Love Your Enemies

The final test of love, and why it cannot be the core of the faith

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 11, 2026
PASSAGES	Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 12:14-21; 1 Corinthians 4:11-13; Luke 23:34-35; Acts 7:58-60; 1 Peter 3:9-12; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6; Titus 3:3-6
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:01:07 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

You cannot claim a virtue you only produce when it is easy. Run love through that grid and the test lands where Jesus said it would: on your enemies. And the instant that standard starts to crush you, you are standing exactly where the gospel does its work — because Christianity is not a program for becoming a good person, it is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A virtue is measured when it is tested. “I’m brave unless there’s danger” is not bravery, and “I love people who are nice to me” is not love.
- Jesus is not raising the standard in the Sermon on the Mount. He is explaining the standard that was always there, polishing the law he himself gave.
- “Love your enemies” does not mean trusting everyone. You can call the police; you can file a restraining order. What you cannot do is return evil for evil.
- God is the example, not an exception: he sends sun and rain on the evil and the good alike.
- Kindness is for difficult situations. Patience is precisely for when waiting is hard. Love is for the contemptible as well.
- Ask to love unconditionally and God will put people in your path who do not meet your conditions. That is the curriculum, not an interruption of it.

- If the core of Christianity were behaving well, it would be one more faith tradition among a dime a dozen. Paul says the core is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised.
- We are called to love like he loves, and we cannot do it on our own power. That is why we need the shepherd of our souls.

▶ 1:01:07

Matt began where he has begun every message in this run through the commands of Jesus, with what he cheerfully calls his boilerplate: obeying Jesus is good, because Jesus is good. It is not a departure from grace. "Honestly," he said, "it's an invitation to deeper and deeper grace." Nobody starts out on grace and then graduates into self-effort — and every time you do what he says, you discover how much of the kingdom of darkness you were still carrying. Earthly masters can be awful, which is why the word *obey* makes Americans flinch. Jesus is the shepherd of our souls, and he can be trusted. His standing advice, if a particular act of obedience frightens you: go ask someone who has walked with Jesus a long time whether they ever obeyed him while afraid, and how it turned out.

How you measure a virtue

▶ 1:03:10

Before getting to the command, Matt wanted an agreed method. Imagine a soldier who says, "I'm super brave and I always hold the line of battle — except when we're fighting. But the vast majority of the time I'm holding the line." Nobody accepts that, because holding the line when the fighting comes is the entire point. The same goes for the man who is patient except when he wants something, or nice except when he doesn't feel like it, or kind except to people he dislikes. "I'm nice except when I don't want to be," Matt said, "is the same thing as saying I'm not all that nice."

You would not call a man a math whiz until you asked him something hard. We all know this at gut level: a quality that is never tested, or that fails when it is, is not really possessed.

Love, run through the same grid

▶ 1:05:16

So what is the big one — the goal the Holy Spirit keeps aiming at? Love.
To love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. And love is the one virtue the whole world still honors out loud. All you need is love. Everyone agrees.

Then run it through the grid. Is it still love if you only give it when you want to? If it only shows up when the people are adorable and you have had your nap? What would the ultimate test of love look like?

▶ 1:06:33

> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."
>
> MATTHEW 5:43–45 ↗

Notice how convenient the add-on is. Love your neighbor — your fellow man. Hate your enemy — and who gets to decide who counts as an enemy? You do. "I love my fellow man unless I hate him," Matt said, "then he's my enemy, and so I can hate him because he's my enemy." Take a bird's-eye view of that arrangement and it is not love at all.

Not a higher standard — an explanation of the standard

▶ 1:08:42

Is the standard unreasonable? Matt offered his own reading of the Sermon on the Mount, flagged as his two cents. He does not think Jesus is raising the bar. He thinks Jesus is showing the true intention of the law all along — "dusting it off and polishing it so you could see the shine that was always there." Jesus is Jehovah in the flesh; he is not embarrassed by the law he gave at Sinai and quietly revising it the next day.

Sometimes "you have heard it said, but I say to you" discredits a human tradition that had corrupted the law. God did say *love your neighbor*; it was preachers who added the part about hating enemies. "Subscribe now," Matt said, "for more tips on how to avoid doing everything God told you to do." Sometimes it discredits a distortion where the letter is kept and the spirit is not. Take the parallel in the same sermon:
anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If that is a new, higher standard, then the old one implied God never minded how lewd you were so long as you did not cross the final line. He does not care only about the letter; he never did.

God is the example, and the final boss stage

▶ 1:12:01

Loving people who are easy to love is easy. Loving your enemies is, in Matt's phrase, "the final boss stage of loving people." And the reason Jesus gives is a description of his Father: he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. God loves his enemies. That is the pattern.

▶ 1:13:12

> "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
>
> MATTHEW 5:46–48 ↗

"Kindness is worthless if you only give it to people that are enjoyable to be around," Matt said. "How hospitable am I if I only host people that are really easy guests?" Kindness is for difficult situations. Patience is break-glass-in-case-of-emergency equipment, for when waiting is hard. Compassion is needed by the unlikable. Love is for the contemptible as well — just as the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Which is why, he noted, when you tell the Lord you want to learn to love unconditionally, he puts people in your path who do not meet your conditions. "And you're like: yeah, pass, skip, next."

What it looks like on the ground

▶ 1:14:30

> "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all."
>
> ROMANS 12:14–17 ↗

Not double evil for evil received, and not even one for one. Matt paused on the realism of it: most of us can think of a moment we were cursed or persecuted, and those moments were hard — harder still when it was for the Lord's sake.

▶ 1:15:41

He was careful to set the boundary. Loving your enemies does not mean trusting everyone or handing your house key to whoever asks. You can call the police for safety. You can file a restraining order. Those are not evil responses. The point is that no evil response goes back out — that when evil comes at

you, especially the deliberate, malicious kind, the Christian's expectation is to bless and to pray for the other person's well-being.

▶ 1:16:48

Then Romans 12:18–21: live peaceably with all, so far as it depends on you; never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; feed your hungry enemy, give your thirsty enemy a drink, "for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." You could spend a week reading scholars on the burning coals, Matt said, or you could read the verse before and the verse after. Before it: vengeance belongs to God, not you. After it: overcome evil with good. Whatever the coals are, they fit inside that window — a good response, not a creepy one.

▶ 1:17:33

And Paul is not prescribing something he skipped himself:

> "To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 4:11–13 ↗

This is the same man who wrote "do not be anxious about anything." The theme keeps surfacing: admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all, and see that no one repays

Jesus on the cross, Stephen under the stones

▶ 1:19:22

Our great example did it while it was being done to him.
"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" — and then they cast lots to divide his garments and the rulers scoff: he saved others, let him save himself. "So they're not just hurting him emotionally, too," Matt said. "He's dying and they're insulting him. It's a whole 360-degree pain." Jesus took the time, in that, to bless the people torturing him to death. He meant what he said, and he did it.

▶ 1:20:21

> "Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."
>
> ACTS 7:58–60 ↗

Two things from that, Matt said. First, Stephen prays to Jesus. Some people feel they are only permitted to pray to the Father, and that paints you into a corner where God the Son is somehow less God than God the Father — "a big no-no." We hold a high view of the divinity of Christ, God made flesh, and you may pray to him; Stephen did, urgently and briefly, the way Matt admits he prays himself: *Lord Jesus, help me.* Second, this is a man literally blessing his executioners. In the heavenly court, Matt said, Stephen is standing before the judge as defense attorney for the men who are killing him.

You have been called to this

▶ 1:21:23

Peter says the same thing, and makes it an assignment:
do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may
"You've been invited into the very glory of God," Matt said, "to learn to love unconditionally the way he does. This is part of the curriculum of the Holy Spirit in your life." And if it is going to be real love rather than the world's version — "plastic, shiny, fake," or an inch deep, the kind where I love people as long as they are really nice to me — then it has to be like God's love, which means it has to be directed unconditionally, which means the recipients will sometimes have to be undeserving. He started to call them targets and caught himself: "target sounded really aggressive." Otherwise it is not love. "I don't know what you would call it — warm fuzzies. Warm fuzzies are great, but the love of God is a top priority for you to learn in your life."

▶ 1:23:01

> "For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."
>
> 1 PETER 3:10–12 ↗

We stand before him with that on the page, and there will be plenty of temptation to argue *but he started it — you should have seen what this guy did*. "But the Lord sees through that," Matt said. Evil was done to us. The question is what we do back.

▶ 1:23:31

Then he asked the room to hold two things at once. "Isn't this beautiful? Isn't it glorious? Isn't it also kind of heavy?" He hoped they could appreciate the glory of God and the standard — how perfect it is, how pure it is — and then he hoped out loud that they actually wanted it. "I want it. I want to learn to love like that. Don't you want to learn to love like that?"

Which is also why this cannot be the core of the faith

▶ 1:24:10

Matt did not pretend it sat lightly on him. "I feel even right now kind of crushed about ways I fail this," he said. He understands the apostolic teaching, he understands that Stephen did what he did by the help of the Holy Spirit, and he wants to love like that — and he has not lived up to *be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*.

"Which is why I am so happy that Christianity doesn't actually boil down to me being like Jesus." Try lowering the bar and watch what happens. Drop it from Christlikeness to merely being very good — can you clear that? Drop it again to being very good most of the time, and now we are one more faith tradition in the business of improving people's performance. "I could be a best-selling author," he said. "Here's my seven tips on being probably mostly good most of the time." And then the turn: "Christianity, thank God, isn't even primarily about me at all." He owned that he had been "a little bit cringey" spending so long on what the gospel isn't, left the room hanging a beat longer, and asked for a drum roll. So what is the core ingredient?

▶ 1:26:59

> "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3–6 ↗

"Our sins," Matt noted as he read, includes our failures to love when we should have. And nowhere in that summary is the claim that we behave better than our neighbors, at least sometimes. "Jesus did

what we couldn't, because we were enslaved to what we shouldn't be enslaved to. He died so that we might live, and he lives so that we may not die." Christianity is firmly rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ — it is not one more moralistic religion teaching people how to be better, and "the world has plenty of that." He was blunt about what it takes to get anywhere near the standard: "I could never ever do that on my own. I need a shepherd for my soul. I need payment for my sins. I need the presence of the Holy Spirit and the grace of my life to ever even think about being like Stephen when he's getting stoned."

> *"The burger of the hamburger is the person and work of Jesus."*

Hated by others and hating one another

▶ 1:28:47

If you want a picture of us without grace, Matt offered one, and recommended it for needlework:

> "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior."
>
> TITUS 3:3–6 ↗

"That to me sounds closer to the real deal," he said — not "let's be vaguely Jesusy, let's be good people." Of course he wants to be like Jesus. Who wouldn't. "And the only one who could get me to even be close to something like Jesus is Jesus, the shepherd of my soul." You can't get there from here. We need a guide, and massive miraculous help, for something we have genuinely been called to and genuinely cannot do on our own power.

Where else would we go?

▶ 1:30:52

So it comes back around to following the one who loves our souls and knows how to teach us to love. "When he speaks, we listen and obey, because where else would we go?" There are plenty of be-good cults, Matt said — so many cults of kindness that you could invent a new one today and it might go viral. He is not interested in joining niceness-ianity. They are a dime a dozen. Who else has words of

life? “Christ alone. Only Christ.” And then the hinge that keeps this from being a slogan: “We abide in him. He bears fruit in us. But that does mean we follow him. That does mean that we learn to obey him.”

▶ 1:31:34

Which is where it gets specific. He puts something hard in your path — maybe someone who does not meet your conditions for love, maybe someone who reviled you, cursed you, hated you, did something evil to you — and like Stephen you say, *Lord Jesus.* One prayer available in that moment is “Lord, deliver me from this.” Matt’s point is that there is a second one, and the Lord may have a particular answer waiting inside it: *Lord, what would you have me do?* “Well, to bless and not to curse, to entreat even though you were slandered. To not repay evil for evil.” And then the question he would not let pass: what are you learning through that process? What’s the point of all this pain? Is the pain just pointless?

▶ 1:32:42

No. “The shepherd of your soul doesn’t just do pointless torture and torment for no reason. We get to learn to love like him. And we can’t just do that on training wheels forever.” *Love your enemy.* He closed by having the room ask the Holy Spirit a single question: where, right now, is there an area where I can obey Jesus and bless back even though I am being cursed — where I can overcome evil with good, as Paul said in Romans 12? Then he pressed the encouragement he has made his refrain. “Take that step of faith. Obeying Jesus is liberty. It’s liberty from darkness. It’s life from the dead. You can trust him.” And then the prayer itself, as short as the ones he admits to praying for himself: “Lord, help us to have grace to obey you, in Jesus’ name.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Matthew 22:37–39
- Matthew 5:43–45
- Matthew 5:27–28
- Matthew 5:46–48
- Romans 12:14–17
- Romans 12:18–21
- 1 Corinthians 4:11–13
- Philippians 4:6
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14–15
- Luke 23:34–35
- Acts 7:58–60
- 1 Peter 3:9
- 1 Peter 3:10–12
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–6
- Titus 3:3–6

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt measured virtues by how they behave under test. Pick one you would claim about yourself and name the conditions you quietly attach to it.
2. Who is the person your love currently has an exception clause for, and what has that exception been protecting?
3. Matt said you may call the police or file a restraining order, but you may not return evil. Where is that line hardest to hold in a real situation you are in?
4. Matt put two prayers side by side: “Lord, deliver me from this” and “Lord, what would you have me do?” Which one have you been praying, and what might the other one ask of you?
5. If Christianity is not your performance but the person and work of Jesus, what changes about how you approach the one relationship you have been avoiding 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=hm05Xg0fQcs&t=3667s

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.