

Title: Love Your Enemies

Passage: Matthew 5:43-48

Summary:

I. The Rabbinical teachings on loving others (v.43)

II. God's teaching on loving others (v.44-47)

III. God's standard of perfection for us. (v. 48)

Key Truths:

- There is a place for righteous wrath on enemies.
- As a group, we can hate people who do evil. But individuals are never called to hate other individuals.
- We cannot hate individuals. We do not have that right. We are not in God's place. We don't know if that person will later become a Christian.
- God's work is in saving the lost.

Application:

- Treat others, especially our enemies, with the love of Christ.
- Pray: bring all criticism to God.
- Practice good listening skills with those who disagree with you.
- Ask for a discerning heart to know when to fight like a lion and when to yield.
- Be prepared for contentious meetings. The Christian life is warfare.
- Beware of gossip and slander.
- Be more zealous for Christ's glory than for your reputation before others.
- Be "more." Be different in the world.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- What point(s) in the sermon did the Lord most impress upon you?
- What character quality more than any other says to the world, "This person is a Christian"? Why?
- How may there be something about your love for others that goes beyond natural terms ("more" that goes beyond the norm)?
- What would my home / workplace / neighborhood look like if I had "more" in my love for others?
- What are some specific ways you can show love this week to someone whom you dislike?

Introduction:

"Saving My Assassin"

- Book by Virginia Prodan
- An assassin went to the office of a Christian lawyer in Romania. The lawyer shared the Gospel of Jesus and the assassin left without killing her. Years later, they met and found he actually came to faith in Christ.

Passage:

Matthew 5:43-48

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.

EXPOSITION

Context of Passage:

Jesus giving the "Sermon on the Mount"

- going through six illustrations showing what the Law was intended to be.
- Starts with what people thought the Law said followed by a contrast of what the Law means.

I. THE RABBINICAL TEACHINGS ON LOVING OTHERS. (v.43)

You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

You have heard that it was said

- pointed to the interpretation of the religious leaders of the law of that time. Common belief of that time.
 - Not restating what the Law actually says.

You shall love your neighbor

Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

- "as yourself": religious leaders focused on this particular word alone as to what it meant.

and hate your enemy.'

- this was an addition never in the Law.

Context:

Deuteronomy 7:20

Moreover, the LORD your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed.

Deuteronomy 30:7

And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you.

Psalms 139:21-22

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

- These verses do contain strong language against God's enemies and those who oppose Him.

Important distinctions:

- There is a place for righteous wrath on enemies.
 - But God never commands us to hate.
- As a group, we can hate people who do evil.
 - But individuals are never called to hate someone.
- We are never to classify people eternally.
 - We don't know who will repent and who will not.
- Example: Conversion of Paul.
 - Paul was an enemy of the church.
 - But later God came to save him.
- We cannot hate individuals. We do not have that right. We are not in God's place.
 - We don't know if that person will become a Christian.
 - God's work is in the business of saving the lost.

II. GOD'S TEACHING ON LOVING OTHERS (v.44-47)

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.

- Quote: "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; but to return good for evil is divine." (Alfred Plummer)
- Jesus commands a love without limits
 - Love that loves others regardless of what they say or do to us.
 - Revolutionary love!

Love

- Greek word: "Agapao" = Agape
- Meaning = A will to perform sacrificial acts
 - Not an emotional feeling.
- We are called to love others with our deeds.

Love your enemies

Parable of Good Samaritan (Luke 10)

Luke 10:29-37

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

- Misperception of parable: who are the characters representing?
 - But the main point of the parable is "Who is my neighbor?"
 - Individual characters are not symbols.

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.

- "Like father like son"
 - Loving our enemies shows you are a child of God.
 - We show others we are like God when we love our enemies.
 - Loving our enemies doesn't make us a child of God.
- God's heart is for His creation to repent and turn to Him. Likewise, our heart should be the same for ourselves as well as for others.
 - God has great patience for others to come to faith to Him.
 - Likewise, we should do the same.

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?

- Loving our enemies distinguishes us from the world.

Tax collectors

- In Roman Empire, they were considered as traitors (those who collected taxes for the Roman Empire as well as padded their own coffers)
 - Even double-crossing people would like similar-minded people.
- Contrast: Christians should do more than what others do.
 - It is the "more" that distinguishes us for God's glory.
- Quote: "...The Christian, by definition here, goes beyond and does more. HE EXCEEDS. He is separate from all others, and not only from the worst among others, but from the very best and highest among them."

Questions of Reflection:

- Is there a "more" for my love for others?
- Is there something about my love for others that goes beyond natural terms?
- Is my love above and different that the most ethical of non-believers around us?
- What would my home / workplace / neighborhood look like if I had "more" in my love for others.

Exceed in our love for others

- This is a command from God.
 - Not about feeling good about loving others.

Matthew 5:16

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

III. GOD'S STANDARD OF PERFECTION FOR US. (v. 48)

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- God calls us to be perfect.
 - What is perfection? Morally right all the time.
- But who can be perfect? No one.

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

But through Jesus Christ, God made us perfect.

God perfects us by:

- Perfecting our record (delivering us from the penalty of our sin)

- Justification (we are given Jesus' righteousness - we are viewed as perfect in God's eyes)
- Perfecting us through sanctifying us in this life (delivering us from the power of sin)
 - Sanctification: present and on-going being made more like Jesus.
- Taking us to heaven (delivering us from the presence of sin)
 - Glorification.

IV. APPLICATION

Treat others, especially our enemies, with the love of Christ.

Romans 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:10

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Pray

- Make it a point to pray for those who oppose and insult you.
- Remember others have souls that need grace and salvation.
- Pray for others for 5 minutes.
 - Use Scripture to pray through for others' behalf.
- Bring all criticism all to God in prayer

Practice good listening skills with those who disagree with you.

Ask for a discerning heart to know when to fight like a lion and when to yield.

Psalms 19:14

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Be prepared for contentious meetings (pray and ask for prayer)

- The Christian life is warfare.

Ephesians 6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Beware of gossip and slander

- do not talk bad of others

- Compare: tax collector in the temple

Luke 18:10-12

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

- Some opponents are children of the devil but they could become staunch allies for the kingdom later.

Be more zealous for Christ's glory than for your reputation before others.

Psalm 115:1

Not to us, O LORD, but to your name be the glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and faithfulness!

Be "more." Be different in the world.

- By God's Spirit and grace, we can be different.
 - This is not being more religious. This is living for Christ.