

Today we are talking about loving your enemies...and I'm not sure many of us have enemies

Does anybody in here have a list of enemies...like you're a supervillain planning vengeance

We, typically, don't have enemies...but we do have people we don't like

Change the title of this message to 'Loving the people you don't like'

Imagine someone who has hurt you deeply.

Have spoken badly about you, treated unfairly, or deliberately made your life more difficult

Now imagine that person comes to you in need

They need help someone to stand beside them. What would your natural response be?

Kick rocks – Go beat the bricks – I'm not helping you...you hurt me...I want nothing to do

- Most of us would find it easier to help someone who has been kind to us.
- We naturally gravitate toward people who love us, appreciate us, and treat us well.
- But showing kindness to someone who has mistreated us is an entirely different matter

Our world often teaches us to treat people the way they treat us

If they are friendly, be friendly - If they respect us, respect them

But if they hurt us, we have every reason to give them the same treatment they gave us

Jesus calls His followers to something radically different

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus challenges the natural boundaries we place around our love

- He tells us to love our enemies, pray for those who persecute us
- Jesus is not simply asking us to be nice to people who are difficult...though part of it
- He is calling us to demonstrate a love that cannot be explained by human nature
- A love that reflects the very character of God

Notice that Jesus does not say we should love our enemies only when they apologize, change their behavior, or begin treating us fairly

He commands us to love them because we belong to Him

Big idea - Respond to Opposition with Christlike Love

The question is not whether we can love people who love us.

The question is has our relationship w/ Christ transformed us to love people who do not

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 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect

October 2, 2006, a gunman entered an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania,

- Shot ten young girls before taking his own life. Five girls died – Tragedy Devastated
- Parents lost their children, families faced unimaginable grief
- Community had every reason to respond w/ anger toward the gunman and his family
- Somethings Remarkable - Hours following shooting | Reached out family | Forgiveness
- Attended Funeral | Support to widow/kids | Showed grace & compassion in suffering
- Response attracted national attention...so contrary to what people naturally expect

Rather than allowing hatred to have the final word,

they sought to respond with the grace and forgiveness central to their Christian faith

- How do you love someone when you have every reason to hate them?
- How do you show kindness to someone who has caused you deep pain?
- how do you respond to those who have treated you as an enemy? | **Three ways answer**

1. Reject the World's Standards (vv. 43-44)

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,

Reject world's standards and embrace Christ's command to love those who oppose you

- Jesus does something a bit different here...he quotes Leviticus 19:18 'Love Neighbor'
- But he also says, 'You have heard it said that your enemy' – Nowhere in the OT
- The Old Testament never commanded people to hate their enemies

This shows how distorted the Pharisees and the Scribes had become by adding the phrase

- In Jesus' day, hostility toward political, religious, and personal opponents was common
- Under Roman rule, many Jews experienced oppression and resented their enemies

Jesus challenged His disciples to respond differently

a. Reject the World's Distorted Love

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"

- Jesus begins by identifying a common teaching His listeners had heard...love neighbor
- The problem was that people had narrowed the meaning of love
 - They understood that they should love their neighbors
 - But they treated that command as permission to hate people outside their circle

Their thinking was simple: I have a responsibility to love the people who are good to me, but I have no responsibility to love those who are against me | We Fall Same Trap

- We love people who share our beliefs, support our decisions, agree with our opinions
- But when someone disagrees with us, criticizes us, or hurts us, we justify our bitterness
 - We may never say, "I hate that person," but we might refuse to speak to them**
 - celebrate when they fail, or secretly hope that life teaches them a painful lesson**

We have allowed the world's standards to define whom we consider worthy of our love

I had two neighbors in a property dispute...hated each other...all started with a fence

Each person believes other deserved the treatment - Both are convinced they are justified

That is how revenge works. Each person uses other person's behavior to justify their own

Jesus challenges us to stop allowing another person's behavior to determine their character

b. Reject the World's Conditional Love - **"But I say to you, Love your enemies..."**

- Jesus moves from identifying the problem to commanding a different response
 - Jesus does not say love only those who deserve it or those who will eventually repay it
- He commands us to love even those who oppose us...unconditionally...to love our enemies**

- Biblical love is not necessarily a warm feeling or personal affection
 - It is a commitment to seek another person's good in a way that honors God
 - Sometimes that means showing kindness when we would rather withdraw, speaking respectfully when we feel insulted, or refusing to retaliate when we have the opportunity**
- Jesus is calling us to reject idea that people must earn every expression of our goodwill**

c. Reject the World's Natural Response **pray for those who persecute you,**

- Jesus goes beyond telling us to love our enemies – Practical Expression of Love = Pray
 - Persecution refers to hostile treatment because of one's faith or commitment to Christ**
- Why does Jesus command us to pray for such people? It changes the way we view them**

- It moves us away from seeing them merely as obstacles, opponents, or sources of pain and toward seeing them as people who need God's work in their lives

It is difficult to continually pray for someone while nurturing a desire for their destruction

⇒ **Pray before you retaliate** - When someone hurts you, make prayer your first response

⇒ **Pray for their repentance** - Ask God to change their heart and turn them away from sin

⇒ **Pray for the strength to love** - Ask God to help you respond in a way reflects Christ

2. Reflect the Father's Spirit (vv. 45–47)

⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Has anyone ever said, “You take after your father”? | **When I do something stupid**

Sometimes that statement refers to a person's appearance, mannerisms, or personality

- Children often reflect the character of their parents, whether they realize it or not
- The same principle applies to our relationship with our heavenly Father

Jesus teaches those who belong to God reflect His character in the way they treat others

The question is not simply whether we love others, but whether our love reflects the Father

- a. **Reflect the Father's Kindness** - so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Common Grace: Goodness that God extends to all people, believers and unbelievers alike

Examples of common grace include:

- Provision: God provides food, rain, and the resources necessary for life
- Protection: God restrains evil and preserves order in the world.
- Pleasure: God allows all people to experience beauty, relationships, and other blessings

Believer or unbeliever – Worshipping God or ignoring Him...all people given Common Grace

- Common grace = God's kindness shown to all people
 - Saving grace = God's grace through which sinners are saved through faith in Jesus Christ
- Farmer has a field and the rain falls...the rain doesn't check if the farmer is a believer**

God demonstrates His goodness to people who do not deserve it – Gospel

- b. **Reflect the Father's Love** - ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Loving those who love you is easy...worst people do that

- In Jesus' day, tax collectors were often despised because they collected taxes for Rome
- They could exploit people for personal gain – They could overtax and pocket difference

This is like saying...even the bookie loves the people who love him

We must extend kindness even to those who do not deserve it or return it

Jesus challenges listeners to examine limits of their love...I have a limit for how much love

- Loving people who love us is natural - Being kind to kind people requires little sacrifice
- Even people who do not follow God can demonstrate that kind of love

Jesus confronting idea we have fulfilled responsibility simply by loving those who love us

Friend who asked for too many favors...didn't reciprocate | You got to keep loving that guy

⇒ **Love beyond your circle** - Reach out to people who are different from you

⇒ **Love without keeping score** - Do not make kindness conditional on receiving

⇒ **Love when it costs you something** - requires time, patience, sacrifice, and forgiveness

If our love extends only to those who love us...reflecting the world rather than the Father

- c. **Reflect the Father's Distinction** - ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Jesus moves from loving to greeting

- In that culture, a greeting could express acceptance and a willingness to acknowledge
- You would only greet those you were friendly with...only people in your social circle
- Greeting only those within one's own circle does not demonstrate anything distinctive
- Even people who do not know God naturally show warmth to their friends and family

Our faith should make a visible difference in how we treat people

⇒ **Welcome the overlooked** - Notice person others ignore, the visitor who stands alone

⇒ **Cross social boundaries** - Do not let differences in status, personality, or opinion

3. Reach for Kingdom Perfection (v. 48)

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect

Now...we know we cannot reach perfection on this side of Heaven. So what does that mean

Imagine a child watching his father working in a woodshop...the father's cuts are perfect

The child wants to try...and his work is a disaster | Dad doesn't get mad...teaches the boy

Over time the child gets better...his work gets closer to perfection with every lesson

Child cannot match his father's skill immediately...his father's gives him standard to pursue

This is not a call to pretend we are sinless - It is a call to pursue the character of God

We cannot achieve God's perfection through our own strength

but we must never stop pursuing His character through His grace

- a. **Recognize the Standard of God's Perfection** - **You therefore must be perfect**

- Jesus uses the word therefore to connect this command to the preceding verses
- Just taught His followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them
- **The word perfect is the Greek word teleios | Context = Brought to an intended Goal**

So, when it comes to loving your enemy, you are not perfect, but the goal is perfection

In all Christian disciplines the goal is to be a perfect representative of the Father

Does not mean Christians can become equal to God in holiness or achieve sinless perfection

- Rather, we are to pursue a mature, wholehearted obedience that reflects His character

- b. **Pursue the Growth of Spiritual Maturity**

- Jesus' command is not an invitation to settle for spiritual mediocrity
- Far too often Christians settle into a groove after time and stop growing...no, no
- He calls His disciples to grow toward maturity in their faith and obedience
- Christian maturity more than knowing biblical information | **Educated Usefulness**

Allowing God's truth to shape our attitudes, relationships, responses to difficult people

We will not reach sinless perfection in this life...we should continually grow in Christlikeness

A tree does not become mature overnight – Seasons and storms help it grow up maturity

Spiritual maturity develops over time - Scripture, prayer, obedience, fellowship, and trials

- **Evaluate** – Look at the areas of your life where your attitudes do not reflect Christ
- **Eliminate** – Eliminate habits and influences that encourage disobedience
- **Exercise** - Practice what Scripture teaches, even when it is difficult

None of us are perfect...if we were Jesus wouldn't have had to come...growing into maturity

- c. **Reflect the Character of Your Heavenly Father** - **as your heavenly Father is perfect**

- Jesus does not merely command His followers to be better people
- He points them toward their heavenly Father as the pattern for their lives

Standard Christian living is not behavior of world around us, but character of God we serve

- Kingdom citizens should display a love that goes beyond what comes naturally
 - The world says, “Love those who love you” – Jesus “Love those that oppose you”
 - World says “Treat people the way they treat you.” - Jesus “Treat people way I treated”

The goal is not simply to look religious but to reflect God's character in our homes, workplaces, churches, and everyday relationships

Why does the moon glow at night...it is reflecting the sun | Be the moon...reflect the SON

Three Ways to Reflect Your Father

⇒ **Mirror His Mercy** - Show compassion to people who have wronged you

⇒ **Model His Love** - Treat people with kindness even when they cannot repay you

⇒ **Make Him Known** - Let your words, attitudes, and actions point people toward Jesus

Big idea - Respond to Opposition with Christlike Love