

Sermon 21, Love Your Enemies, Matthew 5:43-48

“To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. . . . We cannot do otherwise than contend with those who contend with God.”
--C.H. Spurgeon on Psalm 139:21-22 (make this the bulletin verse)

Hatred is opposed to love, as stated above (I-II, 29, 2); so that [hatred](#) of a thing is evil according as the love of that thing is [good](#). Now love is due to our neighbor in respect of what he holds from [God](#), i.e. in respect of nature and [grace](#), but not in respect of what he has of himself and from the devil, i.e. in respect of [sin](#) and lack of justice.

Consequently it is lawful to [hate](#) the [sin](#) in one's brother, and whatever pertains to the defect of Divine justice, but we cannot [hate](#) our brother's [nature](#) and [grace](#) without [sin](#). Now it is part of our love for our brother that we [hate](#) the fault and the lack of [good](#) in him, since desire for another's [good](#) is equivalent to [hatred](#) of his [evil](#). Consequently the [hatred](#) of one's brother, if we consider it simply, is always [sinful](#).

Men are not opposed to us in respect of the goods which they have received from [God](#): wherefore, in this respect, we should love them. But they are opposed to us, in so far as they show hostility towards us, and this is [sinful](#) in them. On this respect we should [hate](#) them, for we should [hate](#) in them the fact that they are hostile to us. (Thomas, ST, II-II, 34, 3)

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Proposition: Because the Father loves His enemies, Christians ought to do so as well.

Introduction

We have been looking for the past eight weeks at the superior righteousness that God requires from Christians. We have seen that we must be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, and we have further seen that the only way that this is possible is through personal acquaintance with Jesus. Today, we come to the climax of the six antitheses. Here, for the first time, Jesus addresses an outright fabrication that has absolutely nothing to do with the law of God. He then places His sights squarely on us. It's easy to say, "Love your enemies" when you have no enemies. But when someone is actively trying to hurt and kill you, this command seems really hard. Indeed, it seems impossible. Only when we know Jesus and have been shaped by His Spirit into His image will we be able to love our enemies. But we must: The Father loves His enemies. He loved us when we were His enemies. So how can we do anything less?

Why should you listen to this sermon? Because you want to be loved. Whether you are currently an enemy of God or an ex-enemy of God, His mercy and love for His enemies personally affects you. If you are a believer today, you have no excuse. You must love your enemies. If you're not a believer today, you have no excuse either — after all, God Himself loves you. He proves it by how He treats you. Will you continue to resist that love?

What do I mean? Well, we pick it up at verse 43.

I. The Law: Love Your Neighbor and Hate God's Enemies, v. 43

Here's the phrase that Jesus' audience had heard: "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." Now, a quick check in your cross-references will show you that the OT never said any such thing. At least, it didn't say the second half of it.

A. The OT Witness

What is in the OT?

1. Moses Commanded Love for Neighbor, Lev. 19:18

We have had occasion to look at this passage numerous times over the course of these six antitheses. Again, though, we see that this verse requires us to love our neighbor because God is the true God. Now, God says elsewhere (Lev. 19:34) that you must also love strangers as yourself. In other words, even from Lev. 19 it is clear that you must love your neighbor and that everyone is your neighbor.

But neither in Lev. 19 nor anywhere else in Scripture will you find a command to hate your enemy. However, there is one passage that talks about hating enemies.

2. David Hated God's Enemies, Psalm 139:21-22

These verses in Psalm 139 emphasize how strongly David has identified Himself with God and made God's cause his own. He begs God to search Him and see whether any unworthy thoughts are in him, because he obviously believes that it is perfectly appropriate for him to hate God's enemies. Indeed, to David, this is a mark of his total dedication to God.

Now, what could he possibly mean here? Well, I know you're wondering, because I wondered the same thing as I read the passage. Why does David consider it a mark of piety to hate God's enemies, when Jesus says to love your enemies and adds that God loves His enemies?

Well, I'll tell you. David hated the wickedness in the enemies. "Love the sinner, hate the sin" — you've heard it a million times, right? Well, it's true. Only it's not that you love the sinner as a sinner, but as a human being. If you have nothing else in common, at least you have your humanity in common! If you have nothing else that you can love about this wicked person, you have the fact that He is like you, created in the image of God and originally designed to live in fellowship with God. That's what you love. But you don't love sin and should never love sin. The fact that someone is an enemy to God is a hateful fact. You ought to hate that enmity, as David does.

Well, that's the core of this sermon. Yes, you did come all the way here to hear "Love the sinner, hate the sin." But we will talk more about what that means over the course of the next forty minutes or so.

B. The Pharisees' Interpretation: Love Your Neighbor, Hate Your Enemy

Now, based on the OT witness about love and hate, the Pharisees had come up with a formula very different from "love the sinner, hate the sin." Their formula said to love fellow Jews who were good righteous Jews, and that it was OK to hate anyone else. They didn't just say, "Love your neighbor, hate God's enemies." As far as they were concerned, everyone who didn't fit their standards was an enemy and deserved to be treated with hatred.

Now, before we sigh over those wicked Pharisees, take a good hard look in the mirror. Do you have anyone that you're on the outs with? Anyone you well and truly hate? Anyone who has shafted you, hurt you, dumped you, trashed your reputation, fired you, gotten you a demotion, etc.? Now, tell the truth to yourself and to God. Have you considered yourself justified in hating that person? Have you considered that because what he did was so awful, it is therefore perfectly all right for you to feel the way you do about him? "God, didn't you see what that child did? He scissored my couch!"

Well, Jesus quotes this idea, but as we will see, He demolishes it. Moses and David were teaching this: love everyone correctly. Love in the right way. In David's case, love and hate are compatible. He hated those enemies in one sense, and loved them in another.

C. The Correct Interpretation: Love Every Person in the Right Way

You see, in order to really understand this command, we need to go back to three different kinds of love that theologians distinguish between. How is that you can love your enemy when he's wicked? Doesn't that involve you in loving wickedness?

1. Love as *Benevolence*: Wishing Well

No. You see, the first kind of love is "wishing well," or in Latin, "benevolence." If you sincerely wish the best for someone, and you do so with eagerness, then it is appropriate to say you love that person. Love is a choice, not just a feeling. And if you choose to sincerely want what's good

for someone else, if it's combined with a feeling of eager desire that that good happen, then you love that person.

2. Love as *Benevolence*: Doing Good

But a second kind of love leads you do good. Once again, it is named in Latin, but its meaning is simply that you reach out and do good — again, with eagerness and delight that you can do that good.

Both of these kinds of love are required, for neighbors and for enemies. You must sincerely wish the best to all people, and sincerely do what good you can when and as you can.

3. Love as *Complacency*: Delighting in

But the final kind of love is the kind which really reaches to the summit of what we consider love to be. This is the love of good pleasure, the love of being pleased with (in Latin: “complacency”). This is the kind of love spouses should have for one another, where you not only sincerely desire good and do good, but also sincerely *enjoy* the other person as a person. This is the fulfillment of love; this is what all love is supposed to be and is striving towards. This kind of love is the love that you should have for God. You should delight in Him, in His presence, in His goodness, in His power and love and joy and every other aspect of the Divine fulness.

II. Jesus’ “Yes, And:” Love Your Enemies, Just Like Your Father Does, vv. 44-47

It is against the backdrop of these three kinds of love that we can best understand Jesus’ command in the rest of this passage. When Jesus says “Love your enemies,” is He really commanding us to be well-pleased with our enemies? To enjoy them? To long to be in their presence, rejoicing in being with our beloveds? No. That would be absurd. Jesus is not talking about the love of complacency. Complacency wholeheartedly approves of the beloved. You’re not supposed to wholeheartedly approve of wickedness. You are supposed to hate it, like David did.

A. The Love of Benevolence and Benevolence Commanded, v. 44

But even as you hate the wickedness that’s in your enemies, you are supposed to sincerely wish them good and do them good.

1. Enemies Are Neighbors Too, v. 44a

Now, since an enemy is out to destroy you, and self-preservation is nature’s first law, it might naturally be supposed that “love your neighbor” contains an obvious exception: “fight your enemy.” But it doesn’t. Jesus’ revolutionary claim here is that enemies are neighbors too! Indeed, as He made clear in the story of the Good Samaritan, everyone is your neighbor. (Already this was clear from the Ten Commandments, in which it could hardly be thought acceptable to covet a Gentile’s donkey.) And so, even if someone is trying to kill you, you are not thereby allowed to hate him. No matter how much someone sins against, you may not get bitter and hateful. I’m not saying this is easy. Jesus never said it would be easy. I’m just repeating what’s right here in the text: hatred of any human being as such (i.e., as a human being) is wicked. It is wrong. It is

immoral. It is contrary to God's law. And so it should never be done. You may not hate even your enemies, much less anyone else.

Rather, you must love them. Again, this doesn't mean that you approve their sins. It doesn't mean since you should love everybody, you should say, "I accept you just as you are. I am well-pleased with the fact that you are trying to kill me and my closest friends." No! You must sincerely and eagerly wish good for this enemy, and do good for this enemy — but you need not (even may not!) have complacency in him unless he turns from his wickedness, in which case he will no longer be an enemy.

2. Love as Beneficence Means Eagerly Doing Good, v. 44b-d

Jesus tells us in more specific detail exactly what this love of benevolence and beneficence requires. First of all, it means blessing those who curse you. That is, when someone uses harsh and foul and abusive language, you should still be kind and merciful. You should still address him with politeness, not returning railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing. Don't descend to his level. You speak as a representative of the King, no matter how nasty the other person is in addressing you.

When someone hates you, do good for that person. Give him a drink. Help his animal. Serve as a character witness for him in court. And so on. There are many situations in this world in which someone will hate you, and the situation itself will dictate how you can best show love to that person. But you will show love by doing concrete good for that person. Of course, the best good you can do is to witness to someone about Jesus. Trying to get him to go to hell would be doing him evil; showing him kindness and then explaining that you help your enemies because Jesus saved His enemies is the kindest thing you can do. It's not easy, but it's right.

When someone uses you spitefully, that is, with mean and nasty pettiness, how should you respond? When you're driven away, fired, sneered at, snubbed, etc., what is your response? Do you pray for the person who is treating you so badly? Do you actually ask God to save that person, to change his heart? You see, the goal of the love of beneficence is that it could get to the place of complacency. You want to be able to enjoy that person who used to be your enemy. You want to be able to commune with him in mutual love for Jesus. But you won't be able to do so unless you are willing to pray for him. Again, this is not an easy thing to do. It's more fun to pray against the wicked person. But you may only pray against his wickedness. He personally you must pray for — that he would prosper spiritually, that he would forsake his wicked way, that he would be converted, that he would stop persecuting. All of these are appropriate prayers. After all, it is not loving to someone to encourage him in sin. It is not loving to try to make someone worse. It is loving to help him be good. I'm not talking about a God-complex here. Nonetheless, it is more than clear that willing good and doing good very well might involve stopping evil. You would do that not as a function of hate, but as a function of love.

Some of us in this room have a duty from the state to use lethal force, if necessary, to stop the perpetration of evil. How should you law enforcement types think about your job in light of the command to love your enemies? Just this way: that stopping someone from doing evil is a

way of showing love to that person. Arresting him (literally) in his wickedness is a means given by God to make him wake up and think about the danger his immortal soul is in. Cops, judges, court personnel — don't do your job with hatred towards the criminals. Don't set out to hurt them and belittle them. Rather, set out to love them. See your job for what it is: a way of willing good and doing good by encouraging people to do the right thing. If that requires force, so be it. Either way, your motive has to be love, not hate. Hate the sin. Please hate the sin! When you burst into a house where a guy is busy breaking his wife's ribs and bruising his children, by all means hate that sin. But don't hate the sinner. Don't seek his destruction. Seek his good. Seek to help him stop sinning and start doing what's right.

B. The Love of Beneficence Illustrated, v. 45

Well, we are supposed to love our enemies, not by enjoying their enmity and wickedness, but by eagerly wishing them good and doing them good when we have the opportunity. Why is this?

1. Sons Should Be Like their Fathers, v. 45a

Well, Jesus tells us that we are supposed to be like the Father. He is benevolent and beneficent to His creatures, especially to man and angels — and we should be so as well. We should have the Father's spirit, the Father's goodness, the Father's love. You are supposed to love like God loves.

2. God the Father Does Good to His Enemies, v. 45b-c

Well, how does He love? He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and He sends His rain on the just and unjust. God does good to all. The sun is His sun. He is capable of putting darkness on everyone except His people, as He did during the ninth plague on Egypt. But He doesn't do that. He gives even to the wicked the inestimable privilege of looking on the sun, of having the rain that nourishes the earth come down on them. What an amazing privilege that is! How great are God's blessings to everyone who lives on this planet, good and bad, righteous and wicked, grateful and ungrateful. We don't stop often enough to consider what a privilege it is to look on the sun. Imagine living through a polar night — three months of darkness and cold. Or imagine being confined in a dungeon deep underground, far from the precious light of the sun. That would be brutal. We don't even know how brutal it would be. But God does good to His enemies. He lets them see the sun.

We should be like God. His love overflows from His own fullness. He doesn't give us sunshine because we're so worthy. He doesn't give us water because we deserve it. He does it because He loves to give. And your love is supposed to be exactly the same thing. You should love your enemies not because they deserve it (even though they are human beings just like you), but because God is loving.

C. The Love of Beneficence Commended, vv. 46-47

Not only must we imitate our Father so that our sonship will be obvious, though. We must also do more than regular unbelievers do.

1. It Has a Greater Reward, v. 46

We must recognize that all but the most wicked kinds of people love the people who love them. If someone is good to you, it doesn't take much to be good back. If someone gives you

something nice, it's relatively easy to treat that person well. Yes, we all know of wicked people who repay evil for good. But honestly, it doesn't require a whole lot of moral amazingness to repay good for good. But Jesus says that that's not good enough. Even people who were looked down in Jewish society at the time were good to those who were good to them. But there is no reward for returning good for good. The reward comes when you return good for evil. If you can sincerely go out of your way to protect the property of a person who hates your guts, that's reward-worthy. That's the kind of thing that shows that you are like your Father in heaven.

2. It Requires More, v. 47

But to actually love your enemies requires more than simply saying Hi to people who are happy to greet you. Loving your enemies demands that you do more than others. It demands that you show by your actions how willing you are to be reconciled, how willing you are to have your love of beneficence complete itself by becoming a love of complacency.

Many of the commentators paused here for application. What do you do more than others? Is there anything about your life that goes beyond what's expected of a nice person? Is there something you do that could only be done by someone who had the Holy Spirit? Plenty of unbelievers go to church every Sunday, read their Bibles every day, and "pray" regularly. Plenty of unbelievers are kind to everyone they meet. Gandhi was an unbeliever. Socrates was an unbeliever. And so on. Do you regularly do things that can only be done by supernatural assistance? Are you overflowing with the kind of love for enemies that you simply could not have without Jesus? It's a hard question. It's not meant as condemnation, but as inspiration. Maybe you don't have any enemies, at least no personal enemies. Praise God! And prepare to love them when they come.

III. Jesus' Summary of Matthew 5: Be Perfect, Just Like the Father, v. 48

Well, Jesus adds one final summary of the whole chapter, and especially of the part since v. 17. Here's what the law is really asking: Be perfect, just like God. Be mature, like God. Reach your final end, like God. That's all that the law requires.

Are you perfect like God? How often?

Of course not. Nobody's perfect, as the proverb says. But everyone is required to be perfect. Everyone should be perfect. And here's where the good news comes in. You see, this is not just an imperative; it's a future indicative. You *will* be perfect. It's a prediction. It's a promise.

Do you want to be perfect? Does this description of the Christian, which we have now seen in detail over 20 sermons, appeal to you? Do you want to be like what Jesus said? Then recognize that the Father is kind. He loved you while you were still His enemy. If you are still His enemy, know that He loves you and seeks reconciliation with you. Call upon Him this morning. Don't leave here unreconciled with the God who has done so much for you! You see, He is perfect. He loves His enemies. He gives not just temporal life but eternal life to everyone who calls on Him.

Don't be alienated. Don't be hostile. Don't say, "These commands are too hard. I want no part of it." The commands are hard because it's hard to love wicked people — people like you. But God does it. And He promises to give you His strength so you can do it too.

Do you want to be perfect? Than submit to the God who loves His enemies and who will teach you to love yours. Amen.