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## Grace to Live - Love Is Our Brand

Matthew 5:38-48 | Sunday, September 9, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

# GRACE TO LIVE LOVE IS OUR BRAND Matthew 5:38-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

“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. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 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.

There was an article a couple of weeks ago in the New York Times, just a fun little piece. Brooke Williams was telling the story. As she and her husband began to have children they experienced a new dynamic in their relationship. They had less and less time, less and less margin for the things that they had normally done and they found more and more not getting done. She noticed a transformation that happened in her husband. Every time he did something around the house to help out, he would announce it. “Honey, I swept the floors. He would move the wet laundry from the washing machine into the dryer and then announce: “I’ve done the laundry.” He would take out the trash and then like a CNN reporter, announce: “The trash has left the building.”

“I don’t know what it is,” I say to newlywed wives about us men, “that we feel like we have to have some form of recognition every time we do something around the house.” These are often things

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that you do all the time, many times a day. Some of the ladies are really nodding their heads right now.

Brooke realized that her husband was in the business of brand promotion. He was just practicing his business ethic. He was promoting his brand in the household. He was trying to get as much market share as he could and he believed strongly that if you don't define your brand, someone else will.

But Brooke then thought, "Well, I'm in PR; I need to use my business skills," so she amped up her game. He would come home and they would start to engage in rehearsing all the things that they had done to sacrifice for one another to make the household work. He would talk about how difficult the commute was, and she was rather astounded that while she was home taking care of two small children and cleaning up messes, he thought it was difficult to sit on a Wi-Fi-enabled bus and stream Game of Thrones, as if that were a sacrifice, compared to her sacrifice. I do not watch Game of Thrones. That must make me much more spiritual. I don't recommend it.

Jesus is inviting you to renounce your brand - to give up your brand, to invite, to welcome his corporate takeover of your life. He is inviting you to carry the brand: Jesus. And unless you renounce your own personal brand, you cannot live the message that is described here, the message of love that is promoted in these verses. Because if you don't, you will do something that has a religious veneer, where you appear to love so that you can promote your own brand.

I want to say to everyone here: If you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, or not sure where you are with Jesus, or not yet a follower of Jesus, we are so glad you are here. I want to tell you, the Church has not done this well. We have not lived this out well, in my opinion. We have been too quick to focus on the promotion of our own particular brand and to appear to be the right thing, rather than just renouncing our own little kingdoms so that we can know the joy and peace of the kingdom of the loving Savior.

As we look at this truth, I need to have a moment of confession and tell you that I don't think I really qualify to preach this message except in the negative sense. I don't mean to be manipulative in saying this, but just to say I have so far to go in living out this truth, so much to learn in terms of renouncing my own brand.

It's a work of God's grace in our lives, where we see the amazing love of Jesus drawing us in. When we were opposed to God, when we were wanting to promote ourselves rather than live for God's

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glory, in amazing love he gave his Son to redeem us, to buy us back, to restore us. The patience and the mercy of God is just amazing grace.

So I want to give that user's disclaimer as we begin and say that as we look at this passage, here is what I believe Jesus is doing. He is orienting us. He is giving us something foundational. If you are a follower of Jesus, this is not like a message on baptism, or the meaning of some practice we do, or the style of worship, or denominational life, or this group versus that group. This is the fundamental orientation of a follower of Jesus Christ. This is foundational. He is establishing for us the entire orientation of our lives. This is how people will know you belong to Jesus. This is the distinguishing mark of a Christian. It's really powerful and really convicting.

If we could frame this passage properly, it's not intended to be comprehensive. What do I mean? It's not going to answer every question you have about how to love other people. In fact, a very important verse will follow in this same Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule: Love others. Treat others as you would have them treat you, as you would have them do unto you.

That simple golden nugget of truth answers many, many questions about how we love. If you just take one fragment of this sermon... For example, when Jesus says in these verses: "Do not resist the one who is evil..." if you just take that and say, "Okay, that's my rule," you're going to be in trouble. Because I believe what Jesus is doing is not answering every question we have here about how to love, he is just getting us oriented in the right direction, with the right priority. He is establishing this ethic as the highest priority in who we are and what we do.

So, it's to orient us. It's to line us up in the right direction. Here's how Jesus does it. He removes our limits to love, our barriers to love, our boundaries on loving others. He just comes through and demolishes those.

If you've ever played golf and you go to a golf course and you drive a golf cart, most golf carts have regulators on them. They keep you from going too fast. They entirely kill all the fun. Jesus is removing the regulators. He is removing the limits to how you love, so that you can have fun, loving other people with the kind of love that you receive from him.

I'm going to describe this in two parts: Reacting in love, verses 38-42, and Acting in love, verses 43-48.

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### I. Reacting in love.

This is a very helpful distinction, because when I was looking at this text and meditating on it, I was particularly convicted by the reaction part. It's easier for me to love if it's my idea. It's more difficult for me to love if you tell me that I have to love you and provoke me to not love you.

I don't react well. When poked, love doesn't ooze out. I was thinking, "Wow, reacting in love is really the part I need," until I started meditating on the acting in love part. Then I thought, "Wow, I just need the whole thing." Then I was just marveling, truly marveling at the love of Jesus Christ for me, for us. The mercy and the patience of God!

Friends, when I am offended, there is something in me that can be so ugly, that is so ugly, that I want to extract payment now. You're like, "Wow, you are scaring me a little bit." Right? This morning, I'm coming to the office and I'm sitting at a light. The light turns green and the guy honks at me. There are two cars on the road! It's 6:30 in the morning! Okay, I was on my phone and I should not have been on my phone. But you know what, I wanted to react by just spewing something unkind. Then I was like, "You know what? I know I'm not supposed to be on my phone." I put my phone down. I want to react. I want to react immediately.

Okay, let's look at it: Reacting. We must remember when we look at this passage that the Old Testament law included not just moral law, but civil law. It was to guide a nation. There were laws that were given to guide the nation as a part of how to keep peace within the nation. This whole idea of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth - it's found scattered throughout the Old Testament. What you'll see when you look at it is that it was designed to prevent vindictive behavior. It was designed to prevent extracting payment that was greater than the offense.

By the time we arrive at Jesus' day, that preventative for civil peace and rest had become a justification for the very thing it was designed to prevent, which was vindictive behavior. It was being used a rule to justify extracting vengeance. "You did this to me, I will require this of you."

Jesus is dismantling this kind of thinking. He is saying, "If you follow me, your love is greater than a legalistic love, greater than legal love. And I want to do away with this equivalent retaliation, this mindset where you are just giving people their due, what you think they deserve, what they've earned." He is calling us to a higher love and he is dismantling our restrictions.

What I want to do is give you a few thoughts to help us apply this and walk it out.

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### 1. Stop predicting the other person's response.

This is what we do, right? We say, "Well, I know that I should go to this person, but I also know that if I go to this person, they'll just do A, B, and C, and it will make things worse. Blah, blah, blah." Right? We now are so wise, so all-knowing, we know how they'll respond. We know them better than they know themselves. We know them better than God knows them. We know them in perfect, undiminished knowledge. So we start constructing a course of action based on their predicted behavior, which is based many times on our uncharitable assessment of them.

Jesus does not give us this mandate to figure out how they'll respond and manipulate the situation to get to the response that you want. Instead, he calls us to do the right and loving thing, and to leave the response with them and with the Lord. That simple phrase is very helpful.

### 2. Do the right and loving thing.

Here's where this fits to this reaction for us. It's so easy to get caught in a cycle of reacting, reacting, reacting, and we want to break out of that. So stop predicting the other person's response. Do the right and loving thing.

Here's something helpful to stir us.

### 3. Change course when you come to your senses.

You and I may fail in the moment to react properly. And as we grow in Christ we want to close the time, the gap between a godly reaction and an ungodly reaction. In other words, something happens and we react in the wrong way -- how long does it take? What's the gap of time until we come to our senses and do the right thing?

That gap has been described by some as the maturity gap. The longer it takes, the more immature we are. If 12 months later we are still holding onto that offense, it probably means we are fairly immature spiritually. But we want to close that gap, and when we come to our senses, to change course.

You guys have heard my simple little story over and over again, where my little girl was playing soccer. I was on the field and some Dad across the field starts yelling at my daughter and telling the ref: "She's fouling! She's aggressive! Stop her!" Yelling at the ref about my daughter! And I didn't like it. So when he said something directly to her, like "Stop it," I decided to engage this new

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acquaintance across the field. You know, “Hey, pipe down,” kinda. I don’t remember exactly what I said, but it was not, “God bless you.” It was something like, “May God shut you down.” And I pretty much meant it.

Big mistake. Because now he engages me. He is screaming at me across the field about what a terrible dad I am to raise such a daughter. And I’m just telling him he’s upset because my daughter is better than his daughter, obviously. This is your pastor. This was a long time ago, right?

Somewhere in that game, I’m like, “Oh, what have I done?” Conviction just falls on me. “I am a complete idiot.” I just got a hearty amen from the front row! I need more water. So, after the game I find this guy and I go up to him, and he is ready to like physically engage. But I say to him, “I am so sorry. Please forgive me.” He just didn’t know what to say. It so caught him off guard. He was loaded, right?

Whenever we come to our senses, we change course. Listen, we are ashamed that we weren’t there to start with. But this is the beauty of Jesus in our lives. He frees us to do that. Look, I’m a pastor! I’m a mess and I’m a pastor! God can use you. Your self-righteousness disqualifies you. Jesus’ righteousness qualifies you. That’s good news, right?

We won the game, by the way. So it was easier to do the right thing afterwards. I’m not proud of this. It is funny. I used to tell my kids my favorite Vince Lombardi quote is, “Show me a good loser and I’ll show you a loser.” That has been an Achilles heel for me. You’re like, “Wow.” Yeah. Sorry I shared that with you.

Okay, this is really helpful. This is the most helpful tidbit for me, wisdom that you glean from this first paragraph:

4. Go beyond.

Here is the key to reacting. You say, “Okay, Brian, you’re just telling me to be a doormat. You are telling me that’s what Jesus says. I say, “No, no, no, no. He gives four examples. Those examples are:

- 1) Give to the one who begs.
- 2) Go the second mile.
- 3) Give your outer garment as well as your inner garment.

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### 4) Turn the other cheek.

Four examples, and in all four the same thing happens. It's not just that something happens to you and you say, "Okay, alright. Just go ahead: Beat me, take advantage of me." No. You react by assuming a proactive stance of blessing that person.

You now say, "Okay, not only am I not going to retaliate, instead I'm going to love you. You require me to go a mile? I'm going to go with you two. You sue me and take my inner garment? The law forbids you to take my outer garment. Much like we have laws today, if you get sued and a large settlement comes against you, your house is protected. Certain things are legally protected, and the outer garment was protected in that way under Old Testament law. Jesus is saying, "You give them your outer garment. You get aggressive in a posture of blessing them." What happens is, you no longer feel like "I'm just a doormat." Now, I'm proactively engaged in blessing the person who is viewed as my enemy. So go beyond.

Fifth, finally, in terms of application thoughts here: Stop predicting the other person's response. Do the right and loving thing. Change course when you come to your senses. Go beyond.

### 5. Give up your brand name.

This is the key. "No, I'm about Jesus. That's the key to my happiness, the peace of God in my life. I need Jesus." A verse that is very helpful is 1 Corinthians 6:7. Paul is saying, "Listen, Christians are suing other Christians. This is crazy! Don't do this." He said, "To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" He is saying it's not about your brand name; it's about exalting Christ. This is the pathway to joy and happiness.

All of that under reacting. Let's go to acting.

## II. Acting in love, verses 43-48.

Jesus gave the understood interpretation of the Old Testament law. It's never stated this way, but this is what had come to be practiced. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbors, hate your enemies.'" That's not there, but it's very interesting. That was the practice that had become the norm in Jesus' day, and functionally it's the way many of us think, that this is normal love. Jesus

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does something here that's really fascinating. It's so life-giving. As he begins to unfold this, he starts with this stinger: "Love your enemies, pray for them, bless them." Wow, right?

But then he says essentially, "You have a new brand name. Here is your brand: You are a child of God. You have a new identity. And God, your Father, gives the sun and it shines on the good and the evil. God bestows his blessing on the good and the evil. Now you are his child."

Now you want to live for him. You want to live for his glory. You want to follow his example. You want to stop this whole cycle of trying to promote yourself and know the peace that comes when you die to it all and say, "I have an identity that Jesus has given me. I'm no longer just a slave in the house. I've been brought into the house. I've been adopted! I'm a son in the house of God, my Father! I am co-heir with Jesus!"

And, here is how we promote the brand name. We promote with this radical, enemy-blessing, self-sacrificing love for other people. That's what God calls us to. It can only happen as his spiritual DNA, just as a gift, gets imprinted on our hearts.

I told you that if you're a newly married wife it might take a while for your husband to get past this need to be recognized. I shouldn't impose my weaknesses on everyone else. Some of the men here are exceptional and that's not an issue for them.

I used to have enough sense to know that I shouldn't say to my wife: "I emptied the dishwasher," but I worked hard to find little ways to leave evidence of the fact that I emptied the dishwasher. Is that so bad? It's so silly. But it's freeing to say, "Lord, I've believed a lie. I really have believed a lie that the promotion of myself is the key to my life, when that's actually the road to death, the road to despair. I am so limited in my resource when you are offering me eternal, infinite love, power, and wisdom as a resource of my life."

God invites us into this. Listen to these two verses from Luke, chapter 6, where Jesus said, "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

In another passage Jesus says, "Don't invite people over to dinner that are going to repay you. Don't give gifts to people that are you'll gain something from." He is saying to be proactive in

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loving people in an unnatural, uncommon love, not a love that makes sense to everyone else. He is producing this style in our lives.

I'd like to give you a few thoughts to help you stir this up and walk it out.

- 1) Renounce your own brand. Definitely say, "Lord, I don't want to just live for myself. I want to live for you." Scripturally, I would put the tag on that: Repentance. God calls us to say, "Lord, I've been doing my own thing and I'm going to turn from that and turn to you. But however that fits for you, there needs to be this decisive moment. We return to it, but we renounce building our own brand.
- 2) Secondly, just trust in Jesus. Delight in his brand. Delight in him. Delight in his grace and his mercy. This is your hope. This is your joy.
- 3) See other people as more than potential converts. This is for anyone who is a follower of Jesus. We really need to just love people. It's a disservice we do to people if we think that their only value to us is if we think we can convert them to Christ. We want to love them. We want to just show love to them.
- 4) We seek for people to follow Jesus out of love for them. So yes, if you're here and you don't know Jesus, I want you to know Jesus. I want my heart to be because it's an act of love. The most loving thing that I can do is not withhold Jesus, but to share him with you.

I'm going to move through these quickly. Several of these have to do with the way we make Christ known to others.

- 5) The way you make your case is as important as the case you are making. This has mammoth application in terms of social media -- many ways where we want to present certain information. The way we make that case is critically important.

Here's one that comes out of left field.

- 6) Love your in-laws. Love your mother-in-law. Love your daughter-in-law, your son-in-law. Mom, if you're listening (my mother-in-law): I love you. Not everyone struggles with this. Christian parents, when your kids grow up and get married, push your married child toward the spouse's parents. We allow these insecurities and fears and differences. It's

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just crazy. If your mother-in-law is here today and hearing this message and smiling in this moment, I apologize.

- 7) Love your boss.
- 8) Love your employees.
- 9) Love your peers.
- 10) Love your neighbor.
- 11) Profit is not the bottom line. Redefine profit so that you reprioritize your life to put people first.

I just give those to stir up application, but it's dangerous because it becomes kind of like a legal code. I want us to be incited with receiving the mercy of Jesus and his incredible love so that we find security in Christ that propels us into this uncommon love.

Now, whose brand are you wearing today? Is it Jesus? That's my desire.