

Have Enemies. Love Them.

Why an enemy-free Christian life is a fool's game, and how to love anyway

SPEAKER Matt Ryniker

DATE Sunday, October 2, 2022

PASSAGES Luke 6:20-31; Matthew 10:24-25; John 15:18-21; James 4:1-4; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Galatians 5:16-24; Ephesians 6:10-12

MESSAGE Begins at 1:07:10 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

People hear “love your enemies” and mishear it as “have no enemies.” But Jesus expected his followers to be hated, because there is open war between Christ and the kingdom of darkness. Our task is to love the people caught in that darkness on God’s terms — with good boundaries, no partnership with evil, and no fear of man.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ An enemy-free life is impossible. Whatever way you live, someone will dislike it; the wise thing is to choose which enemies, and for what reasons.
- ◆ Jesus links being spoken well of by everyone with false prophets. Being hated for his name is not proof of failure; it may be the opposite.
- ◆ The people who hate you are not really your enemy. The spirits animating them are, and the war began long before you were born.
- ◆ Love is patient and kind, but it does not mean always agreeing, affirming or avoiding conflict. You are responsible for your behaviour, not for other people’s response to Christ.
- ◆ Have good boundaries, practise a godly indifference to praise and criticism, and don’t go halfway to please the world.
- ◆ The root issue is the fear of man, and the answer is repentance.

► 1:07:10

Earlier in worship John Patrick had shared that God told him he had ignored a gift of prophecy for five years, held back by a spirit of fear. Matt responded that one way to fight fear on behalf of a group is to lead out boldly, and invited anyone ready to stop ignoring God's gifts to come forward, while John Patrick prayed for boldness.

Fear, sin and boldness

► 1:13:32

The message fits that moment. Its title is its idea: we should have enemies, and we should love them. What hinders us from accepting that is fear.

► 1:14:07

We fear being mocked or getting it wrong, but there is a harder reason too: when we are entangled in sin, we are most likely to be afraid. In [Revelation 21:8](#) the first item in the list of sins is cowardice. “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” One way to grow in boldness is to wage war on the sins that entangle us.

► 1:15:26

But Isaiah lists “the pointing of the finger” among the things to put away ([Isaiah 58:9](#)). “When I talk about fighting sin, I don’t mean them. I mean us — and when I say us, I want you to hear you, and when I say it, I’m thinking me.”

A fool’s game

► 1:16:34

As a youth pastor, Matt ran a thought experiment: choose which kinds of people you are most okay with hating you. Every way of living, including a bland middle — “Jesus’ least favourite anyway” — draws someone’s dislike. Thinking we can live enemyless “is a fool’s game.”

What Jesus expected

► 1:17:43

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets... Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

LUKE 6:20-31 ↗

► 1:19:00

Jesus links everyone speaking well of you with false prophecy. The false prophets wanted to be liked — “that desire is in me too, so I need to watch this.” Universal approval is not even desirable.

► 1:19:34

Then: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” See how confident Jesus is that some people *will* hate, curse and abuse us. Why? “A disciple is not above his teacher... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” ([Matthew 10:24-25](#)). Jesus was demonised; if we represent him well, we should expect the same.

► 1:20:47

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

JOHN 15:18-21 ↗

► 1:22:03

“There is open warfare between Christ and the kingdoms of darkness. You didn’t start it, and there’s no avoiding it.” The people who hate you are not really your enemy; often they are victims of the darkness. And that darkness is not only out there. [James 4](#), written to believers, traces our quarrels to passions at war within us — and then says, “friendship with the world is enmity with God.” There is no “none of the above.”

► 1:23:48

American evangelicals need to make peace with this. The church has adopted “this customer service representative attitude about people who don’t like Jesus,” and Matt’s concern is that it crushes people who feel responsible for others’ problems with Jesus.

What love is, and isn't

► 1:25:32

We cannot love our enemies if we don't know what love is. 1 Corinthians 13 says love is patient and kind, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on its own way. But read closely: it does not say love always affirms, always agrees, or avoids conflict. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18) — because you cannot control other people. You are responsible for your behaviour, not for others' responses to Christ — "an insane emotional burden to bear, and not possible."

► 1:26:52

Kindness does not mean agreement; "we can walk and chew gum." Conflict is not proof of unkindness — Jesus was kind and bothered a lot of people. Patience does not mean silence. We do not insist on our own way, but we do insist on Christ's.

► 1:28:10

Loving our enemies means wanting what is best for them. It is not the same as loving "the world." John's warning not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17) is not about nationalities or people groups but about the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life.

► 1:29:17

The war already has a Victor, though God does not always make it obvious. When the veil is lifted, loyalty will be easy. "It's a gift to be in the midst of a world that is often dark and hateful towards Christ, because we can show loyalty then, and that is a great offering of worship."

The battleground is within

► 1:30:59

Because the war is about Christ and darkness, not about us, our primary focus is within — as individuals and as a church. Paul clarifies that he never meant to avoid the immoral of this world, "since then you would need to go out of the world," but not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother and lives that way. "What have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?" (1 Corinthians 5:9–13).

► 1:32:38

In Paul's mind, worldly Christianity is a far bigger problem than the news. So Matt finds wishy-washy Christian messaging intolerable: "We do more damage against the body of Christ by speaking about

Jesus falsely than Sam Harris ever could,” and progressive theology, in his opinion, does more damage than Richard Dawkins.

► 1:34:07

Sexual ethics matter because “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:18–20) — the antithesis of a culture that says to exalt yourself at anyone’s expense.

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

GALATIANS 5:16–24 ↗

► 1:35:51

Pure religion is to visit orphans and widows in their affliction “and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). Different branches of the church fixate on one half or the other; we want both.

Suggestions for the church in America

► 1:37:10

Speaking as “a millennial who grew up in these United States,” Matt thinks the average evangelical is easy to manipulate emotionally: our emphasis on evangelism combined with “nicing people into the kingdom” means any time someone is upset, we assume we did it wrong.

► 1:38:18

He sketched the fantasy: Stuart, smelling like Chick-fil-A, is so pleasant his boss asks what is different about him. The deleted scene is who Jesus actually is. “Jesus loves you just the way you are.” “Yeah, I love me just the way I am too.” Then you are out of tools. “Abandon this project of nicing someone into the kingdom — for your own sake.”

► 1:39:27

One: have better boundaries. Someone being upset with you is not mission-critical or even a failure. You cannot preach the gospel to a self-exalting culture without pricking it. People with no boundaries will weaponise a relationship — cutting you off because you “think wrong” about abortion — and blame you. That is “weaponised unity”: unity as the stated goal, coercion as the real one. “There is only one unity, and it’s in the one broken body of Christ our Lord.”

► 1:42:09

Paul refused the Judaizers as allies, though his small movement could have used them: “purity of message is way more important than alliance.”

► 1:42:38

Two: a godly indifference to praise and criticism. Not harshness for its own sake, but recognising that our behaviour is evaluated by Jesus Christ, not random people on the internet. Matt’s own resolve: “However people feel about it, I’m going to keep preaching the Scriptures.”

► 1:43:45

Three: don’t go halfway to please the world. They will not like you anyway, and you will have degraded yourself — lose-lose. He quoted J. Gresham Machen: “I see with greater and greater clearness that consistent Christianity is the easiest to defend.” À la carte theology is your own Frankenstein’s monster, and its flaws are your fault. Submit to the faith handed down for millennia, which everyone knows you did not write; if people hate Jesus, it is not you they hate.

► 1:45:10

Conflict is not the enemy. Matt does not mourn the loss of casual cultural Christianity. “Fake peace obfuscates what spirits are really animating our lives,” and attacks on the church expose what is in the church.

What it looks like in practice

► 1:46:13

Matt gave personal examples. At his Krav Maga gym, everyone is expected to partner with everyone for groundwork, but he does not want to wrestle women. When the owner asked why, he said, “I’m basically Amish” — which “explains so much so fast.” But the gym also has trans members, and holding his own rule means letting people judge him. The same with not entering a woman’s home when her husband is away and his wife is not with him. “My integrity is more important than someone else’s offense.” When worldviews clash, “you have to just own it and move on.”

► 1:48:35

Sometimes it happens at you, as when talk of strip clubs started in a teachers’ lounge and he felt he had to say it was “actually not cool.” Church people are easily told it is their fault if a relationship fails — and so are scared into silence.

► 1:50:05

Yet a conflict of worldviews should not require a severed relationship. Matt used to attend a mosque to grow his friendships with Muslims, praying his own way and practising his Arabic, knowing they did not share his beliefs about Christ. “I’m an emotionally healthy adult with good boundaries, and that’s the path forward.” The difference is that some ideologies do not let you simply stand apart and disagree.

► 1:51:33

How will “the poor sweet church lady” handle a worldview that comes looking for a fight if she has no theology of having enemies? It is like Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image ([Daniel 3](#)): when you hear the music, you must consent. You cannot nice someone into the kingdom in a culture that expects your worldview to change through emotional manipulation.

Repent of the fear of man

► 1:52:04

“We must repent of the fear of man.” It is not complicated; “it just grips us tightly by the throat.” No Jew, Muslim or Hindu ever told Matt they could not be his friend. This newer threat is aggressive, in part “because we let it, because we’re terrified.”

► 1:53:22

Radical activists are not his enemy; he wishes them no harm. But the spirit animating the demand for unlimited self-expression is antichrist at its core — the opposite of taking up your cross. We are limited: to mortal bodies, to the families we were born into, as male and female. Satan’s promise of self-exaltation delivers degradation and destruction — “and these people aren’t our enemies.”

► 1:56:30

“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

EPHESIANS 6:10–12 ↗

► 1:57:09

So acknowledge the war. Acknowledge the true Victor. Wonder aloud why he hides his obvious victory — and, like Matt, find part of the answer in the chance to show where your loyalties lie.

► 1:57:48

“Gentle meekness is not weakness.” Matt wants Hope to be like the Lion of Judah, who can lie down near sheep without harming them — and also a place where “a wolf in sheep’s clothing should not ever feel comfortable.” There is no worse myth for the modern church than believing evil wants to gently coexist with us. Asking someone to step back again and again as he kept closing the gap, he made the point: “The devil has bad boundaries.”

► 1:59:38

He has settled it like this: speak out against abortion, pornography or sexual immorality and be called a backward bigot, or sit quietly and be called one anyway. Satan wants to steal, kill and destroy either way, “so I might as well just retain my dignity and say what’s true.” God has never needed our help with numbers. “Is Christ not glorious enough to suffer the consequences of saying no?”

► 2:00:37

No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24): there is the self-exalting spirit of antichrist, and there is Christ. “No matter how you make your choice, I’ve made mine.” He prayed, agreeing with John Patrick: give us boldness to represent you well, rescue us from fear and confusion, and let your people shine brightly.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Revelation 21:8
- Proverbs 28:1
- Isaiah 58:9
- Luke 6:20–31
- Matthew 10:24–25
- John 15:18–21
- James 4:1–4
- 1 Corinthians 13:4–7
- Romans 12:18
- 1 John 2:15–17
- 1 Corinthians 5:9–13
- 1 Corinthians 6:18–20
- Galatians 5:16–24
- James 1:27
- Daniel 3:1–18
- Ephesians 6:10–12
- Matthew 6:24

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said many Christians hear “love your enemies” as “have no enemies.” Where have you tried to live an enemy-free Christian life, and what has it cost you?
2. Jesus says “woe to you when all people speak well of you.” How much does the desire to be liked shape your words and choices?
3. How would you describe the difference between being kind and agreeing, or between being patient and being silent?
4. What would “good boundaries” and a “godly indifference” to praise and criticism look like in one relationship you are in right now?
5. Where is the fear of man gripping you, and what would repentance look like this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGqilptXlwg&t=4030s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.