



## Part 36: Jesus and Enemies

Matthew 5:43-48

Be like your heavenly Father and find a way to love your enemies.

### I. Review

“These last two antitheses bring us to the highest point of the Sermon on the Mount, for which it is both most admired and most resented, namely the attitude of total love which Christ calls us to show towards the one who is evil (v.39) and our enemies (v. 44). Nowhere is the challenge of the Sermon greater. Nowhere is the distinctiveness of the Christian counterculture more obvious. Nowhere is our need of the power of the Holy Spirit (whose fruit is love) more compelling.” – John Stott

Rather than follow our natural impulse for retribution, we seek to de-escalate the situation and look for creative ways to engage and bless the offender.

### II. What is Jesus Commanding?

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you...” Matthew 5:43-44

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people but love your neighbor as yourself.” Leviticus 19:18

This is a favorite Old Testament command of Jesus, and he pairs it with the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) as his guide for obeying the commands of the Old Testament (Matthew 22:34-40).

There is no command in the Hebrew Scriptures to “hate your enemies.” Jesus is likely referring to a Jewish idiom – “love your neighbor and hate your enemies.” It was popular to see your neighbor as a fellow Jew and your enemy as any Gentile (especially the hated Romans).

On the contrary, the Hebrew Scriptures commanded the covenant people to help your enemy in need (Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22 quoted by Paul in Romans 12; Job 31:29-30).

“If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if he is thirsty, give him drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.”  
Proverbs 25:21-22 (quoted by Paul in Romans 12:20-21)

Jesus is making explicit what was implied in the Hebrew Scriptures: “neighbor” includes our “enemy.” (parable of the Good Samaritan).

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### III. Why Love our Enemies?

Jesus gives us our motive.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you **that you may be sons of your Father in heaven**. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Matthew 5:43-45

A. This is the way your heavenly Father is. He is gracious and loving even to evil people.

“...to love those who do not love you is not offered as a piece of pragmatic wisdom, but as a reflection of the character of God himself (v. 45). ... it is to live on a level above that of ordinary decent people, to draw your standards of conduct not from what everyone else is doing, but from your heavenly Father.” – R.T. France

B. This the character of Jesus, who gave his life for God’s enemies (Luke 23:34).  
“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”  
Luke 23:34

C. We were once God’s enemies (Romans 5:6-11).

“Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, **when we were God’s enemies**, we were

reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" Romans 5:9-10

D. It leads to greater intimacy with the Father (John 14:23).

"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him." John 14:23

"The first clear motive for keeping Jesus' commands now appears: If we will live this counter-cultural way we will come to experience God the Father in an especially intimate way – we will become God's close sons and daughters; we will become in personal experience what we are in gracious fact – members of the family of God...The motive of the seventh Command, then, is exactly the promise of the seventh Beatitude: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God!'" – Dale Bruner

#### **IV. How do We Love our Enemies?**

A. Agape love is a choice.

Jesus uses the word agape for "love." This is the word used to describe the kind of "love" God expressed in saving sinners (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10).

*Agape* is the love that chooses to act for the goodwill of another regardless of feelings. It wills the objective good of the person (1 Cor. 13:4-7). This is the love God gives His people so that we might love in His Name (1 John 4:7-21).

"Agape love is a rugged commitment to be with someone as someone who is for that person's good and to love them unto God's formative purpose." – Scott McKnight

B. Identify who you see as an "enemy."

C. Start with Prayer.

"This is the supreme command. Through the medium of prayer, we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

D. Look for ways to get to know them (assuming they are safe) (Luke 6:27-28).

## V. What about Evil?

- A. Refer to last week's sermon on Matthew 5:38-42.
- B. Jesus is not saying that people are not evil or do evil (Matthew 5:39).
- C. Jesus gives us his example of confronting evil in nonviolent ways (Matthew 21:12-17; 23).
- D. The Lord hates evil, and He wants us to hate evil too (Psalm 1; 5:4-5; 24:4-5; 45:7; Romans 12:9).

“The other side of burning love for God is an understandable burning desire for an end to all that resists God; passion for God is matched with a comprehensible passion against everything hostile to God.” – Dale Bruner

- “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”
- “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:9, 17-21

In our personal relationships, we are called to resist and oppose evil as much as possible by any nonviolent means as well as seeking to love the person by calling them to repent.

## VI. What about War?

There has been a debate in the Church about whether Jesus' commands in these last two passages forbid a disciple of Jesus from serving in the military (pacifists vs. two kingdoms).

Those who believe Jesus permits us to serve in the military find some Biblical support in Paul's writings in Romans 13:1-4. The wrath and revenge denied to Christians are permitted for the State.

Augustine was the first Church Father to advocate for the permission of a Christian to “bear the sword” for the State as long as it is done righteously. When

asked by a Roman officer if he could, in good Christian conscience, continue his work as a soldier, Augustine responded:

“Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace.” – Augustine

Michael Wilkins notes seven distinctives of a “just war”: (1) a just cause; (2) just intention; (3) last resort; (4) formal declaration; (5) limited objectives; (6) proportionate means; and (7) non-combatant immunity.

It is clear that the teachings of Jesus have been ignored throughout Church history (Crusades), and it is also true that his teachings of loving our enemies has had a significant influence on the way Western nations have tried to conduct war (with many exceptions).

Ex. Movie – (YouTube): “To End All Wars” – “When Grace Overcomes Hate” (04:00 – 6:44) ... American & British POWs in a Japanese prison camp – one soldier defies both the commanding Japanese officer and his commanding officer by offering care to wounded Japanese soldiers brought to their camp (wounded by Allied bombers). This act of enemy love was incomprehensible to the Japanese.

## VII. Formed to be a People of Radical Love

“Be **perfect**, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is **perfect**.” Matthew 5:48

*Telios* = coming of age, mature, complete.

“God loves his enemies. That is the glory of his love.” – Darrell Johnson

The ultimate mark of spiritual maturity is our willingness and ability to love even our enemies.

“Our call is to grow and mature into the kind of people who turn an enemy into a neighbor through love.” – John Mark Comer

“We have risen considerably in this Sermon. At the beginning of the chapter, we were with the ‘poor in spirit;’ here at the end of the chapter we are with the ‘perfectly mature.’ There we were in the valley; here we are on the summit. In the

Beatitudes we were in deep need; in the commands we are on high assignment...The shortest route to the First Beatitude is to take Jesus' last Command seriously." – Dale Bruner

**Discussion questions:**

1. What has been your experience with teaching on this passage?
2. What do you hear Jesus saying is our motivation for loving our enemies?
3. Read Romans 5:6-11. How does this inform the way you think about Jesus' command?
4. What questions does Jesus' teaching raise for you?
5. Read Romans 12:9-21. What similarities do you see in Paul here and what Jesus says?
6. Who do you see as your "enemy"? What steps do you think the Lord may be calling you to take to turn this "enemy" into a "neighbor"?