

Command #8: Love your enemies like God does.

Matthew 5:43-48 // Jerry Barber & Greg Singerle

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Condensed Version

Read Matthew 5:43-48 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. The love God expects believers to demonstrate is a great testimony; what two reasons are given in Matthew 5:45 and 5:46-47?
2. Since "perfect" means "reaching the intended goal in a mature way," what does "be perfect" in verse 48 mean in this context?
3. What restrictions do we put (intentionally or unintentionally) on those we are willing to love, or on the degree to which we are willing to love them?

Study (answers follow below)

1. Meditate on Matthew 5:43-48 and make several observations about the passage.
2. The statement in Matthew 5:43, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' is not OT teaching but a perversion of Leviticus 19:18, as some took it to demand love only for one of your own people. As you reflect on Leviticus 19:18 and 33-34, why does what the Jewish leaders said, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy," differ from what God meant?
3. The love God expects believers to demonstrate is a great testimony; what reason is given in Matthew 5:45?
4. The love God expects believers to demonstrate is a great testimony; what is another reason given in Matthew 5:46-47?
5. Verse 48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" could lead someone to misinterpret this and claim that Christians can or must attain "sinless perfection." One of the keys to good Bible interpretation is understanding the context. Read some of what comes before and some of which follows (especially 5:6 and 6:12) and explain why Jesus is not demanding sinless perfection.
6. Now re-read Matthew 5:44-45 and explain what "be perfect" means in this context.

Answers:

1. (many answers possible here)
2. (1) The command to not seek revenge against own people doesn't allow seeking revenge for others. (2) It restricts God's standard of love by leaving out "as yourself." (3) It restricts the objects of love by excluding enemies and adding a command to hate them, which is not biblical and contradicts Leviticus 19:33-34.
3. This kind of loving reflects God's love. It demonstrates--apparently like nothing else does—that we are like God, our Father, and therefore being called "his children" is appropriate.
4. This kind of loving goes beyond normal human love, because even unbelievers love their own kind. Verses 46-47 teach that Christians are not just to resemble those who don't know Christ; we are to do and be MORE in the area of virtue. If we want to live out the values of God's kingdom, we need to demonstrate a love that differs from that of others.
5. Jesus has already indicated in Matthew 5:6 that out of our imperfection we are to seek more of God's righteousness. In Matthew 6:12 he teaches us to pray for forgiveness, as he knows we will sin.
6. Throughout this context Matthew has been appealing to God as our example in the area of love, so the context indicates that our call to perfection is to "perfection" in love. And since "perfect" means "full grown" or "reaching the intended goal in a mature way," we are to be mature in the way we love; we are to love perfectly as God loves.

Command #8: Love your enemies like God does.

Matthew 5:43-48 // Jerry Barber & Greg Singerle

Worship

We are commanded to love our enemies. But what is Biblical love? I (Greg) have heard it said that love without truth is a lie. How can I love someone without telling them the truth? How can I say that I love someone if I do not tell them the truth of God's hatred of and eternal punishment for sin and how to have forgiveness through Jesus Christ?

Biblical love incorporates truth. The western world has or is adopting a position that love means withholding the truth – not surprisingly, the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches. Have we been silenced by a world that believes that the greatest offense is to offend someone by telling them the truth? Further have we allowed this idea to pervade our understanding of who Christ is by thinking of Him *only* as the meek Lamb and forgetting He is the Lion who offended nearly all the religious leaders in His day to the point they wanted him dead? Let's possibly become a little less "comfortable" with Jesus as we examine His unique nature, especially in loving those who opposed Him. Specifically, focus on Matthew 5:44 and how Jesus fulfilled this command in Luke 11:

Luke 11:37-52--Jesus Is Invited to Dinner

Questions:

1. Why didn't Jesus politely or quietly go along with the tradition of washing?
2. What do you think about Jesus from this account – would you want "this" Jesus as your next dinner guest?
3. How did the Lawyer describe Jesus' words and actions?
4. Does Jesus like conflict?
5. How does what Jesus did at dinner align with His command in Matthew 5:44? To help discover this answer these two questions: What is the ultimate desired outcome of God's love? How do Jesus' words and actions in Luke 11 align with this goal?
6. How has this impacted your understanding of what it means to love your enemy?
7. What do you admire about Jesus in this event?

Answers:

1. Are man-made traditions harmless? If it is not something forbidden or against your conscience, this answer is determined by how it affects those who witness the participation – does it strengthen or weaken them? (See 1 Corinthians 10 and Romans 14). The Pharisees had distorted God's commands into their own man-made commandments, which they thought made them righteous before God by following them. Jesus was not going to do anything that could be perceived in any way to support this lie.
2. Do we want to know the truth about ourselves? Do I want to know: the areas where I have offended Him; where I have replaced His truth with the traditions of man; where I have become "religious" in my relationship; when I am more concerned about what the world thinks of me than what God thinks; when am I following Him incompletely and not with my whole heart? This is the process of sanctification – God's rooting out the old self and replacing it with the new self.

3. As offensive. In loving His enemies and speaking truth, Jesus actions are perceived as offensive.
4. Jesus said that He came not to bring peace but a sword and that there would be conflict with the world and even in our own families. Although conflict is not part of God's design, it is clear from Scripture that Jesus did not back down from conflict and in many cases with the religions leaders, He purposely did things in a manner that conflicted with their religious teaching, usually by "working" on the Sabbath.
5. God created love and Satan and fallen humans distort it. We must look to God as the example of what love is because God is love. The ultimate outcome of God's love is found in verses like John 3:16-17, where salvation is the clear desire. (Yes, God's love continues to sanctify a believer but in the context of loving His enemies, God's stated outcome is salvation.) Satan has erected all kinds of barriers to keep God's salvation from being received. Unbelievers are described as having a veil over their hearts that Christ must remove for them to believe (2 Corinthians 3:14-16). Many people then and today have erected a "veil of religion" – believing one is justified by their works – that keeps them from seeing the truth. Jesus, in His love and kindness, spoke the truth to each person to remove the "veil" that kept a person from trusting in Him alone for salvation. Sometimes Jesus told a person their sins (John 4:18); sometimes He told a person truth that seemed impossible (John 3:3); many times He did miracles; and sometimes He entered into heated discourse like in Luke 11 and John 6, 8 & 10. Let's face it, Jesus' actions at dinner don't *seem* loving. However, when the truth that God is good, loving and kind is solidified in our hearts, it forces us to examine everything Jesus did through this truth to understand His loving heart that desires all to reach repentance.
6. It reminds me that loving my enemy entails not only giving unwarranted grace above and beyond the call (going the second mile that we learned last week) but it goes further to my heart being aligned with God's heart in desiring that my enemy comes to know Christ as Savior so that everything I do, I do for that purpose. (I don't know about you, but I realize that I need a lot of dying to self in this regard.)
7. I admire: that He is bold and courageous and does not back down; that He stands for the truth even when it is not popular; that His love for people compels Him to tell the truth; that He is not a respecter of persons; that He never takes the easy path; that He exposes the pride, hypocrisy, and destructiveness of religion; and that He desired the Father's affection over the world's acceptance.

Obey

Answer the following questions (first, alone, and possibly discuss them with others afterwards):

1. Have I taken the step of going beyond a head knowledge about Jesus Christ to surrendering my will and receiving him as my LORD and Savior? (Without Christ in your life, there is no motive or power to love like this--He is the author and model of love for us).
2. Have I put restrictions—intentionally or unintentionally—on those I am willing to love, or on the DEGREE to which I am willing to love them (love them "some" but not "as myself").
3. Am I willing to actively love (and pray for) the difficult people in my life?

Train

How to help disciple others:

1. Study Matthew 5:43-48 yourself, ask your disciple(s) to study it, then discuss it and pray about it together.
2. Discuss with your disciple specific ways God is leading both of you to love more like Jesus did. Pray with each other for God's enablement.