

Title: Kingdom Concerns: Enemies Included

Scripture: Matt 5:43-47

Main Idea: Righteousness that exceeds means that we show ourselves to be children of our Heavenly Father.

Love our enemies

If we thought last week was tough... standing down in the face of personal insult, opposition, and oppression, Jesus goes on in this sermon to say besides passively not retaliating, actively pursue the best for our personal enemies.

The further we go the harder it gets – this week and next week we arrive at the crux, the pinnacle, the standard of all standards, the nearly impossible...

We come to those statements of Jesus that are so challenging, that we don't really know what to do with them. As we introduced the series, we mentioned the challenges re the teaching of Jesus and how people tend to deal with them

- Many have looked at the sermon and then looked around at people and determined that living out its standards is impossible – noble and attractive, yes, but attainable, not so much
 - “the sermon on the mount is of no practical value either to individuals or communities. At best, it represents the unpractical idealism of a visionary.”
 - Some claim Jesus was giving his disciples a sort of interim ethic or martial law since the end was near.
 - Jesus was using hyperbole simply to make a point – well he was making a point, but Jesus was not trying to score rhetorical points or ratio his opponents with likes because of his rhetorical jabbing abilities .
 - Many therefore soften the absolute demands through qualifications in order to accommodate our inabilities to keep them.
- Others glibly claim that the demands are self-evidently true and easy to follow.

I think that we must take them at face value, let them have painful yet liberating work on our hearts, and then in the power of the Holy Spirit go out and walk in obedience.

At the outset, **two issues we must address: self and love**

- Self is what prevents us from loving others –
 - There is no room for self in love – in its nature love is the desire for the best of the object of that love and thus demands the suppression of self for the self-sacrifice required to love.
 - As long as we are driven by self, we place ourselves and our well-being in the hands of circumstances and others – the freedom that comes from loving is the release from concerns of self that flare up when we are mistreated or going through hard times.
- The whole concept of love has been coopted and corrupted
 - Love does not belong to the realm of romance
 - Love does not belong to the realm of affection – love is not driven by our affections; rather our affections are to be guided and controlled by our love
 - Love belongs to the realm of will – choice

Jesus' statement as given to us by Matthew leaves off a phrase normally associated with loving our neighbors and thus makes a subtle shift in emphasis from how to love to who to love – the focus is not about how we love, although there is some inevitable overlap for sure, but about who we are to love. In short, we are to love everyone, but the distinguishing love of a follower of Jesus is love for enemies.

And although we emphasize love in this text, it seems that the emphasis lies with the who, and our concern for them.

Our concern/approach to everyone, but especially to those who are our enemies.

Should reflect God's character as our father

- “so that” – the purpose clause in this passage

- I thought about titling “chip off the old block” but was concerned that it might be flirting with lines of respect to refer to God as an old block; but the phrase captures the point – as God’s children, we should be recognized as such by how we act, talk, think, and walk – we should look like our Father.
- Example here of God’s love that extends to good and evil ...

Should distinguish us from non-believers

- Tax collectors

Tax collectors - the collectors of tolls and taxes who were infamous in first-century Judaism.

- Tax collectors were despised as traitors and thieves who were ritually defiled.
- Tax collectors had allied themselves with the hated Romans who imposed a heavy tax burden on the people of Galilee and Perea.
- This alignment was seen as a traitorous betrayal
- Tax collectors were not salaried employees of the Roman government. Instead they received a modest commission, but by elevating already astronomical tax rates, they could increase their takings.
- The people called them "licensed robbers."
- The Babylonian Talmud listed service as a tax collector or publican among the most despised trades.
- The mere entrance of a tax collector into a Jewish home left the entire home in a state of uncleanness. Anything they touched was deemed defiled.
- Jewish law said that a Jew could not handle money from a tax collector's chest.
- Law forbade even a beggar to receive money from a tax collector's wallet.
- Tax collectors were expelled from Pharisaic communities.
- Tax collectors could never serve as a judge and their testimony was invalid in court.
- Jewish law gave them no more rights than a Gentile slave.
- Thus by comparing self-serving love for others to the love of a tax collector Jesus was giving a stinging rebuke.
- Righteous Jews wanted to think that they had nothing in common with tax collectors. ...

- the love and loyalty of the tax collector was for sale to the highest bidder.

Gentiles – some interpreted neighbor to mean Jew and thus all Jews were to be loved and everyone else hated: those dogs

Greetings (Quarles SM)

- Jesus also urged His disciples to be different from those who greeted only their brothers.
- Ancient greetings in both the Jewish and Gentile worlds typically expressed some kind of blessing.
- The Hebrew greeting shalom wished the peace that results from divine favor on the one being greeted. The greeting essentially meant, "May it be well with you."
- Some Jews were evidently hesitant to pronounce such greetings to their enemies in fear that they might thereby ensure their enemies' prosperity and success.
- The rabbis debated at length whether Jews should greet Gentiles, and they concluded that greetings could be offered to Gentiles "in the interests of peace"
- The Greek greeting *chairein* meant "joy be to you." Thus Gentiles sometimes refused to greet those whom they deemed unworthy, perhaps particularly Jews.

Remnant of love in us that remains present but is corrupted

Should prioritize eternity over temporal

- The eternal state of souls – prayer for those who persecute us
 - Three reasons to pray:
 - 1) to see our hearts
 - 2) to see others as God does
 - 3) no way to remain bitter/angry if above
 - 4) to bring our enemies within God's framework for moving in people's hearts and lives – does not guarantee a positive outcome, but brings to a realization of a conscious choice
- The eternal rewards for believers

Conclusion:

- Robert Smith Jr. – phone call late at night of Oct 30, 2010 – son had been shot during robbery at the restaurant where he worked. Pleaded with God to save Tony for an hour but another call brought the devastating news.
- “do you believe what you have been preaching”

Don't make the mistake here of thinking this is easy and somehow within our grasp on our own...

For the standards of the Sermon on the Mount are neither readily attainable by every man nor totally unattainable by any man. To put them beyond anybody's reach is to ignore the purpose of Christ's sermon; to put them within everybody's is to ignore the reality of man's sin. They are attainable all right, but only by those who have experienced the new birth...

Only a belief in the necessity and possibility of a new birth can keep us from reading the Sermon on the Mount with either foolish optimism or hopeless despair. Jesus spoke the sermon to those who were already his disciples and thereby also citizens of God's kingdom and the children of God's family. The high standards set are appropriate only to such.” Stott, 28-9