

Essentials

Radical Love

Matthew 5:43-48

July 16, 2017 am

HDBC

This is the last of six illustrations of how the **essential expectations** for believers rises above the letter of the law or the previous interpretations of the O.T. Jesus had indicated that our righteousness was to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. From a salvation standpoint that can only come from the imputed righteousness of Christ. From a practical standpoint that comes as we live our lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit rather than according to a list of dos and don'ts.

The question before us this morning is a difficult one. What do you do with your enemies? How do you respond to those who not only have hurt you, but who have set themselves against you? This may sound like a repeat of what we dealt with last week, but it is a step beyond. Last week we dealt with our initial reactions to insults, mistreatment, harassment, and abuses.

The short answer . . . lovingly and patiently take them and use your reaction to build a platform for sharing the gospel. Turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, giving more than is required when mistreated . . . all of these will get the attention of others who will want to know why you are different. On the surface these reactions may seem to reflect fear and weakness, but they actually demonstrate strength and confidence.

Jesus now extends the principle beyond the initial reaction to a permanent attitude. We are not simply called to control our reactions to insults, we are called to love our enemies.

1. Limited Love (43)

Jesus quoted the prevailing view of the O. T. teaching concerning love.

You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. This was not at all what the O.T. taught. But Jesus knew he needed to start with the prevailing belief. The actual O.T. law on love can be summed up with Leviticus 19:18.

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."

This verse in Leviticus raised two questions in the minds of the Jews. They had answered both incorrectly, as is reflected in the statement by Jesus.

A. What do I do with my enemies?

There is no mention in that verse of what to do with one's enemies. They answered this question with a very narrow understanding of love. Since, Jesus only mentioned loving one's neighbor, they assumed they were free to not love, or in the extreme, actually hate those who were not neighbors.

In Jesus' day the Jews were seeing it this way. They misused this law to foster hatred and prejudice against all whom they did not consider neighbors. But that leads to another question.

B. Who is my neighbor?

In Luke 10 we find Jesus being asked this question by an expert of the law. The lawyer did not ask it in order to extend his love to many, but to restrict it to a few. He was not interested in who he had to love, but who he was free to hate. This was the sentiment of the religious leaders in Jesus' day. They believed fellow Hebrews were neighbors, but not the Samaritans and Gentiles. What did Jesus say? He told a story, essentially saying your neighbor is anyone in need.

By the time of Jesus, the hatred of foreigners was so institutionalized that the Jews thought they were honoring God by despising anyone who was not Jewish. The standard love in Jesus' day was a limited love. Love your brother. Hate the outsider. *Not too many non-Jewish outsiders were vacationing in Israel!*

2. Radical Love (44-48)

A. The Command (44)

Note that there are two parts to the command. They complement one another, but are not synonymous. Both are supremely radical!

1) Love Your Enemies

Try to imagine the shock that this statement would have made to those who were present to hear Jesus say it. They were not prepared for this.

Someone has written . . .

To return evil for good is devilish;

To return good for good is human;

To return good for evil is divine.

Enemies refers to one who is hostile, hateful, opposes. Those who would purposefully bring pain, frustration and difficulty into our lives. Those who would attack us.

This is a call to a higher standard of love. Jesus is calling for a new order of men and women who would not simply love those who love them, but would broaden the scope of their love to include the unlovely, the difficult to love, and even those who do not deserve or desire our love.

2) Pray for those who persecute you

Praying for one's persecutor may be the highest expression of love possible.

This is the supreme command, wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was hanged by the Nazis days before his prison camp was liberated at end of WWII.

Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God.

And in the process of praying for him, we not only express the highest love, we also grow to love that person more. It is hard hate a person for whom you are praying. In our praying for others, we develop a love for others.

In these two commands, Jesus is calling us to **love and pray without limits**.

B. Reasons (45-47)

Why would Jesus call us to this kind of response toward our enemies and persecutors? Three reasons.

1) Points to our relationship with God (45)

When we love our enemies we are very much like God. He sends rain on the good and bad. When we shower our love on the good and bad, we are being like God. Therefore it proves we are His children. He not only sends rain on the unjust, but He sent Jesus to die for the unjust.

2) Distinguishes us from unbelievers (46-47)

When we love our enemies we stand out. People will notice. ***All kinds of ways to get attention. Be the best at what you do. You can be crude and obnoxious. You can do odd or unusual things and people may notice.***

Best way is to love your enemies and pray for persecutors

3) Reflects the standard of perfection (48)

Note the words of Jesus in verse 48. We are to be ***perfect***. Wow!

Perfect means full grown, complete, mature. Loving your enemies is a sign of spiritual maturity.

We all know what to do with family and friends: We love them, enjoy them, encourage and protect them. We watch out for their interest, as they do ours.

But what do you do with your enemies and persecutors?

We now have the answer. We love them and pray for them.
If you are a child of God, that is the clear answer. **No debate!**

Listen to the words of missionary, Amy Carmichael in her simple but profound book, ***If***

Her point is that the love Jesus calls us to, is *Calvary Love*. The way he loved us.

If I feel bitterly towards those who condemn me, as it seems to me, unjustly, forgetting that if they knew me as I know myself they would condemn me much more, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I say, 'Yes, I forgive, but I cannot forget,' as though the God, who twice a day washes all the sands on all the shores of all the world, could not wash such memories from my mind, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

Helps:

1. It is a Decision, Not a Feeling

Can't wait for feelings. May never come.

2. It is Active, Not Passive

Find ways to express it. Direct or indirect.

In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis writes about this kind of love.

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

3. It is Selfless, Not Selfish

What if they do not respond? Keep it up.

4. It is Possible Through Jesus

Never underestimate the power of His love in and through you. You just need to unleash it.