

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Matthew 5:43 (NKJV)

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

It is true that Leviticus 19:18 specifically says, “***you shall love your neighbor as yourself,***” but nowhere did the law command “***hate your enemy***”. The Jews thought it was implied that Israel’s enemies were God’s enemies and therefore they should be hated (cf. Deut. 23:3-6; Ps. 26:5; 31:6).

They got this from places like Psalm 139 where David said...

Psalm 139:21–22 (NKJV)

21 Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

22 I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

“The Pharisees thus implied that their hatred was God’s means of judging their **enemies**. But Jesus stated that Israel should demonstrate God’s love even to her enemies—a practice not even commanded in the Old Testament!” – ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

Matthew 5:44 (NKJV)

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,

Christ acknowledges that we will have enemies. And who are they? They are people who curse you, who hate you, who spitefully use you and persecute you. A lovely bunch of people to be sure!

This may be the hardest commandment given in the Bible. Like I say, it is not found in the OT. This is radical stuff. We can more easily understand the command to love our brother, but our enemy? That is radical!

The Greek word for LOVE in the command, “***love your enemies,***” is the word “***agape***”. It is the intense word for love. It is not based on emotions which is a good thing because sometimes it is very hard to get the emotions to feel loving when people are abusing you. Agape love is based on the will. It chooses to love and it seeks the other person’s highest good in spite of their actions. This is God’s kind of love.

Loving your enemies responds with blessing them when they curse you. That is not easy to do. When someone curses you, the most natural thing in the world is to want to curse back.

But remember the example of Jesus. As His enemies were crucifying Him, He prayed, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”* (Lk. 23:34). Stephen, the first martyr of the church, as he was dying, said, *“Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”* (Acts 7:60).

1 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that **you were called to this**, that you may inherit a blessing.

“These blessings are intended to lead unbelievers to repentance (Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:4). Of course, there is a sense in which God hates those who are resolutely and impenitently wicked (cf. Ps. 5:5; 11:5; Eph. 2:3), but God’s blessings of common grace constitute his primary providential action toward mankind here and now.” – ***ESV Study Bible***

When I was a brand-new Christian, I worked with a close friend who did not appreciate my conversion. He liked the **“old Dwight”** and not the **“new Dwight”**. When I got saved, he told me that I had **“messed in my own nest”** (using sanitized language) and made it clear he wanted nothing to do with me.

When I would come into the shop in the morning, I would say “Good morning,” and he would turn his head the other way. This went on day after day for a long time. It so happened in those early days of my salvation that I started memorizing three verses each day, and one of my memory verses was Matt 5:44.

Matthew 5:44 (NKJV)

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,

So when he would do this, I would pray for him. One day, he was in a situation where he needed someone to help him, and being desperate, he asked me to help him.

I promptly told him that because he had been treating me so badly, I would never help him and that those who abuse God’s servants in this way are headed for hell. (Just kidding). Of course, I didn’t do this! Rather, I told him I

would be glad to help him, and that broke the ice. After that, he was civil to me. We were never again close friends, but he was always civil.

Romans 12:21 (NKJV)

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Jesus said to respond this way...

Matthew 5:45 (NKJV)

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.

The sense here is not that you may become sons, but that you may reflect that you are indeed “*sons of your Father in heaven.*” (cf. Mt. 10:16; Lk. 6:36; 12:40; Jn. 20:27). Verse 48 shows that Christ is addressing those who already have God as their Father.

Those who truly know God as Father should show a moral resemblance to Him. God loves unconditionally, and so should we. This is God-like and is to be indicative of His children.

God causing the sun to rise on those who are evil as well as those who are good; and Him sending rain on the just and the unjust is what theologians often refer to as God’s “**common grace**”. God loves everyone. He is gracious to all. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16).

God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). God loves the unlovely. He loves sinners and wants to save them. We, as God’s children, should reflect God’s disposition toward the lost.

It is good to constantly remind ourselves that Jesus died for them too (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:1-2). Jesus died for our enemies, and He died for us while we were still His enemies!