

Authentic Christians

Lesson 17 – Matthew 5:43-48

1. OT Background

- There are “bookends” or *inclusios* to the 5 clarifications of the Law ... see 5:20 & 5:48 ... each *inclusio* points to a standard of behavior that can only be accomplished through God’s work in the heart.
- The Beatitudes are being fleshed out in 5:21-47:

“The norms of the kingdom, worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom, constitute the witness of the kingdom.” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 33)

- The “You have heard that it was said ...” formula points to the perverted conclusion of the religious leaders in Jesus’ day and their misunderstanding of the OT Law.

How did they come to this conclusion? (See Lev. 19:18 ... what evidence implies hatred for an enemy ... could it be the treatment of foreign nations ... the reciprocal murder by the victim’s family ... the imprecatory psalms like Ps. 69?)

“The law had taught the Israelites to love their neighbor (Lev. 19:18). Although they were never explicitly commanded to hate their enemy, this spirit underlay much of their indoctrination. This attitude was a summary of the OT’s outlook toward those who persecuted God’s people (see Ps. 139:21, 22). It was a righteous hostility directed against the enemies of God.” (The Believer’s Bible Commentary)

- Nowhere in the Bible (OT or NT) are we commanded to “hate our enemies”!
- The religious leaders concluded that since the OT commanded Jewish love to be directed only to a “neighbor” and since the context of many OT passages defined “neighbor” as a fellow Jew, “enemies” were then outsiders in both compassion and Jewish privilege.

“With such teachings prevalent as Jesus here describes, we can understand how the Jews came to be charged by Tacitus with ‘hatred to the human race.’” (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 121)

“The problem of identifying the ‘neighbor’ was a live issue in Jesus’ day.” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 56)

What should be our response to the “enemies of God”? (Is there a place for open/discreet hostility directed toward those who are openly/discreetly hostile to the things of God? What is our interpretation of Ps. 15:4 [MacArthur Study Bible: “Whom God rejects, the psalmist rejects; whom God loves, he loves.”] in light of Jesus’ words? Is there a difference between “your enemy” and “God’s enemy”?)

- This is the 5th and final time this formula is used in Matt. 5.

- According to 5:17-20, loving one's enemies is the "fulfillment" of the Law, it is the "righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees", and doing so is essential to one's inclusion in the kingdom of heaven.

In the OT there are numerous injunctions against mistreatment of an adversary and scores of commands to show kindness to an enemy – Ex. 23:4-5, Ps. 7:3-5, Prov. 24:17-18 and Prov. 25:21-22.

- The original command (Lev. 19:18) is "open-ended" – it's a command that has no conclusion or well-defined boundaries; it's certainly a command that irritates and confuses a legalist!

2. **The Structure of the Passage**

- The NKJV & KJV includes the phrases "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" and the phrase "despitefully use you" in vs. 44; these are not included in the ESV, NASB, NIV, or several other less-known versions.
- The earliest and best Greek manuscripts don't include these phrases in Matthew's Gospel; they were borrowed from Luke 6:27-36.

"The clauses omitted from this verse in Revised Version are wanting in the earliest manuscripts and versions, and were manifestly borrowed in later copies from Luke 6:27ff. They are a real part of the discourse, but not of Matthew's report of it." (Broadus, Commentary on Matthew, pg. 121)

RABBIT TRAIL: *How do the omissions and additions of the KJV (as compared to other versions) affect your confidence in the Word of God?*

- The issue again is the perversion of God's commands by those who want to justify themselves – in personal relationships, a child of the kingdom is ruled by God not their flesh.
- Jesus' response is to love an enemy and pray for those who mistreat:

How would you define an "enemy"? (Are they "real" or "perceived"? The word refers to one in hostile opposition to another, Jesus categorizes an enemy into three categories: personally vindictive, verbally abusive, consistently malicious, note the reference to tax collectors and Gentiles)

Why "love" and "pray"? What do these two actions have in common and what distinguishes them from each other? (both require a determined effort, both require the help of the grace of God, "love" seeks to effect change through modeling a positive/godly behavior – "prayer" seeks to effect change through a work of God in the heart, "love" may change a person temporarily but "prayer" seeks a permanent change)

- Luke 6:27-36 actually adds two additional practical expressions of love for an enemy – do good to them and bless them
- Luke 6:27-36 also gives a more detailed description of an "enemy" (one who hates you, one who

curses you, one who spitefully uses you).

- In response to these kinds of people, Jesus gives us three reasons for loving our enemies:
 - Doing so evidences a redemptive relationship with God (vs. 45a)
 - God does the same (vs. 45b)
 - It makes sense for citizens of God's kingdom (vv. 46-47).
- Jesus is again returning to the theme of vv. 38-42 ... how much value do we place on ourselves?

"It [vv. 43-47] is a definition of what the attitude of the Christian should be towards other people. In the previous paragraph we had that in a negative form, here we have it positively. There the position was that of a Christian man subjected to the insults of others. They come and strike him a blow, and inflict other kinds of injury upon him. And all our Lord says in the previous paragraph is that you must not hit back ... Here, however, our Lord leaves that and goes on to the positive and it is, of course, the very climax of Christian living. Here He leads us on to one of the greatest and most glorious things that are to be found even in His own teaching ... the vital thing is that a man should be dead to himself, dead to self-interest, dead to a concern about self." (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 267)

- **PRINCIPLE:** Our response to others must NEVER be governed by who/what they are or even what they have done to us ... it must ALWAYS be governed by God's view of them, especially with their spiritual condition in mind.
- After plainly stating that loving our enemies evidences a redemptive relationship with God, Jesus appeals to God's "common grace" as a model for our response.

What is "common grace"? (in contrast to efficacious grace it is the "kindly providence" of God or "the unmerited favor of God toward all men displayed in His general care for them" [Charles Ryrie])

How inspiring or challenging is the model of God's "common grace"? Does it encourage or discourage a proper response to our enemies?