

What are you doing more than others?

Righteousness & Relationships Part 15

Matthew 5:43-45 7-11-10

Summary: Our love must be “more than others.” If we love like the world (love those who love us) that is inadequate. The problem isn’t that they are merely missing a component (enemy love); rather the fact that enemy love is missing is a symptom that they have a completely wrong kind of love. The Father loves evil people because they are the work of His hands and in His image. We must love for that same reason. They love in a way that points to created things as supremely valuable; we must love in a way that points to God as supremely valuable.

Introduction.....	1
More than others	1
Love – the summary of righteousness in relationships	2
The World’s Love.....	3
The OT Teaching	3
<i>Hate your enemies?</i>	3
<i>Love your enemies</i>	4
A hard saying (what’s to love?)	4
Definition of love	5
<i>Different kinds of love.....</i>	5
The Father’s Love	6
Love to become a son? 6	
God-likeness 7	
<i>Why love evil?.....</i>	7
<i>Sun and Rain Love.....</i>	7
HIS sun	
<i>The work of His hands.....</i>	8
<i>Image.....</i>	9
<i>The purest love</i>	11
Announcements	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Matthew 5:43-48 You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Introduction

More than others

In v.47 Jesus asks a very striking question.

47 ...what are you doing more than others?

That question speaks volumes about what the Lord expects from the Christian life. If what we are doing is not well beyond what unbelievers are doing, it is not the Christian life – especially in the area of love.

Love – the summary of righteousness in relationships

If you want to measure a person's righteousness the way to do it is by examining that person's love. Love is the core of righteousness. If you examine his words or his actions, that might give you a little bit of a clue about his righteousness, but the most accurate gage is his love. A person's love is what really tells you how righteous or unrighteous he is.

The Sermon on the Mount is a sermon about righteousness in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. In ch.6 Jesus will discuss righteousness in religion – the way we interact with God, and then righteousness and resources – the way we interact with our possessions. But here in ch.5 for the last 15 weeks or so the topic is righteousness in *relationships* – the way we interact with people. (not being angry, reconciling broken relationships, being faithful to your wife, being reliable, keeping your word, telling the truth, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile – it is all been about what righteousness looks like when it comes to relationships with people. And so it is no surprise that this closing portion focuses on love, because when it comes to relationships with people, that's the summary of what righteousness is – love.

What is the Christian life? When it comes to interactions with people, the Christian life is a life of love. But it is a completely different kind of love than the world has. When Jesus tells the Pharisees that their love is no different from the world's, that is a very serious indictment. It means their love was worthless.

Jesus requires that citizens of His kingdom have a kind of love that is fundamentally different from the world's kind of love. And that is devastating, because look at how Jesus describes the world's love.

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

So the world's kind of love is when you love your brothers – your friends – the people who love you. If you do that you are like the world and, according to v.46, you will get no reward.

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Think of all the times in your life when you loved someone like that. Add it all up on Judgment Day and you get zero reward – which means it is absolutely worthless. God promises rewards for some pretty small things. If it has any value whatsoever you get rewarded for it. But there will be zero reward for any affection you had for your family or friends or anyone else if that love is like the world's love – even if you sacrificed greatly for it. People in the world make all kinds of sacrifices for their kind of love – but in God's eyes it is worthless.

So what is the difference between Christian love and the world's love? We need to figure out what is wrong with the world's way of loving, and what is different about the Christian way of loving. The Pharisees' love was no different from the world's love, so let's look at the Pharisee's approach.

At first it is not very easy to spot, because loving friends and family seems like a perfectly good thing to do. Scripture commands that you not only love your family and friends, but that you have a special love for them. So what is it that's so evil about loving my wife and kids and all of you? It is not that it is simply missing a component. If you love your friends and hate your enemies you cannot solve the problem by just adding enemy love in with your love. It is not that you are missing that one ingredient. If you do not love your enemies, what that reveals is that ALL of your love is worthless, worldly love because it is the wrong kind of love altogether.

It is like if you put water in your gas tank and then notice that your car will not start, and you say, "Oh, I just need to add in that one missing ingredient that makes the engine run." No – you are not missing one ingredient; you have got the wrong kind of fluid altogether. Failure to love their enemies was

not the problem; it was just a symptom that exposed the problem. The problem was they had the wrong kind of love.

The World's Love

So what is the difference between the right kind of love and the wrong kind? And why is it that the right kind can love enemies while the wrong kind cannot? We will answer that question when we get to the part about how God loves, but first let's take a look at what the Old Testament teaches about enemies.

The OT Teaching

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

The first part comes right out of Lev.19.

Leviticus 19:18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.

That is where they got the **love your neighbor** part, but where did they get the **hate your enemy** part?

Hate your enemies?

Maybe they just figured if God says, "Love your *neighbor*" then that implies you do not have to love a non-neighbor. The problem with that logic is that the word "neighbor" includes enemies. Leviticus 19:18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. Your neighbor is not just your best friend – your neighbor includes those people who are hurting you, and against whom you are tempted to seek revenge or bear a grudge. Someone asked Jesus one time who qualifies as a neighbor and Jesus told a story about enemies – a Jew in a ditch and a good Samaritan who was a neighbor to him.

Another possibility is they got it from the fact that the Jews were commanded to show no mercy to those nations Israel was to drive out of Canaan.

Deuteronomy 7:2 you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.

But that command is talking about the nation of Israel being used to carry out God's judgment on those nations. It has nothing to do with personal relationships. (And when some enemies were not under God's judgment, they could show mercy.

2 Kings 6:21-23 21 When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?" 22 "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

Another passage they might have used is

Amos 5:15 Hate evil, love good.

Or maybe they got it from the imprecatory Psalms (those are the Psalms that call for God to punish the wicked).

Psalm 139:21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? 22 I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

But psalms like that express hostility against those who oppose God because they oppose God, not because they oppose me. They are a cry for justice and the vindication of God's name. (It is true that sometimes David will call maledictions on people because of what they had done to him but that is because to oppose David was to oppose God.)

The truth is David loved his enemies. He loved Saul, he loved Absalom, and when his enemies in Ps.35 got sick David put on sackcloth and mourned as he would for his mother. We tell people "To the degree you set yourself against God you are setting yourself against me, because I love God." To the degree you insist on identifying yourself with your sin, I will oppose you. But if you are thirsty I will give you a cup of cold water.

Love your enemies

Jesus' command to love our enemies is nothing new. It is not a change in Biblical ethics at all. God has always required that His people love His enemies.

Exodus 23:4 "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.

"But that's describing only actions – not emotion." No, it is describing love, which is emotion that compels action. If you want to see the emotion just take a look at Job 31.

Job 31:29 If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune [I would have been unfaithful to God on high]

Job is not talking about harming his neighbor or *doing* anything. The sin would have been an emotion – a feeling. Feeling a sense of happiness when your enemy has trouble is sin. So the OT teaching about enemies is very clear – love your enemies. Jesus is not overturning or adding to the OT ethic – He is just correcting their wrong understanding of it.

A hard saying (what's to love?)

The command to love our enemies is arguably the hardest saying in the entire Sermon on the Mount (which is saying a lot, because this sermon is loaded with hard sayings). An enemy is someone who either hates you or is hurting you (or you hate them). Probably the most difficult change you can make in your heart is to generate love where it does not exist. To cause yourself to start loving someone you do not already love is about as difficult a task as there is. And it is exponentially more difficult if the person hates you or is hurting you. If there is someone who is really doing you harm or causing you pain or whom you really, strongly dislike; it seems impossible to love that person.

In fact, it seems impossible to love a person that you have no feeling at all for. Some of you might be like that in your marriage. You do not hate your spouse, but you do not love them either – your heart is just numb toward them – no feelings at all. And trying to imagine having strong feelings of love just seems like a fairy tale that would be impossible in real life.

And yet Jesus commands it. Loving your enemies is an essential part of the Christian life – so much so that if we fail to do it we are like the Pharisees. And Jesus said unless your righteousness is greater than theirs you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. So if we do not love our enemies we are lost.

Definition of love

The most common way Bible teachers have solved this problem is by defining love in non-emotional terms. They say “It is impossible for me to have feelings of love for my enemy, so this command must simply refer to actions of love, not feelings of love.”

And at first that sounds very reasonable because the examples Jesus gives here focus on actions rather than emotion. We are to pray for them and do good to them and greet them. Even God’s love is set in terms of actions. It says He causes His sun to rise on His enemies and sends them rain.

So is that the solution? Can we escape the seemingly impossible requirement of loving our enemies by redefining love in terms of mere actions, so we can go on hating them emotionally (or at least having no feeling at all for them) as long as we show them acts of kindness? No – that is not a valid solution for one simple reason - Jesus picked the word “love,” and love is an emotional word. If all He required is that we serve our enemies or show them acts of kindness or give sacrificially to them He could have used those words. He could have said “serve your enemies” or “give to your enemies.” But He said “love your enemies,” and the word “love” is the probably most emotional term there is. In every language and every culture love is a word that involves feelings.

The most famous passage in all the Bible about love is the “love chapter” (1 Cor.13). And at the beginning of that chapter Paul says that if you give all you possess to the poor but do not have love it is worthless. (v.3) That would be nonsense if acts of kindness were by definition love. If giving is automatically love regardless of how you feel then it would make no sense for Paul to warn us against the danger of giving all your possessions to the poor but failing to have love.

On the other hand, Scripture also teaches that if you have feelings in the heart without acts of kindness – that is not love either. Love is a complex thing. It has several components, and it is crucial for us to understand the relationship of those components if we are going to ever be able to obey this command to love our enemies.

So let me give you what I believe is the biblical definition of love, and then we can think through how the component parts fit together. Love is a combination of esteem, desire, and delight that compels you to seek the other person’s greatest good and deepest joy. Just seeking their greatest good and deepest joy is not love. Love is when you do that because you are driven to do it by your high esteem for that person and your desire for that person and your delight in that person.

I gave a detailed defense of that definition of love from Scripture in parts 1 & 2 of the Joyful Marriage series. I am not going to re-plow all that ground again this morning, so if you want to study that in detail you can get those sermons.¹ This morning I am just going to take the definition of love that came out of that study and use that as our beginning point. Love for a person is a combination of esteem, desire, and delight that compels you to seek the other person’s greatest good and deepest joy. That is what love means – feelings that compel actions. And the fact that Jesus sometimes emphasizes without mentioning the feelings does not give us the green light to completely redefine love in a way that involves no emotion.

Different kinds of love

That is not to say love is exactly the same in every kind of relationship. Some relationships emphasize one part more than another. There is a difference between the way you are to love your wife and the way you are to love other women (obviously). There is a difference in the way you are to love

¹ http://foodforyoursoul.net/ffys_v2/?page_id=37&series=43

your children compared to the way you love other children. There is a difference in the way we are to love one another compared to the way we love unbelievers.

There are some bare minimum essentials that all the kinds of love have in common, and that is that they are all some combination of esteem, desire, and delight that compels you to seek the other person's greatest good and deepest joy. But the particular way those components are combined can vary. The closer the relationship the more love is driven by desire and delight. And the more distant the relationship the more love is driven by esteem.

Loving your enemies is not mainly an issue of desiring to be with them or taking great delight in their company. It is a function of esteeming them highly because they are the work of God's hands, and because God loves them.

But we still have not answered our question. What is the fundamental difference between Christian love and the world's love? And what is it about Christian love that enables you to love your enemies?

The Father's Love

The way to answer that question is to examine carefully how God the Father loves.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. ... 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Love to become a son?

At first glance verse 45 sounds kind of like salvation by works – you become a child of God by loving your enemies. God is not the Father of all mankind. Only believers are His children. And so it sounds like Jesus is saying, “The way to become a child of God – the way to become a Christian – is to muster up enough love. That would be salvation by works.

But we know Jesus is not saying that, because He says we should love our enemies so that we might be sons, but then look at how He refers to God. He calls Him **your Father in heaven**. He is already your Father, which means Jesus is speaking to people who are already believers. So if God is already my Father, why do I need to do something in order to be His son?

We need to understand that the word “son” is not always used in the same way. Sometimes the word “son” points to family relationship, and other times it points to resemblance. For example, when Jesus said the Pharisees were sons of their father the devil, does that mean the devil fathered them by bringing them into existence? No. It simply means they were acting like him. They were being chips off the old block. Jesus spoke of being “sons of the light” (Jn.12:36)² James and John were called “sons of thunder” (Mk.3:17)

My dad used to be the table tennis champ in Boulder years ago. He was absolutely incredible at ping pong, and everyone who played competitive table tennis in Boulder at that time knew who he was. Imagine I went to one of his tournaments back then and someone who knew dad came up to me and said, “So, are you a Ferguson when it comes to ping pong?” Or if I said, “I want to be a son of my father when it comes to ping pong” – that is the way Jesus is using the word “son” here. In a relational sense I am already my father's son, but if I say, “I want to be a son of my father in the area of ping pong” - that statement simply means I want to be like him in that particular area.

Jesus does not say “Love your enemies in order to become a son,” He says, “Love your enemies in order to BE a son of your Father.” The issue of entering into the kingdom has already been dealt with in the beatitudes. The issue here is not entering the kingdom or becoming a Christian. Jesus is speaking to people who are already believers and commanding us to mimic our Father in the way we love. He is saying, “Be a true child of your Father in the area of love.”

² See also 1 Thes.5:2.

God-likeness

If your love is like the Father's love, then it is righteous. If it is not like the Father's love then it is worthless. So you can see that our task here is to really understand the nature of the Father's love.

Why love evil?

God the Father loves His enemies.

45 ... He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Why does God do that? Why does He love wicked people? That question is not as easy as it may sound. One thing we have seen over and over in our studies of love is the fact that you can measure how good or evil a soul is by what it loves. If you love good things, you have a good heart. If you love really good things you have a really good heart. If you love evil things you have an evil heart. The best heart of all is the heart that loves the highest, most excellent good, which is God. And a wicked heart is the heart that loves evil. According to Titus 1:8, for a man to be morally qualified to be an elder in the church he must be a lover of the good. But in 2 Tim.3:2 it describes the wicked people of the last days as those who are **not lovers of the good.**

Amos 5:15 Hate evil, love good

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

The measure of the goodness or evil of a soul is what it loves.

So do you see the difficulty? In this text Jesus not only commands that we love evil people, but He seems to set that kind of love as being greater than love for friends and family. Loving those who are kind to you is not as great a thing as loving those who are evil. How can that be? Those two principles seem to conflict. The one principle says loving the good is what is best. But Jesus is saying loving those who are evil is better than loving those who are not.

This simple answer to this problem is to just say, "When the Bible says not to love the world it is talking about sin – do not be attracted to sin. But when he says love your enemies he is not telling us to be attracted to their sin but rather to show kindness to the person in spite of his sin." That is true, but it does not fully answer the question. Jesus does not just tell us to be kind to our enemies – he says to *love* them. Why love them? "Because God loves them." Why does He love them? If His heart is good, and a good heart loves the good and hates evil, then why does God love evil people? He certainly is not attracted to their wickedness. He does not desire or delight in their evil. He did not look down on earth and see a bunch of vile, wicked, rebellious, arrogant sinners and say, "Oh, they are all just so irresistible – I think I'll save them." If a righteous heart loves what is good and holy and hates what is evil and wicked, why does God love evil people?

Do you realize how important and how unspeakably valuable the answer to that question is? If we can answer that question we can have the key to loving our enemies. Learning to love that which is intrinsically good may not be easy, but we can at least understand how it is possible. If there is something out there that is intrinsically good and beautiful and lovely, then learning to love it is simply a matter of having your eyes opened to its true beauty. But how do you learn to love evil people? What is to love? If I am attracted to the wickedness in them that means my heart is evil. So how can I have esteem, desire, and delight in ugliness? Let's take a look at how God does it.

Sun and Rain Love

HIS sun

45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

I noticed something this week that I never noticed before. For some reason I always thought it said, “He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good.” But that is not what it says, It does not say He causes the sun to rise; it says He causes HIS sun to rise. The sun is referred to about 140 times in the Bible and this is the only place where it is ever called HIS sun. Jesus is making a point. He is emphasizing God’s ownership of the sun. We always just assume the sun belongs to us. We go outside, use it is light to see, enjoy it is warmth; utilize all the benefits that come from the sun as if it is just public property. It is not public property. It does not belong to us.

Have you ever supplied someone with a gift for so long that that person forgets it is a gift and just assumes they have it coming – so that if it is missing one day they get angry? That is what we do when we complain about bad weather. It is not our sun – it is God’s sun, and every time we enjoy its warmth, or use its light, or eat food that was created through sunlight – it is all borrowing from God. 99.99% of the use of God’s sun goes completely unappreciated, and yet He never gets sick of providing it. He never gets fed up with the ingratitude. If He were like me, as soon as someone started complaining about the weather He would say, “OK – that’s it. You don’t like the way I’m providing sunshine? Fine” and blow it out. But He does not do that. He faithfully causes it to rise every morning. It rises on the good folks, it rises on the murderers, atheists, blasphemers, false teachers – everybody. When it rains it waters my yard and every yard in on my block.

And those are just two examples, but the list of gifts of kindness every human being on the planet receives from God every single day is endless. Once in a while someone tells me God has never done anything for them. He has Never blessed them at all. The absurdity of a statement like that is unbelievable. Every breath you have ever drawn has been a gift from God. It is His air – not yours. And it is God who enables your muscles to inhale His air. Every bite of food you have ever enjoyed – every moment of sleep is from God. He has given you a mind that can think and understand. He has given you a body that can accomplish great things in His name. If you think God has not blessed you just ask yourself, How many arms do you have? Are you crippled? Can you see with your eyes? Who gave you those eyes? How many nights have you had a warm place to sleep? How many days have had food and water available? How many days did God supply you with clothes to wear – even when you were rebelling against Him or ignoring Him? Who gave you life? How many times has God has caused your heart to beat? And what benefits came to you from the oxygen He supplied? How much did He charge you for all that? How many times has He delivered you from the consequences of some bad decision you made? Has He blessed you with the ability to smell? to taste? to feel? to hear? Can you walk? Has He given you opposable thumbs so you can pick things up? How many times has He enabled you to use your memory? How many injuries and disasters has He spared you from throughout your life? How many times have you experienced pleasure? A pleasant taste? Smell? Feeling? Sight? Thought? Emotion? Has God ever provided you any money or possessions? Has he ever granted you any responsibility? Has God ever failed to be faithful to maintain the laws of physics so you could live? How many raindrops or snowflakes have benefited you directly or indirectly? When you came into the world, did God provide anyone to take care of you? How many things did that caregiver do for you when you were a baby? How many days has God spent watching you sin or waiting for you to repent? Every human being who has ever lived has received countless blessings from God. Even the most blasphemous atheist is dependent on a thousand acts of kindness from God just to have the strength to be able to utter his blasphemies.

The work of His hands

Why does God do all that? The answer is in Ps.145.

Psalm 145:9 The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

The Lord has compassion on what He has made because He made it. God loves evil people not because He is attracted to evil. He hates evil. He loves them because He is so wise, so good, so majestic, so holy, and so perfect that anything that comes from His hand is of great worth.

If you have a painting that says “Rembrandt” at the bottom, and you can prove it really was created by him, it is automatically worth a fortune regardless of what it looks like. A Picasso original or a De Vinci original or a Monet original – they all have great worth because of who made them. Your enemy is a God original. That person who is hurting you, annoying you, irritating you, persecuting you, making life miserable for you – that person is the very work of God Himself. God loves unbelievers because they are the work of His hands.

And that is still true even when they rebel against Him. The people of Nineveh were wicked and godless, but God still sent a prophet to preach to them and call them to repentance because He had compassion on them. And when they repented at that preaching God had mercy on them because of His compassion. And when Jonah complained, here’s what God said:

Jonah 4:11 Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left ... Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

God has compassion on those He created just because He created them. That gives them great worth. The reason it would have been sin for Job to rejoice when his enemies met misfortune, and the reason we should love those who persecute us and mistreat us is simply because they are the work of God’s hands.

Psalm 28:3 Do not drag me away ... with those who do evil, who speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts. 4 Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work ... 5 Since they show no regard for the works of the Lord and what his hands have done, he will tear them down and never build them up again.

Mistreating any human being is wicked because it shows disregard for the work of God’s hands. God will punish those who fail to love others because they are showing no regard for the works of the Lord.

If you come home from dinner, and your wife has worked all afternoon on a special meal, and you sit down at the table – take your plate of food, throw it down on the floor and say, “You expect me to eat this SLOP???!?” – and then you turn around and say, “But I really love you honey” – that does not work. Why? Because if you despise the work of her hands you are not really loving her.

“But what if it really is slop?” It may be. You might have a wife who is a terrible cook and cannot heat up water without burning it and everything tastes terrible. But that is never the case with the things God makes. Your wife might produce substandard food in the kitchen, but God does not produce substandard anything.

“OK, but what if it is a beautiful, genuine Rembrandt but it has been ruined? Someone defaced it and made it ugly?” Well, without question every one of us has been messed up by sin. But no matter how messed up someone gets, the fact that he or she is the work of God’s fingers is enough to cause God to love them. And if it is enough to cause God to love them it should certainly be more than enough for us to love them.

Image

And that is even more the case with a human being because not only is he or she a work of God’s hands, but they bear the very image of God.

James 3:9-10 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

The rocks and trees are the work of God's hands, but only human beings are in God's image. Nothing else in existence bears His image. But every human being is a walking illustration of what God is like. God made your enemy – that person you find so hard to love – God made him with eyes and ears and senses, because He wanted us to understand when He told us God is a perceptive being – He can see everything. God made your enemy with muscles so we would understand when God told us about His mighty strength. God made your enemy with a will which is a walking illustration of the fact that God chooses and decides things. God made your enemy with a mouth, so we would understand when God tells us that He is a God who communicates reveals Himself. Your enemy has emotions, which are a picture of what God means when He speaks of His love, anger, compassion, sorrow, joy, etc. God made your enemy with a nose so we would understand the metaphor of God saying that our prayers are like a sweet smelling fragrance to Him.

He made your enemy with the capacity for love and compassion and mercy and patience and righteousness and holiness and justice. That person you find so hard to love has personhood - will, emotions, self-consciousness, the capacity for abstract thought, language, a sense of eternity. (**Ecc.3:11**)

The image of God is a supremely precious and wonderful thing. Think of the people you love the most. Isn't it true that the things you love about them are the ways in which they exhibit attributes of God? The most delightful people in the world are delightful because of God's image. All the amazing things your mother did for you when you were little – the great things about your dad, your best friend, your spouse – all the things that make people a delight to be around - they are all attributes of God.

And that is not all – there is more to the concept of “image” than just resembling God. Being in the image of God also means representing God. God created man and placed him in on the earth to have dominion over it and tend it and care for it. Every time you ever see someone carrying out a task that has to do with the administration of planet earth you are witnessing the function of the image of God. That includes people who take out the trash, or grow food, or cook food, or build highways, or provide paper clips, or transport goods, or fix things or make things or sell things, or anything else that contributes to the administration of God's world. If the great king sends a representative to you – even if that representative is acting like a jerk, if you respect the king you will honor his representative.

Why does God love evil people? What's to love? They are the work of His hands. They are God originals. They bear His image. They resemble His nature and serve as His representatives. And God prizes His own goodness and glory so much that anyone who is connected to that goodness and glory receives His love.

So it turns out loving evil people in this way is not a conflict with the principle that says the more righteous your heart is the more you will love that which is good. When God loves wicked people, what He is loving is good, not evil. His reason for loving them is not attraction to their evil, but esteem for His own glory and goodness.

So the question for us is do we prize God's goodness and glory that much? Do we prize His honor so much that anyone who bears His image will be held in high esteem in our hearts?

This is what makes our love so different from the world's love. It is not just that we are a little friendlier than they are, or on average we give a little more to charity, or we smile a little bigger – it is that our love for people is a function of our love for God. Loving people for any other reason is worthless. The only thing that ultimately matters is glorifying God, and so if you love someone in a way that does not point to the goodness and glory of God or put His beauty on display or call attention to His worthiness – then that love is worthless.

So you see the thing that is wrong with the world's love is not just that they are missing the one component of loving their enemies. It is because none of their love comes from the fact that God is so great, and out of esteem for His greatness they have high esteem for anything that came from His hands. None of the world's love is like that, and so all of their love is worthless. When they love their husbands or wives or children or parents – worthless. When they give to the poor – worthless. When they befriend an outcast – worthless. None of it has any value, none of it is worthy of any reward, none of it rises to the

level of the bare minimum required in Christ's kingdom because none of it is motivated by love for God. All the world's love is evil because it always points to some created thing rather than as the supreme treasure. When they love for selfish reasons they are pointing to themselves as the supreme treasure. When they love only because of the attractiveness of the object of their love they are pointing to that person as the supreme treasure. When they love to impress people so that people will think well of them they are pointing to the opinion of men as supremely valuable. But the world never loves in a way that showcases the worthiness and goodness of God. And so all their love is worthless and worthy of punishment rather than reward.

The purest love

And that answers the question of why enemy love is greater than loving friends and family. Is enemy love the highest form of love? No – the highest form of love is loving the greatest good (which is God). Loving a Christian because of your love for Christ is a higher form of love than loving an evil person. There are greater loves than enemy love. The reason Jesus points us to enemy love here is not because it is the highest or greatest kind of love; it is because it is the purest example of loving a person because of your love for God. If you love your wife or your friends or your children you might be doing so because of your love for God or you might not. You might have a sinful kind of selfishness mixed in with your love. The more you love someone because of your love for God, the purer that love is. And so in one sense the purist form of love is love for enemies, because it is almost impossible for selfishness to be mixed in. Pretty much the ONLY reason you would love your enemies is because of your love for God. When you love lovable people it is hard to discern for sure what your motives are. But when you love enemies in order to be a son of your Father in that area then your motives are pretty clear.

All that lays a basic foundation to introduce the concept of this kind of love Christ is calling for. Next week we will plan on looking at the specific instructions Jesus gives about how to love like that.

For now, let's devote some time to examining our hearts. This past week I was a on vacation with my family in South Dakota. This is a convicting sermon to prepare while you are on vacation. We had a great time up there. I thoroughly enjoyed the time with my family, but the whole time I kept asking myself, What am I doing more than others? Am I guilty of loving my wife and children in the way people in the world love their families? Is my delight in my family any different from the way all these other people around me are enjoying their families? Does my love point to me as the most important person? Does it point to my worthiness of my wife and kids to be loved? Or am I loving them with a love that magnifies the glory of the God who created them?

Benediction Isaiah 43:1 But now, this is what the Lord says-- he who created you ... 3 I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; 4 Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, ...6 I will say to the north, ... Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."