

Lesson #7 – Love Your Enemies – Matthew 5:43-48

Review of Previous Week

- What did Jesus mean when he said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away?”
 - We are to take drastic actions to steer clear of sin in our lives.
 - What are some examples of this?
- What does *lex talionis* mean? What was its intended purpose?
 - John Stott defines *lex talionis* as “the principle of exact retribution, whose purpose was both to lay the foundation of justice, specifying the punishment which a wrongdoer deserved, and to limit the compensation of his victim to an exact equivalent and no more.”⁸⁶
- What is the difference between “you have heard it said” and “it is written?”
 - “You have heard it said” does not refer to Old Testament law. It refers to the oral teachings / traditions / interpretive additions of the Pharisees.
 - When Jesus says, “It is written,” he is referring to Old Testament law.
- When Jesus says, “Do not take an oath at all,” is he banning all oath taking?
 - No. There are other places in the New Testament where people take oaths.
 - No. In the Old Testament, there are places where God makes an oath.
 - No. Jesus, in his trial before Caiaphas, took an oath.
- How had the culture at the time of Jesus removed the *lex talionis* from its intended purpose?
 - Rather than being a part of the public justice system, it became an opportunity for private revenge.
 - Physical penalties had been replaced by financial damages.

⁸⁶ Stott, 104.

Opening

- It is a fact of life that children act like their parents.
 - This can be both good and bad, but children imitate what they see.
 - Good habits that the children may learn from mom and dad include:
 - Respect for others – using ma’am and sir; please and thank you
 - A strong work ethic – not being afraid to work hard
 - Kind and loving to others
 - Proper worship of God - this is one of the reasons that it is so important that children attend worship services with their parents – so that they can imitate their parents’ worship of God.
 - However, bad habits can also come from mom and dad. These include:
 - Sarcasm / cynicism
 - Lying
 - Swearing
 - Being self-centered
- Even when parents display bad habits, the children often desire to be better than their parents.
 - What standard should the children aspire to?
 - What habits should they develop?
 - We should aspire to imitate God and his attributes / actions.
 - We are to “be holy for he is holy.”
- In a few minutes, we will be discussing actions and habits that we are to learn from our heavenly Father.

Scripture

- 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 makes his sun rise

on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- Luke 6:27-36 is a parallel passage to Matthew 5:43-48. We will be looking at both passages – “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. ³² “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”
- Three points
 - What are we to do? We are to love our enemies.
 - Why are we to do it? We are to love our enemies because God loves them too.
 - How are we to do it? We are to love our enemies without limits.

Hating Your Enemies Within the Rabbinic Tradition

- Once again, in today’s scripture, Jesus opposes the interpretive additions of the Pharisees and religious teachers and demands a heart-based approach.
- Matthew 5:43 – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

- Hatred did not necessarily mean what it does today; in the time of Jesus, it meant a sort of “non-love” or attitude that was not loving. Hatred was not necessarily equivalent with hostility.
 - Jeremias translates, “You shall love your compatriot but you need not love your adversary.”⁸⁷
- Rabbinic teachings (at least those that have been preserved) typically do not jump to such a bold and incorrect conclusion.
- However, the Qumran (think Dead Sea Scrolls) covenanters required love for those inside the Qumran community and hatred for those on the outside.
- This is a blatant Pharisaical abuse of Old Testament law, and yet it would have likely been defended as a legitimate interpretation.
- Spurgeon calls this addition a “parasitical growth”⁸⁸ upon God’s law.
- God never commanded his people to hold to a double standard of morality – one for a neighbor and another for an enemy.⁸⁹
- The Pharisees had distorted the commands of the Old Testament.
- There is such a thing as godly hatred.
 - It is a hatred for enemies of God, not our own enemies.
 - It is free from spite and vindictiveness.

What are we to do? We are to Love our Enemies (verse 44)

- Matthew 5:44 – “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
- The Biblical command to love our neighbors from Leviticus 19:18 extends to foreigners in the land (Leviticus 19:33-34.)
 - 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.” (italics added.)

⁸⁷ Jeremias, 213.

⁸⁸ Charles Spurgeon. *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. (Passmore and Alabaster, 1893) 31.

⁸⁹ Stott, 117.

- Leviticus 19:33-34 – “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”
- Neighbor, in the time of Christ, meant fellow Israelite.
 - However, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus broadens the definition of the word neighbor to include those outside of our comfort zone.
- Love is the characteristic that should best distinguish those of us who are the recipient of God’s love.
 - This Christ-like love is not limited in the manner in which it is acted out, but rather unlimited, to those both good and evil.
 - This is the mark of the love of God.
 - We are to care for others, because caring is God’s way.
- Jesus is raising the issue of more in regard to the law: He is both widening the scope of love and the recipients of that love.
 - He has removed “as yourself,” thereby instructing us to love without any attachments.
 - He also has changed “neighbor” to “enemies,” thereby widening the definition of neighbor to include those that we really don’t like.
 - In Jesus’ vocabulary, “neighbor” includes “enemy.”
 - When reading Leviticus 19:18,
 - We like to think of our neighbors as those who:
 - Are friends and family
 - Are close personal friends
 - Are those that are in our demographic group:
 - Those of the same denomination
 - Those of the same political leanings
 - Those of similar income levels

- Those of the same race.
- When we think of our neighbors in this manner, we are released by the law to not love strangers or enemies.
 - This frees us up to hate our enemies.
 - However, Leviticus 19:34 informs us otherwise, “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself.”
 - We are to love the strangers (immigrants) in our land.
 - This is not a political issue.
 - It is a spiritual one.
 - Proverbs 25:21 addresses the manner in which we are to treat our enemies, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.”
 - We have been given the responsibility of taking care of the physical needs of our enemies.
 - How different would our socio-political climate be in this country if we all followed the commands given in Leviticus 19:18 and Proverbs 25:21?
- If we fail to love our enemies, we are no different than the world.
 - Most people look after those they care about.
 - The litmus test of our faith is how we respond to those we don’t care for.
 - It is not enough for believers to resemble non-believers. We are to out-virtue them.
 - Bonhoeffer said it this way, “What makes the Christian different from other men is the ‘peculiar,’ the “extraordinary,” the “unusual,” that which is not a matter of course . . . It is the more the “beyond-all-that.” For Jesus, the hallmark of a Christian is the “extraordinary.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, 136.

- What is this “extraordinary,” this “unusual” that Bonhoeffer was talking about? It is the love of Christ himself who patiently and obediently went to the cross. The cross is the differential of the Christian religion.⁹¹
- As God’s adopted children, we are to reflect his character; we are to resemble him in attitude, disposition, and conduct.⁹²
 - To be like God is the core of man’s obligation to God as well as the glory of human virtue.
- Matthew 5:46-47 tells us “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”
 - The world (and the Pharisees, apparently) tell us to be kind to those who are kind to us but get revenge on those who wrong you.”
 - “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine.” (Plummer)⁹³
 - Jesus, in this passage, is ironically showing the Pharisees that their loveless attitude is identical with the very people they despise.⁹⁴
 - We have a “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” attitude with those we like.
 - It is clear that we are called to more: to a greater righteousness, not only in our outward actions, but also in the depths of our hearts.
 - The ultimate standard of righteousness is the character of God, and since man is made in God’s image, man is to be like God.

⁹¹ Ibid 137.

⁹² Murray, 176.

⁹³ Alfred Plummer. *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew*. (London: Robert Scott, 1915), 89.

⁹⁴ Green, 79.

- The Holy Spirit has written God's law upon our hearts, and we are to strive to obey it.
- "The life of the old (fallen) humanity is based on rough justice, avenging injuries and returning favors. The life of the new (redeemed) humanity is based on divine love, refusing to take revenge but overcoming evil with good."⁹⁵
- "The demand of love, unrelenting and all-pervasive as it is, does not abrogate the demand of justice. Love is not inconsistent with the infliction of punishment for wrong."⁹⁶

Why are we to do it? We are to Love our Enemies Because God Loves Them Too (verse 45)

- Who are the enemies of whom Christ speaks?
 - First of all, Jesus is speaking of personal relationships as he had in the previous antitheses.
 - He is not talking about nations at war or the like.
 - He is speaking of personal enemies.
 - Matthew indicates that these enemies include the ones who were persecuting the church.
 - Verse 44 tells us exactly that, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
 - This inclusion is not limited to one particular type of enemy.
 - Christ is instructing us not to discriminate against our enemies.
 - The love Jesus requires extends outside of our little cliques to our opponents.
- God demonstrates his love through common grace.
 - The perfect love of God is shown to those who do not return it.
 - God is gracious to all of humanity, including those that don't love him.

⁹⁵ Stott, 123.

⁹⁶ Murray, 179.

- Longman defines common grace as “the gracious favor that God bestows “commonly” without distinction on all men. God could with justice condemn all; instead he shows repeated and prolonged favor on all.”⁹⁷
- Scripture calls us to be imitators of God – therefore, we also are to be gracious to all humanity.
 - 1 Peter 1:16 – “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”
 - Matthew 5:48 – “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- “Our Christian calling is to imitate not the world, but the Father.”⁹⁸
- As believers, we are to display righteousness – hungering and thirsting for it continually.
- When any of us sins, we deserve eternal separation from God.
 - As Romans 6:23 states, “the wages of sin is death.”
 - However, as part of God’s grace, the punishment for sin is not immediately felt.
 - All of mankind – regardless of whether they will ultimately receive God’s grace or God’s judgment – will continue to receive blessings while on earth.
 - If God were to deal with man. in the manner of quid pro quo, of reciprocation and compensation, we as sinners should receive nothing good.
- Common grace is seen in many areas of life
 - These blessings can be physical in nature - Matthew 5:45 – “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
 - They can be moral: People are not as evil as they could be
 - They can be creative: People can produce and appreciate many different kinds of beautiful things.

⁹⁷ Longman, 192.

⁹⁸ Stott, 124.

- They can be religious / social: Jesus tells His followers in Matthew 5:44 to pray for their persecutors.
- Although common grace does not save people, God's delaying His judgment allows many to come to salvation.
 - 2 Peter 3:9 – "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."
 - Finally, God's bestowing of common grace on all people demonstrates His glory through their imitation of his character in their many activities.
 - While God is gracious to all, he is not Father in heaven to all.
 - He is Father in heaven to those who love him.
 - He remains gracious to those who do not love him.

How are we to do it? We are to Love our Enemies Without Limits (verse 48)

- How are we to love our neighbors? (Luke 6:27-28)
 - Luke 6:27-28 – "But I say to you who hear, *love* your enemies, *do good* to those who hate you, ²⁸ *bless* those who curse you, *pray for* those who abuse you."
 - Love
 - "True love is not sentiment so much as service – practical, humble, sacrificial service."⁹⁹
 - "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all. . .but active love is labor and fortitude, and for some people too, perhaps, a complete science."¹⁰⁰
 - "Our enemy is seeking our harm; we must seek his good. For this is how God has treated us. It is "while we were enemies" that Christ

⁹⁹ Stott, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov*.

died for us to reconcile us to God. If he gave himself for his enemies, we must give ourselves for ours.”¹⁰¹

- Do good

- The love of which Jesus speaks is not a sentimental, emotion-based love, but one of concrete action.
- In using the command, “Do good,” Jesus displays that he is talking about actions, not just sentiment.
 - However, in loving ones enemies, sentiment and emotion cannot be completely removed from the actions, just as praying for ones enemies will also include sentiment and emotion.
 - Love is not just a sentimental emotion, but an earnest desire for the good of our enemies.

- Bless

- Luke tells us to bless those who curse us.
- We are to respond in loving-kindness when others speak evil toward us.
- As followers of Jesus, we will be hated, cursed, blamed and ostracized.
 - We are not to respond in like.
 - We are to respond in love.
 - We are to bless them.

- Pray for

- One of the manners in which we love our enemies is to pray for them.
 - We have no problem praying for loved ones, or those within our own social circles.
 - However, it is difficult to pray for those that antagonize or disagree with you.

¹⁰¹ Stott, 118.

- Tremper Longman, in his commentary on Matthew and Mark, says, “The more love, the more prayer; the more prayer, the more love.”¹⁰²
- To love our enemies in prayer means that when we pray, we are to desire that they will repent and come to have a believing faith, which will ultimately result in their salvation.
 - If we truly love our enemies, this will be our prayer for them.
 - This is far more than mere sentimental prayer.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “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.”¹⁰³
 - It is impossible to pray for someone without loving him, and impossible to go on praying for him without discovering that our love for him grows and matures.¹⁰⁴
- Chrysostom understood the responsibility to pray for our enemies as the “very highest summit of self-control.”¹⁰⁵
- What does this look like?
 - Jesus prayed for those who persecuted him before and during his crucifixion.
 - Luke 23:34a – “And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
 - If the torture of crucifixion could not silence Christ’s prayer for his enemies, what pain, pride, prejudice, or sloth could justify the silencing of ours?¹⁰⁶
- Verse 48 ends the six antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount.

¹⁰² Longman and Garland, 192.

¹⁰³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (SCM, 1959), 276.

¹⁰⁴ Stott, 119.

¹⁰⁵ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, Part 1. 281.

¹⁰⁶ Stott, 119.

- Verse 48 sounds like an impossible command, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- However, the word perfect (*teleios* in Greek) is better translated as “mature,” “complete,” “whole,” or “full-grown.” My personal understanding of this word in the context in which it is used is “loving without limits.”
 - Divine love is indiscriminate love, shown equally to good men and bad.
 - This is known, as we just studied, as common grace.
 - This is to be the standard of Christian love.
 - When we practice this Christian love, we are following him who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (verse 17.)
- As J. Walvoord has said, “While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable.”¹⁰⁷
 - God has so poured out his love for us when we were rebels against him. In his love for us, he has justified us, purified us, adopted us into his kingdom, and now wants us to represent him in this fallen world.
 - In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were set apart for God.
 - In the New Testament, the followers of Christ are set apart for God. In order to best display our setting apart, we must practice Christian love with our neighbors and our enemies.
- We must desire God’s will so much that we seek to please him in every area of our lives.

Review Questions

- Today’s interpretive addition runs contrary to Scripture. What additions to Scripture do we have in today’s cultural Christianity?
- What are the four manners in which we are to love our enemies?
 - Love them

¹⁰⁷ J. Walvoord, Matthew: *Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 51.

- Do good to them
 - Bless them
 - Pray for them
- What is common grace? Why is it important?
 - Common grace is the gracious favor that God bestows “commonly” without distinction on all men.
 - Common grace provides us with God’s example to love those who reject us.