



Christianity in Real Life-Part 6

Dealing with Mean & Demanding People

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Let's begin today by considering a hypothetical exhortation—just hypothetical. Don't respond—just hypothetical. Here it comes, ready: "Let's get out there and beat them. Show them no mercy. Let's decimate those guys." I got it. Think this through with me: hypothetical exhortation—"out there and beat them, show no mercy, let's decimate these guys."

Here's the question: What exactly is the expected response to that exhortation? Think in your mind now, think that through. What would that be? Now, you're groping in the dark, because you'd have to have a few questions answered before you would know what exactly is the expected response. You'd need to know who's giving that directive; you'd need to consider a context in which that's given.

If it were a sergeant in a foxhole in Afghanistan before a night raid, then you might be on to exactly what is expected. If it were a high school football coach in a locker room before a Friday night football game, then you know the exact response will be much different than in a foxhole in Afghanistan. If it were the captain of the chess team on a Saturday morning speaking to his guys about the chess match, it would be a very different response. If it's the Awana leader on a Thursday night out back before Steal the Bacon—I'm sure it's been said, right?—you would expect a different response.

What you would not want is your little Awana Jr. out there exactly responding as a Marine in Afghanistan. And you wouldn't even want the chess team to respond like the linebackers on the football team. You would have to expect the appropriate response in the right context, knowing who it's coming from and what's the setting in which that was given.

That's what we call standard hermeneutics. When we see a text of Scripture that is giving an exhortation, we have to consider who is saying it, who the subjects in that exhortation are—in this case, who is "them"? And then we can start to define words like "decimate," "show them no mercy," "beat them." We can understand those verbs and those imperatives when we know the context—the applicational context.

Now, the reason I say that and I emphasize it the way I did is because we're entering into, in our verse-by-verse study through Luke, a section of the Bible that is so often misunderstood and misapplied that we need to be super careful about all of these verses that we're going to encounter. We're only going to look at four of them today—Luke, chapter 6, verses 27, 28, 29, and 30. We're



just going to get those four. But we're getting into territory of verses from Christ: they're pithy, they're short, and they're quoted all the time by Christians and non-Christians. And my contention this morning is that they're often misapplied.

I just want you to not fall to the problem that a lot of Christians fall to when the world or the critic or the skeptic or even some fellow Christians quote these verses out of context and we don't know how to respond. As a matter of fact, if you don't do what they expect you to do in response to quoting some of these verses, then they start saying, "Well, you sure are selective about the way you apply the Bible. You sure like to cherry-pick the verses that you obey." And a lot of Christians unfortunately recoil, and they go, "Well, yeah, well, I just don't think that's the way I should be, you know, applying that text." Now, we don't have a legitimate answer.

In other words, let me put it this way: I want to respond to every exhortation of Christ exactly as Christ intended me to respond to it, living as a part of the church, in the church age, in my case in the 21st century. I want to respond exactly as he intended. I don't want to take these out of context. I don't want to respond as an Awana kid would to an exhortation that was intended to be responded to like the Marines. I need to know: What is the genre? What is the setting? What is the context? So important.

We're going to get to some that are even more—I mean—abused than the ones we're going to look at today. We're going to get into, real soon, the one on "Don't judge, lest you be judged." Has that ever been misquoted? More on that later. Today we're going to look at some that are very familiar, though: "Love your enemies," "turn the other cheek," and "give to everyone who asks." Just think of those. You're going to be confronted with situations—if not by someone else, then the little voice in your head, reciting Scripture to yourself—and you're going to say, "Well, I guess that's what the Bible says." And you need to know: Is this an applicable, applicational context? Is this the right context that Jesus was talking about?

So I want to do something unique in a lot of ways in this message. And the first thing I want to do that's unique is I want you to write down the first point of the sermon on your outline before we ever read the text—and that's never happened. And here goes. Number one, before we even read the text, I want to make sure that we know what Jesus isn't saying. That'll be our task. We want to make sure we understand what Jesus is not saying. And that will be determined by the context. Okay? Not just the applicational context—well, that is all of what I'm talking about—but that will be determined, deciphered, by looking at the literary or the grammatical context. Where do these words come from? Who are our enemies? "Turn the other cheek"—in what situation? "Give to the one who asks"—who or what are you talking about?



Okay, so let's read the text. We're in the middle of Luke chapter 6, the Sermon on the Plain. Jesus is preaching. We've just gotten through this section on the corresponding blessings and woes. And if you've noticed, a lot like the Proverbs, these are very, oftentimes short, pithy, and even startling statements that get our brains going. And now we settle into some teaching here in verses 27 through 30 that are talking about our enemies.

Let's read this together now as you're following along while I read it for you, verse 27:

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who"—now, you need to circle this word, and we're going to come back to it—"begs from you."

I don't like to undermine your confidence in the translators of your version there—most of us are reading from the ESV—but this is one exception where I need to say I think this is a poor translation of this word. And I'll make the case later. But just put a little asterisk by that translation of the word here that's translated "begs." Sorry—couldn't even read it without saying, "Give to the one who begs from you." "And from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back."

And you see some things here in the motifs that we're used to: love your enemies, turn the other cheek, give to the one who asks—that triad of statements is often misapplied. And sometimes those statements may even haunt you, so to speak, in trying to give you that sense of guilt about doing something in a situation that really you should have no guilt about, because that's not what Jesus intended.

So we need to understand the context. A lot of people look at this and say—I don't know—let's just start with "turn the other cheek." Start in the middle of all this. We'll get to "love your enemies" in a minute. But, you know, "If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other one—offer the other; here, you hit me here, hit me there." That sounds like almost an impossible command to obey. So you've got some choices: either you think, well, it's not literal; or you say, you know what, I just think in this case I'm going to set aside the teaching. I want to do everything Christ asked me to do—and you should too. We're going to be judged by whether or not we respond to Christ's teaching—and I don't mean in terms of heaven and hell, but in terms of the bema seat of Christ. We're going to give an account of our lives, whether we were obedient to what Christ taught. I want to make sure I respond exactly as Jesus intended. And if that means when someone's beating me up, you know, when I'm in some bad part of town on my way to the car, if I'm not supposed to defend myself, then I want to know I'm not supposed to defend myself.

But is that what's in view here? Is this about thugs and muggings and criminals? No. To find the appropriate applicational context, we should look at the literary or grammatical context. And let's go back and find out. We just ended a set of blessings and woes. We had the pairings, right? The blessing and the corresponding woe. Well, the last blessing and "woe" you see ends there in verse 26. And if you remember, if you've been with us, it'll start with the blessing and it goes: blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing; and then woe, woe, woe, woe. So what we did is we took the first blessing and the first woe—because they correspond—the second, the second; the third, the third; and that's how we moved through the list.

The last one—look at verses 22 and 23 as the last blessing, and verse 26 is the last woe—and they correspond. What was the theme of the last one? Let's look at it.

Verse 22: "Blessed are you when people hate you," okay? Now, that's supposed to be a good thing—when people hate me? This is weird. That's the startling nature of the Rabbi's teaching here: "and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil"—now, there's not a period there, is there? There is a comma. Now we're going to describe what kind of situation we're talking about. This is what you need to highlight or underline. Don't miss this. Here's the context: "on account of the Son of Man." We're not talking about people that are your enemies either civilly or philosophically or politically or this. We're talking about people here that hate you, exclude you, revile your name as evil, spurn you—why?—because of your alliance with the Son of Man, with Christ.

Well, and he goes on to illustrate, make this even clearer in the parallel that's made in verse 23. The reason I should see that as a blessing is because it says in verse 23, I should "rejoice" and "leap for joy," because my reward is great in heaven. So God's going to reward it. Why? It makes it very clear: "for so their fathers did to the prophets." What were the prophets? They spoke the truth to their generation. They said things that weren't easy to hear, just like we say things to our generation that aren't easy to hear: "Christ is the only way, the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through him"—the exclusivity of the message of Christianity; the issues of heaven and hell; "Broad is the way—wide is the gate—that leads to destruction," and many... People don't want to hear that. Now, if we're faithful messengers of the message of Christ, and we stand in alliance with Christ and his teaching, the Bible says you're going to get a negative reaction from a lot of people in this world—just like the prophets did—but that's okay. God's going to reward you, and you're in good company. We taught on that.

Inversely, the woe in verse 26: "Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." Now, if that's not clear enough to give us a sense that we're right now talking about people opposing us—or even, if you want to use this big word, persecuting us—because of our stand with Christ, then we've missed the context. Now I know what kind of enemies we're talking about. Verse 27: "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies"—that's the kind of enemies we're talking about. And he repeats some of the words we saw up in verse 22: "do good to



those who hate you, bless those who curse you” (or revile you), “pray for those who abuse you” (or spurn you). These are the people that, because I’m a Christian, they oppose me; they come up, they come against me and attack me negatively.

Now, he says, here’s some things you need to do. When you’re in a situation and there is some assault on you, in that context: “They strike you on the cheek.” Some commentators say, “Is that physical? Metaphorical? Is that my reputation? Is that a slap—slap? Is that a punch? What is that?” Well, I’m not sure. The word is pretty broad here. But the point is, in the context of opposition—and for some of us it is a slap-slap, embarrassment, reputation thing; in the early church, and in some places around the world today, it’s physical beatings—the Bible says, “Hey—say, okay—whatever. Turn the other cheek. You want to oppose me and attack me because I’m allied with Christ? I’m not going to fight you on this. I’m going to stand with Christ and take it.” That’s the context.

“From the one who takes your cloak away,” he says, “give him your tunic too.” You see, that’s the context, as we see in the Bible, of Christians being persecuted—as it says over there in Hebrews 10:34—about people having their property confiscated. Why? Because they stand with Christ. People being thrown in prison—not because they’re drug dealers and rapists—but because they stand for Christ. Those people being persecuted, the Bible says, “Hey, if they’re going to take your stuff, let them take your stuff.”

Now, do you see this is not the context of criminal behavior? If you go out to the parking lot and there’s someone there ripping your car off, right? They’ve broken into your car, and they’re stealing all your valuables—which I hope you don’t have too many in your car—but they’re stealing your stuff out of your glove box, you don’t want then to go, “Oh, hey, wait—wait—my wallet; here, look, I got money here too!” Don’t do that. Let me prove to you that that is not what Christ is saying.

Turn to Luke 22. Luke chapter 22. We are not talking about thugs. We’re not talking about muggings. We’re not talking about criminal behavior. We’re not talking about justice in the justice system. We’re not even talking about civil law. We’re not talking about criminal law or civil law. We are talking about persecution for your Christianity. That’s what we’re talking about. “Turn the other cheek”—not in a fistfight on the playground; that’s not what we’re talking about. People misquote this text all the time.

Luke 22—did I take you down to verse 35? This is the end of Christ’s earthly ministry. He’s going to leave his twelve—he’s going to leave his disciples (actually eleven he’s going to leave behind; one is going to hang himself). And he said to them, “When I sent you out”—this is Luke 22:35; did



you find it?“When I sent you out with no moneybag, knapsack, or sandals, did you lack anything?” And they said, “Nothing.”

Now note this. Here’s the strategy of Christ, by the way—and I can prove this to you if I had more time—but Jesus sends them out in a very unconventional way: “Don’t take money, don’t take extra shoes, don’t take a backpack, don’t take resources; just go and watch how you’ll be supplied for.” That was not going to be the norm for Christian missions work. That was not going to be the norm. He’s about to change that. What he’s proving by that is: if you go out—even though you’re prepared, which he’s going to call them to do now—you find yourself with your back against the wall, trust me. It’s like the disciples on the ship on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the storm: trust me. Even when the storms are knocking your life up against the wall, if you feel like you’re at the end of your rope and you don’t have the money, you don’t have the resources—trust me, I’ll provide. So he gives them these three years of experience of going out without provisions. But that’s not how he wants them to live. That was to show them that God would supply. He wants them to plan; he wants them to prepare; he wants them to take provisions. And he changes the rules. This is the norm for the church age. Here we go.

He says, verse 36: “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack.” You better take it. “And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.” Now that’s telling right there. Think about that. You remember the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus tells—that road down to Jericho? Dangerous. If you have heard anybody preach on that before, I mean, that was a notorious road for thugs and people to come out and mug you. They’re going to be going all over the cities of Judea, Samaria, all over the ancient world preaching this message. He says this: “You better take a Glock with you.” Do you have a Beretta 9mm? Do you have something? You know what—if you don’t have one, you should run on down and fill out the forms and get one—even if you have to sell your coat. I’d rather you be cold than not have a defensive weapon on you. Think that through.

If in their minds they took Luke 6 as, you know, “When I’m jumped on the road to Jericho and someone comes out and says, ‘Stick ‘em up, give me your money,’ and they reach for my knapsack or my moneybag, I should go, ‘Oh, Jesus said turn the other cheek; here, take my jacket too.’” That is not the context of Luke 6. Luke 22 makes it clear: pull out your sword and defend yourself and protect your property. You’re going to need to do that.

And they say—if you drop down there to verse 38—they had two swords. And he says, “Well, that’s enough,” meaning that he’s not asking you to build an arsenal—have flamethrowers and bazookas behind every door in your house—but it wouldn’t be a bad idea to defend yourself. See, because if you creep into my house in the middle of the night to take my stuff or threaten my family, I’m going to shoot you. See? And I’m the pastor. And I believe fully—you shouldn’t clap at that, really—I believe fully in Luke 6 about turning the other cheek. But if I shoot you and I don’t happen to kill you, and then you want to pull out your Bible as you’re laying there on the gurney as

you're getting wheeled to the paramedics and say, "Pastor, don't you believe this—that if someone asks of you, you're supposed to give it, right? Shouldn't you just turn the other cheek?" I'm going to laugh at you, and I'm going to say, "You are misquoting Scripture. That is not the context of Luke 6." And I'm going to quote for you Luke 22. And I'm going to tell you that's why I bought a .357—so I could shoot you when you come into my house to steal my stuff. See? Now I'm going to do it lovingly. Right? And I mean that. This has deteriorated; I should stop.

All I'm trying to tell you is there is a very specific context for "turn the other cheek." Very specific. And to "give to anyone who asks of you"—and let me deal with that word. I had you circle the word or highlight it or put a star by it in verse 30: "everyone who begs from you." Can you at least get the context not only from verses 22 through 26, but can you recognize what we're dealing with in verses 27, 28, and 29? We've got enemies; "hate you," "curse you," "abuse you"; "strikes you on the cheek"; "takes your cloak." Now look at the bottom of verse 30: "takes away your goods." You think in the middle of all that God wants your mind now to rush, in verse 30 (the first half of the verse), to think of the beggar at the corner of the Costco parking lot? Is that what you think we're talking about here?

It's a mistranslation, in my opinion, of this word *aiteō* in Greek—used seventy times in the Greek New Testament—and it's never translated "beg," ever, in the Greek New Testament, if you take the ESV translators—except for in this context (this context and its parallel context in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5). Every other time it is translated "demand" or "to ask," okay? That's how the word is translated the other sixty-eight times. And if you look at other translations like the New American Standard or the NIV or the King James, they all translate it "ask," not "to beg." It just doesn't even make contextual sense to shift my mind from people hating me, cursing me, abusing me, striking me, taking my stuff away, and say, "Oh, and by the way, the beggar—anytime you pass a beggar—you ought to give him money." That is not what this text is about. This text is about someone coming and demanding your things. What's the picture? Someone in authority who is now opposing you. This was going to happen to all the followers of Christ. They were going to be opposed by all the officials in the Roman Empire. They were going to be persecuted, led off to the lions. They were going to be hung. They were going to be skewered. They were going to be crucified because they were followers of Christ. And he says, when they come and do these things because of your allegiance to Christ—man, then, if you're caught and you're there, you're done—and you say, "Hey, for Christ I'm willing to do this; for Christ, I'm not going to hold tightly to this stuff; I'm not going to try to get it all back; fine. If this is the price I'm going to pay for standing with Christ, fine—take it. You want to persecute me, you want to put me in jail because of my Christianity, you want to—because of my views of Christ and what the Bible teaches—you want to in some way inflict some punishment," then the Bible says, fine—take it—no problem. That's my attitude. That's the "turn the other cheek": if they ask of it, give it—give it over—and don't demand it back. The picture is me being willing to put all of this in perspective and recognize that my goal is allegiance to Christ—not saying, "Well, I want my stuff."

Now, again, I'm not trying to keep my stuff and defending my cloak or my knapsack either. When it comes to civil justice and all that the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, says about self-



defense and all the rest—you know, it’s not because I’m a materialist or I’m greedy. But the point is that if you think this text is saying Jesus wants us all to be doormats, that’s not what the text is teaching. And I don’t want you to selectively look at this text to say, “Well, I’ll apply it where it makes sense, and I won’t apply it where it doesn’t make sense.” You need to apply it in exactly the way Jesus wants you to apply it. And it has to do with you losing a client, losing a job, losing a promotion, losing an invitation, losing being a part of that social circle because of your standing with Christ. Be willing to say, “Fine then; if it’s for Christ, I’m willing to suffer the loss of that. I don’t even care—take it—if that’s the purpose of you coming in and doing this.”

By the way, I don’t have time for all these passages. Let me throw a few out for you note-takers. John chapter 18—Jesus does get struck on the cheek by the Roman soldier (you might remember), and he doesn’t turn the other cheek and say, “Oh, that really hurt—do it over here.” No. He doesn’t turn the other cheek. He says, “If I’ve said something that is wrong,” he says, “bear witness of the wrong. If I haven’t said something wrong, then why do you strike me?” That’s John chapter 18. Look at the context. The verse I quoted was verse 23 (John 18:23). All I’m telling you is, that can’t be what Jesus means in every context—to “turn the other cheek”—or, “when someone wants something, you don’t defend it; you don’t protect it; you don’t put a lock on your door or an alarm on your house; or defend yourself in an assault.” That’s not what the text means.

“Giving to those who ask”—and I don’t have time for this either, but you might want to jot it down—I think we put it at (not too many weeks back) 2 Thessalonians 3:8–12. Second Thessalonians 3:8–12. And another one you might want to jot down is 1 Timothy chapter 5. People come in—and I’ve been a pastor now for decades—and especially when I was the only staff member. I’ve been in situations where, you know, I was the front line and did everything in the church. And when people knock on the door, and everybody came with their story about how they needed the church’s money—right? And every conman in the world sees a steeple and they come running. And so they come in, and if I don’t give them something based on a story that can’t be verified or not backed up or clearly just a big, you know, load of nonsense, and I don’t do it, they start quoting Scripture at me, like this one. And here’s what I need to tell them: there’s a specific context for this verse. It is about persecution for me being a Christian. You want to talk about me giving to people—the Bible is very discriminating about that. When I pass somebody who’s begging, the Bible says I need to be very discerning about that. And 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 says I need to meet some criteria. And in that case, it says that if people aren’t willing to work, I should not be aiding their poverty, or aiding them getting out of poverty, by giving them food or money. And that’s just one example. Another one might be in a church setting. In 1 Timothy chapter 5—the widows list—and the Bible says, “Listen, be very discriminating about who you put on that list.” As a matter of fact, the text in 1 Timothy 5 is more about who you should not put on that list. Think about that. If the Bible here is trying to talk about charity—“Give to everyone who asks of you”—not only would you be broke in a week (if you have the mailbox that I have, full of people asking for money from, you know, pets and turtles and horses and all the other things they ask for in my mailbox every day), but the reality would be I would be not taking heed to the words of Scripture that tell me that I need to be very careful about my charitable giving. That’s all I’m saying. There’s so much in the Scripture that would let me understand Jesus must be talking about a specific setting here. He’s not saying, “Everybody who asks you for a buck—you better give ‘em a buck.” It’s not



what the Bible says. And there's lots of things on that that we could deal with—and we don't have time for.

One passage I should point out if you want an example of what we're talking about, I think I quoted it already, is Hebrews chapter 10, verse 34: people joyfully accepting the confiscation of their property. We're talking about Christians who are being persecuted because they're Christians. He says they did it in this case because they knew they had a better possession—an abiding one. What is that? That's the echo of what Jesus is saying: "Your reward in heaven is great." If I lose a job because of my Christianity, I don't worry about that. If I lose a client, if I lose my reputation, if I lose a few Facebook friends because of my stand for Christ—it doesn't matter. The Bible says you should gladly sacrifice that to stand in fidelity and faithfulness to Christ.

So, in summary, I guess—what are we saying? I'm saying Jesus is not saying "Be a victim, a doormat; never call the cops; never engage in some kind of lawsuit to somehow assert a right." And I know I can preach on the fact that people assert way too many rights. But to just—I mean, I can't help this—if you go through the book of Acts, look at how many times the disciples were being persecuted—even Paul himself. When there were things being done that were unjust to him, he wanted those to be made right. Remember when he—because of his citizenship—and they find out he's a Roman citizen, they want to release him quietly. What does he say? "No, no, no, no—you can't do that. You arrest me publicly, you flog me, you drag me in here, and you do it unjustly—you better make this right; you better make it right publicly." What's with that? Where's the "turn the other cheek" in that? Well, that's not the context of the "turn the other cheek" command.

All right. Have I said enough on that? I have to say all this because we're going to get into more of these statements that are so famously quoted by people—Christians and non-Christians—that are trying to evoke something in your life that is not the appropriate applicational context. And we're not being selective; we're not cherry-picking; we're not trying to avoid an inconvenient application. I'm willing to apply the Bible in any way the Bible wants me to apply the Bible. If Christ wants me to give to everybody who asks, then I'm fine—I'm going to give to everybody who asks. But there's a specific context here.

All right. Enough said on that. Another example I wrote down—I should give it to you—Hebrews 11:35. In that great list of all those heroes of the faith, it says some that were in prison refused to accept their release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. There's another picture of someone saying, "Hey, you put me in jail; I'm not going to run out at the first sign of being able to be released. If I'm doing this for Christ, I'm willing to stand here and be persecuted and be imprisoned for my faith; I'm willing to do that. And in that case, I'm even willing to refuse my release." That's an amazing statement—but an example of what I'm talking about—of saying, "Hey, fine—no problem." That's the context here: enemies because of the Son of Man, and my alliance with the Son of Man.



Right now, that's all hermeneutical clarification. Let's get into what the sermon is really all about, and that is the message of Luke chapter 6, verses 27 through 30. What is he saying? Listen: love your enemies; turn the other cheek; give to the one who asks of you in the situation of persecution.

Let's deal with love last. There's a reason for that, because it has very specific demands there from us, and we'll end with that. But let's start here with verses 29 and 30. "Strikes you on the cheek—offer the other also." What does that mean? If I'm somehow hurt; if I'm somehow ridiculed; if I'm somehow insulted; I'm willing to give up even more insult; I'm willing to have even more pain. Someone wants to take something from me—if I lose a client, if I lose a job, if I lose a promotion—I'm willing—I'm willing—I'm willing to lose the next one. If someone's going to demand something from me because of my Christianity—if that's because I stand with Christ—"You're going to take something? Fine. I'm not going to demand it back." That's the picture here.

What is that? This is showing the relative unimportance—notice—of my pain and my loss, my embarrassment, my reputation. The relative unimportance of what is really important to me, and that is that I do stand with the Son of Man; that I am allied with Jesus Christ; that people do know that I'm a Christian, and I'm not ashamed to stand with Christ. The relative unimportance of those things—that's the "you can have it, it doesn't matter" attitude when it comes to people who are going to persecute me because I'm a Christian. That's fine.

Now, I don't want to, you know, get in line and be the first one—"Hey, please persecute me because I'm a Christian." I'm not a masochist. But if that's what it comes to in our society, if that's what it comes to in a small way in our day, I want to be able to put that kind of persecution in perspective—starting with what's more important to me: my comfort, my convenience, my stuff—or my fidelity to Christ.

I want to get persecution in perspective—number two on your outline; let's put it that way. Get your persecution in perspective. If they're going to hit you—so to speak, or even literally—then hit me. I'm willing to suffer the pain and discomfort because I'm more willing for you to know that I will not deviate from standing with Christ. I'll stand with him; I'll preach his message; I'll affirm the things he affirms; I will be counted as a Christian even if it costs me. That's the picture of putting my pain in perspective.

So many things to say on this. Let me—this is a bit of a play on words—but let me go another direction with this because the Bible does (1 Peter chapter 5, for instance, and Hebrews chapter 12—there are two passages for you). First Peter chapter 5—you don't need to turn there, but you might remember that passage about the roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Smile at me if you



remember that passage. Right after that it says, “Hey, the same things that you’re going through are being experienced”—and there’s suffering—“by your brethren all around the world.” People everywhere are going through this. That broadens my view, because in suffering, you know, it hurts so bad, and it feels so isolating. One thing to help me—pardon the pun—get my persecution in perspective is not only recognizing I’d much rather stand with Christ than be comfortable, but it’s my discomfort—let’s look at that in light of everybody else in the world. Let’s look around the world.

That was great—not great; I mean, it’s sad—but it’s affirming. I’m preaching this very message last night to our Saturday night crowd, and this morning someone points out to me that on the front page of the Fox News website, one of the banner articles was that persecution and martyrdom of Christians has doubled in the last year. Today in this world, in places like Syria and Africa and Somalia and North Korea and Senegal, all over the world, people are dying for their faith today.

What hurts us—now, I don’t want to minimize pain, and I preached this when we preached verses 22 and 23—I don’t want to make light of pain. When someone says something and it hurts me, I’m not going to say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” It hurts. But really, let’s think about: How bad is the hurt? How bad is the hurt compared to what’s going on? I mean, Pastor Siete is in the news there in Iran. I mean, really—when you lost a few Facebook friends this week because you stood up for Christ—I don’t know—you weren’t thrown in prison.

Now, I don’t mean to make light of it. It hurts. I’d like everybody to like me. But they don’t—amazing. They don’t like—what’s the deal with that? I can still go home and eat my Cheez-Its and sit in my recliner tonight, and I’m not in a prison in a dungeon somewhere. I’m not in a prison in North Korea because a dictator threw me there because of my religious beliefs. I’m not in jail because I shared the gospel with someone in Egypt. See what I’m saying? I’m not really suffering the way they’re suffering. And while Peter kind of sees a flatline, saying, “Hey, you Christians suffering—you’re suffering—but there are Christians everywhere suffering,” when we look at that, we’ve got to look way up and say, “Look at those Christians—those are the big boys—and they’re really suffering.”

Do a little work—just looking. And there are legitimate websites (there are obviously always bad websites), but there are legitimate websites that track the persecuted church in the modern world. You need to become aware of what’s going on around the world in terms of Christians being imprisoned at a higher rate than they ever have. There are more people—according to that article I just read this morning—the numbers of martyrs for the Christian faith have doubled this year, in 2013 (right—the year that just ended). It’s a big deal. Tens of thousands being put in prison and thousands being martyred. That, to me, helps me not cry so hard because someone didn’t like me, didn’t invite me, excluded me, hurt my feelings, said something bad about me online. That, to me, should be a much smaller tear-fest than the people that really are being tortured for Christ right now.

I said two ways: 1 Peter chapter 5—around the world. Hebrews chapter 12—look back. Look back in time. Now for them, it was a very short distance, but it was that second generation of Christians there at the end of the first century who were looking back at the persecution of Christ and those who brought the message of Christ. And in Hebrews chapter 12 it says there in verses 3 and 4, “Hey, don’t lose heart when you’re suffering, because you’ve got to look back at Christ; consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself—consider him—so that you won’t lose heart.” And then he lays this line on them in verse 4: “You haven’t resisted to the point of shedding blood.” In other words, if you just look back, you’ll kind of get your suffering and persecution in perspective. And for them, they were just looking back at the crucifixion of Christ and all the price that the apostles paid. But we now have 2,000 years of church history. And every chance I get, when we touch on the theme of persecution, I’ll always put some titles on the back of your reading list (the worksheet every week). I’ll always put a couple titles on the martyrs—people that have lost their life because of their faith in Christianity. And if you haven’t done that recently, just look back through time and read some of the notorious persecutors of the church and the victims in Christianity that have died for their faith. That may help you when you lose a couple Facebook friends and feel bad about it. You ought to recognize that, you know what, we haven’t really resisted the temptations of compromise and fitting in to the point of shedding blood—but many people have. It’s been going on since the early days of what I think Jesus clearly had in view in this passage of the Roman Empire rising up against the church.

I can’t help but think of examples that would make anybody really feel a heart of compassion and how bad these people had it—like Perpetua. Let me—she’s a great example. Perpetua was an early third century—she was executed in 204 AD in Carthage under the Roman emperor who was persecuting the church at the time (and it was just a series of emperors who were persecuting the church until the fourth century). But here was this gal—and she was written about a lot; a lot of historians wrote on her; she kept a journal; there’s a lot of information on her. She’s one of the early, most full-orbed stories. Now, some fable has grown up around the edges of the story. But the core of the story—her in Carthage there in North Africa being fed to the wild beasts in the amphitheater because of her faith. She was a 22-year-old nursing mom with a little infant child; had a non-Christian family; a non-Christian dad begged her to just recant. The Roman officials just want you to say, “Jesus is not Lord”; they just want you to say that the emperor is. “Would you just recant? If you just said a few words and denied Christ, you can have your baby, you can have your freedom back, you can have your life back. Don’t you know they’re going to kill you?” Imagine how incessantly she got this from her non-Christian family. I have no word about her husband—either her husband was executed, or her husband died—we don’t know. But Perpetua there was willing to be faithful to the end, to have her little infant taken from her arms—think about that, Orange County parents—taken from her arms because she would not deny Christ. And there is a 22-year-old mom led in there—and all the accounts say this beautiful young, you know, this sweet gal who was there as a mom being dragged into the arena and fed to the wild beasts for the entertainment of the pagans, and to the satisfaction of the perverted desires of the Roman soldiers. This is a horrible story.



And I think to myself, that's what people were doing who had the same faith that you and I have in Christ—willing to give up all of their freedoms, all of their loves, all their family life, because they weren't willing to recant. All I'm saying is: what do we complain about? We really—I say it often—but we're lightweights, are we not? I mean, can you imagine the martyrs that are there in heaven looking over the rails down at us when we're going, "I don't think I'm going to get that contract and they see me as a Jesus freak, and I don't know if I'll get the promotion," and they're like, "Are you kidding me?"

And, by the way, if you want a chance to prove your loyalty to Christ, I think the fire is heating up. Have you noticed that? The Bible says it's going to. We've had a little bit of a respite here in Western, you know, American culture. Things are changing. I mean, I don't pray for it like some pastors boldly say (I don't know if they really mean it or not). I mean, I hope we don't hit persecution. But you know, I do think it's coming. And I think in cultures like ours, people like you and I that are willing to speak up for Christianity are going to pay a much heavier toll than we've ever paid. It won't be hurt feelings that we're nursing. It'll be imprisonment. It'll be confiscation. It'll be legal matters. It may be our lives at one point—I don't doubt it. There's a lot going on on the international scene, the geopolitical scene, in terms of the intolerance of Christianity. And all I'm telling you is when it heats up in your life—whether it's this week or, you know, 25 years from now—we need to be ready to stand faithful to Christ because we've kept our persecution in perspective.

Just one text on this that may help: 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Let me just turn you to this one text—2 Corinthians chapter 4. When Paul talks about his own afflictions and his own persecution, drop down to verse number 8 once you find that chapter—2 Corinthians 4:8. Let's start there and read through a few paragraphs here (won't read it all, but we'll get a little bit of each of these paragraphs). Look at verse 8, chapter 4:

"We are afflicted in every way"—Paul speaks of him and his associates in this regard (Silas and Timothy, probably Titus)—"but we're not crushed." Okay, well there's a lot of conflict on the outside. "We're perplexed even, but we're not driven to despair; we're persecuted, but we're not forsaken; we're struck down"—literally struck down—"but we're not destroyed." Now, "we're always carrying in the body" (in this life, in this physical body, he says) "the death of Jesus." Now there's the redeeming value of all this for him: what we're going through is what Christ went through; the promise that if he was rejected, we'd be rejected; if he was persecuted, we'd be persecuted. You know, we're getting some of that spilled over into our lives. He says—and all of that, he says—the ironic thing about this parity between "afflicted on the outside but not crushed on the inside": he says it's "so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies." Look at the internal life of the Christian under persecution. That's why, by the way, when persecution does break out in America, if I'm still alive and people are being killed for their faith—here's the deal: our church numbers may shrink a little bit. You might find a parking space a little bit easier on a Sunday morning. But you know what? The Christians that are real Christians in here, in the midst of that persecution, will thrive. There will be a kind of dynamism to our Christianity that you have not seen during peacetime. As Tertullian said, "You can mow us down, but you can't stop us." In



reality, he says, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” and the church blossoms when it’s under that kind of pressure. You watch a new kind of Christianity—even right here at Compass Bible Church—if you see that persecution move into Western society, in places like America. All I’m telling you is, he says, the life of Christ—man—it blossoms in that context.

He says in verse 11, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake”—we’re having all kinds of persecution because of this. Why? Well, one thing you see here, at least, is that “the life of Jesus” is also “manifested in our mortal flesh”—that is, the contrast outside/inside that is really spoken about here in verse 16. And this is often misquoted. I know when you get your hip replaced or whatever—you’ve got arthritis—you quote this verse. It’s not about your failing body as a 65-year-old, okay? Read it: “We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” Do you see that in verse 16? What’s the context here? The persecution on our lives. In our case, it may just be the exclusion, the loss of jobs, loss of clients, the loss of promotion—whatever it is that you pay—the price you pay for being a Christian. Inside, there’s renewal.

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us”—and this gets us excited—“an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” And that sounds a lot like Romans 8. That’s exactly what he says—that the present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed. Does that sound like Christ? “Rejoice in the day that you suffer.” Why? Because when these enemies come upon you and they assault you and they oppose you and they revile you and exclude you—your reward in heaven is great. You should leap for joy. It’s a good thing. And it does things in our lives now. But here’s the key, verse 18—this is the shift in your thinking that has to take place: “as we look not to the things that are seen”—like the loss, the pain, the ridicule, the embarrassment—“not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient.” Your reputation won’t matter 100 years from now. How much money you made at work will not matter. How comfortable you were, how much stuff you had—none of that will matter 100 years from now. “But the things that are unseen are eternal.” And all I’m telling you is: to get your persecution in perspective, you have to shift your thinking in that regard.

Now, some of you want to go underground because you know that there’s a price to pay when you’re vocal about your Christianity. I’m not talking about being a bossy, you know, rude person. I’m just saying: make sure that your world knows you’re a Christian and you stand up for Christ. You’re afraid to do that because it will cost you. And all I’m telling you is a text like this says: put your mind on the eternal things. Care less about the price that you’ll pay—the discomfort or the embarrassment or whatever costs are associated with it—and look to eternal things. That’ll get this whole point in this text where it needs to be: if they want to take from you, if they want to do something to hurt you—fine: “You want my—whatever—no problem.” They will not be—to take a phrase out of Philippians 2—“something to be grasped.” Don’t be grasping for all those things, because what you really want to take hold of is your alliance and fidelity with Christ.

Now, I don't have time for this at all, but some people say, "Well, I don't get persecuted." Study this text sometimes—Philippians chapter 1, verses 27 through 30. If you're experiencing no persecution in your Christian life, something is seriously wrong. Either you're not even a Christian—you're playing games with this whole deal—or you're not trying to live a life that's worthy of the gospel, one or the other. Or to put it in the words of Paul to Timothy—2 Timothy 3:12—"All those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus"—you know this verse—"will be persecuted." All of them. All I'm telling you is: if you're one of those that says, "Why is Mike always on this persecution kick?" Well, because I'm preaching the Bible, and it's always on this persecution kick. Because if you're standing with Christ, the world's not going to like it. And unless you live in a cave or in a monastery, you're going to have a lot of opposition in your life. And all I'm telling you is: you need to be willing to step up, step out, and let that be a reality. I don't revel in it; I don't enjoy it; I'm not a masochist—I've said that. But I recognize it's a small price to pay to be counted as faithful to Christ.

So much more I could say on that. Maybe a homework assignment would be just to look through the book of 1 Peter—filled with good information—if you happen to be taking it on the chin (pardon the pun) for your Christianity these days.

Now, I've got to get to verses 27 and 28, because there are some very specific directions for us here. Knowing that that's the context and that's where he's going to go—"Don't worry about the losses; don't worry about the pain; stand with Christ"—in verses 27 and 28 he now gives us instructions about those that are opposing us: "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies"—and because of that motive (which, by the way, is not a feeling—can I make that clear? Not a feeling. Not a feeling). When you look at dictators in countries that are throwing Christians and Christian pastors in jail, you do not feel good about those people, do you? The people that ridicule you for your Christianity, make fun of you at work, say things behind your back, start rumors about you because you're the Jesus freak—you do not feel good about them. Love is not a feeling word in the Bible. This is a motive of intention to do good to them. That's why the next phrase says, "Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who abuse you."

Cross-reference Romans chapter 12—we've read this text; we've studied this text in detail. Don't take your own revenge; when they curse you, don't curse them in return; when they revile you, don't return with reviling. You're supposed to "overcome evil with good." Now, that's the end of chapter 12 of Romans—"overcome evil with good." The key there to catch is overcoming evil—overcoming evil. I don't want to aid evil.

That's why when I read a passage like this, I'm not going to say, "Well, I want to do good to them; I want to bless them; I want to pray for them—hmm, how can I pray for the person that ridicules Christians? How can I pray for the dictator that throws pastors in jail? I just pray they're healthy. I pray that they are having a great day. I pray that they have all the money they could ever want. I pray that their kids obey them. I pray they win the lottery. I pray for clear skin." I don't know what



you're praying for, but stop praying those kinds of things. The goal is to overcome evil. And the strategy isn't by revenge; it isn't by cursing; it's not by reviling; and it's not by any of the things that we might naturally feel like we want to do to retaliate. It's by doing good. And what's the good? The only good that I can think of to end the evil of someone who's oppressing and opposing Christians is for them to be converted. That's the point: for the evil to stop.

I mean, don't you want Rodman not to go over to North Korea and act like such a fool over there? Now, I know our natural response is what the Bible says—"hot indignation"—just putting someone in the 119. And your natural flush of reaction: "Maybe God, just drop a big rock out of the sky when he walks off the plane in North Korea and smash him there on the tarmac and we'll be done with Rodman." I'm sorry—this has gotten too personal. But the Bible says, "No—that should not be your prayer." Or the dictator he goes and wants to sing about. We don't pray for them to be destroyed. God has said he'll do that in time if they don't repent. Right now our job is ambassadors of Christ. Our job is to bring the message of the gospel. Our job is to call the dictators to repentance. Then, you know what? The opponents and persecutors and the fools become the wise men and the proponents and the apostles of the church. Isn't that what happened to the blasphemer, the persecutor of the church? 1 Timothy chapter 1—Paul said, "I was the worst—the blasphemer, the persecutor—but God converted me. He brought me to repentance."

What is my prayer for those who—in the text—"abuse" me? The prayer is that they'll repent. What is my blessing for those who curse me? It's bringing the blessing of the message of the gospel. What's the "good" to those who hate me? It's doing good by calling them to trust in Christ.

Number three on your outline: we've got to seek the conversion of our opponents. Seek the conversion of our opponents.

Now, I know I've taken you across the globe to think of people being thrown in jail for their faith. But let's think real personal about your life right now. Think of your life. Now, you're not being, you know, beheaded for your faith this week (I assume—unless you're traveling somewhere). Here's the deal: who ridicules you? Who mocks you? Who belittles you? Who does things to hurt you because you stand with Christ? There's somebody. Pick the person that does that the most, and picture their face. Now, if you want to pray for a big rock to fall on them and squash them, I can understand the feeling. But the text says I'm to love them—which is not a feeling. I'm not called to feel a certain way toward them. I'm called to do good, to bless, and to pray. And what I want to pray is that the opponent of my Christianity becomes the proponent of my Christianity. I want them to repent; I want them to become Christians. God's done it. He's taken some of the worst opponents of Christianity and made them the biggest proponents of Christianity. And I don't know if they'll ever come to repentance. So I'm going to pray. I'm going to optimistically hope. I'm going to bring the message of the gospel to these people.



Perpetua, by the way, is a good example of that. If you read some of her stories in any of the books on the martyrs (and the books on the back of your worksheet are certainly going to include the story of Perpetua in the third century), one of the stories about Perpetua is they used to take the prisoners before the day they fed them to the wild beasts in the Coliseum—in this case, in the arena in Carthage—and they would take them into a public dinner somewhere outside of their prison cells. And the little group that Perpetua was going to be martyred with, they all went out there to this place to eat. And it wasn't so that they could have their last meal like the warden might say at San Quentin, "What do you want for your last meal?" That's not how it worked. It was to take them out in the public so people could jeer at them, mock them, ridicule them, and scorn them. And so here were this little group of Christians that were brought out there who were going to be fed to the lions the next day. The history of these Christian historians (and even in her own journal) speak of the fact that they didn't sit there and, you know, mourn about their loss—or I'm sure it didn't feel good. And they didn't sit there and enjoy their last meal and say, "Well, I'll have seconds." They weren't worrying about that. The historians say that those Christians—that band of Christians that died with Perpetua—they turned that time into an opportunity to address the crowds and their jailers and their abusers and the Roman soldiers to preach the gospel to them.

Look at any of the stories of the martyrs. Now, not all of them do this, but so many of them get to that place of turning their testimony to those that abused them. And like Darlene Deibler—I know Carlin preached at one of the women's events on Darlene Deibler—in that prison camp in Japan, and the Japanese jailer there abusing her—one of the things that helped her, along with Corrie ten Boom and a lot of other people who were being persecuted, to finally start praying for their persecutor was to recognize (and it's an old line, but it's certainly true), "there but for the grace of God go I."

Think about it. We're not Christians and following Christ because we're so smart—so much smarter than those that oppose Christ. I know sometimes we feel that way. That's just a feeling, and it's a wrong feeling. We were plucked out of our state of helplessness, being dead in our transgressions and sins, and we were brought into the light of God's kingdom. See? And when we look at our oppressors, wouldn't we be one of those to mock Christians and insult Christians and defriend Christians on Facebook who said all these things that we didn't like, if it weren't for the grace of God in our lives saving us? That's when Corrie ten Boom and Darlene Deibler and Perpetua and a lot of other martyrs could turn to their accusers—even Jesus himself in the Bible and Stephen in the book of Acts—and pray with a heart of brokenness for those that were accusing them and abusing them and persecuting them, and pray for their salvation.

Now, you've got that guy's face—that gal's face—in your mind that's the biggest pain in your neck about your Christianity. Pray for them. I know you want to pray vindictive prayers, you know—"God, call down a bolt"—don't pray that way. God is going to take care of the vindication and the justice and the vengeance of people who don't repent. Our job in this season of grace, with the open door of mercy before us, is to continue to proclaim the gospel. Perhaps God would see fit to save some of these people. Seek the conversion of your opponents. That may be the hardest thing to do.



And again, I guess part of what I'm trying to dispel as a myth in verse 27 is: "Love your enemies" does not mean "feel good about those who oppose Christ and oppose you." I'm not asking you to feel anything. And as I already quoted from Psalm 119, you may feel a lot of indignation toward those people. But you still need to purpose to have God work in their lives—pray and beg and beseech God to do in their lives what God has done in your life. By the grace of God you were saved—maybe, by God's grace, he would save them.

This is a hard text—I realize. But for some of you that struggle with even understanding persecution, it may be because you're an undercover Christian. We talk a lot about that, and we have already in the book of Luke. But I hope that maybe this week you'd be emboldened to stand for Christ—stand with Christ. Don't be a jerk; don't be an irritant to your coworkers. But God is going to put you in a situation, I'm quite sure, where you're going to have to make a decision—whether you're going to go silent, be quiet, or whether you're going to speak up and stand with Christ. When you do, and you take it on the chin for that, all I'm telling you is: just recognize that God is going to compensate you. Be willing to quickly lose the things that they want to take from you in that situation (which for most of us is just reputation and hard feelings and all the rest). And then turn your attention—and some of the frustration that you might have over that—into a real concerted effort to pray that they would be converted. How great would it be if all the people that we envisioned in our minds, in this big auditorium, and we thought of all these hostile people toward the gospel—what if all those people—what if half those people became Christians? That should be our hope.

I know it's a humbling thing to pray that God would mercifully save our opponents. But it is the call of Christ in this very specific passage about our persecution. So I exhort you to that end with this tough text.

Let's pray together.

God, so many examples run through my mind in terms of people—Justin Martyr, Tertullian I've already quoted, so many others; Bonhoeffer in the era of the Third Reich—so many that were willing to graciously respond to those that persecuted them in ways that, thankfully, right now none of us have to experience, and be magnanimous enough in their own hearts and wise enough in their own theology to recognize that what the blasphemers and opponents of Christianity really need is the gospel. And while we may just want to call down imprecatory psalms on our enemies, we learn to pray and bless them by proclaiming to them the message of the gospel. And it may not always sound good—I think of the stories of Perpetua walking in as the judges were railing at them, saying, "You may judge us now, but God will judge you at the end of your life." And even that, though, is an act of mercy to try to at least speak some truth in the last moments of her life to those that would flip the switch, so to speak, to kill her.



But God, we look back at these people as heroes because they were willing to hold the world's goods and the comforts of this life lightly in their hands and let it go when it was demanded. I don't know what's going to be demanded of us. We can think long-term and maybe miss the application for this week. But we do see our country turning in a direction that makes it harder and harder to be a vocal Christian in our society. Give us courage and boldness. Let us willingly pay the price. If it puts us in prison, or excludes us, or whatever it might do—God, let us willingly pay that. But then for this week, just let us know that our hearts should be so resolved to stand with you that these costs seem real small in comparison. And help us, God, always have that evangelistic heart—and, oh, that's the call of every Christian—to be fishers of men, to be ambassadors of Christ. Let us always—even if we can't say it, because the situation doesn't allow for it—let us at least pray for the opponents of Christ to become proponents of Christ.

Thanks for this reminder from your word. Help us always to be good students of your word, rightly handling the word of truth, being very careful to rightly apply these texts. Thanks for the clarification this morning as we've studied together. In Jesus' name, amen.