

Love Your Enemies

Matthew 5:43-47

⁴³ 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 in order 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. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?

Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

1. Can you come up with some common sayings we use in our culture that sound religious but that are clearly not biblical?

Read Matthew 5:43-47

2. The Jewish people had apparently adopted the statement "Love your neighbor but hate your enemies" as a biblical mandate. Discuss what was behind this distortion.
 - a. Read Leviticus 19:18.
 - What did God command in this passage?
 - How might this verse have served as at least part of the backdrop for the statement above? What did the people add?
 - What does the statement "hate your enemies" suggest about the people's understanding of God's actions? What about their understanding of God's character?
 - Did God pour out His anger against pagan nations because He hated them (cf. Ezekiel 33:11)?
 - b. Read Deuteronomy 7:7-8 and 9:4-5.
 - What was the point that God wanted to make to the people in these passages?
 - Why do you think God saw it as necessary to tell the people these things (i.e. what were they thinking about themselves that God needed to correct)?
 - How does the people's statement "love your neighbor and hate your enemy" suggest that the Jews of Jesus' time were thinking in the same way as those of Moses' time?
 - How are we like this, and how will this kind of attitude influence the way we think about or treat others?
 - c. When you consider the way the people were distorting God's character and the way in which they were thinking of themselves, how do these distortions show up in our culture, especially in the American church culture? How might you be tempted in these ways?

3. Jesus taught that God shows love to all people without distinction and that we are to be like God in this respect. God hates sin and will judge sinners, but this does not mean that he hates His enemies in the way that the Jews were teaching.
 - a. Re-read Matthew 5:44-45.
 - What two things does Jesus explicitly command in these verses? How does Luke 6:27-28 help add practical clarity to what it means to love enemies?
 - To what does Jesus point as a basis for His command? How might Genesis 1:26-27 help us understand why Jesus points this way?
 - In verse 45, what does He say will be the outcome if we obey?
 - What kinds of characteristics usually show up in sons that come from their fathers? How might this reality help us understand what Jesus says in verse 45?
4. If you compare Matthew 5:46 with Luke 6:33-35, it seems apparent that the “reward” or “credit” to be derived from doing the right thing is at least in large part a matter of approval. This fits with other passages that suggest that God’s approval is a large part of what we will receive from Him (cf. Matthew 25:21-22; 1 Corinthians 4:5, etc.). This suggests that we should desire the approval of our heavenly Father and that we should desire it more than the approval of people.
 - Jews of Jesus’ time would have found it acceptable to hate their enemies. Can you hate your enemies now and still receive the approval of your peers (i.e. can you justify your hatred in ways that are socially acceptable)?
 - From whom do children most crave approval? How should this instruct us as God’s children? How will you know what pleases Him (cf. Romans 12:2)?
 - Can you identify practical ways in which your life would be different if you valued the approval of God more than the approval of people in your life?

The only way you will truly grow in your love for those unlike you and especially for your enemies is for you to grow in your understanding of and love for your heavenly Father. The more you know Him, the more you will love Him; and the more you love Him, the more you will love others.