

ADOPTING AN ATTITUDE OF LOVE Sunday School- November 13, 2011

Unifying Topic: LOVING AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Lesson Text

I. The Challenge Explained (Matthew 5:43-45)

II. The Challenge Exemplified (Matthew 5:46-47)

III. The Challenge Expanded (Matthew 5:48)

The Main Thought: But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People usually find it difficult to love—even to like—those who are their enemies. Is there any help that would encourage us to change our attitude toward those who hurt us? Jesus taught the disciples to pray for those who are unjust and evil.

Lesson Aim: To encourage students to love everyone as God loves them.

Life aim: To teach students to practice the principles of godly love and to share this love with everyone they encounter, including their families, friends, and foes.

5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

5:46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

5:47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

SYNOPSIS:

Jesus took six important Old Testament laws and interpreted them for His people in the light of the new life He came to give. He made a fundamental change without altering God's standards: He dealt with the attitudes and intents of the heart and not simply with the external action. The Pharisees said that righteousness consisted of performing certain actions, but Jesus said it centered in the attitudes of the heart. Anger is murder in the heart; lust is adultery in the heart. The person who says that he "*lives by the Sermon on the Mount*" may not realize that the Sermon on the Mount is more difficult to keep than the original Ten Commandments!

First illustration: Murder (5:21-26)

¹Matthew 5:21-22. Jesus wanted them to know that not only was the actual act of murder sin, but the hatred behind the act was also sin. "Angry," is a mental attitude sin—rage and hatred; while "good for nothing" is a verbal attack on one's intelligence motivated to hurt the person; and "fool" is a verbal attack on the moral character on another because of hatred and desire to damage the person. Mental and verbal sins like these are even enough to bring one under God's judgment.

Matthew 5:23-24. Jesus warned them against concentrating on their own grievances against someone else and forgetting all about their rightful grievances against them. Jesus reminded them and us that it is often more important to clear up someone's anger for cause against them.

Matthew 5:25-26. Jesus took this idea a little farther. It is far better to solve a disagreement out of court, especially if you are the guilty party. Otherwise, you will end up in jail and still have to pay the damages.

Second illustration: Adultery contrasted to lust (5:27-30)

Matthew 5:27-28. Jesus clarified the law about adultery (Strong's 3431, moicheuo) found in Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy

¹ <http://www.spokanebiblechurch.com/study/Matthew/Matthew5.13-48Summary.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

5:18, and other Scripture by teaching that adultery is not just physical, but also the mental attitude of lust.

Matthew 5:29-30. Jesus taught at times by overstatement to stress a point. He did so in these verses. Every sin deserves God's judgment. Better to lose an eye or a hand than to be under God's judgment. God is holy. Every sin is against him, so avoid sin even though God will always forgive sin because Jesus Christ took the judgment for every sin.

Third illustration; Divorce as contrasted to marriage

Matthew 5:31-32. Jesus taught that divorce is not the solution to marriage problems. A couple should stay together if at all possible. He voided the conception that some had that if the wife displeased the husband, he could divorce her. Jesus allowed divorce for immorality. Proper divorce allowed remarriage. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, added that desertion by an unbelieving spouse allowed remarriage.

Fourth illustration: Oath-taking as opposed to speaking the truth

Matthew 5:33-37. In Jesus day, the Pharisees made many vows, but found ways around keeping them. Jesus taught his disciples against careless oaths. They were not to swear that something is true when one knows that it is false, and when one promises something under oath one should fulfill the oath. He did not disallow oaths in law courts. Jesus (Matthew 26:63-64), Paul (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:12), and James (James 5:12) allowed correctly given oaths. Church age believers ought not to make promises to God; we can only please Him through abiding in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (John 15:5).

Fifth illustration: Retaliation as opposed to forgiveness

Matthew 5:38-42. Jesus' disciples would run into much opposition and harassment when they proclaim the kingdom of heaven. Jesus gave four illustrations of kinds of incidents they would face: slap, take your shirt, go two miles, and borrow some kind of personal wealth. He taught them that for the sake of the gospel they should not retaliate; they should not be distracted by demands on their possessions, time, or money, but should be flexible, helpful, and generous.

LESSON:

Matthew 5:43-45 The Challenge Explained

5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy— From our last lesson which distinguished Jesus' teaching from that of the interpretation of the Scribes and Pharisees was the illustration of murder, contrasting you not to be angry because you would be in danger of the judgment. Jesus suggests a new response to injustice, instead of demanding our rights. He asks us to give them up freely.

This lesson displays the **Sixth illustration: Love thy neighbor contrasted to love thy enemy.** Well, the law is what you have heard—The Mosaic Law. The first half (**Thou shalt love thy neighbour**) is found in Moses' Law (Lev.19:18). The second part (**and hate thine enemy**) was found in how the Scribes and Pharisees explained and applied that OT command. Jesus' application was exactly the opposite of hate, resulting in a much higher standard. Love for one's neighbors should extend even to those neighbors who are enemies. Nowhere did the law teach hatred for one's enemies.

The law said, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Lev.19:18). Israel made two fatal mistakes in interpreting this law.

1. They said neighbor meant only the people of their own community, religion, and nation. They did not include anyone else. They did not include the uncircumcised as neighbors but as enemies.
2. They inferred they were to hate their enemies. God said, "*Love thy neighbor*"; therefore, they reasoned and added, "*Hate thine enemy.*" It is the natural reason of man at work. It is not God's best for the world.

5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies— The word "*But*" is saying "*quite the contrary to what has just been said.*" All people are our neighbors including our enemies. Jesus is acknowledging that we will have enemies, yet we are to respond to them in love, trusting God that we come out the better. The real meaning of the law to love involves four very practical acts:

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

1. **Love your enemies:** respect and honor all men (1Pt.2:17). Every human being has something that is commendable, even if it is nothing but the fact that he is a fellow human being with a soul to be reached for God.
 - a. Loving our enemies is against human nature. The behavior of human nature is to react, strike back, hate, and wish hurt. That's human nature! The root of human reaction against enemies is self and bitterness (Self-preservation is not evil of itself).
 - b. There is one thing a believer can have for his enemy: mercy or compassion. If he does not have compassion for those who hate him, he has gained nothing of the Spirit of Christ (Lk.6:36). When Christ said "*Love your enemies*", He could have used any one of four words:
 1. "*Eros*" love—this love arises from passion, infatuation, and sexual attraction. It is the love (passion) of a man for a woman.
 2. "*Storge*" love—this love arises from affection, the affection of family love. It is the love and natural affection between parent and child.
 3. "*Phileo*" love—this love arises from affection. It is an affection that fills a person's heart with warmth, tenderness, preciousness, and a deep consciousness of really loving and really being loved; those who are very near and very dear to one's heart.
 4. "*Agape*" love—this love wishes well. It is a love that demonstrates kindness, benevolence, and esteem. It is the love of choice; the act of our will. It is a sacrificial love, that is, a love that cares, gives, and works for another person's good—no matter how the person may respond or treat one. Loving your enemies is agape—the love that must be willed. Note:
 - a. The Christian's love for his enemy is different from the love he holds for his family. It would be impossible to love an enemy with affection. Christ knew this.
 - b. The Christian sacrifices himself, bears all in order to work for his enemy's good.
 - c. The Christian's love (agape love) is not complacent acceptance of open wickedness and license. It is not sitting back and allowing a person to do as he pleases. It is restraint, control, discipline, and even punishment when it protects the offender from himself and protects those whom he hurts (i.e. a parent controlling a child for his own good and for the good of those who love him).
 - d. A Christian can have agape love only as he allows God to love through him.

5:44b ...bless them that curse you— the second act of the real meaning of love:

2. **Bless those who curse you.** To "*bless*" means that a person has to speak. Christ is saying to speak softly to the curser (Prov.15:1). Use kind, friendly words; when face to face, be courteous; when behind his back, commend his strengths. Do not render railing for railing, that is, do not condemn or attack him in bitter or abusive language (1Pt.3:9). The curser has two major problems:
 1. The curser has a weak self-image. He feels the need to assert himself to come across as strong and forceful to fit in. One sign of a weak self image is the acceptance of cursing as a normal part of conversation.
 2. The curser either does not know the Lord or else is very immature and weak in the Lord.

5:44c ...do good to them that hate you— We can overcome evil with good— The third act of the real meaning of love:

3. **Do good to them that hate you.** Doing good goes beyond words. It does things for the person who hates. It reaches out to him through his family or friends, employment or business. It searches ways to do good to him, realizing that he needs to be reached for God. If no immediate way is found, then the Christian patiently waits for the day when he will face one of the crises that comes about in life (i.e. sickness, accident, death). And then the believer can go and do good, ministering to him as Christ Himself would minister.

5:44d ... and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; — The fourth act of the real meaning of love:

4. **Pray for those who persecute you.** Three things need to be prayed about:
 1. For God to forgive the persecutor.

2. For peace between one's self and the persecutor.
3. And for the persecutor's Salvation or correction.

Prayer for the persecutor will greatly benefit the believer. It will keep the believer from becoming bitter, hostile, or reactionary. When we continuously pray for our enemies, especially those who does spite against us and persecute us, we will find it easier to love them. It is God who does the changing in us. We might not see a change in them right away but the change is coming through us. It is taking the "*poison*" out of our attitudes. Hallelujah! This challenge is only done through the grace of God which is a sacrificial love.

5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Jesus reminded us that love was a necessary proof of salvation, that you may be children of your Father which is in heaven. A child of God will be called to love. This love is a mark of maturity, proving that we are sons of the Father, and not just little children. We act Godlike because the Father shares His good things, even by sending sun and rain, upon those who oppose Him. Our love creates a climate of blessings that makes it easy to win our enemies and make them our friends. Love is like the sunshine that rises and the rain that falls, that the Father sends so graciously whether they do right or whether they do wrong on the just and on the unjust. What a gracious God! And so, Jesus has explained our challenge that is ahead of us.

Matthew 5:46-47 The Challenge Exemplified

5:46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? Remember, we are displaying the character of the citizens of the kingdom. If people loved and cared only for those who loved them, think how divided the world would be. Someone has to reach out; all must be reached: the bitter, the curser, the hater, the spiteful, and the persecutor. The "*publicans*" were officers of the revenue, farmers, or receivers of the public money: men employed by the Romans to gather the taxes and customs, which they exacted of the nations they had conquered. These were generally odious for their extortion and oppression, and were reckoned by the Jews as the very scum of the earth. Even though they were of Jewish nationality, they were generally despised and hated by the people. The idea here is that even the most hated people of the day loved their own friends. Therefore, the true child of the kingdom is to have a quality of love that goes beyond that of the world. God has done more and gone beyond by sending His Son into the world (Jh.3:16).

5:47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Motives have to be watched. Too many are nice and kind out of self-interest. They hope to gain something (a vote, money, inheritance, support) from those to whom they are friendly. The believer is to be different and distinctive. His motive must be to reach out to the unfriendly, even the enemies of Christ. If our love is of no greater definition than that of the world, then our claims are empty. As the challenge was explained, now it is to be exemplified (illustrated) through us; be what Jesus say we are and show forth the qualities as His example.

Matthew 5:48 The Challenge Expanded

5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. The Greek word used here for perfection (*teleios*) is a translation of the Hebrew tammin (which means both ripeness and maturity in trust and surrender to the Lord. It is not to be taken as absolute sinless perfection. This charge is "*Be ye, for that reason, perfect.*" There is a purpose. It has to do with an end, an aim, a goal, a purpose. It means fit, mature, fully grown at a particular stage of growth. It does not mean perfection of character, which is, being without sin. The point is: the mature believer will do good and show kindness to all men, both good and bad men. He is mature in heart when he shows love to his enemies as well as to his friends. God Himself is the believer's example in this. God who is love perfects love! Therefore, He wants a world of love from creatures who will freely choose to love. ²If the

² <http://www.elim.nl/en/theology/matthewmatthew-5.html>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

heavenly Father is presented here as an example, it is not to point out His sinlessness, but His goodness and love (v.45b). *'Be perfect'*, then, does not mean *'be without sin'* here, but *'stand completely in the leading of the Holy Spirit, and love other people as God loves us'*. This love is in fact only possible through an intervention from the Lord because His love is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Through this challenge, it is to be exemplified by us and expanded to others. The true Christian....

- has his enemies, yet he is to love them.
- has his cursers, yet he is to bless them.
- has his haters, yet he is to do good to them.
- has his spitters, yet he is to pray for them.
- has his persecutors, yet he is to pray for them.

If a person will work to mature in this challenge, he will be marching ever forward to be like his Father who is in heaven. No man will ever gain perfection, particularly in the area of human relationships. Just consider how short each person comes in relating to spouse, child, friend, fellow workers, and enemies. Yet he is to follow after...forget the past...reach forth...press. The whole point in the context of this passage is for us to be like our Father in heaven—Love people like God does. Don't quit trying to love people because it seems too hard – go for it; walk as you have learned to walk, more and more like Christ. As God's love is complete, not omitting any group, so must the child of God strive for maturity in this regard.

SUMMARY:

³Jesus taught His disciples to treat their enemies differently than the current religious leaders taught. The disciples were to love their enemies and to pray for them. God blessed both believer and unbeliever with common grace, blessings like sun and rain. Even sinners love those who love them. Should God's people do any less? God's ideal was that believers should portray His love, not hate, and therefore display his traits and be complete, mature, and blameless.

APPLICATION:

Love first has to be transformed in our hearts before the change is seen by others. Have you been transformed by the renewing of the Word of God, by the Spirit of God, and by the choice of your will to choose love? Adopt the attitude of love for your life that love will consume you. If you say, *'you give up on people'*, please don't give up on God, because you have enemies that will be used to mature you—those you have given up on! So, you have been challenged to love, not as the world loves; you are to exemplify that love toward others not just to friends and family; and you are to expand that love as your Father has matured His love in you! Thank you Lord!