

Love Your Enemies

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:129-136

1st Scripture: Luke 6:20-36

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:17-20, 43-48

Hymn (Supp)- *When We All Get to Heaven*

Hymn #500- *He Leadeth Me*

Hymn #567- *To God be the Glory*

Introduction

We come now to the sixth and final of our Lord's, "You have heard it said...but I say to you," declarations, where He continues to address the erroneous teachings of the religious leaders, concerning the Law of God. Next time, Lord willing, we will move into the third portion of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, where He will begin to address the corrupt and hypocritical *actions* of the religious leaders, as well.

Now, as we consider this text, you will find that it certainly relates to the previous declaration of our Lord's, which we considered last time. However, whereas verses 38-42 focus more on responding graciously to the specific actions and desires of those who might oppose us (turning the other cheek *when slapped*, giving up the cloak as well as the tunic *when sued*, going the extra mile *when ordered*, giving and lending *whatever is asked for...*etc), verses 43 and following, go above and beyond this, compelling us to further look for ways beyond the stated and expressed desires of our opposers, to love them and do them good. In other words, it brings us to the point where we not only wait for our opposers and enemies to express *their* specific wants and desires, but rather, furthermore, we consciously look for ways to bless them and to do them good, beyond what is expressed by them. We labor unto *positively* serving them, for the sake of the Gospel, and not merely avoiding resisting them, when they press us in some way.

I. Love Your Enemies (vs. 44)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy...' (vs. 43). Now, here again, we find nothing wrong with the first portion of this statement, as it is taken directly from the OT Law of Moses. In Leviticus 19:18, we are told, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, *but love your neighbor as yourself*. I am the LORD." And so, that Second of the two greatest commands, "to love your

neighbor as yourself,” is indeed an Old Covenant concept which transcends all covenants, making its way into the New Covenant as well.

What then is the problem which our Lord is addressing here? It is the second portion of the teaching, which the religious leaders had presumed to be the logical outworking of the first. In other words, they saw the command, which emphasized “loving their neighbors,” as that, which then inevitably allowed them to “hate their enemies.” Once again, they missed the main purpose of the command; the very heart of it, in their attempt to chase after the “letter,” rather than the spirit of the command. They saw it as a means of justifying the “hatred” of some people, rather than, emphasizing the loving of their neighbor. And so, as we have seen in the five previous commands that we have already addressed, the Scribes and Pharisees had gone astray in their neglect of seeking to understand the intended purpose of these laws, and in their misusing the letter of each of them, so as to provide justification for their wicked actions. They made this a warrant to “hate,” rather than a command to “love.”

And so, our Lord then, once again, adds His corrective teaching with divine authority, “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...” (vs. 44).

And so, our Lord teaches His disciples, stating, “You’ve been taught to love only your neighbors; your friends and your own kinsmen, but I’m telling you that you’ve been taught grossly wrong. You are to be thoroughly and sincerely concerned about those whom you don’t naturally like; indeed, even those who *hate you!* It is your very mission in the Gospel to repay your enemies with blessings and not curses, so that, you might lead them out of their present darkness (which once owned you), and into the power of the Gospel! You are to love your enemies! That is, you must look out for their interests, even as they willfully oppose and oppress you, attempting to meet their needs and to do them good. You are to reward their hatred with compassion, gentleness, kindness and mercy. As they curse you; that is, as they wish harm and even death to come upon you, you are to wish blessing and life upon them. And as they treat you in arrogant and spiteful ways; as they seek to take advantage of your kindness and goodness, you are to return the favor by praying for them; by interceding on their behalf before the throne of God. Why? Because they are desperately lost sinners, living in and owned by darkness, heading

straight for hell, and they desperately need the light of the Gospel, which alone can awaken them out of their presently lost, hopeless and dead state!”

Their opposing you is the very evidence of their dire need of your pity, compassion and mercy, because you hold the key that can truly free them, from the deep, dark dungeon of their sin and corruption. Yes, they are acting wickedly. Yes, they are terribly offensive and hateful toward you. But, they are only exhibiting the marks of their sin nature and curse. They are living out of their damned disposition, and the devil holds them under his sway by his wicked deceptive power, and they so desperately need to be freed by the power of the Gospel. Will we withhold that key from them, which has been entrusted to us, and which alone can deliver them from the power of evil, when we have freely received it ourselves, having once been chained to that wretched state? Are we unwilling to look past their intended harm and offense, when willingly receiving such harm and offense, in this temporal life, presents us with great opportunities for shining forth the light of the Gospel, that can save them for eternity?

[Note: The misunderstanding of the term “neighbor” as well, which our Lord addresses in the parable of “the Good Samaritan,” answering the question, “Who is my neighbor?” — Levite and priest pass by their own, but a Samaritan half-breed loves the mauled Jewish man]

And so, we are charged to love our enemies! But, notice further an additional compelling motivation for doing this, given in verse 45.

II. Be Like Your Heavenly Father (vs. 45)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, *so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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*” (vs. 43-45).

And so, what then is the critical motivation which our Lord uses to compel His Apostles to, indeed, love their enemies? In essence, He says, “Look, do you want to know why you ought to love even your enemies? Do you want to know why you should pray for them and bless them, even when they curse and hate you? Because doing so, would be to emulate the very heart of your Heavenly Father!” God does it all the time. And God does it, not simply for the sake of

being nice, but because He is acting out of the inclination of His own perfect and holy character! If I can say this in some sanctified sense, “It’s in His very nature!” People curse God every single day. People hate God. People worship idols. Indeed, the whole world is naturally under the power and sway of the devil, God’s greatest foe. Heck, people actually deny the very existence of God in some cases!

And yet, they enjoy different aspects of this life. They still enjoy His sunshine, breathe His air, and are being held together (every moment) by His divine power; eating of the produce of His earth, which He provides for them! God-haters laugh and smile and enjoy all kinds of benefits in this life, while spurning their Holy Creator, and He still provides for them and holds their atoms and cells together. Indeed, He exercises the utmost patience toward them; a patience infinitely beyond what us sinners could ever comprehend for even a moment. A perfectly pure and holy and righteous God, who cannot even look upon sin, patiently endures the insults and rebellion of sinners. And to such wretched creatures, (who are naturally like us), He holds forth the life, death and crucifixion of His only Son, and says, “Come and partake; repent, and draw from the atoning sacrifice of My Son, so that we might be reconciled forever, having all of your sins washed away by His sacrificial blood!”

Such is the heart of our God, brethren! Can we then, being far less than God, and not without an eternal weight of our own sin, look upon even our enemies with disdain, bitterness, and hateful and vengeful hearts? We are to be like our Father in heaven, our Lord states! How He is toward the whole of this lost and rebellious, cursed and fallen world, and most of all, not forgetting the magnitude of grace (saving grace), which He has poured out upon us, in Christ!

Finally, our Lord adds, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (vs. 46-48).

You see, there is nothing overly commendable about “loving your neighbor,” in the sense that the religious leaders were teaching. Even ungodly traitors, heretics and criminals can do that. And there is no sacrifice involved in greeting your brothers and friends. The heathen do such things as well. Treating people you know (and are already friendly with), in kindness and

love, doesn't exhibit any life changing light to the world, because the world, itself, often does that as well. Certainly, we should do that, but the power of the Gospel is not found in those patterns of behavior, which even the unbeliever regularly attains to. No, again, we are to reflect the glory of our Heavenly Father; we are to be perfect even as He is perfect. That is to say, that we are to strive unto emulating the character and heart of the One who is perfect; the One who is the very standard of all righteousness and goodness. And to reflect Him, we must learn to bless, and pray for, and love, even our enemies.

This is the general sense of our Lord's teaching, concerning this sixth and final command that He addresses here.

III. The Overarching Principle

Brethren, getting back to where we began with these six commands that our Lord addresses, and which were distorted and misused by the religious leaders, what then is the overarching principle that we can derive from the whole package? Remember, it is not simply about getting these six teachings right, but rather, there is a larger principle in view here, which gets down to the very heart of the matter, and which ought to be applied to every sphere of life, and to the Law of God as a whole.

Every true Christian; every true child of God and subject of His Kingdom (the Kingdom of heaven), must, ought and will, have a greater righteousness than the Scribes and the Pharisees. And the reason for this, is because those who exhibit genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, will have a righteousness that begins to be formed on the inside of the heart first, and which will make its way out into the daily living of the individual. Outward works, outward show, outward subjection to a mere code of law (of any law), that does not proceed out of a sincere and genuine heart which truly loves God and others, is worthless and hypocritical in the sight of God. This is why our Lord often referred to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were very "holy" looking on the outside, as white-washed tombs and a den of hypocrites. True adherence to God's Law, compelled by love to God and faith in His Son, is not looking to mold the Law of God into some self-righteous, wooden, heartless, standard of justification. True love for God, does not compel his children, to strive to find ways to simply

adhere to the letter of God's Law. No, true love for God understands, approaches and prayerfully makes use of the spirit of God's Law, having a jealous desire to glorify our Triune God!

IV. Concluding Thoughts

1) Before we close then, brethren, let me note something extremely important, which ought to provide us with a great measure of encouragement, as we seek to better put into practice the kind of love that our Lord calls us unto, here. This is extremely important to understand, or you will be tempted to give up, as you fight this daily battle.

And really that is the very thing that I want to point out right there. This is absolutely a battle. As you strive to love your enemies, and to bless those who curse you, and to do good to those who seek to spitefully use you, and to pray for those who hate you, it will be a very trying battle. Such loving obedience to Christ will never come without a fight. No matter how much we determine to die to ourselves, daily, we will find a part of us that will continue to fight to live for ourselves, at the same time. Don't let that discourage you. Don't allow contrary feelings and emotions to keep you from doing what our Lord commands in this regard. Keep the big picture in mind and fight to do what you know is right, and pray to that end. You see, you can love your enemies and you can do good to them, even when there are remaining ungodly urges within your flesh, which try to compel you to hate them back.

To this end, we must...we absolutely must, carry the Gospel closely to our hearts, at all times, or we will surrender in this battle. The fight is intense. The battle is real and constant, and on this side of heaven, there will always be a part of you that will war against the good that the Spirit of God is working in and by you. But, we can walk by the Spirit (we can follow His lead, by faith and not feelings, based on what we know to be true in God's Word), so that, we don't fulfill the desires of the flesh. And so, don't be surprised when you find yourself struggling to do what our Lord commands here. But, do it, nonetheless, and know that God is determined to fix all that remains broken. He who began a good work in you, will complete it! In the meantime, we have to fight this battle not only against the world and the devil, but against our own flesh and remaining corruption. And so, know in advance that there is remaining sin within you, which would yet spurn the grace of God, and which could even care less that sinners are

heading for eternal destruction. There's a part of us that would rather salvage our pride that glorify our Savior and see sinners rescued by the Gospel. But, by grace, we can walk in the Spirit and further drive nails in the coffin which will soon carry our remaining flesh, six feet under! Fight the good fight and lay hold of eternal life! Keep your eyes on Christ and love your enemies!

2) If you are outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore, still alienated from your God and Creator, see how the patient love of God has endured with your wretched state. You are a continual, living, breathing, offense, against your holy God, and you deserve to be in hell right now. But, He continues to sustain you and to give you life and breath...but, for how much longer, we do not know. For how much longer, will God hold forth the atoning work of His Son, pleading with you, through us, to repent and believe into Christ, so that, you might be reconciled to Him? [The Gospel!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25