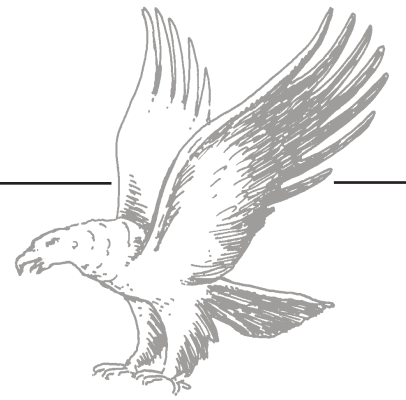


# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



September 25, 2016

## Love Your Enemies

Jesus' injunction to "love your enemies" is often dismissed as unrealistic. But until we seriously commit to following this principle, we will never grasp what the religion of Jesus is about.

*"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. . . . But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:27-36).*



Of all the ethical teachings of Jesus, none draws more attention than His command to "love your enemies." Skeptics dismiss it as hopelessly unrealistic and unworkable. Disciples struggle with it, looking for ways to weaken its

meaning to render it less onerous. The idea of showing active, unconditional kindness to one's enemies seems so unnatural that it strains credibility.

There are three reasons why we ought to take this lofty ethical ideal at face value and incorporate it into our personal relationships.

First, what is the alternative? The history of the human race is a long, sorry tale of hate, revenge, and getting even. Treating our enemies as enemies has done nothing but spawn more bloodshed and suffering. After thousands of years of this behavior, maybe it's time to try something different. The results couldn't be any worse than what we're already doing.

Second, although it seems counter-intuitive, this approach to relational conflict resonates with our nature. There is something in the human psyche that responds positively to kindness, especially when it is undeserved. We cheer the hero who sacrifices himself for strangers, and for the athlete who treats his opponents with sportsmanlike dignity. What Jesus taught simply broadens

that principle to cover those who mistreat us. The power of love to tear down walls of hatred has been demonstrated again and again throughout history.

Finally, Jesus was not merely theorizing about an abstract ideal—He lived by this principle in His own life. He embraced it fully, even in the face of a gruesome death. His uncompromising love for His enemies has transformed the lives of millions of people, and changed the course of history.

So how do we incorporate this ethic in our lives? Notice that in His lengthy commentary on this rule, Jesus never addressed how we should *feel* about our enemy. Instead, He spoke only about how we should *behave* toward our enemy. That is, we treat our enemy *as if* he is our friend, even though he is not. It's hard to implement at first, but a lifetime of practice will gradually reshape our minds to the point that we really can love our enemies—from the bottom of our heart.

Loving our enemies is not an unrealistic ideal, but a practical approach to making the world a better place for all.

— David King