

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

June 16, 2024

I. Introduction

A. **Matthew 5:43-48**, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [44] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] **so that** you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] If you greet only your brothers, **what more** are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] Therefore you are to **be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

B. Last Sunday we looked at Jesus’ teaching on dealing with the person who is forcing you against your will – either forcefully or passively – to do what they want you to do. I pointed out that though it is right and good to control children, it is wrong to control adults – unless it is necessary for the public good.

1. This does not mean we cannot talk to adults about their behavior. We can, and in some cases, we ought for their good and the public good.
2. But there is a vast difference between talking and coercing, inviting and commanding, urging and forcing, speaking the truth in love and being derogatory, humiliating, sarcastic, and demeaning.
3. When talking with the adults in our life, our attitude, choice of words, timing, and approach must be within the boundaries of godliness and show that we value love and meaningful relationship more than getting our way or making them do what we want them to do – even if what we want them to do is best for them and all involved.

C. Pray

II. Our love is to be a complete love – just like God’s love

A. [43] You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

1. This popular view of life and God is based on beliefs, values, and a theology that is self-centered, self-seeking, and self-ruled.
2. It makes self-protection, a personal sense of security and well-being, freedom from having to deal with people who deliberately mistreat us, and a comfortable life more important than God’s eternal intentions

- for all who He created in His image – including our enemy’s spiritual well-being, and our own spiritual health.
3. The reality is, this self-centered, love friends–hate enemies view of life and God is incapable of producing genuine love. It can only produce a selfish use of love that seeks to benefit ourselves – in accordance with our selfish thinking and desires.
 - a. And though it is common for us to feel sorry for ourselves when mistreated, and fight back when attacked, God’s way is (1) to feel sorry for those who mistreat us because of their sin-sick condition, and (2) to demonstrate the way of love in response to the evil of their thinking, desires, words, and deeds by treating them as we want them to treat us.
 - b. As **Romans 12:21** says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
 4. “But,” you say, “treating our enemy as we want him to treat us can be exceedingly costly!” This is true, yet consider:
 - a. Love is others focused, not self-focused. Therefore, even though love can become costly to the one loving, the cost becomes less important when we treasure the good that comes from treating others as we want to be treated.
 - b. For example, the cost of loving as we want to be loved is overshadowed by the joy that comes from pleasing God, the hope of our enemy’s conversion as a result of modeling love, the example we’ve set for those watching of having sought our enemy’s good, the inner peace and contentment that comes from resting in the knowledge that God works all things out for good – including whatever it costs to love like this, and the blessings that God bestows on those who love as He loves.
 - c. In other words, love’s rewards exceed its costs, so much so, that the cost of love becomes insignificant by comparison.
- B. [44] [Therefore, Jesus says] **love** your enemies and **pray** for those who persecute you, **so that** you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*). [45] for [God] causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
1. Who or what is an enemy? According to Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary, an enemy is someone who is hostile toward you, who hates you (*or at least treats you in ways that make it appear they hate you*), and who desires or attempts to injure you in some way.

- a. An enemy is a person, group, or government who acts as an adversary or opponent who intentionally, and possibly even cruelly opposes you, oppresses you, and is antagonistic toward you.
- b. Your enemy may be someone in your home, extended family, social group, workplace, neighborhood, state, or nation. And your enemy may act against you in open and obvious ways, **or** more passive, hidden ways – yet the outcome is the same, your harm and loss.
2. As strange as it may seem to the culture that surrounds us and the unconverted mind – God calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. And though you may not be aware of this, this call to love our enemies began in the OT. For example:
 - a. **Exodus 23:4-5**, “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. [5] If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him (*your enemy to solve on his own*), you shall surely release it with him (*help your enemy*).
 - b. **Leviticus 19:17-18**, “You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him (*deal with him in a sinful way because of his sinfulness*). [18] You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”
 - c. Jesus affirmed that the OT Law applies to today when a Jewish lawyer (*one trained in the OT Law*) tested Jesus by asking what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by asking the lawyer what the Law said. The lawyer responded with “Love God supremely (**Deut. 6:5**) and love your neighbor as yourself (**Lev. 19:18**).” To this Jesus said, “Do this and you will live,” to which the lawyer asked, “And who is my neighbor.” Jesus responded by telling the story of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**), affirming that the OT Law about loving your enemies applies to NT times.
3. These three portions of scripture (**Lev. 19, Deut. 6, Luke 10**) give us a picture of what God **is** and **is not** asking of us. For example:
 - a. **God is not asking us** to have fond feelings for our enemy or to love him with the kind of affection or endearment that we have for our family and friends.
 - b. What God is asking of us is to remain free of ungodly anger, resentment, bitterness, ill-will, hatred, and any other ungodly thoughts, attitudes, or feelings that would drive us toward committing relationship murder.

- c. And, God is asking us to care about our enemy's well-being, and show that we care by doing good to our enemy when he is in need of having good done for him – for this is what love does.
 - (1) The most well-known Biblical example of doing good to our enemy when he is in need of having good done for him is, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink,” (**Proverbs 25:21, Romans 12:20**).
 - (2) Here in **vs 44**, Jesus adds that we are to pray for our enemies, which doesn't mean praying against them, but for them. For example, we can seek their good by praying that they would come to their senses, respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, repent, be converted, and live with God for eternity.
- d. **God is not asking us** to love our enemy in ways that allow him to think we approve of his sinful, evil behavior. What God is asking us to do is to follow His example of both (1) making the sun shine and rain fall on righteous and unrighteous alike, that is, seeking our enemy's good when good is needed, and (2) speaking the truth in love to him about his unloving, evil behavior – which God does through good government, one's conscience, the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, and through us as we meet the needs of our enemy and talk to him about the way of love.
- e. **God is not asking us** to spend time with our enemy as we would with a friend or loved one.
 - (1) What God is asking of us is to be committed and available to show kindness and good-will to our enemy as needed.
 - (2) And knowing that our enemy will have to answer to God, we ought to feel pity and sadness for him, for he is turning God against himself, and setting himself up for harsh judgement.
- f. You may be thinking that pity and sadness are unrealistic given the way your enemy is treating you.
 - (1) Admittedly, from the perspective of how you are being treated, pity and sadness make no sense.
 - (2) But from the perspective of how God has treated you, it makes complete and perfect sense. Consider what the Bible says:
 - (a) **Romans 5:8**, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
 - (b) **Romans 2:4**, “It is the kindness of God that leads you to repentance.”
 - (c) **Ephesians 2:8**, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

4. There are two belief-changing, value-changing, mind-changing, attitude-changing and love-changing truths found in **vs 44-45**.
 - a. **First**, the foundation, the essence, the reality of love is in doing good for anyone and everyone who you encounter and who is in need of having good done for them – regardless of the presence or absence of any love type feelings.
 - (1) This is why the definition of love that makes the most sense to me is: Love is seeking the good of everyone who is in any way effected by my choices and behavior.
 - b. **Second**, this is the way God loves His enemies, and He does so because He, himself, is love.
 - (1) When we love like this, we are not only loving as God loves, we are showing our enemy, and the world, that we are children of God who are living according to God and His word.
 - (2) Therefore we read in **1 John 4:7-8**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”
- C. Jesus moves on to establish the fact that Christians are to rise above the universally common, self-serving, limited form of love that is practiced by unbelievers.
 1. [46] “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors (*the worst of the ungodly*) do the same? [47] If you greet only your brothers, **what more are you doing than others?** Do not even the Gentiles (*average unbeliever*) do the same?”
 2. The point here is that if our love does not go farther than the love of unbelievers, we are no better than them. In fact, we are acting like them, for we are (1) to choosing selfishness over love, (2) committing relationship murder, (3) adding to the amount of conflict, enmity, and hostility in our world, and (4) fueling division rather than seeking unity and peace – all things that make the world worse than it is already.
- D. [48] Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
 1. In other words, we Christians are not to be like the unbelievers, but like our heavenly Father. His quality of character, His way of thinking and acting, His measure of holiness, His love is to be our standard of character, thinking, acting, holiness, and love. Or as it says in **1 Peter 1:14-16**, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the

- former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in **all** (*not some, or most, but all*) your behavior; [16] because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”
2. In the phrase “you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” the NASB translates the Greek word “teleios” as “perfect.” It can also be translated as “complete” or “whole” or “mature.”
 - a. For many years I would have fought for the word “perfect,” mostly because many Christians point to the impossibility of being perfect, and use that to justify their own sinful practices rather than making perfection a goal to pursue – even if it is unreachable in this life.
 - b. However, today I believe the better translation is complete. We are to be complete in our love – treating everyone, the righteous and the unrighteous, those near and dear and our enemies, just as we want to be treated.
 - c. And when we add (1) treating those who force us against our will to the way we want to be treated, (2) keeping our word regardless of what it costs us, (3) refusing to divorce our spouse except for the reason of adultery, (4) remaining outwardly and inwardly faithful in marriage, (5) refusing to commit relationship murder, and (6) pursuing a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, the word “complete” seems to say it best.
 3. One more point: in this context, to be perfect or complete or whole or mature is to fulfill the purpose for which we have been designed and made.
 - a. Just as God is love, and just as we have been designed and made in the image and likeness of God, so we are to be love.
 - b. And when we are love just as God is love – that is, when the right view of love permeates our thinking, molds our actions, and affects all our relationships, just as it affects all of God’s relationships, we fulfill the purpose for which we have been designed and made. This is perfect completeness.

III. Conclusion

- A. Therefore, may we make an honest, daily effort to love as God created us to love, for everyone who loves this way shows that they are born of God, that they know God, and that they are fulfilling the purpose for which they were created, born, and born again.