



“Bless Those Who Curse You”

Matthew 5:43-48

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- “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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father 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 have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

# Understanding Matthew 5:43-48

- “This may be one of the most important verses in the New Testament; the ideas expressed in this verse are considered the Christian distinction and innovation. Love thy enemies is what separates Christianity from all earlier religions” (Ulrich Luz)
- There are a number of historical precedents: the Babylonian Counsels of Wisdom, the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope. In Greek and Roman philosophy, it was addressed by writers such as Cicero, Seneca, and the Cynics.

# Understanding Matthew 5:43-48

- Old Testament
  - Lev. 19:18 - “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”
  - Deut. 23:6 - “You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.”
  - Prov. 25:21-22 - “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; 22 For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the LORD will reward you.”
- But before Jesus, all others advocated loving enemies when it is to one’s own advantage

# Understanding Matthew 5:43-48

- The meaning of the word love is more restricted in Greek than in English. Greek has four different words translated as love: love for a family member, storge; sexual love, eros; and deep affection, philia, are not used in this verse. Jesus uses agapao, which translates as ongoing benevolence.
- Enemies is a broad term that applies to all manner of foes and adversaries. In this context, persecutors are specifically mentioned.

# Understanding Matthew 5:43-48

- Even some of the best Bible students have some trouble understanding what Jesus requires in this passage. We are in a world where people tend to live only for themselves. Having to love and forgive our enemies seems counter to our own sense of fairness and reason.
- According to the tradition of the Pharisees, one could hate one's enemies. The Jews were intent on practicing this tradition. They disdained the Samaritans to the north. They despised the Gentiles around them. Roman historians charged the Jews with the hatred of the whole human race.

# Understanding Matthew 5:43-48

- 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, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”
- Ex. 23:5 - “If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.”
- Acts 7:60 - “Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep”
- Eph. 4:32 - “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

# Understanding Matthew 5:43-48

- What it means to love our enemies in four questions:
  - Who are our enemies?
  - What is loving our enemies?
  - How and when do we love our enemies?
  - Why should we love our enemies?



# Who Are Our Enemies?

- Who they are not:
  - People who have a different opinion than we hold.
  - People who are of a different ethnicity.
  - People from other countries.
  - People who are different, quirky, or eccentric in some way.
- The Christian ought never presume anyone to be his enemy.

# Who Are Our Enemies?

- Those who by their choices and behaviors make themselves our enemies.
  - Foreign aggressor nations we are fighting.
  - Those who hold immoral philosophical and promote evil political policies
  - People who despise Christ and oppose Christianity.

# Who Are Our Enemies?

- A better distinction is made with the question, “Who is God's enemy?”
  - Those who are willfully carnal minded
  - Rom. 8:7 - “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

# Who Are Our Enemies?

- Those who purposefully practice friendship with the world
  - James 4:4 - “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”
- Those who rebel and rail against God
  - Heb. 10:29 - “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”

# What Is Loving Our Enemies?

- What it is not:
  - It doesn't mean that we have strong feelings of affection for them.
  - It doesn't mean that we agree with them or approve their behavior.
  - It doesn't mean that we capitulate to everything they want of us.

# What Is Loving Our Enemies?

- It is in imitation of the character of God
  - Matt. 5:45, 48 - “That you may be sons of your Father 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... 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”
  - Rom. 5:8-10 - “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

# What Is Loving Our Enemies?

- God is love, even for His enemies
  - 1John 4:8, 16 - “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love... 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”
  - John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

# What Is Loving Our Enemies?

- It is what defines a Christian
  - It's significant that many other world religions seek to destroy enemies.
  - Christians always seek the wellbeing of their enemies. They desire to save their souls.
  - Matt. 10:28 - "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
  - Matt. 16:26 - "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"



# What Is Loving Our Enemies?

- Abraham Lincoln said: “Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”
- Christians seek to destroy their enemies by making them brothers.

# How And When Do We Love Our Enemies?

- How can I love someone who hates me and is trying to destroy me?
  - By blessing, doing good, and praying for them - Matt. 5:44
  - By refusing to return evil or violence for their treatment of you; by going the extra mile for them - Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:19
  - By attending to his needs - Rom. 12:20
  - By overcoming evil with good; teaching them the gospel - Rom. 12:21

# How And When Do We Love Our Enemies?

- When do we love our enemies?
  - Any opportunity we have to show love to them.
  - When we don't want to love them.

# Why Should We Love Our Enemies?

- God loves them - John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-10
- They need the gospel - Rom. 1:16; John 14:6; Acts 16:25-28
- To be more like God - Matt. 5:45
- Every soul is worth loving.

# Why Should We Love Our Enemies?

- “Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause He had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work. 'The kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared' (*Luther*).”  
(*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*)