

# Love Your Enemies

## Matthew 5:43-48

**Introduction** – Jesus continues His correction of the Pharisees’ instructions on how we are to treat others. In vv 38-42 He taught what we *must not* do, and now He will address what we *must* do. It is important to note what Jesus already taught in Matt 5:10-12 as well. He assumes we will have enemies. Paul said, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” This is the nature of the antithesis (John 3:20-21) and we are simply walking in our Savior’s footsteps (John 15:18-25).

**The Pharisees Teaching** (v 43) - They taught that Gentiles and all others who offended them were dogs or worse, which is why when Jesus says ‘to love your neighbor’ they are quick to ask ‘who is my neighbor?’ (Luke 10:29). Once again they stood in stark defiance of teachings from their own law. God commands the stranger to be loved (Lev 19:33-34, and your enemy to be treated lawfully (Ex 23:4-5). Proverbs instructs us not to rejoice when our enemy falls (24:17-18) and to feed him when he is hungry (25:21). But these teachers of Israel hated the Gentiles, and later hated the gospel going out to them (1 Thess 2:15-16).

Some might ask, ‘what about the imprecatory psalms and God’s commands to Israel to completely wipe out entire nations in Canaan?’ This is the difference between my enemies and God’s enemies (Psalm 139:19-22).

**Enemies Are Neighbors** (v 44) - Jesus sets the record straight, and this leaves us with a difficult teaching, especially when we try to impose a warm, fuzzy, sentimental meaning on this word ‘love’. But the love Jesus is referring to is obedience to the law from the heart (John 14:15, 1 John 5:3). Jesus gives three illustrious applications.

“**bless those who curse you**” - You must speak graciously of and to them. Their sin is no justification for yours.

“**do good to those who hate you**” - If he lost his ox (or his wallet) and you pick it up, what must you do?

“**pray for those...**” - Their names are to be brought before the Lord, but not for cursing.

**The Results of Such Love** (vv 45-46) -

**Imitation of Common Grace** – We are to imitate our Father in all things. We are to be His sons. There is a love which he bestows upon all, the just and unjust alike. Luke 7:35 says, “For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.” Romans 2:4-11 describes the purposes of God’s kindness. It will either lead one to repentance or heap guilt and condemnation upon the hardened God-hater, both to the glory of God.

**Imitation of Redemptive Love** – However, we must keep in mind that there is a love which God is very discriminatory about which we must imitate as well. And so, we must love our wives as Christ loved the church. He only loves this woman in this way, and it is obvious. So should it be with us.

**What Do You Do More Than Others?** (vv 46-47) - Religious faith without works is a dead faith. God is not impressed. “It is not by personal holiness that a man shall enter heaven, but yet without holiness shall no man see the Lord” - Charles Spurgeon. Are we lights in darkness, are we salt in the earth, are we different? If there is no fruit, there is no reason to suspect that the root is different no matter what the tag says. Which leads us to Christ’s final words in this section:

**Gospel Perfection** (v 48) - Before the Fall, the requirement was absolute perfection. And after the Fall, the requirement did not change. Christ is simply restating Deut 18:43 “You shall be blameless before the Lord Your God”. In fact, this is just a positive summary of the Ten Commandments.

**Poverty of Spirit, Hunger for Righteousness** - If you respond ‘but that is impossible!’ then you are beginning to understand the gospel. The gospel is only good news to those who are in a hopeless, desperate state. You need perfect righteousness. You need Christ’s righteousness. And this righteousness, when imputed by the Holy Spirit drives a man to hunger for its manifestation. Hear the words of a justified man -

“Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!” - Psalm 119:5

“Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed.” - Psalm 119:80

We will only be salt and light, we will only be holy and different, when, by faith, God works in us *both* to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). And so “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” (Phil 3:12)