

The Messiah Has Come
Week 20
Matthew 5:38-48
“Love Others First”

Introduction

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. **Philippians 2:3 (KJV)**

As has been said many many times before, “*Christianity is a radical doctrine.*” There is nothing earthly about it, but rather, it is about living life from a heavenly perspective. Which actually should come as no surprise to us, for we are on a journey to a far better place, and are, in fact, as Believers in Christ, citizens of The Kingdom of Heaven. *The Sermon On The Mount* is merely an explanation of what God expects the citizens of His kingdom to be. And as such, we will have very little in common with the world around us.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ time on earth had gotten so far off track from God’s intentions in regards to the Mosaic Law, that everything Christ had to say was akin to a foreign language to their ears. It is almost inexplicable how these so-called “*spiritual men*” could have known The Law so well, and yet, missed its intent completely. They were extremely religious, and yet, they did not know God. I find that there are many today that are in the same proverbial boat, for some of the most “religious” people I know are also some of the most unkind and unloving!

It is in this portion that we are studying today, where the “rubber meets the road”, as they say, when it comes to who truly belongs to God and who does not. For God’s children must learn to love as God loves. In fact, love is by far the most telling thing when examining whether someone is a genuine Believer or not. For as Christ has told us:

I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. **John 13:34-35**

And even though The Savior called it a “*new command*”, its origins are rooted in *Old Testament* Law. Remember what Christ Himself had said:

Do not think that I came to abolish The Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish (The Law), but to fulfill. **Matthew 5:17**

And He also stated that *The Old Testament* Law could be summarized into two commands: **“Love The LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and ...Love your neighbor as yourself.”** (**Matthew 22:37b & 39b**).

But the Pharisees had gone to great lengths to weaken the intent behind these commands. Oh they claimed to love God with all their hearts, but it was their neighbors that they had the problem with. Therefore, they were continually blurring the lines as to just who their neighbor was. In fact, by the time that Jesus came, the only ones they truly considered to be their neighbors were their own corrupt and wicked peers. Everyone else was looked down upon as inferior, and therefore, unimportant. This can be demonstrated by their attitude toward those who flocked to Christ, when they sent the temple guards to arrest Him. When the guards returned empty handed they were scorned for their reasoning:

“Why didn’t you bring Him?” The servants answered, “No man ever spoke like this!” Then the Pharisees responded to them, “Are you fooled too? Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which doesn’t know The Law, is accursed.” **John 7:45b-49**

Little did they know that some of their own ranks, Nicodemus for one, were in fact going over to Jesus!

So today we will study Christ's own commands toward what it really means to love our neighbor as ourselves, as well as exactly whom God considers to be our neighbors. The love of which Christ speaks in this sermon is not a worldly, fleshly kind of love, but rather an agape love. Which is indicative of the love of the Father. So, who do we love? Short answer: everyone! This includes *Loving The Users* and *Loving The Abusers*. We are nothing like Christ, when we only love those who agree with us or love us back! Please allow me to explain.

Loving The Users (vs. 38-42)

You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, don't resist and evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. **Matthew 5:38-42**

Over and again in His sermons, The LORD used the word *Agapao* (to love). His instruction is clear. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are to love as God loves. And God loves unconditionally. Many people here on earth are the enemies of God. But He is not the enemy of *them*. He loves, and He does it without being loved in return. Therefore, agape love is a God kind of love. And what agape wants is what is best for the person it loves. No matter what. This is the very heart of God:

The LORD does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. **2 Peter 3:9**

So, while God's righteous judgment demands a penalty for sin, He would much rather see the sinner repent and be saved from wrath. This is how we must love as well. One thing I have learned in all these years as a pastor; those who are my enemies today, may very well end up being my brothers and sisters tomorrow! That is what the grace of God can do. It reconciles. So:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. **Matthew 5:9**

In this life, there will be no shortage of those who would take advantage of us; the users, I like to call them. They are so consumed with the disease of self-love that other people's feelings never enter into the equation. They grasp at all that can be obtained and will do most anything to get what they want, which includes taking everything that they can from you, by legal or even by illegal means, if necessary. And if we react in our flesh, we retaliate to protect what is "*rightfully ours*". In fact, we live in a society that is all about standing up of for our so-called *rights*. But the Believer has been called to live to see others reconciled to God. Therefore, we are to be willing to set aside those rights in order to pursue a greater good.

The Law of Moses was adamant that when an injustice was done, that the punishment should indeed fit the crime, as it were. This is why it says, "**an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth...**". But we must always remember that the Law was broken down into three parts; Judicial (or civil), Ceremonial, and Moral. An eye for an eye was part of the Judicial code for Israel. In other words, God expected those who led the nation to enforce the laws and to mete out just punishment, when necessary. If a society does not punish its criminal element, then anarchy will ensue. So the government must see to it that justice is visited upon the lawbreaker.

But that is the government. No where in God's Law is the individual given license to become his or her own judge, jury, and executioner! That is to go against the *moral* law. And the moral law calls us to love those who would take advantage of us. We love them in spite of themselves and leave the judging of their deeds up to God, and if need be, government.

In Christ's day, Rome was the master over Israel, and the people hated the government. Every occupying Roman soldier had the power to order an Israelite subject to carry his heavy pack for him. And this was often done in the most humiliating and bullying fashion, as you may well imagine. When pressed

into this kind of servitude, Roman law required that the citizen to carry the heavy pack (and possibly his weapons as well) for one Roman mile, which was shorter than our mile today. After this, the citizen could not be compelled to go any further. But Jesus commanded that His followers should offer to carry the burden an extra mile voluntarily! What a shock this must have been to those who were longing for a Messiah to come and forcefully remove Rome's icy grip from around their necks! But God loves the Romans, just as He loves the Jews. He love the pagans, just as He loves the faithful. This is agape.

As for the part about "*turning the other cheek*", The LORD is not saying that the Believer is to be a doormat for others to walk all over. The statement is less about what we do *not* do, than what we do. In other words, Children of God do not retaliate when being taken advantage of. The natural response to a slap across the cheek, which has always been considered the harshest form of insult, is to go after our opponent with a vengeance. However, for the Believer, such things are left for The LORD'S handling and not ours. The Apostle Paul knew this truth all too well, for he had been on both sides of the equation.

Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to Me: I will repay, says The LORD. Romans 12:19

Jesus demonstrated this kind of patient endurance better than anyone ever has. He prayed for those who nailed Him to the cross. In the end, no one will ever get away with the evil which they do. There is only one of two choices for any of us to make; either repent and find God's mercy and forgiveness, or rebel and face His justice. For those who would abuse us, we hold out hope for the former and not the latter. And we must never turn away those who ask us for help. We give, expecting nothing in return, and we lend, expecting never to be repaid. For to love with agape is to love the abuser and long to see him or her saved. And we are to never rejoice, when they face their punishment in the end.

Don't gloat when your enemy falls, and don't let your heart rejoice when he stumbles, or The LORD will see, be displeased, and turn His wrath away from him. Don't be agitated by evildoers, and don't envy the wicked. For the evil have no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out. Proverbs 24:17-20

So, do not retaliate when being misused. Instead, treat everyone like a brother or sister, for who knows, someday they may repent and join the family. But if they do not, if they remain a lifetime in their wicked and rebellious ways, leave their justly deserved punishment to the One Who is most qualified, for only He knows what is to become of them.

Loving The Abusers (vs. 43-48)

You have heard that is was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48

Of all the Law that the Pharisees had corrupted, nothing seems as flagrant as this particular passage. There is nothing in *The Old Testament* Law about "hating your enemies". And there is also an omission from the part that was quoted, The Scripture doesn't just say to "love our neighbors", it says to "**love our neighbor as ourselves.**" I guess that last part was just a bridge too far for the Pharisees, for they couldn't love anything as much as they loved themselves! Listen to the prayer of the Pharisee that Jesus quoted:

The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: “God, I thank you that I’m not like other people — greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.” Luke 18:11-12

Wow! Was that guy impressed with himself or what? It’s pretty inconceivable that a man like that could ever hope to love anyone as much as he loved himself. So, I guess that explains the omission! But Christ had a different message for the people entirely. Everyone, even our enemies, are to be considered our “neighbors”, and we are to love them no matter what! Again, Christianity is a radical faith. And to love as God loves is to love... period.

God proves His love for everyone by allowing them to have some of the blessings that this life has to offer; sunshine and rain for their crops. If we look around us, we see the wicked prospering all over the place. In fact, it has always been thus, and all we need to do is to read some of the *Psalms* in *The Bible* to know this is a reality of life on this earth. God is good, even to those who despise Him in return. This doesn’t mean that the wicked will get a pass on the day of judgment, but it most certainly means that in this life God has been far more gracious to them than they deserve.

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again. Your enemy today may very well be your brother or sister in Christ tomorrow. And therefore, we must love them, for the child of God longs to see even the worst of their enemies be reconciled and at peace with God. After all, this is why we are here!

For Christ to command us to love our enemies naturally assumes that we will *have* enemies. In fact, The Scriptures have forewarned us that we will have.

Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. 1 John 3:13-14

So, for the Believer, having those who would abuse us is a given. But how we are to treat those abusers is to meet their abuse with the love of God (*agape*). It is easy to love those who love us in return, but to be able, and yes, even to long to love those who despise us, that is a sign that The Holy Spirit is *running the show*, as it were.

I once heard it said that to carry a grudge is to place your enemies in a “mental jail cell”, and that every jail must have a jailor, a person who stands guard, if you will, so the malefactor stays locked up. If you are holding a grudge against someone, then you, my friend, are the jailor. So do yourself a favor, let your enemy out, so that you can go home (metaphorically speaking) and get some rest, for it takes a lot of effort to carry a grudge. It is so much easier just to let it go.

Now, there is a huge difference between retaliation and reconciliation. As Believers, we do not try and get even, but restoration may never come in some circumstances. Your enemies may very well hate you for the rest of your life, but you do not have to be enslaved to the hate they so willingly carry. Pray for them instead, that they are reconciled to God, because only then, can you be at real peace with them. And love them, with *agape* love, longing for them to have all that is best for them. This doesn’t come naturally, but rather, it will come supernaturally, when you are under the control of The Spirit of The Living God. Or rather, should I say, the Loving God?

So, in conclusion, the best way to tell if someone is a genuine Believer, a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, if you will, is by their ability to love those who this world would deem unlovable, and to forgive those who would seem unforgivable. We are to love both our *users* and our *abusers*. We do this for one reason and one reason alone:

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that EVERYONE who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 (emphasis added)

For your enemies today, might very well be your brothers and sisters in Christ tomorrow!

So let all those who would share His love say... **TRUTH!!!**