

# MATTHEW 5:43 – 48

## LOVING OUR ENEMIES

---

Over the years, I have heard believers declare; almost complain about feeling as if their lives were in a fish bowl. They didn't want to be on display or feel that they were there to be judged by everyone else. On one hand this is understandable, but on the other, this should only worry us if we are not living out the very principles we espouse, or at the very least claim to espouse. For if we truly believe in the changing power of the Gospel and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, then this is merely an opportunity to manifest that in which we say we resides within us.

Today we will read of Jesus' teachings as He corrects the commonly held beliefs of the scribes, Pharisees and Rabbis of His day. As has been said week after week in our study, it was only the external and not the heart that has been dwelt with by these teachers of the Law. Jesus has taken these teachings and has stood them on their heads. It is the heart that truly reveals the spiritual condition of a man. The heart can, at times be masked by silence, inaction or just plain conniving dishonesty.

The Sermon on the Mount is not about how to get right with God, but rather it is about how people that have gotten right with God are to live. I believe that is what bothers at times – the fact that we are held to a higher standard. The fact that so much, so much more is expected of us can be overwhelming to those that purpose to live for Jesus, while for those that hope to get by on a nominal Christian faith, it is a very large inconvenience.

It has been said that some portions of the Bible are challenging because they are hard to understand. While still other portions are challenging because they are so easy to understand. I believe the latter to be the case today.

We will all be challenged today, perhaps even more so than at any other point thus far in the Sermon on the Mount. But, if we will see it as an opportunity and not an inconvenience, then we will see much fruit come from it.

Mt. 5: 43 - 48

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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father 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 have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

This is the last of our comparative statements. After this, Jesus does not choose to compare His teachings with those of the day in this same way.

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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Loving our neighbors is essentially the status quo. It is natural for us to love those that love us in return. But Jesus takes things to an all-new high with this statement. We are to love our neighbors, true enough, but we are also to love our enemies. We are to bless those that curse us and do good to those that hate us. And on top of that we are to pray for those that use us spitefully and persecute us. That is a tall order no matter how you slice it. All of these things go against our very nature. Human nature, our adamic nature tells us to go in the opposite direction.

And that is at the heart of this very teaching. To follow Jesus also goes against the natural man's thinking. Jesus intends to reverse our very nature. That is because it is a fallen nature. What seems natural to us feels that way because it is the way of the world. When we give in to those thoughts, feelings and proclivities we are giving in to a nature, which is at its very core, anti-God. Please note that there is nothing in this sermon that speaks of Jesus death, burial and resurrection. Those things were yet in the future. In fact, the disciples seemed to be ignorant of those things right up until the very end. But Jesus is teaching on what is to be expected of His followers. For those that were already believers, they probably didn't know the fullness in which they could walk in this light, at least for a time. But for us, we know, being that we are on the

backside of the resurrection and Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to indwell those that believed in Jesus' work.

- The way loving your enemies was taught: Leviticus 19:18 stated that you were to love your neighbor, but said nothing of an enemy. Therefore what was added was that you could hate your enemy. They added to the Word. (This may have come about because of Israel's status in the land but was not God's intention.)
- Jesus says, "My kingdom is not like that!" From God's perspective, everyone is a neighbor, even our enemies.
- "But who is my neighbor?" The parable of the Good Samaritan. This was asked in order that the man could justify himself. Jesus wasn't having any of it.
- There are some that we see as enemies though they are not our enemies at all. They have been created in our minds. Regardless, we are to love them.
- But it doesn't stop with love. We are to bless, help and pray for them.
- We aren't to pretend that we have no enemies. That we have them is a given. But we are still to do good to them.
- It is an opportunity for ministry.
- We aren't to remain silent. This is not a command to be silent or inactive. We are to be active, even proactive. We are to ask God to bless them.
- There is no tit for tat. "You punished me, therefore I hope you are punished."
- Jesus says nothing here about how we are to "feel." Feeling will take you down the wrong road. In the West, we automatically attach love to feelings. Jesus didn't say to FEEL love. He didn't say we are to FEEL anything toward them. HE said to DO something. The feelings will follow the actions.
- It is impossible to live this sort of kingdom life if we live with a victim's mentality.

**Rom. 12: 14 – 21**

**14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**

**17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore**

**“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
 If he is thirsty, give him a drink;  
 For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”  
 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

We are to respond with love when confronted with evil and hatred. God does the transforming work. When we allow this to work itself out, the results can be nothing short of miraculous.

- “Coals of fire...” Not third degree burns, but rather is a blessing like a fire that goes from house to house. Idiomatic expressions.
- This is far greater than non-retaliation. This is positive love. We are to respond with non-retaliation and then go beyond it with love. Like going the extra mile while carrying the Roman soldier’s pack. (Take a sad song and make it better.)
- Not, “Let’s get this relationship right, YOU NEED TO CHANGE!”
- You destroy enemies by making them your friends.
- The context here is that of personal relationships, not that of civil government. The judge is still to impose a just sentence, not just let the criminal go. They have their mandate in Romans 13, as we spoke of last week.

Why are we to live this way?

**45 that you may be sons of your Father 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.**

We are to do this so that we may be sons of our Father in Heaven. Look at how God works. He makes the sun and rain to shine on both the just and the unjust. **Why does God move this way? He does so because He is rich in mercy, not because He turns a blind eye to evil. God is long-suffering!**

Today is the day of grace. His judgment will come one day, but right now we are to take the opportunity to show grace and mercy; be sons and daughters of our Father and be salt and light.

Another reason to live this way.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

Here Jesus uses that most- hated of all people; the tax collector. They were considered to be the scum of the earth.

- It is the default position to love those that love us. In doing so, we are no better than those considered to be the lowest of the low.
- You love your fellow church members? Wow! Do we expect to get a cookie for that? Real love is shown when we can extend it to those outside our group – those that don't agree or live as we do.

**Jesus is saying to the world, "You can expect more from my followers."**

**God expects more from His people than from those that have yet to become His followers.**

Should we really expect Christian behavior from those that don't know Jesus? There are reasons why we should be held to a higher standard!

- **We claim to have something others don't have.**
- **We claim to have been renewed, born again, repentant and redeemed!**
- **We claim to have an active power in our lives, which enables us to live this way!**
- **We understand that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!**
- **We claim to have a better future in eternity than they!**
- **We have something to live for other than the present, fleeting things of this world!**
- This should make a difference in our lives!! Even if the rest of the world follows another path, we are to live this way.
- Even regarding the atheist who is determined to undermine our faith and country... Even to those that don't believe in our moral framework and seek to impose their lifestyle on our society and us, we are to defend the faith and our morals but we are still to love while doing so.

Are you being challenged yet? If so, cheer up. It only gets harder.

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Are you ready to close your Bibles and walk out of here? That is understandable.

This is impossible, is it not? If you have seen the impossibility of this, then you are being honest with yourself. If you can truly see how impossible this is, then you have come to the same revelation the Apostle Paul did when he realized he could not live up to the Law of Moses.

Matthew 5:3

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

If you have come to that place, the end of yourself, the Jesus can help you. Do you see that Jesus' message has the same effect as the Law had on Paul?

We can't live this way, at least in our own power. It is impossible. It is the antithesis of our very nature. Folks, we need Jesus! We need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit!

Are we serious when we say we want to follow Jesus? If so, then this is what is supposed to await us. This is the sort of life we are to live. This is the example we are to set for others. This is our testimony and our witness!!

Let me ask you this. Is this your reality? It is often when we go from theory to practice that we have problems. Let me say that I am there with you.

We are powerless to live out this life apart from salvation in Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Have you been challenged today? If not, then I will pray for you. If you have been, then let me encourage you to right now ask God to empower you.

If you are not a believer, but have come to the conclusion that you are powerless to live like a follower of Jesus, then you are in a good place. You have come the end of your self. And upon receiving Jesus as your savior, you will be blessed, happy because you have become the poor in spirit. And thus, you have become a child of God. If this is you, then I would like to be the first to welcome you to the family of God. Let's pray.

