person a little bit on their heels, saying, How do I handle it now? I didn't expect that action. It's a creative way in which the follower of Jesus can confront evil without continuing the cycle of violence.

Go The Extra Mile

Jesus says, If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. This would've brought to mind, in the ancient world, the Roman military. There were laws about this in which a Roman official could force anyone at any time to carry their load, whatever it was, for one mile, but nothing more. Remember when Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross? That's this law in action. When the Roman who was going to carry the cross didn't want to carry it anymore, he called Simon out and had him carry the cross. This was the law.

Now imagine you're a first-century Jew living under Roman occupation, and at any time this dehumanizing act could happen where an official could come up and tell you that it's your turn to carry their pack. So you would have to carry the pack.

You could do two things: you could choose flight and just take it up, acquiesce, just let it happen. But most likely, what's going on inside your heart is what Jesus spoke about a few weeks ago: anger, bitterness, and

vitriol. You could fight, you could try to take them down, or you could join some of the rebel movements and try to take down some of these Roman officials by killing them. That was an option.

Jesus would suggest a third way. You take the pack, you walk that mile. But then Jesus says, to go the second mile. When you get to the mile mark, everyone who knows this law is expecting the Jew to pull the pack off and set it down, with the Roman official taking it back up. But what happens when you just keep walking? Take it the second mile. Now the soldiers like, "Wait a minute, what are you doing? It's illegal for you to carry it more than a mile. Are you making me break the law? Do you think I'm not strong enough?" It shifts the power imbalance in which the oppressor is now put on tilt. It's a creative, nonviolent solution in which you can resist evil without becoming the evil that's perpetrated against you.

Do Not Turn Away

One more example is to give to the one who asks and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Jesus shifts from the first three examples. They were from the oppressed perspective. Now, it's if you are the oppressor and someone's asking you for something, you have two options. You could give them whatever they want, not worrying if it's in their best interest or yours. Just take whatever it is. You could fight, you could give it to them, but then charge a high interest, demand payment back, and refuse to give the gift. Maybe you evict them or whatever it is. You could also do that to the person in need.

Or is there a third way? Jesus says give, but he has that little line that says, "Do not turn away from the one that asks." That's relational language. What Jesus is saying is to give out of relationship. Refuse to look down on the other as less than, refuse to turn away from them. Give from that posture in which you've now gained a friend. One should give out of this perspective. This breaks the cycle of imbalance and violence.

Jesus' call isn't for us to just pull back and not respond to evil, but it's to get creative. To try to figure out ways you can take back your dignity while not contributing to the descending myth of redemptive violence. Find creative solutions. These examples are not necessarily meant to be taken literally in our day, meaning it is restricted only to when someone slaps you on the right cheek. In many ways, Jesus is furnishing our moral imagination to say, think creatively when you are confronted with these things. It's what Glen Stassen, a professor out of Fuller Seminary, calls it "waging peace." And Walter Wink wrote,

[Jesus'] teaching on nonviolence forms the charter for a way of being in the world that breaks the spiral of violence. Jesus here reveals a way to fight evil with all our power without being transformed into the very evil we fight. It is a way—the only way possible of not becoming what we hate. 'Do not counter evil in kind'—this insight is the distilled essence, stated with sublime simplicity... Jesus, in short, abhors both passivity and violence. He articulates a way by which evil can be opposed without being mirrored, the oppressor resisted

without being emulated, and the enemy neutralized without being destroyed. Wink

Here is usually the moment in which you're tempted to think, but this just isn't practical. Could it happen? I would point to the life and work of Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, and Caesar Chavez, just to name a few who have changed the world as we know it. Many of them based their life's work out of the Sermon on the Mount and the ability to see behind that. New Testament scholar Scott McKnight says in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount and pacifism:

Pacifism isn't quietism or withdrawal or inactivity, and it isn't simple submission. Pacifism's roots are connected to the peacemaking beatitude, rooted in love, and expressed when the follower of Jesus actively seeks peace. Pacifism isn't a lack of interest or noninvolvement, but the hard work of seeking peace. Pacifism is nonviolent resistance, not non-resistance. What Jesus teaches his followers to do illustrates the sort of pacifism he advocates: turn the other cheek, surrender even more clothing, go the extra mile, lend and do not charge interest, or require a payment back. Hardly the stuff of the inactive. McKnight

We tend to think in polarities in conversations around the topic of violence and nonviolence, where we think there's either pure violence or pure nonviolence. But Jesus is trying to furnish our imagination to say it's not action or non-action. It's action rooted from a different world, which is what Jesus is saying. The kingdom of God is here. Live into that reality.

Now tons of questions surface at this time. I get it. What about self-defense? What about someone invading my house? What about the death penalty? Do these teachings speak only to the individual? Do they speak to national defense policy? Do these just perpetuate abuse through passivity? What about the brief violence? What if brief violence prevents significant violence? Is there a difference between force and violence?

All incredible questions that are far more than I can answer in this moment and are worthy of much longer conversations. Because there are all sorts of nuances in how we understand this. I want to offer that, just like last week when we were teaching about divorce, if you're coming to this teaching, looking for the ways in which you can inflict violence, you're missing the point. The point is to say the goal is always where Jesus goes next. Love of our enemies. Which is why he immediately follows it up with that teaching. Immediately after the creative nonviolent solutions, he states, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy' (Matthew 5:43).*

This is where it has been moving towards. It's the North Star in which everything's finding its footing. We hear that familiar paradigm. You folks have heard it before. I don't need to make any argument on that. It is Christianity 101. Love your neighbor. Of course, Jesus at one point was asked, What's the greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and what? Love your

neighbor as yourself. But then he says this interesting phrase, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

Jesus is not pulling this from any scripture reference. Nowhere in the Old Testament has it been commanded to hate your enemy. Likely what's happening is that this phrase for the Jews under the oppression of the Roman Empire in the first century had generated a cultural statement that would've been, "Yes, love your neighbors, but let's hate those Romans," which, with the history in the first century, is understandable. What they were experiencing was a deep hatred towards them. So the natural human response is to love my neighbor, but hate my enemy, my oppressor. When Jesus said that, there was something there in which he was speaking directly to that context.

To us, we're very comfortable with loving our neighbor. But we oversize our enemy. I'd caution you from trying to think that you don't have enemies. Give it a moment. Who do you despise? Who just causes your body to respond? What hits your nervous system when you hear about those people? Because if you push further, we all do have some of those in our lives.

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children 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. Matthew 5:44-45

Did you notice the subtle shift? Jesus says that you've heard it said to hate your enemy singular. But then he says that we are to love our enemies plural. There's a temptation to want to reduce this either to the one personal enemy or the more ethereal, big social enemies that are out there. You think that he means that it has to be just a personalized thing, or the opposite is true. You think we have to hate the enemy over there, but at the same time, like you've got a train wreck of relationships behind you, and you despise your neighbor, and when he said to love your enemy, it's them over there. I'll love those enemies. I just won't love that one close to me.

Jesus' invitation is to see the enemy as the singular enemy, but also the plural enemies. But I say to you, love your enemies. The Greek word here for enemy is really instructive. It means enemy and foe when made plural, obviously enemies. But one lexicon describes this word to have a little bit of an edge on it. He says, an enemy is properly an enemy, someone openly hostile. Animated by deep-seated hatred implies irreconcilable hostility, proceeding out of a personal hatred bent on inflicting harm.

Consider that definition. Who comes to mind? Jesus says, You've heard that it was said. Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies. Love those who have a personal hatred bent against you and desire to inflict harm on you. Love those who are openly hostile to you. Love those who have a deep-seated hatred in irreconcilable hostility against you.

It's hard to get a more radical call to love, than what we see in this text. Jesus said that to love that person is to move with the flow of the kingdom of God. For Jesus, the gap between neighbor and enemy is

non-existent. His command to love covers all of it, every last part of it, which is interesting because then, in that framework, you realize that the enemy is not a category that's afforded to the Christian. Because if I'm called to love them, the goal is always to take that enemy and move them towards neighbor or friend. What does that mean? I don't know, but I know that's the vision in which Jesus is pushing us and moving us toward.

This word love, what does it mean to love? Does it mean to feel good feelings about a person? Does it mean to tolerate the other? Those are both ways our modern world would like to describe it. I'll just point out that the word here is *agape*, which is the love that God espouses towards us. Ultimately, anytime we love our enemies, we're just mirroring the very love that he's given to us. We were once enemies, and yet God loved us. Think of Romans 5:8. "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" When we take on this *agape* type of love, we are made to receive that love and then reflect it out into the world.

Jesus doesn't leave us without practicality. One of the simple ways to love is to pray for those who persecute you. It's really hard to hate people when you're praying for the blessing of God on their lives. To love someone is to will the good of the other. It is to desire good for them.

Sometimes that might mean hard things. It doesn't just mean that it's always good and whatnot. Sometimes, to will the good of the other is to confront them in their brokenness and in their sin. This may mean you have to go to them and say that what they are doing is wrong, but not lose connection. It means I can name that which is evil and wrong in the other. I can desire for them to be healed. But the call is also not to just fully remove them. What would love require of you to walk with that person?

Jesus says, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven*" (vv. 44b-45). That's Jesus saying that you are never more like God than when you love your enemies, because every one of us has experienced that love.

Jesus then digs it in a little bit more. "*If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?*" (Matthew 5:46). The tax collectors worked for Rome, and some were Jews who had sold out and started working for the Empire. They were seen as traitors who decided to work for the one who was oppressing them. And he says that even the tax collectors love those who love them. We all do that and continue to do that, he's not saying don't do that, but he's saying how would that love be different? He is saying that if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? The tax collectors are doing that.

"*And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*" (Matthew 5:47). Jesus is inviting us to a different reality, a different way to understand the world. Jesus was asked, What's the greatest commandment? What's the measure of maturity of love? Or what's the litmus test for what it means to follow Jesus?

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-40

world around us? That's the invitation. Who are your enemies? Who is it that comes to mind that God is inviting you to love a little bit more? What can you do to turn them into neighbors? Because the call is to diminish the gap between enemy and neighbor.

That's why we arrive at verse 48. *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (v. 48). At first glance, this can be overwhelming. The word perfect there is where we get the Greek word, *telos*. I talk a lot about that concept. If you're a philosophy student, you might be familiar with the word teleology, which is like the end goal of a thing.

Last week, I talked about the watch example. The *telos* of a watch is to tell time accurately. Perfect's a good translation, but it's lost because we import a modern understanding that sees perfect as without flaw, which, hear me clearly, God is without flaw. So I'm not saying he's not. But when we read something like that, a better translation would be mature, as our heavenly Father is mature.

We will never arrive at that perfection, but the invitation is to move in the direction of godliness. Meaning if God is love, which is what his disciple John would say later in the New Testament, then the goal has always been to become a person who reflects that love out into the world. You are never more like God than when you are loving your enemies. That's the invitation. To be mature is to move in that direction. God is without flaw, but that isn't necessarily the invitation here because we will fall short of that. However, Jesus has made provisions for that as well.

Love is the great litmus test of what it means to be mature into the life of the kingdom of God. The reality is that we all were once enemies of God. This whole thing has been pointing towards what Jesus has done on your behalf. We are to love as God has loved us. This will raise all sorts of questions.

My hope this week, as I've been writing this Sermon, has been for you to leave with more questions than when you arrived. This topic of violence and love, we have domesticated and made it too simple. My hope this morning is to complexify it. There are times where my role as a pastor is to make being a Christian hard, and this is one of those teachings. This is hard. This has implications for you this week. It has implications for how we think about the world. It has implications far beyond what we can understand. I don't have all the answers. I don't know. But I do know that the goal that Jesus is calling us all to is to become a person of self-giving sacrificial love, because that's at the very core of the character of God himself.

That's the invitation. What would it look like for a church like us to be a people who learn this love and become a beacon of that love to the

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