

Radiant Church, February 14, 2016
Mike Rydman

A Disciple's Heart...Blesses Its Enemies Matthew 5:43-48

In 1958 C.S. Lewis responded to a published criticism of him, that Lewis did not much care for the Sermon on the Mount. Lewis responded by saying this: "As to 'caring for' the Sermon on the Mount, if 'caring for' here means 'liking' or 'enjoying,' I suppose no one 'cares for it.' Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledgexhammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure."

If last week's sermon on "turning the other cheek" seemed 99% impossible, then this one will feel 100% impossible!

If last week's sermon was responding to enemies with defense, this is responding to enemies on offense...the Great Commandment of Love

Matthew 5:43-44 *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be some of your Father who is in heaven.*

The Jews considered only other Jews to be their "neighbors." They could not tolerate any extension of the term to pertain to anyone else

The OT commands to exterminate the Canaanites, and the Psalms we call the "imprecatory psalms" were judicial - never individual

But it seems in our heads that a strong positive statement, like "love your neighbor" assumes if not demands an equally strong negative, like "hate your enemy"

By Jesus' time, hatred for outsiders, let alone enemies was almost institutionalized. The Qumran sect that copied and stored vast sections of Scripture in caves (the Dead Sea Scrolls) also said this, "I will love only my neighbor, and I will hate everyone else. It is my duty."

First of all, the OT never says to "hate your enemy"
Jesus is correcting not the OT itself but misinterpretations of the OT

But, to love an enemy seems absurd, and offensive, and beyond anyone's capability.

Why? Because it offends our natural sense of right and wrong, good guys and bad guys.

And Jesus, instead is calling us to love others without limits, regardless of what they say or do to us. This is counter-cultural.

Why is He calling us to adopt this radical and revolutionary way of living?

Matthew 5:45 *For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

While God hates evil, He still brings many blessings in this life even to His enemies. Theologians call this “common grace,” the favor He gives to all people, not just to believers. God shows grace and care for all of His creatures
Rain, sunshine, natural beauty, Northern Lights, laughter, etc.

These common grace blessings are intended to lead unbelievers to repentance and acknowledgement of their Creator.

So if we love others unconditionally and without limits, we are acting like God acts

Matthew 5:46-47 *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*

Tax collectors were Jewish, and they were extortionists, thus were despised and hated by their own people
Gentiles were anyone who wasn't a Jew, therefore they were unclean. Jews and Gentiles didn't mix.

Christians are called to behavior that shows significantly greater love

The second reason Jesus commands His disciples to love like this is because this kind of love distinguishes us from the world - we're to love more and love better than what is common among nonbelievers.

We may be called to love people we do not like.

And by loving the unlikeable people, it likely will not result in their being changed.

But we will be changed.

Matthew 5:48 *You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Scripture is a reflection of God Himself, as He has made Himself known to His people. As Christians seek to live in conformity to Scripture, we are in fact pursuing the very perfection of God

Let's go back to where we started, and look at the second part of verse 44

Matthew 5:44 *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

In addition to loving, we're also called to pray for our enemies!

This too is a seemingly impossible, high call. This takes us to the unknown heights of selfless love

As Jesus was being crucified, even as His enemies had nailed his hands and feet to the cross, He prayed, **Luke 23:34** "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"

And one of the first deacons, Stephen found himself transformed by the Holy Spirit, in response to this command, and he said this while being killed for his faith in Jesus; **Acts 7:59-60** *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

This last section of chapter 5, even this last verse provides the conclusion and summary to the idea that all of the Law and the Prophets find their perfect fulfillment in the perfection of the Father, which is what all Jesus' disciples are called to pursue

Everything Jesus has said and commanded His disciples to follow is somehow within reach...by everyone who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ

Who do I need to ask the Spirit to give me love for?

Who's the meanest person we can add to our prayer list?

And can we trust the Holy Spirit to do in us what only He can do?