

## Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV)

<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, '*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*'

<sup>44</sup> 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,

<sup>45</sup> 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.

<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

<sup>47</sup> And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

<sup>48</sup> Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Let's take a moment to review the context. Jesus had just told us **not to resist an evil person**. We discussed the fact Jesus was addressing His followers, not all of humanity. He was showing us how different the law's **true intent** was from what **the Pharisees were teaching**. And we got the very clear idea that what Jesus was demanding of us is impossible in the flesh. Jesus was not addressing **institutions**. He was **not** presenting a different philosophy that men should follow. He was telling us what God truly expects from His followers.

Now, first He addressed dealing with evil in terms of **responding to bad things** done to us. This week He is going to address **good things** we should **initiate** toward wicked men, those who have **harmed** us or **intended** to harm us, those we regard as enemies.

What enemy has **harmed you** or **intended** to harm you? If there is anyone in your life that fits this description, this teaching of Jesus can be immediately applied. And it is very freeing.

We are going to approach it like the last several passages.

What did the **law** say?

What did the **Pharisees** say?

What did **Jesus** say?

First off you will notice in your Bibles that the most reliable passages do not have a section that the NKJV version has.

The ESV says

### Matthew 5:44 (ESV)

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

It does not have the section- **bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you**

Since I tend to be very suspicious of those passages in the NKJV that are not in versions like ESV, I will exclude them. It does no harm to the meaning, emphasis or direction of the text.

OK

What did the law say?

### Leviticus 19:18 (NKJV)

**18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.**

This is primarily the passage that the Pharisees were teaching about. And their interpretation of it is what Jesus is refuting. And if this were the **only thing** the Old Testament said, you might understand the Pharisees error. Here the law teaches very clearly that, at least among the children of Israel, the standard for love is that one **treats a neighbor** like one treats himself. One should have the kind of regard and interest in another's well being that one has for one's own. One can quickly determine many right and wrong issues by asking, "would I want to be treated this way?" Granted that a person has to know what God says is right and wrong to best do this. But the point we most fail at in human relationships is **not** on our **lack of knowledge** of what God wants. It is usually in our own **selfishness** where we treat ourselves best with **less concern** about how our actions affect anyone else. So the law taught that we should love our neighbor like ourselves. And we are to do that because God says "I am God." It might be like when a parent says do this because I said so.

That is the primary teaching.

Now in this statement, "**you shall love your neighbor as yourself:**" what word would a legalist most focus on? What word has wiggle room? What word will you need to understand before you can apply this accurately?

### **Neighbor.**

What is the definition of neighbor? The whole application is adapted by the word **neighbor**. We will look at how the Pharisees defined it in a little bit. But let's look at what else the Old Testament said about the treatment of enemies.

We are not going to spend much time on these. My effort is to show that there was much said on the topic of bad treatment by others. New Testament ethics are Old Testament ethics.

**Ex 23:4-5 4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.**

Look at this. Do you see anything about hating your enemy here? This scripture is clearly teaching the Israelites to **love those** who are their enemies. How else could you define this? It is very clearly teaching what Jesus taught.

**Le 19:33-34 33 'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. 34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.**

OK, just in case we are looking to restrict the requirement to love to only **fellow Israelites**, this clearly expands that concept as well. There is no difficulty in understanding this. And look at the reasoning. "You know what it is like. You know how it feels. You knew what it was like to be slaves in Egypt. You knew how you **wanted** to be treated and how you were **not** treated. Do better. Treat the stranger better than you were treated."

So we are to love our neighbor. We are to love our enemy. Is that it?

Look what is next.

**Job 31:29 "If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, Or lifted myself up when evil found him**

Here is Job. Job lived prior to the law. Scholars think he may have lived around the time of Abraham. He loved God. And what did Job think that God expected from him? He can't even rejoice when an evil enemy dies. This is tough. I can think of the deaths of some people in which I rejoiced. I wasn't around when Hitler died, but he is always a good example. Think of Hitler. Would this planet not have been better for his death? Most assuredly that seems so.

But should we throw a "Hitler is dead" party? Well the context of Job's quote is a personal enemy. But as we look at this concept closer we should keep this question in mind. We should think about it. How should we greet the news of the death of a wicked man?

**Psalms 7:4 If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me,**

**Or have plundered my enemy without cause, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; and let him trample my life down to the ground, and lay my glory in the dust".**

We see the Christian ethic from David's eyes here. David did plunder some enemies. But only those who were national enemies or those who had taken his compatriots stuff. He wasn't looting villages as an occupation.

Basically David is saying if I have been ruthless to an enemy just because he is an enemy, then I am guilty. Just because he is an enemy does not give me the right to treat him badly.

**Prov 24:17,18 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,  
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;  
18 Lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him,  
And He turn away His wrath from him.**

Here is Solomon giving us the same sort of guidance. The assumption is that this enemy did the victim harm. Well then, we are free to think, "well that person just got what they deserved and we are free to be happy in the justice they received".

No We are **not** free to do so. We cannot even allow our heart to settle into a happiness on this topic. No. We should not be happy. We should not rejoice. And Jesus will later teach us how to avoid that sin.

**Prov 24:29 29 Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me;  
I will render to the man according to his work."**

Here again is clear teaching about how we should not only act, but how we should think about an enemy. We cannot consider vengeance. We cannot think about how we will render justice. We may think about handing it to a civil court to gain justice. But it is not ours to take upon our own hands.

But the next verse is a real clencher.

**Proverbs 25: 21 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat;  
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;  
22 For so you will heap coals of fire on his head,  
And the Lord will reward you.**

Again Proverbs teaches us what Jesus will teach. Much of what Jesus said was directly or indirectly from the law.

**Here is how to treat a personal enemy.**

I found this quote and really liked it.

**To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine" (Plummer)**

OK then what did the Pharisees teach?

<sup>43</sup> **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'**

That is what the Pharisees taught.

Now the Pharisees left something important **out** that Bible **does say** and added **something in** that the Bible **does not say**.

Look at it a minute. What is it.

What was left out when the Pharisees said "You shall love your neighbor"? **AS YOURSELF.**

Why did the Pharisees **leave out** "as yourself"?

Well maybe it is because they had no intentions of loving others the way they loved themselves. Jesus reveals, and castigates, their true motives over and over. The Pharisees **loved themselves** at the expense of others. They had no intentions of **lifting the burdens** they put on others. And they had no intentions of living by anything that eliminated their **self** esteem and **self** worship and **self** serving. So they were ok with the idea of loving others. But not at a sacrifice to self. They had redefined love to fit with their **lifestyles** and **expectations**. Yeah, this loving your neighbor stuff is good. But let's not go overboard. That might be too costly.

And what did the Pharisees **add**?

**Hate your enemy.**

Now before we are too hard on them, let's consider why they may have thought this.

First, look at their history. Look at the Canaanite wars. What did God ask them to do? Did he ask them to **love their enemies**? No. He said wipe them out completely. Wipe out their bloodlines. Wipe out their babies. It is easy for us, and them, to get the wrong ideas about that.

Look what God tells Israel so they don't get the wrong idea.

**Deuteronomy 9:4-6 (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> **Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land'; but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is driving them out from before you.**

<sup>5</sup> ***It is* not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart *that* you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.**

<sup>6</sup> **Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this**

**good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you *are* a stiff-necked people.**

The reason that God had these people killed is because of **their wickedness**. What these people were guilty of was **hideous**. They broke just about all the laws of morality that the law revealed. And they had heard about the God of Israel, and had evidence that He was the Lord of Lords and the only true God. But they were having none of it.

So the Israelites were tools of God. But God told them from the start that they were not chosen because they were superior human beings. Yet that is where the Pharisees went with it.

In the Pharisees mind, Gentiles were scum. They were dirty. They were not fit to live. So for them to hate Pharisees was no big deal to them. It was sort of a moral obligation to hate Gentiles. In their mind you were not a good Jew if you did not hate Gentiles.

And then to add to the violent history of the Israelites, we have the Imprecatory Psalms

Here is just one example prayed by a spiritual hero of the Jews. David.

**Psalm 69:22-28 Let their table become a snare before them,  
And their well-being a trap.**

**<sup>23</sup> Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;  
And make their loins shake continually.**

**<sup>24</sup> Pour out Your indignation upon them,  
And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.**

**<sup>25</sup> Let their dwelling place be desolate;  
Let no one live in their tents.**

**<sup>26</sup> For they persecute the *ones* You have struck,  
And talk of the grief of those You have wounded.**

**<sup>27</sup> Add iniquity to their iniquity,  
And let them not come into Your righteousness.**

**<sup>28</sup> Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,  
And not be written with the righteous.**

What the Pharisees failed to discern is the difference between the **Judicial decrees of God** and the **individual offenses of men**. God had decreed His judgment upon the Canaanites. He wanted them destroyed because of their wickedness. And He had chosen a people that He wanted to carry it out. We don't know **why** God wanted to do it through that means. I think it is because God wanted these people to get just how hideous sin is. The awful things

those soldiers had to do would have left a lasting impression on their minds. It would have been an awful task to be given.

God had also assigned David as the **King of Israel**. So the enemies of David were **the enemies of God**. David had some authority over his enemies, those who were resisting the plan of God, that normal individuals do not have.

David's enemies were resisting the will of God. Ours may not be.

The Pharisees put everyone in this category of **judicial enemies of God** that even personally offended them. They put **all Gentiles** into this category, even though **God** had not done so.

The Roman literature shows that the Romans regarded the Jewish people, as a whole, to be the "**haters of all mankind**". The Jews, as a whole, regarded themselves as a **superior race**. Even now some pockets of orthodox Judaism still hold true to this idea. You can ask Brad about some of his experiences.

John MacArthur has this quote.

**A saying of the Pharisees has been discovered that reads, "If a Jew sees a Gentile fallen into the sea, let him by no means lift him out, for it is written, 'Thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbor,' but this man is not thy neighbor." It is little wonder that the Romans charged Jews with hatred of the human race.**

OK so we see what the Old Testament taught. And we saw what the Gentiles taught. Now what does Jesus teach?

**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.**

Now remember that the Pharisees said "love your **neighbor**?" And obviously they had excluded **the Gentiles** from being a **neighbor**. We will spend the rest of our time this morning looking how Jesus **redefined** neighbor. Then we will take up more of this next week Lord willing.

Let's take a look at how Jesus deals with the core of the issue we are dealing with this morning. If someone can define neighbor narrowly enough, they can make God's law apply to virtually **nothing** they are doing. By the time Jesus is done, this idea of neighbor is expanded to nearly everyone.

**Luke 10:25-37 (NKJV)**

**25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"**

**26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"**

**27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' "**

**28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."**

**29 But he (the teacher of the law), wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**

Now, why in the world would this man want to justify himself? And how would he do it by focusing on the word neighbor?

I think it is obvious. The man wanted to prove **he loved his neighbor**. He wanted to prove he **kept the law** in a way that would make him right with God. He wanted to prove he **deserved** salvation. But he had to prove one point. He had to prove **he loved his neighbors**. So the issue of **who his neighbor actually is** is of primary importance to this man.

**30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.**

**31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.**

**32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.**

**33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.**

**34 So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**

**35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'**



**<sup>36</sup> So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"**

**<sup>37</sup> And he (the teacher of the law) said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."**

Oh, this hurts the man who wants to justify himself. Jesus does not focus on who the **neighbor** is. He focusses on who **the law keeper** is. And who is it? It is the person who **meets the needs in his vicinity**. That is the person who loves his neighbor like himself.

The Priest and the Levite had spiritual reasons that the man in trouble was **not their neighbor**. They were too spiritual to help them. The wounded man would have made them unclean, especially if he died. Even though he was probably a Jewish brother.

But here comes a Samaritan. And the Samaritan treats the person in need like he is a neighbor. The Samaritan loves that person like he loves himself.

This explodes on the Jewish teacher asking Jesus the question. When Jesus is done with His story, the teacher does not have a chance of justifying himself. He would never, in a million years, do what the Samaritan did. Jesus has exposed him.

What Jesus is doing here is basically **expanding the definition of neighbor** to any person in our vicinity who **needs our help**. If we see the need and can meet it, that person is now **our neighbor**.

So we go back to the initial quote of the pharisee that Jesus is speaking against.

**<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor**

And Christ is saying, you do not need to go further. Stay right there. You shall love your neighbor. And your neighbor is anyone with a need you can meet.

OK. You can imagine Jesus asking the teacher, OK Tell me. How have you done? How justified are you?

We hope to look at this passage more next week. But for this week we would do well to consider, how do I respond to needs around me. I think our global awareness may actually serve to distract us from loving our neighbor. We can be absorbed with concern about huge needs, needs that we can do nothing about... the regional atrocities, harrowing situations. Those exist every day. We can be absorbed with those and completely miss the little needs that are evident to us that we can meet on any given day. And yet we can feel like our focus is very spiritual.

We do well to focus on those needs we **can** meet and **pray for those** that we cannot meet. It is amazing how good some Christians get at seeing and

meeting the needs of their neighbors. I know I have experienced some of that from you all. And I have seen it in our church. It often happens quietly and secretly.

I would like to issue a challenge this week. Pray for God to reveal **one need** in **someone around you** that you can meet. And then meet it. We can report on it in Prayer meeting or in Sunday School.