

“Love your enemies” - this is Jesus’ word to us in his sixth and final example given in Matthew 5 to explain the true meaning of God’s holy law in contrast to the common perversion of it.

We have already been challenged with shunning the sins of anger, lust, disrespecting the sanctify of marriage, making false vows and retaliation – all difficult to do and needing God’s supernatural intervention to even begin to accomplish. But the challenge to love our enemy takes us to a whole new realm of difficulty – and to what even seems to go beyond a reasonable expectation.

After all, is not Satan our ultimate enemy and worth of our hatred? Did not Jesus show a hatred of the Scribes and Pharisees in his many strong words of rebuke? Did not God the Father show a hatred of the heathen nations that opposed Israel, causing them calamity and charging the Israelites with wiping them out? What is Jesus really asking us to do? – certainly not to befriend our enemies or let them do their worst without feeling any resentment to their wrongdoing.

Let’s begin by reading our text in what is known as the “Revised” version – from which comes the Bible I typically use for my study, the New American Standard Bible (as well as the New International Version and many others).

Matthew 5:43-47 (NASB) *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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*

Now let us read the same passage from what is known as the Authorized Version, from which come versions such as King James, New King James and Young’s Literal translation.

Matthew 5:43-47 (New King James) *You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 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, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?*

Did you notice the difference? It comes in verse 44. The Revised versions say “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” The Authorized versions amplify this section with “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.” Both versions are drawing from the ancient manuscripts we possess, some of which include the additional and others not. So which do we use?

I find it helpful to look at the Revised version of Luke’s account of the sermon. Though it is not as complete as the Matthew text, we find that it includes the fuller text of the Authorized versions of the Matthew text,

Luke 6:27-28 *But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

From this evidence, I choose to use the Authorized text, for it gives us a fuller understanding of what Jesus meant by “love your enemies.” (And Martyn Lloyd-Jones came to the same conclusion.)

Today, I want us to examine what it means to (1) “love” our enemy, (2) love “our” enemy, and (3) love our “enemy.” This should give us a full understanding of what this difficult and obviously critical command of our Savior means for us today. And then we’ll finish with noting a mild rebuke from our Savior, which we would do best to heed. This will be our outline, so let us proceed.

LOVE YOUR ENEMY

It should not surprise us to learn that the Greek word Jesus used for “love” is AGAPE. This is the supernatural, divine love that only God can produce. It is not the love of feelings or friendship, but the love of sacrifice and benevolent deeds. As 1 Corinthians 13 tells us, it is the love of patience and kindness, which does not take into account a wrong suffered. It does not rejoice with unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth, enduring all things.

This speaks “loud and clear” as to how we are to love our enemy – patient, not reactionary; kind, not vindictive; and not allowing the wrong done to “ruffle our feathers.” This love given is not condoning the wrong, but emphasizing the truth of God’s mercy and love. And it is a love that endures the pain and wrong suffered for the greater good of responding with God’s love of the person.

The text of Matthew’s Authorized version and Luke’s Revised version gives us a beautiful 3 point outline of how to LOVE our enemy.

1. **“Bless those who curse you.”** I take this to mean that when we receive mean talk we respond with loving talk. We don’t swear back, or even respond with a haughty or hurt attitude. Rather, with the help of our indwelling Holy Spirit, we respond with words of blessing – words to hopefully cool the fire of contention and fuel the fire of communication.

Proverbs 16:24 *Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

Now giving a blessing doesn’t mean to you have to say nice things about this person who has just wronged you. But a blessing is sharing the goodness of God with another, so we can pass on how much God loves them. Or we can bless them by saying that we don’t hold their unkindness against them, because God has forgiven us of so much. The challenge is, what can I say graciously in response to their unkind words. And if we are convinced that we must respond in kindness, God will give us the gracious words to say. You can do it! And God will be revealed!

2. **“Do good to those who hate you.”** I take this to mean that we respond to hateful actions with sacrificial (agape) loving actions. This goes beyond just responding with kind words. This second part of the 3 point outline is to respond with kind ACTIONS. This gets even harder and takes some thought as to what might be done. Maybe it’s accepting their suggested compromise, even though it is unfair. Or maybe it’s thanking them for pointing out something you needed to be aware of, even though you found it to be harshly stated. Or maybe it’s doing them a favor in response to their doing something unkind to you. Again, the Holy Spirit will give you the right action if your mindset it to respond in sacrificial kindness.

3. **“Pray for those who mistreat you.”** This third of these three points of “loving” is the hardest of all. Oh, it might be easy to pray “convict them” or “bring them down” – but I don’t think that’s the prayer Jesus is asking us to make for our enemy. Rather, we can take our example from Jesus when he prayed “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Or we can take Stephen’s example from when he was being stoned, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” We can pray that they might see the error of their way and be drawn to the merciful forgiveness of their Savior. Or we can pray that they might see Jesus in us. It’s amazing how these prayers for those who have wronged us help melt our heart to become more of the heart of Jesus.

Bottom line, when we are wronged – or even when we feel we have been – we must have the mind of Christ. Gladly, Paul taught the Corinthians, and us, that we do have that mind of Christ as God’s children. (1 Corinthians 2:16). Following is the chorus of a song I wrote, to help remind me of the goal of displaying Christ’s mind and heart at all times:

Think like Jesus, act like Jesus – Lord this is my goal.

I want Jesus’ mind and spirit deep down in my soul.

I want the way the He thinks to be the way that I think,

Until the world sees Him in me.

May I have the mind of Christ in me, Lord in me!

May I have the mind of Christ in me!

From “The Mind of Christ In Me” by Craig Crawshaw, c.2002

LOVE YOUR ENEMY

So who is MY enemy? Jesus is not talking about who might be my country's enemy of Isis, Russia, North Korea or another. Nor is He speaking of a competitor of my job, or of one who might be my friend's enemy. Nor is it someone who might believe differently than me politically, or about abortion or on climate change or on any other issue.

Rather, MY enemy is one who is close to me personally in such a way to "ruffle my feathers," disarm me or disrespect me on some way. It doesn't have to be a "bad" person or even "mean" person – but one who causes me grief and doesn't show me love. As Jesus describes "my" enemy, it is one who mistreats or persecutes me personally.

He is not some distant country or organization of opposition. Rather he/she is someone I personally encounter and have the hands on opportunity to love back in words, action and prayer.

LOVE YOUR ENEMY

Lastly, what does Jesus mean by "enemy?" Well, you remember how a lawyer, wishing to justify himself, said to Jesus "and who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). And Jesus responded by telling the story of the good Samaritan, finishing by asking "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" The answer was clearly the one who showed mercy toward him. Our "neighbor" in this context is not the one who lives next door, or our Christian brother or friend. Rather our "neighbor" is anyone we encounter in life who needs a helping hand of mercy and love.

In the same way, our "enemy" is anyone we encounter in life who opposes us in some way, so as to mistreat or give us a "hard time." It doesn't have to be over spiritual issues, though it could be. This is our "enemy" in this context – one to whom Jesus wants us to respond to in mercy and love.

And Jesus gives us the example of God our Father who shows this mercy and love to both the one who is evil or the one who is good. God sends sunshine and rain on both. And in this spirit God wants us to shower mercy and love on both our "friends" and our "enemies" – both those who do us good and those who don't.

Again, this requires supernatural love and supernatural mercy, only available through the indwelling Holy Spirit who will give in abundance by His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) as we allow Him to make us His instrument of goodness.

A MILD REBUKE, NOT TO MISS

Jesus concludes this section reminding us that we comfortably show love to those who are loving to us. But even evil people to this, He says. Showing love to our "friends" does not fulfill this demand of His kingdom citizen. In a kind but firm way He is saying, "shame on you for ONLY showing love to those who show love to you. I want you to show love to all the others." – that is, to the "hard" cases. Will you and I receive this mild, yet important, rebuke from our Master?

In summary we are called to respect all with (1) words of love, (2) actions of love and (3) prayers of love. I urge you, as I challenge myself, to think of one or more who have recently been your "enemy," What can you say, do and pray to show this one the love of Jesus?

This too is Jesus perfect fulfillment of the law. This too is what He expects of you as His kingdom citizen. This is your "kingdom constitution." Love your enemy. Amen.