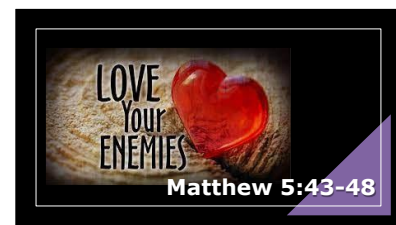


Love Your Enemies : The Pinnacle of Jesus' Teaching

This is the pinnacle of the Sermon on the Mount, not just another piece of advice. It is the culmination of all of Jesus' teachings thus far:



- (i) spirit of anger (Matt 5:21-26)
- (ii) spirit of immorality (Matt 5:27-30)
- (iii) marriage covenant (Matt 5:31-32)
- (iv) integrity in words (Matt 5:33-37)
- (v) spirit of retaliation (Matt 5:38-42)

This is the destination of all the teaching of Jesus that precedes them. If you truly walk in love, you will not act in ways contrary to love. This is a supernatural lifestyle that cannot be mimicked by the world. This is how we become the salt and light in the world and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt 5:13-16).

1. Misguided Oral Tradition: 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'

'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour and not sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.' (Lev 19:17-18)

'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.' (Lev 19:33-34)

- a. The error of OMISSION – '*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*' (Too hard! So ignore it.)
- b. The error of ADDITION – '*...hate your enemy*' is an addition to the law arising from *logical deduction*. If you must 'love your neighbour', then you must be allowed to 'hate your enemy.'
- c. The definition of 'LOVE' (Heb. אָהַב aheb) is a very common word. (occurs 209 times in OT).
 - (i) Gen 22:2, '*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...*'
 - (ii) Gen 24:67, '*and he [Isaac] took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her.*'
- d. The definition of 'NEIGHBOUR' C.f. A certain lawyer asked Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' (Lk 10:29)
 - (i) Jews who are suffering under the Roman occupation (Lev 19:17-18).
 - (ii) For the generous Jews, also the foreigners who live among the Jewish community (Lev 19:33-34).
 - (iii) The Roman soldiers were not considered their neighbours.
 - (iv) What about Samaritans who also largely suffered under Roman occupation, but are of mixed blood? They were not considered 'true Jews'.
So Jesus rocked their boat with the good Samaritan story. Jesus changed their question to '*To whom are you being a neighbour?*' (Lk 10:36)
- (v) The most despised class among the full-blood Jews were the tax collectors, the traitors of their countrymen. They collaborated with the Romans to extract taxes from their own people (blood money) to enrich themselves and their own families.
E.g. After the Japanese occupation of Korea ended, the Koreans who collaborated with Japanese authority were hated for three generations.

2. Jesus Teaches Us to ACTIVELY Pursue Love

- a. 'But I say to you, 'Love your enemies.'

Some spiritual leaders in the past have taught not to retaliate against an evil person. But no one has ever taught us to love (agape) our enemies. Jesus' teaching thus far on the subject of hate, lust, marriage,

integrity, and forgiveness has been taught by other religious leaders also. However, here Jesus departs from every other teacher and stands on His own [C.f. Ex 23:4-5 – an allusion to this ‘love principle’ to help our enemy’s animal.]

b. Who is our enemy?

Those who ‘curse you’, ‘hate you’, ‘spitefully use you,’ and ‘persecute you,’ – an accurate definition. Jesus teaches us to actively ‘bless’, ‘do good’, and ‘pray for’ (‘not pray against’) them both publicly (among people) and in private (so our enemy does not know). Meet the challenge in the opposite spirit - of love rather than hate.

This does not make any sense. It is humanly impossible. And that is precisely the point! No religious group or philosophical idealism could ever produce this kind of love unless one has a direct and personal relationship with the heavenly Father. This is how we lead the world to our Father who is in heaven because we manifest His nature on the earth as His sons and daughters who intimately know Him and walk with Him. (*John 13:35, ‘By this all will know...love for one another.’*)

c. *‘To return evil for good is devilish. To return evil for evil is beastly. To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine.’ – proof of God.*

(i) ‘bless’ – search for their virtues, and speak well of their virtues.

(ii) ‘do good’ – look for practical opportunities to do good to them whether it be known or hidden.

(iii) ‘pray for’ (not against) – in private, bless their children, business, health, etc. Not long prayers, but repeated prayer until our hearts experience freedom.

‘Repay no one evil for evil...Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:17-21 c.f. Prov 25:21)

3. Original Intention

a. The tax collector’s Basic v=Virtue (Mt 5:46-47)

Those we hate and despise often are not so different from us. They love those who love them and hate those who hate them, and they love their children. In fact, often it is their love for their own family that drives them to do wrong, that makes us despise them.

(i) But Jesus reminds us that living our lives just within the boundary of natural affection is not what we are called to. There is no eternal reward in it from our heavenly Father at all – let this sink in.

(ii) Our heavenly Father is the most maligned, misunderstood and misrepresented Person on earth. We are called to represent the Father’s divine nature of MERCY on earth. *‘He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.’ (Mt 5:45)*

Who is equal to this task of showing God’s grace and mercy to the dying world?

b. Jesus Christ the Perfect Example

Jesus lived what He preached. Jesus perfectly manifested the Father’s Name, i.e. His divine nature (John 17:6). Jesus took the insults and did not retaliate as they slapped His face and spat on Him (1 Pet 2:23). Jesus gave His garment to the soldiers who took it and cast lots among them. They forced Jesus to carry the cross, the tool of His own execution. Jesus carried it up the hill of Golgotha as a lamb led to slaughter (Is 53:7).

All this He could have refused to do, but He did it willingly. On the cross, Jesus prayed (*imperfect tense*) and forgave his murderers and collaborators who did not ask for it, *‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.’ (Lk 23:34)*

c. The Father’s purpose for our life on earth

'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.' (Mt 5:45)

'Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Gk. *teleios* – mature, complete).'
(Mt 5:48).

4. Reflection

1. How did you handle your enemies in the past? Was our heavenly Father glorified in it?
2. What is the main take-home message for you?