

Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV)

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.

OK so last week we talked about what the law said. It clearly said that a person should treat his neighbor, friend or enemy, well. He should **do good** to his enemies.

The Pharisees taught that some of this was called for when dealing with a **fellow Jew**, but when dealing with a **Gentile** all bets are off.

But then we looked at how Jesus redefined the word "**neighbor**". He focused on the **law keeper** as being the one who **met the need** of the person in his vicinity.

This morning we will look deeper into the rest of what Jesus said.

Remember that the most reliable sources do not contain some of the verbiage in verse 44, so we will skip it.

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,

Remember what we saw a few weeks ago when we looked closely at the examples that **Jesus used** for those times when **we should not resist an evil person**. Well this is essentially the other side of the same coin.

In the last passage our enemy sought to do us harm. And we were told to respond other-worldly. We were told to do the impossible in **this world's** way of thinking. We were told to withhold the **natural response** and display the **supernatural response**.

Well in our text today we aren't even to wait for an enemy to **do us harm**. The last passage told us how to **respond** to evil men. That was **reactive**. Now we are told to be **proactive** toward evil men.

We are to **initiate** goodness, kindness, benevolence, love.

Love your enemies.

The word used for love here is agapao. It is God's kind of love that **gives** because that is the kind of love that it is. It does not wait until love is deserved.

I hope we are getting this. Jesus is telling us to live in a way that is **other worldly**.

This way of living will never **just happen** to us. We will never **default** to it as long as we are in the flesh. We just studied in 1 Peter that we are to **gird up the loins of our minds**. In other words we need to prepare our minds to **do** what our minds **do not want to do** if we are to have the kind of hope that we should have. Rom 12:2 tells us that we should **not be conformed to this world**, (in other words we are not to allow anything of the world, the flesh and the devil to have any controlling interest in our thinking) **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, (The change we need for growth happens by **intentional and continual rethinking** that does not come natural) **that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God**.

If we go through a day without making continual corrections from the **first thought** or **first reaction** to a situation, and changing the **subsequent thoughts** and decisions made **about** that situation, we are probably not carrying this out. If we are doing it we can easily know. Because we will constantly be talking to ourselves in our minds. This will be part of our continual self talk. We will think things like this. "I **feel this emotion**, but **God says this**." Or "God I do not know **what to think** about this but I have an uneasy feeling about my response." Or "**God help me**. I need to be different than this." or "God my life **looks different** here than how **your word** describes a believer's life. **Change me**." I hope you are getting what I mean here.

That is the spiritual life. That should be a common description of what is continually going through our brains. Do you see what I mean? There is nothing default about that. There is nothing lazy about that. This is sober stuff. And to the degree we **dip our cups into the well of God's Word** and place **what God says** in the forefront of our minds, to **that degree** we have the fuel for the battle. The goal is getting God's truth in the inmost places

where we make decisions about everything. And then going by God's Words instead of our seemer.

We must continually grow in this way of living. Every day we have opportunities to apply this in new areas as we see **new things** about God's word and **new areas** in our lives to apply it. Or maybe just old things in old areas.

We must see that this is the Christian way of life. It is part of our reasonable service. For us to choose another reaction isn't just **unfortunate**. It is **sin**. It is the kind of sin that **robs us of joy** and makes our lives **miserable**.

Christ is commanding us here to be like Him.

We face someone who stands for those things we hate. Who are some of the clearest examples of people who **stand for things we hate**? Maybe they are the people who are championing the cause of **convenience murders**, those who whole heartedly endorse abortion? Maybe they are those who continually attempt to pass laws that allow children to make **sex change decisions** prior to knowing anything significant about life. They are too young to choose to smoke a cigarette but are somehow competent to decide on changes that can never be undone.

Maybe we think of those men who **exploit women** and take advantage of their vulnerability. Maybe we think of the men who have made a business of doing so.

Maybe we think of women who think it a sport to ruin families for their own selfish gratification.

We can all think of those we love to hate.

We could go on, but I think that is enough to help us identify what Jesus is describing as an enemy. Our **flesh** wants to grab these people by the collar and shake them. Our **flesh** wants to do them bodily harm. And we can rationalize it with a sense of righteous, Godly indignation. Look at the evil they stand for. Look at the evil they are doing. Surely God wants us to hate those individuals. Surely we can say whatever we want against those people. But what does Jesus say? What does he say about those very people who are sinning far more **against Him** than they will ever sin **against us**?

I say to you, love your enemies

No, surely not. He could not mean those people.

Well as much as I do not like it, Jesus does not qualify it. Certainly there are other factors in the rest of scripture. As we look through scripture we see that **action** is sometimes required to **protect others** from the evil of our enemies.

Sometimes warnings need to be made about **the effect** of these enemies. Sometimes force might need to be used to stop them from victimizing people. We see all this in scripture. We see how Jesus dealt with the scribes and Pharisees and the money changers. We see that there are times when **the love for the flock** requires harshness toward our enemies. When evil people are feeding on the flock, what we do may not **look loving** to our enemies. We know we have to consider these things and sometimes factor them into what we must do in a situation. But if those factors are not in play, we love them. We look out for their needs. And what they need most is Jesus. Now watch here. Jesus does not say we love them to **make them our friends**. But we love them just the same. No we do not stop calling evil evil. We aren't to **lose our minds** or our **discernment**. But what Jesus is describing is how we are **to treat**, how we are to **regard** the human beings who are the vessels of the evil.

Do you see why I say that this is unworldly? To respond properly requires death. It requires **death to flesh**. It requires **death to self**. It requires a **meekness to King Jesus** that is difficult to attain. We need to be like the horse that keeps looking at the trainer. We may want to avoid something that scares us, but we **look to the trainer**. We may want to respond to a distraction that would anger us, but **we look to the trainer**. We may want to head to the stream for water or the barn for food, but we **look to the trainer**. We may want to defend ourselves from a perceived threat, but **we look to the trainer**.

This will not happen to us by showing up at church. This won't happen to us by taking up the proper creeds and listening to the right preachers. We must decide that Jesus **IS** Lord. We must catch and maintain the positive virus of Christianity that changes everything we are over time.

A person will not get here until he divorces himself from living for the approval of others. As long as he cares what others think of him, he is not free to live for King Jesus.

But more than that, a person will not get here if he allows **himself** to sit on the throne of his life. A person cannot be picking and choosing what he likes about what Jesus commands and what he does not. He cannot be saying, I will treat **church people** the way Jesus tells me to, but I will **not** treat **these** people the way God tells me to.

To obey what Jesus says here requires a deep trust in the character of God. We must believe that He knows exactly what He is doing. And we must believe we are being as wise as we can possibly be when we say **Yes Lord Jesus**.

And that will not come naturally. We won't fall into that. It must be decided each step of the way. The beautiful thing is that **Christ will empower each step**. It is He works in us **to will and to do** that which pleases Him most. So as we work our minds and we rest on Christ, He will **enable** the transformation.

Our flesh is programmed to **treat people** according to the way **they treat us**. And I am not trying to say that should not be information that helps us be wise. How they treat us tells us things we need to know. We are not to regard our enemies as friends. They are still enemies. We must keep that fact in our minds. It matters.

But we do not need to respond like the world. We will look at this in greater depth a little later.

But for now, how will we know when we are getting this right? How will we know we are becoming what Jesus wants us to be?

We will know it when we are **more for the person's restoration than for their removal**. We will know it when we are more for **their eternal life** than **their eternal death**, when we are more for their **salvation** than their **damnation**.

And how would we display such a thing?

pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

It is important for us to get this. These people that Jesus is describing are **spitefully using us** and **persecuting us**. He is not describing innocent people. These people are acting evilly. And we are not to **redefine** their behavior. We aren't to put any positive slant onto what they are doing.

Jesus was clearly talking about enemies being evil people doing evil things.

And their bad treatment may be focused on us because **they hate Christ**. That is what persecution is. So they are **bad people** doing **bad things**. We need not be confused about that. We are not to treat these people like they have redeeming virtues. They may have no virtues at all except that they are made in God's image. Jesus does not command us to do what He commands us to do because He has some kind of **blind idealism** toward these people.

There is a story John MacArthur found that I think displays the point. It is just one example of a person who did this.

In 1567 King Philip II of Spain appointed the Duke of Alba as governor of the lower part of the nation. The Duke was a bitter enemy of the newly-emerging Protestant Reformation. His rule was called the reign of terror, and his council was called the Bloody Council, because it had ordered the slaughter of so many Protestants. It is reported that one man who was sentenced to die for his biblical faith managed to escape during the dead

of winter. As he was being pursued by a lone soldier, the man came to a lake whose ice was thin and cracking. Somehow he managed to get safely across the ice, but as soon as he reached the other side he heard his pursuer screaming. The soldier had fallen through the ice and was about to drown. At the risk of being captured, tortured, and eventually killed—or of being drowned himself—the man went back across the lake and rescued his enemy, because the love of Christ constrained him to do it. He knew he had no other choice if he was to be faithful to His Lord (Elon Foster, *New Cyclopaedia of Prose Illustrations: Second Series* [New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1877], p. 296).

This is the kind of earth shattering, mind blowing love that believers are to exhibit. This escapee knew what **his enemy** was doing. He knew what his enemy was **intending**. He knew it was **absolutely devilish**. He did not regard this man as his friend. But he reached out to meet his need anyway. And He did it only because of His love for God.

Now Jesus tells us that we are **to talk to God** about these kinds of people. And we are not to pray against them. We may pray against what they are **trying to accomplish**. But we are to **pray for them**. We are to pray that God will reach them like God reached us. We are to pray for their salvation. We are to pray that they too would break down before the God of the universe and surrender their lives to His lordship.

We tend to **love those who love us** and **treat badly those who treat us badly**. But what Jesus is saying is that **how we are treated** should never be **the standard** for **how we treat others**. We cannot **go by** that standard. Our actions come from **another source** and **another motivation**. This is insane by the world's standards. But it is common in the Kingdom.

There is a principle here that I think is important. How can you **pray** for a **person's benefit** and **wish** for a person's **demise** at the same time? You can't. When we pray for the person, we line up with God's intention. Oh maybe He will not save the person. But it is so very like Him to do so.

When it comes to humans, **God never saved a friend. He only ever saved enemies.**

But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that **while we were still sinners Christ died for us.**

We were all enemies of God when God saved us. Every one of us. And He wants us to be like Him. He wants us to desire to see enemies saved.

That is exactly the reasoning in our text. Look what comes next.

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.**

You see, **this is the reasoning** of the text. We are to **love** like **God loves**. And as we do, we become more and more **representative** of Him. We don't do it to **become** His. We do it because we **ARE** His. The more we love our enemies, the more we act **congruent to who we are**. We **ARE** sons of the the Father and we become more glorifying to our Father as we act **more like Him**. We show our spiritual genetics.

Now look around. When a farmer in the valley prays for rain, and God sends rain, who gets it? Does it just land on those who have surrendered to King Jesus? No. It rains on his God-rebellious neighbors as well.

Could God make it rain just on His children's crops? Of course He could. Why doesn't He. Ultimately it is because that is **not like Him** to do so. It is not like God to not allow **His common grace to be shared**.

God grants some graces to all people. Theologians call this **common grace**. The fact that anyone lives long enough to be saved by God's **saving grace** is due to this **common grace**. If God were not loving, if He were not gracious, no human would be breathing. But it is **like God** to give people life. It is **like God** to allow them to exist while knowing that they would never want to choose Him and never will. They continue to breath. They continue to eat His food and drink His water and enjoy His creation, even as they exploit what He created in their rebellion.

That is how God is.

Now while we ponder that, we need to really **consider the implications**. The way I understand it, God allowing Hitler **to live until His death** took no more grace than God allowing me to **live to my point of salvation?**

An enemy is an enemy.

So when we pick those people we regard as the **most wicked**, we have got to factor that in. What would **we have become** had God not gripped our hearts? What state would **we have been in** if God did not love His enemies? I know what kind of person I would have been. And for sure, the world would have been better off without me.

Who do you refuse to pray for because they are your enemy? Who do you not wish would be saved? Who will you not ask God for their salvation? If there is anyone like that for you, one thing is for sure. You are not representing your Father well in that specific regard.

Let's move on.

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?

Jesus is telling us **how the world acts**. It is based on an economy. I give something to get something. I get something so I give something. That is how economies run.

We should notice something here. The world is not likely to act **evilly** all the time. When it is **getting what it wants** and when it is **wanting what it gets** it can be downright civil and pleasant. And we are to be thankful that is the case. We are to live in peace as much as we are able.

It would be wrong to teach our children that the world will always treat you horribly. It may not. But we can teach our children that our world is **self serving** in whatever way **it perceives its advantage**. If someone has an advantage by treating you well, you can expect that they will treat you well. And sometimes that is complicated. I know sometimes I am surprised with how kind and generous non believers respond. But the truth is, everyone does what they perceive is in their best interest. And sometimes displaying virtue is what they perceive is in their best interest.

Jesus is basically saying here that you don't really display something supernatural in the **world's economy**. You don't display the character of God when you treat a person well when you have something **to gain from it** and treat a person badly **when you don't**. That isn't the nature of God that saved you.

Now Jesus is using the example of the **tax collector** as the person that the common Jew regarded as **the worst of the worst**. Jesus knew that they were no worse than anyone else. But His audience did not think that way. So he used them to say that even **the worst of the worst** looks after their own selfish advantage. There is no supernatural trait displayed there. It is just selfishness. It is common human behavior.

As long as you limit your love to those who love you, you have not done anything that a child of the devil would not do. Tit for tat. Compliment for compliment. Gift for gift.

That is the way of the world. **Love** is to be reserved for **those you get along with**. **Distain** is for everyone else.

Our old nature loves those who are lovely. We distain those who are not. We loft up those who **can grant us** some advantage. We ignore those who grant us **no advantage**. That is the way of the world.

And when that is how we act, we cannot make too much of it. It isn't anything special or remarkable. Everyone is kind to the one whose kindness would greatly benefit us. Nearly everyone says "Have a nice day" and means it. We are exceedingly good by nature at doing those things that will serve our selfish benefit. But what Jesus is describing is something very different. The last verse in our text gives us the real emphasis of what Jesus was saying.
48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Are we getting this? The goal is not to **guard our interests**. The goal is not to **divvy out justice**. The goal is not to be "**smart**" about our own interests. The goal is not to **gain an advantage** in human relationships. The goal is not to foster getting the **emotional strokes** we are after.

The goal is to **reflect** the kind of treatment that **God displayed toward us**. Because that treatment is **perfect**. That treatment is **Holy**. That treatment is **supernatural** and comes from the **very Character of the HOLY God**.

You shall be perfect. Now surely that does not mean we will be perfect in every way while we are still in this flesh. But the most perfection that we can attain is when we treat **fellow human beings** the way that **God treated us**. I believe that is the perfect that Jesus is referring to.

And what is it really?

It is **grace**. Just simple, **easy to understand but hard to comprehend**, grace. Grace that reaches out to an enemy and offers them salvation. Grace that never allows what is done to us to make us decide **what we will do to them**. The grace that God displayed to all of **His enemies** that **He made friends out of**.

Grace.

The most perfect we can be is to **act like God** in the **face of our enemies**. The **perfection** that God expects **out of us** is for us to act like **we appreciate** the grace He displayed **to us**. This is gospel beginning to end.

We cannot say, "but this person **is wicked** and **not deserving good treatment**." Well, we were wicked and not deserving good treatment. Where would we have ended up if God had not displayed Grace.

We cannot say, "**look how they have hurt me**. Look how they have not done the right thing. Look how they did not pay attention to what God said." Uh huh. And who else do we know like that?

We cannot say, "But God, they knew they were doing wrong but did it anyway." Uh huh. And I guess we never did that?

We cannot miss this unless we choose to be blind. The perfection referred to here is the perfection of **passing on** something **that we were given** when we did not deserve it. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. We want to make it more than that. We want to make it more complicated than that. We want to factor in our hurt and our discomfort, etc. But Jesus is telling us that we **can afford to grace the wicked**. We can afford to **pray for the salvation** of those who harm us.

Really I think there is a deep beauty in this, a beauty that only comes from God. We can look at fellow human beings who have **evil motives** for doing **evil things**. They are truly acting as **our enemies** and, even more so, as the **enemies of God**. They are all of these things without question.

And we look at those enemies and we **see ourselves** and the condition **we** were in. They are dupes of the deceiver. They are pawns in his hands. Do we really think those we look at as being the most wicked people got there by themselves? Oh no. The devil has been using them to the extremes. They are fools who think themselves wise. They are headed to an eternity where they will suffer tremendously.

That is the goal this morning. Christ is saying this. I want you to be perfect by treating them like I am perfect in treating you. That is really it.

He is not pointing to some sinless perfection where we **never make a mistake** or **never choose a sin**. What He most wants for our lives is for us to be **the grace** people. He wants us to be the people **addicted to grace**, **appreciative** of grace, **understanders** of grace, the greatest **proponents** of grace and at the end of the day, the **extenders** of grace to the ones who are the most unlikely to receive it.

We must look at our enemies from the eyes of God until it finally dawns on us that every fact about them should cause us to be sorry for them. And we become **so sorry** that we **plead** that God would show them how hideous the path they have chosen **is**, and how **foolish** and **evil** it is. We should mourn for their evil. Not hate them because they have chosen it. Oh what a horrible state they are in. It does not matter how many votes or dollars or conquests they get. They are in the most hideous state a person can find themselves in. They are an enemy of God.

We must allow this to help us see the need they have. And what else can we do but **call out to God** to **meet that need** like **He met ours**. We know first hand that He can do it. He saved **us**.

What a huge difference this is from the fleshly reaction. As we look at the news reports, as we see the evil things that evil people are doing, as we face the consequences of what evil people decide, will we obey Christ? Will we be like Him. Will we **reflect** the grace that was **shown** to us?

We will have an opportunity to apply this this week. All we need to do is read the news headlines.