

## Jesus Taught About Loving Our Enemies

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children follow the example of Jesus and learn to love their neighbor as they love themselves. In this topic, we are going to see that Jesus went on to explain how we are to show love to those who treat us as enemies.

We have seen that Jesus explained the meaning of several of the commands in the Old Testament. We will see that He explained some additional commands in this topic. Matthew 5:43-44 says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 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.” Jesus quoted part of a verse and then explained how the Jewish religious leaders added to that phrase and gave it a totally different meaning. The verse is Leviticus 19:18 which actually says, “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.” We see that this verse is actually a warning against taking vengeance.

Instead, the religious leaders added to that verse a statement which showed the sinfulness of their own hearts by dropping “as yourself” and adding “and hate your enemy”. Later, in Revelation 22:18-19, John wrote, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.” The religious leaders had both added to the Word of God and taken away from the Word of God. These verses, in Revelation, show that such acts will bring eternal judgment.

Then, Jesus went on to explain what it actually means to “love your neighbor as yourself”. That kind of love will cause us to do four things. First, Jesus said that to “love your neighbor” means to love your enemies. Jesus certainly modeled that love by His own life. Judas showed himself to be an enemy of Jesus when he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Matthew 26:50 tells us the words that Jesus spoke to Judas immediately after that kiss. That verse says, “But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Jesus knew exactly why Judas had kissed Him because Jesus said in John 6:70-71, “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’ He spoke of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.” Jesus had treated Judas with the same love and respect that He treated the other disciples; none of them even suspected that Judas would be the one who would betray Jesus.

Second, Jesus said to “bless those who curse you.” Jesus modeled that same love for those who mocked and crucified Him. Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” Just a few hours later, Jesus died for their sins just as He died for our sins. In 1 John 2:2, we read, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Jesus satisfied the Father by dying for the sins of the whole world so He could offer eternal life to all who would come to Him.

Third, Jesus said to “do good to those who hate you.” The verses quoted in the previous paragraph show that Jesus certainly did good to those who hated Him so much that they put Him to death, even though they knew that He was innocent. Fourth, Jesus said to “pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” John

11:49-50 says, “And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’” Later, Caiaphas said, in Matthew 26:65-66, “Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?’ They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death.’” As we saw in the earlier paragraph, Jesus also prayed for the very men who condemned Him to death.

Jesus went on to tell us why we should respond in these same ways. Matthew 5:45-46 says, “‘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. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?’” Here, we see that in addition to providing an example by His own actions, Jesus pointed out the fact that the Father has that same care and concern for the just and unjust. God continues to cause His sun to rise on those who are evil, just as He provides the sun for those who do what is right. He sends His rain on the unjust at the same time that He sends His rain on the just. Since we become the children of God at the moment of salvation, we are to act like His children. That means showing His love by patience and kindness, even with the most evil of sinners. God has shown His patience and kindness to each of them.

Then, Jesus gave two illustrations using tax collectors to show that even those who are very sinful can still love others. Many of the Jews had a particular hatred for those who were tax collectors. In that day, the tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for the hated Roman government. In Matthew 9:10-11, we see that the Pharisees could not understand why Jesus would show kindness to the tax collectors. Those verses say, “Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” The Pharisees were loyal to other Pharisees, but they had no concern for the tax collectors. However, we see that the tax collectors had just as much love for other tax collectors as the Pharisees had for other Pharisees.

In contrast, Jesus showed that He had a great love for all people. He ate with tax collectors and He ate with Pharisees. Jesus said that those who are sons of the Father will have the same love for all people whether they are good or evil. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Here, we see that we are to follow the example of Jesus and do good to all. Jesus made it clear that this is the way we are to treat even those who oppose us and treat us as an enemy. This is how we fulfill the instructions given in Romans 12:21, where we read, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” God uses our actions that please Him to bring others to Himself.

Jesus went on to give a second illustration in Matthew 5:47-48, where we read, “‘And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.’” The word translated “brethren” can include family, people who have a common ancestor or people of the same country. Among Christians, it can speak of a fellow believer in Christ because we are both in the body of Christ. It is common for people to greet others who have one or more of these similar backgrounds. People of almost every culture greet people of a similar background regardless of whether they are good or evil. Jesus again pointed out the fact that even tax collectors greet other tax collectors. However, as followers of Jesus, we want to show that same concern for all.

That is why Jesus said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” The word translated “perfect” means *that which is brought to an end, is finished, is complete or is fully mature*. Several verses illustrate this meaning for a Christian. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “And He Himself gave some *to be*

apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In these verses, we see that the goal Christ has for every Christian is that we will grow to spiritual maturity, so our lives become more and more like Christ.

Paul explained, in Colossians 1:28-29, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Here, we see that it was the goal of Paul to help every Christian come to maturity in Christ. He said that He worked hard to help others because the Lord was continuing to work in his life to help him continue to grow and become more like Christ. Later in that book, we see that Epaphras had this same goal. Colossians 4:12 says, “Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Here, we see that Epaphras spent much time praying that the Christians in Colosse would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

John pointed out that as we mature in our spiritual lives, the perfect love of Christ causes us to learn to be led by love instead of driven by fear. 1 John 4:18-19 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.” As we learn to be led by the love of Christ, we see that love grows to maturity in our own lives. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to grow and mature so that the love of Christ is brought to maturity in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to let the love of Christ grow to maturity in their lives.