



Love Your Enemies

Pastor Dan Kelm

July 4, 2021



⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor^{a]} and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that 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. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48



Well Good Morning! This morning we are finishing up Matthew chapter five, which is the first of the three chapters that cover the *Sermon on the Mount*. And for all of our messages, we give them a title, and I was debating what to call the message this morning. So I was thinking either “*Crazy Things Jesus Said – Part Seven*” or “*Jesus Says the Darndest Things*”. I mean, does it ever feel that way or is it just me? I mean, do you ever wonder why can't this just be easier?

Seriously though, I think it feels that way because it just goes against everything inside of us. Left to ourselves, we could look at Jesus' teaching here, in just a very distorted way; a way that's influenced by our sinful nature. And maybe I think that's how some of us maybe are still hearing it. Maybe how you're hearing it goes something like this: you've heard something that makes sense—love your neighbors, hate your enemies. But I tell you something that doesn't make sense—love your enemies and pray for them. Because God is unfair, and He makes His children's lives unfair; because He says that you need to be better than everyone else. In fact you need to be perfect otherwise you are not worthy of being in His family. And maybe I'm wrong, but I

think that sometimes, that's how some of us read this. But that's the exact opposite of what Jesus is talking about.

The basic outline is this: we've come to believe something false, right? Love your neighbor only and hate your enemy. And Jesus tells us the right way to believe—love also your enemies and pray for them. Be children of God, because God is merciful and gracious. There's no reward for being like the world. Instead, be like God. And that's the mindset that we're supposed to have.

And so, Jesus starts by addressing our false belief. And this is the last time in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus uses that phrase, “*you've heard it said, but I say to you*”. And so, starting in verse 43, He says. “*You have heard that it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy*”. Well, the command to love your neighbor goes back to Leviticus 19, which says, “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord*”.

And I love that in the command it says “*I am the Lord*”. He reminds them who He is. It's as though in the command itself is a reflection of God and His character, right? But the command, *hate your enemy*, is nowhere in scripture, right? There's nowhere in the Bible that tells us to do that. In fact, this is the only place in scripture that even mentions it. So what's Jesus talking about? All right, some scholars have wondered if this was maybe, perhaps, a rabbinical law. But there's no rabbinical law before this, or after this that says that. So where did this come from?

Well, what Jesus is alluding to is likely pop-culture, popular theology. And we've got some of that today, things that you think are in the Bible but just aren't. You know, like *cleanliness is next to godliness*; *God helps those who help themselves*, right? Even the phrase, *this too shall pass*, is not actually in the Bible, right? So sometimes, these phrases can be close to lining up with real scripture, and sometimes they are just totally wrong. And that's likely how this idea of *hating your enemy* came about. It didn't come from the heart of God; it came from the heart of man. And it was wrong.

And again, throughout all of Jesus' teachings that start by saying, “*You've heard it said, but I say to you*”, Jesus isn't just pointing to the letter of the law, or even just the heart of the law. Jesus is pointing to something deeper. He's pointing to the fulfillment of the law, which is found in Himself. And Jesus is pointing us to love. In *Matthew*, when a teacher of the law comes up to Jesus and he asks him, “*What is the most important command?*” Jesus says it's love. And he says that all of the law is summed up by love—love God, and love your neighbor is the summary of all of the law. And the point here, is that it's not human love, it's Godly love. We're supposed to love others with a love that God himself has for us.

So, in verse 44, Jesus says “*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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.*” Okay, I feel like Jesus just steps it up a notch here. He pushes into this a little further. I mean it's not like loving our enemies and praying for our persecutors isn't hard enough, but now He adds that bit about causing the sun to rise and the rain to fall on the good and the evil. And it's like he needs to remind us that life is unfair, right? Because sometimes it seems like God is unfair. And is God unfair? Yes! And praise the

Lord, because if He was fair to us, we would have received His just wrath, because we were once His enemies. Instead of hatred, God showed us love.

Romans 5 says, *“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if,”*—and this is the big part—*“while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have now received reconciliation”*.

We were the enemies of God. And He caused His sun to rise on us. And He provided His reign for us. And more than that, he provided His Son for us to make reconciliation between us, His enemies, and Himself. It was His love that brought about our reconciliation, and that reconciliation has made us sons and daughters of the Father in heaven. And that's why Jesus says *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”*. Why?—that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

I have three kids. They look like me; they have funny hobbies like me. Unfortunately, sometimes they act like me. Children reflect their parents. That's what they do. It's in their DNA, and it's in their upbringing, right? It's nature and it's nurture. It's the same for the children of God who have been reconciled to God through Christ. It's nature and nurture, right? It's Christ in us and the Holy Spirit working through us, and in our new born-again nature. It is also Christ working on us through sanctification and through the purifying of our hearts, as we are nurtured into this new way of thinking, and acting, and living.

Jesus reminds God's children, us, that we ourselves didn't receive God's hatred when we were enemies of God, but we received His mercy, and His grace, and His love, and most especially demonstrated through Jesus Christ.

And so, as God's children we need to take on God's nature and follow God's nurturing, to also love and pray for our enemies, especially that they would come to know the love of God that is found only in Jesus.

Not too long ago I, remember talking with someone about a politician that I don't really care for. And that person said that they prayed for that politician regularly. And I was thinking, *“Yeah, pray that they got caught for their crimes and thrown in jail”*. But no, that person said that they pray regularly for that politician to come to know Christ.

I'll tell you what. My heart gets it wrong all the time. My sinful nature wants to keep steering me off of the narrow road. Jesus is steering us to the heart of the Father. And He asks, *if you love those who love you what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that?*

This isn't a question about earning rewards in heaven, and frankly, even if there were rewards given, I'm pretty certain they'd be awarded based on how many people that we shared the gospel

message with, and how many people we led into the love of the Father in Jesus. No, Jesus is asking us about standing out; about being different; being set apart; being holy. Common people do common things. But we are to be set apart, holy, and to be used...to use our lives for holy purposes.

In this whole passage, Jesus is addressing justice and the fair treatment of others. People understood—they understand today—that you take care of those who will take care of you, right? You're good to those who will return the favor when you need it. That's basic survival 101.

Later this summer, we're going to talk about the Golden Rule which is in Matthew chapter 7. But here, Jesus is confronting the opposite version of the Golden Rule, and it's the rule that nobody needs to be taught because it's in our very basic sin nature. And that rule is, *do to others as they have done to you*. Do to others as they have done to you, right? If someone has treated you well, you return the favor. You remember that they can be trusted and that they're good people. And if someone's treated you poorly, you hold that grudge, and you remember...and you possibly return the favor. Or at least you celebrate when something goes poorly in their life. It's justice. It's fairness. It's about avenging injuries and returning favors. It's about equal treatment.

I could bring up my kids, and they tell you all about fairness and, right? I hear it every day, “*It's not fair*”. It's not fair! Because fairness is justice human justice, right? And in their sinful nature, my kids know that language without me having to teach it to them. It's in our sinful DNA.

Jesus is calling us to more—more than human fairness, more than human justice, more than human love. He's calling us to godliness—godly justice and godly love. And in verse 48, he says probably the craziest thing yet. He says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5). I think this verse sometimes makes some of us want to check out, right? Some of us strive and fail for perfection in everything we do. Others of us recognize that perfection is never possible so we don't even bother trying. Don't check out here. I think we need to figure out what Jesus is talking about, because this is definitely a loaded statement. But it's also a command. Perfect is a big word.

So first, where does our perfection come from? Where does our righteousness come from? Where does our holiness come from? It comes only from Christ, Christ in us. He is our perfection.

Second, Christ is perfecting us. He's working in us and working through us. It's the mustard seed that starts small but grows large. It's the yeast that works its way through the whole batch of dough. Christ is working in us, toward our perfection. And our role is in inviting Him into that work, inviting Him to do that work and allowing him to prune as he sees fit.

And third, our perfection comes about through our participation, right? It's stumbling toward perfection. It's stubbing our toe toward the finish line. We're going to make mistakes as we go, but we keep going, walking in the grace of Christ toward the Father, and continuing to grow more like Him.

The apostle James calls this maturing, and becoming complete in our faith. And this means becoming more like God, and learning more about His character; examining His Word; being in

community; being in accountability.

Luke's gospel has a parallel teaching to this one in Matthew 5. And there Jesus says, "*Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful*". What qualities does God have? Those are the qualities that we need to take on. If it's perfection, then we strive toward perfection because we strive to be like God. And if it's mercy, then we strive to be merciful to be like God. And if it's love, then we love like God to be like God. The apostle Peter says, "*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*".

The goal of knowing and obeying the law was so that God's people would be different from the rest of the world; so that they'd be separate and holy because they would be like God.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan told one of the most powerful lie. He said, "*If you eat this fruit you will be like God*". Disobedience doesn't lead us to become more like God; it leads us to become less like Him. We become like God when we seek to know His character, and take on His characteristics through obedience. We call this becoming Christ-like, right?

Satan tries to use the same deception on us, just like when he tried to deceive Jesus in the wilderness. He tries to distort God's words. And the distortion here in our passage, is about receiving justice. But if God is just, then we should be those who pursue justice. And the distortion is that justice is a perfect balance—eye for an eye, love for love, hate for hate, good for good, evil for evil.

But Godly justice is a different balance. It's a perfect balance, a balance of justice and love, right? Because of God's love, He sent Christ, and Christ satisfies God's need for justice that's created by our sin. And so as the children of God, when we seek justice we don't seek human justice, we seek Godly justice.

And we desire that our enemies would know the love of God that's found in Christ, and we pray this! And we pray so that when we—recognizing we, who were enemies of God—we pray this, so that we can celebrate with others who were enemies of God, and who have now become made, and have been made children of God through Christ. Let me say that again, because I butchered it! The reason that we desire that our enemies would know the love of God, and the reason that we pray for this, is because we, who were once enemies of God, we then can celebrate with others who were once enemies of God, and who have now been made children of God. That's love—*crazy love*. And that's God's perfect love, and God's perfect justice.

But the major points from this message are pretty short and simple. First, God wants us to be like Him, right? And conversely, He calls us to turn from the things that are not like Him: revenge; human justice; anger; hatred; lust; divorce. Those things aren't like God, and He's calling us to be like Him. Because of our sin nature that we still wrestle with—thinking this way and doing these things—they don't come easy. But when we invite Christ in to our lives, He will be working

in us and through us, to perfect us, to become more like our heavenly Father.

Second point, is our love must be sincere. To borrow some words from the apostle Paul in Romans 12, *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves...Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...do not repay anyone evil for evil...Do not take revenge, my dear friends. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”*. Our love must be sincere. It can't be phony; it can't be fake. While we can hate the evil that is done in the world, we can't hate the evil doer. We can't. It's not Christ-like, and it's not in the character of God.

And we're called to no less than the perfection that we see in God. This is hard. Nobody said it would be. Jesus said His yoke would be easy, which means even though it may be hard to forgive, and hard to love, and hard to pray for our enemies, it won't weigh us down in brokenness. It'll do just the opposite: it'll free us from the burden of hate. Hate weighs down. Love frees. It keeps no records. It seeks the. To sincerely love someone is to pray for them, to pray that they would be blessed, and with the greatest blessing of all—Christ.

And last, we live differently from the world because we are different. We've been separated and made holy by the blood of Jesus. We've been reconciled to God through Christ, and are now children of our heavenly Father. And as His children, we think different; we talk different; we live different; we love different. And the world will know we are Christ followers because of our love. And our prayer is that they would know Christ because of our love.

There are a couple questions I want us to think about. The first one is who are your enemies? And have you been praying for them? Jesus says pray for our enemies, so it appears that He assumes that we have enemies. And I think, to say that we don't isn't being honest with ourselves. We're promised in this world that there will be those who hate us and who persecute us. We're promised that there will be those that oppose Christ and the message of scripture.

So this may not look like your arch nemesis, but they may be people that annoy us, or people that we work with, or people in the public sphere, or politicians. It might be someone you were once close with and who hurt you. It might be a stranger that hurt you, maybe someone that embarrassed you, or someone that let you down. And maybe it's a friend or a relative who turned their back on Christ, or who walked away from the truth, or embraced a worldly lifestyle. Have you been praying for them? Have you been seeking their best?

Our hearts are prone to wander, so we need to be reminded of this. We need to remind ourselves to do this, because this is what Jesus calls us to.

And second, are you seeking to be perfected? Jesus says *be perfect because our heavenly Father is perfect*. He says *be merciful because our heavenly Father is merciful* and has displayed His mercy to us. He says, *be loving because God loved us when we were yet His enemies, and God is love*. Are you seeking to be perfected in Godliness, in Christ-likeness, to become mature and complete not lacking anything? Or have you become complacent? Have you become complacent? We're called

and commanded to be like God, to stumble toward perfection. Are you growing in your faith? Are you seeking out the ways that you are not like Him, and allowing Him to prune those areas in your life? That's what Jesus is calling us to.

Well this morning, we have the opportunity to celebrate communion, and I want to invite our ushers to come forward. We do this once a month to celebrate and to remind ourselves of what God has done for us, in Christ. I want to mention that we practice an open communion, which means that if you're a follower of Jesus and have invited Him to be Lord of your life, you are welcome to participate. So ushers, you guys are welcome to distribute the communion elements...and I want to invite you to hold on to your communion elements so that we can celebrate together. I use that word "celebrate" on purpose, because that's what it is: it's a celebration of the victory of Jesus, right?—Just like Independence Day or Memorial Day, or D-Day, which are celebrations of costly victories. In communion, we celebrate the most costly victory of all—the crucifixion and death of Jesus, which paid for our reconciliation to the Father. In communion, we recognize that we who were once far from God have been brought near by the body and the blood of Jesus Christ.

The bread and the cup symbolize and represent the New Covenant that is in Christ; the new opportunity that we have; the new deal; the ability to be reconciled back to the Father; that we who were enemies of God have been brought near by the blood of Christ. And we have the opportunity to celebrate who He is, and to celebrate what He has done for us.

I want to invite you to take out the bread. Though we were once enemies of God, God demonstrated His love to us through the body of Jesus, which was broken for us, so that we could be called children of God. And we do this in remembrance of Him. Let's take the bread together.

I want to invite you to open up the cup. Though we were once deserving of God's just wrath, our sins were washed by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, where He prayed for the forgiveness of those who persecuted Him. And we do this in remembrance of Him. Let's take the cup together.

It's by His body and blood that we were reconciled to the Father, and made sons and daughters of the Most High. Let's pray together.

Oh Father, You are Holy. You are perfect. You are good. And Father, You in your goodness, and in your love, and in your mercy, provided Christ so that we could have Your attributes, so that You could be our righteousness, so that You could be our goodness, so You could be our perfection. Father, I pray that you would continue to work on us, work in us, and work through us, Lord God, that you would be drawing us nearer to Yourself, drawing us into your perfection. And Father, I pray that we would also grow into all these things, so that we wouldn't be ineffective in our knowledge, but that we would be useful—Lord God that we would be useful for Your Kingdom. Father, I pray that you would draw us to Yourself so that we could draw others to you, to your goodness, to Your Holiness, and into your amazing grace-filled love. Father, we thank you for Jesus and what He has done in His sacrifice, and in His resurrection. And we proclaim this and we celebrate it. And we say this all in the name of Jesus. Amen.



TAKE-AWAY SUMMARY

God wants us to be like Him.

Our love must be sincere.

Live differently from the world.



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

Who are your enemies? Have you been praying for them?

Are you seeking to be perfected?



WORSHIP SONGS:

Not To Us | Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow | Jesus Messiah | The Stand