

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Personal Relationships - Part 7 Love Your Enemies

Text: Matthew 5:43-48

Introduction: In the beginning of Matthew 5, Jesus begins to teach the standards of the religious man made crowd and God's standards. They are radically different. The beatitudes define who is truly blessed. Christians are to be the light and salt of the earth. By our words and actions we are to reflect who God is and what God has done. In Matthew 5:20 Jesus defines this in a simple yet powerful statement, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that of the scribes and Pharisees*, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." From vs. 21-48 we see this standard is to be in Christians, a standard that is far above the righteousness, man made righteousness of the Pharisees.

Point 1 - What The Law Says

Cf. Leviticus 19:17-18. What does the law say about loving your neighbor? As noted, "as yourself" has been removed because that was a key that needed to be omitted in order for a self righteousness to be established. It was simply inconceivable for them to care for anyone else as much as they cared for themselves. Mark 12:32-33 "The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." The was in response to the question of what was the greatest commandment of all? And it was to love your neighbor as yourself.

What does the OT teach about loving your neighbor? Cf. Deuteronomy 22:14, Exodus 23:4-5. The enemy spoken of in Exodus 23 is not an enemy on the battlefield, but a fellow brother or anyone else who may, in some ways, be antagonistic towards you. In the fullest sense the Israelites neighbor was anyone who you came across that may need your help. Jesus answers the question of "who is my neighbor" in Luke 10:30-37. In vs. 36 Jesus was asked "And who is my neighbor?" According to the self righteous law of the religionist, this man wasn't their neighbor. And they intentionally went to the other side.

Here is David's concern if he has disobeyed God's law in Psalms 7:4-5 "If I have rewarded evil to my friend, Or have plundered him who without cause was my adversary, Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake *it*; And let him trample my life down to the ground And lay my glory in the dust." David even prayed for his enemies when they meant harm to him, Psalms 35:12-13 "They repay me evil for good, To the bereavement of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, And my prayer kept returning to my bosom." David had opportunity to take Saul's life, to extract his own vengeance, cf. 1 Samuel 24:3-7.

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No where does the Scripture teach us to rejoice at the fall or demise of those who are against us. Proverbs 17:5 *"He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished."* Proverbs 24:29 *"Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work'."* Proverbs 25:21 *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink."*

Application: No where do we find the OT scriptures a law that says only your neighbor is those whom you want to be your neighbor, those like you, those with the same views, likes that you have. Your neighbor is the one who is in need.

Point 2 - The Law Perverted (Taken Away) And Added To

Notice what was being left out. The OT law requires you to love your neighbor as yourself. However, that part was being left out and not enforced. This is often repeated in the NT, Matthew 19:19 *"Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* James 2:8 *"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well."* This is often repeated in Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9 and Galatians 5:14. In all of those references, we see the "as yourself" included and not omitted.

The leaders had dropped that requirement from the law. It has been said *"A little truth makes deception more believable."* We all know we love ourselves. The Scribes and Pharisees loved themselves. Matthew 6:2 *"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men."* Matthew 6:5 *"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men."* Of course Luke 18:11 defines the pride and arrogance and the love of oneself, *"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'"*

Application: Many of us are in similar ways no different. We often think of ourselves first. How does this affect me, my time, my schedule? We spend most of our life seeking our own interest. Safety, healthy, pleasure personal interests and so on. Obviously, I'm not saying you shouldn't care about your health or safety or even personal hobbies. But when it overtakes the commands of Scripture, you must look at where your heart is.

The tradition of the Pharisees had narrowed the definition of a neighbor. Knowing they could not live up to the standards of "as yourself" they simply dropped it. This is what is happening all over so called "evangelical" christianity today. Whatever you don't like in Scripture, redefine it, rework it or just drop it all together. The fact is, they didn't want to live up to God's standards, so they changed it. When they removed the "as yourself" they narrowed the meaning to who their

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neighbor was. It was those like them. Those tax collectors and ordinary “sinners” were on the list as NOT their neighbor. In fact, they often looked down on the “common people” because they didn’t know the law, John 7:48-49 “No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.”

Now notice what was added. The Pharisees tradition added “and hate your enemy.” But does the Bible teach that? The addition to Scripture is even more hideous than the subtraction or just ignoring a command. One excuse the Jews may often have used to justify hatred of Gentiles was based on God’s commands for their forefathers to drive out Canaanites, Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites, and other pagan people as they conquered the promise land.¹ It is true those ancient inhabitants were some of the most vile, wicked, depraved and corrupt in history. But it was God’s judgment and they were to be cut off from the influence of wickedness. God was exercising just judgement and it was never intended for the Jews to extract vengeance nor return evil for evil or hatred for hatred.

How could they have justified adding the “hate your enemy” clause? Cf. Psalms 69:22-24 and see the reason for this is found in vs. 9 of the same Psalm. David wasn’t extracting personal hatred for his enemies, he was wanting justice for their violation of God’s law and His name. David was angered at what was done against God.

Application: It’s one thing to defend the honor and glory of God by seeking the defeat of His enemies. I know the term “righteous anger” and I’ve often said it’s impossible. However, let me attempt to refine my conviction. We can be angered at disrespect of God and His ways, His glory, His holiness. We can vigorously defend God’s honor and His word. We can defend the right to purity, life and other issues related to the attributes of God. But we cannot be hateful, spiteful and vengeful, that’s where the sin is human wrath comes in. James 1:20 affirms such, “for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” It’s quite another to seek vengeance or hate someone personally over a person’s antagonist attitude. Even to those who despise us we are to love and pray for them.

We are to share a balance of God’s love and justice. God loved Adam but cursed him. God loved Cain but punished him. God loved Sodom and Gomorrah but destroyed them. God loved Israel but allows her to be conquered and exiled.² The scribes and Pharisees knew nothing of this balance. They hated, they chose who were to be their enemies, and they established their own self righteous criteria. Beloved, it’s a great danger to add or take away from the commands of God. He said to love and pray and we must. Next week will show us that in much greater detail.

¹ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pp. 341,342

² The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pp. 343