

Just Like Your Father

Matthew 5:43-48

It's interesting how people always think babies look like their mother or father. Even the newborns who are still shriveled prunes. "Oh, she looks just like her mother!" "He's his father's spitting image." Yeah, I guess dad is a big headed, bow legged, chubby lump.

It was funny when our girls were babies. My family would say, "She looks like her daddy. Yup, definitely a Raymond. See, she's got Dan's straight, brown hair." Meanwhile, Teresa's family would look at the exact same child and come to a completely different conclusion. "She looks just like her mommy. Yeah, she's a Shaw alright. Look, she's got Teresa's straight, brown hair."

All arguments about family traits aside, there is one time when Jesus says that we as Christians look most like our heavenly father. There is one quality that undeniably shows that we are God's children. When we do this one thing people can look at us and see that we look just like our Father. It's not that cowlick in your hair. It's not your green eyes or your pointy nose. That undeniable family trait is when we love our enemies. There is something distinctly "godlike" about loving our enemies.

Matt 5:43-48

(2 Slides) 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[i] and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 **that you may be children 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.**

(Next Slide) 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 own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**** (NIV)

(Next Slide) Since the opening beatitudes Jesus has been contrasting fake religious righteousness with true righteousness of the heart. The Pharisees were guys that wanted everyone to think they were super spiritual. They put on a big show of being devout. But Jesus gives example after example of how their show was just a phony godliness, just a façade. From their anger issues to lust to breaking their promises to seeking personal revenge Jesus exposes their true hearts, and also reveals the heart of true righteousness.

There is a natural progression to these examples Jesus gives. He's not pulling them out of thin air. He's building to something. He's going deeper. Each one gets a little closer to our heart of hearts.

First, Jesus talks about not being angry with our brother. Then he talks about being faithful to our spouse. Next he talks about keeping our promises, and then last week we saw how Jesus does not want us to retaliate against those who have wronged us. But in this morning's passage

Jesus goes on to say not only should we not seek revenge against them, but we should actively love them.

That's next level spirituality. That's God level. Dan level spirituality says, "Maybe I could put that dirty deed behind me as long as I can ignore them from now on and avoid them," but no, Jesus says I can't ignore them. I can't forget them. I can't just steer clear of them. I must love them.

This is the exact opposite of what the Pharisees taught and practiced.

I. What the Old Testament Actually Said

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

This is a direct quotation of what the Pharisees taught. The first part comes right out of the Old Testament law, but not the second part.

The full command from **Leviticus 19:18** was "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus will later quote this verse himself. Now, did you notice the difference between what Leviticus says, and what the Pharisees quoted? They left off the last two words, "*as yourself.*" These two words are a key part of the command. There is a big difference between loving someone and loving them as we love ourselves. Loving someone as we love ourselves sets the bar really high.

This could never fit in with the Pharisees prideful self-righteousness. These guys really loved themselves, and all the religious things they did were not really about loving God, but loving themselves. Jesus describes how they made a big show out of their giving. They would have trumpeters let everyone know they were about to make a big donation to the temple treasury. Their public prayers were well rehearsed, finely honed speeches done in a time and place to be heard by the most possible people. Even something as personal as fasting was turned into a dramatic production designed to garner TikTok views and Facebook shares. No, these guys really loved themselves, and they couldn't love others at that same level.

But not only did the Pharisees leave part of the command off, they added something else to it. This one addendum completely changed its meaning. They added this part, "hate your enemy."

Their reasoning went like this. The law says I'm supposed to love my neighbor. Well, just who is my neighbor? Someone who is one of my own people, someone of my own race and religion, someone of my own tribe, a fellow Jew, that is my neighbor. Other people are not my neighbors. They are my enemies. The law doesn't say we have to love them. In fact, since it specifies that we should love only our neighbor, then that means we should hate our enemy.

Using such loopholes and interpretive gymnastics, the Pharisees could make the law say anything they wanted. But in doing this they ignored God's true intent in the law.

II. Jesus Reveals the Law's Deeper Meaning

Jesus, however, points us to God's true heart in loving our neighbor. Jesus says, *"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* This isn't anything new. This very same teaching was in the Old Testament.

Ex 23:4-5 says, *"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. 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."* Prov 25:21 says, *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink."*

(Next Slide) Jesus says that when we love our enemies we become true children of God. The NLT translates the verse this way, *"In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven."* We are showing that God's nature is truly within us. Our love is proof we are his children.

When we love our enemies, we are acting just like our Father. In kindness and compassion undeserved we bear an unmistakable family resemblance. God shows his love to all people whether they love him or hate him. In verse 45, Jesus speaks of how God shows his love to all, *"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* God gives his blessings without regard to whether people deserve them or not. God's love, in some form, benefits everyone.

This is very different from the Pharisees who divided everyone into two groups: neighbors and enemies, and then they had different codes of conduct for each. But there is nothing special about loving those who love us. Jesus says everybody does that. Even the most ungodly people love those that love them. There's nothing particular spiritual about just loving your "neighbors." Now loving your enemies, that is truly unique. In fact, it's a god-like quality.

In Luke 10, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was discussing with a teacher of the law the meaning of the verse, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* The teacher asked, *"And who is my neighbor?"* In that story, Jesus makes it very clear that anyone could be our neighbor. A neighbor is not defined by race, religion, or social status. Jesus pointed out that a neighbor was any person in need. The Pharisee's definition of neighbor was a tight little circle that included very few people. But Jesus drew his circle with the far reaching hand of God so that it included everyone. No one was left out of Jesus' neighborhood. To Jesus even the strangest or most different person was a next door neighbor.

Jesus definition of neighbor was so large that it included loving even your enemies. Like the teacher of the law, we're tempted to ask a question of our own, *"And just who do you mean by enemy Lord?"* By enemy do you just mean we should love those who are a minor nuisance? Maybe those who are a little inconvenient? Perhaps you mean the irritating co-worker, or my annoying uncle, or that pesky neighbor, but you don't really mean E-N-E-M-Y do you? Do you really want me to love the person who doesn't like me? I mean they can't stand me. They have

it in for me. They would like me to get fired from my job. They would love it if I got kicked off the team. You want me to love them?

Well, if we turn to Luke 6:27-28, we get a very good picture of exactly who Jesus means by our enemies. Luke 6 contains a sermon of Jesus that is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount. It's commonly known as the Sermon on the Plain. Some believe it is the same sermon, it's just that Luke gave a much more condensed account of it. Others think it was a different sermon where Jesus talked about the same stuff. Whatever the case, we see in verses 27 & 28 exactly who Jesus means by our enemies. Jesus says, **"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."** Jesus defines your enemy here with three words.

First, your enemies are those that hate you. There is nothing mildly annoying or inconvenient about this. This word means to detest or to abhor, but there is more. This is a person who really doesn't like you. They can't stand you. But this isn't just the person who doesn't like you, so they stay away from you. This word also contains the idea that they wish you ill will. They are hoping something bad happens to you. One of my Greek dictionaries defines this word this way, "To pursue someone with hatred." This person really doesn't like you, and they want you to know it. And what does Jesus say? *"Love them."*

Secondly, your enemies are those who curse you. In a specific sense this was someone who would invoke a formal denouncement of you. It was to call upon God or the gods to bring about calamity in your life. But a curse could be speaking any sort of evil or ill will against you. This is the person who spreads malicious gossip about you. They tell lies, and try to undermine you with others. This is also the person that insults you to your face. They use their words to injure and embarrass. They post malicious stuff online. When it comes to talking to you or about you, this person uses words as finely sharpened weapons. And what does Jesus say? *"Love them."*

Thirdly, Your enemies are those who mistreat you. Jesus says our enemies show their hatred in their actions. Not only do they speak evil of you, they act with evil intent. The word that Jesus uses here literally meant to bring a false legal charge against someone. This is someone who will lie, cheat, and scheme to hurt you. And what does Jesus say? *"Love them."*

III. How to Love Our Enemies

It would be real easy for me to just end the sermon here. We understand the passage. We know what it means. But knowing and understanding aren't enough. It's the doing that counts, and that's where it gets really tough, especially when it comes to loving our enemies.

There was a speaker at a conference I attended who talked about certain passages in the Bible where he would write in the margins of his Bible, "YBH," which means, "Yes, but how." I know what you mean, Lord, but how do I actually do this. These are the difficult sayings that we understand well enough, we just don't seem to be able to live it out in real life. The most

difficult verses aren't the one we don't understand, they're the ones we understand perfectly well, but we just don't want to do them. Let me give you some help in the "but how" area. Full disclosure here. I don't have this figured out. Loving my enemies is not a spiritual discipline I have mastered. I've been given many opportunities over the years to take the high road, to keep my mouth shut when slandered, even to turn the other cheek. But actively loving my enemy. This is hard stuff, and I struggle with it too.

If we go back to Luke 6:27-28 we will see that not only does Jesus describe our enemies in three ways, but he also show three specific ways we can love them. Here's what he says again, *"do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."*

A. Love in Action

First, Jesus says we love in action. We do good to those that hate us. When Jesus uses the word love, he doesn't mean what our world usually means by love. Jesus doesn't mean warm, fuzzy feelings. Jesus isn't saying that we will have warm fuzzy feelings for our enemies. That's impossible, at least at the beginning. Jesus doesn't isn't referring at all to what we feel about them, he is talking about what we do, how we act toward them. The way we start loving our enemies, is that we do the loving thing, regardless of how we feel about them.

The O.T. verses we looked at earlier gave some very specific ancient examples. If you see that your enemy's donkey escaped from its pen what do you do? Shew it further on down the road, or do you return it to where it belongs. If you see that your enemy's ox has fallen under its load, what do you do? Do you laugh at your enemy's misfortune, or do you ease the burden and help the Ox back up? What we need to do is apply these examples to 21st Century life.

If you see your enemy's car parked on the street and the meter has run out, what do you do? If you see your enemy walk out of the bathroom toward her locker and a long strand of toilet paper is trailing from beneath her skirt, what do you do? Some of your enemy's mail accidentally ends up in your mailbox including what seems like a very important bill, what do you do? Your boss mistakenly thinks your enemy messed up a very important account, and so you do what? How you answer those questions show whether you're truly a child of God or not.

Jesus isn't calling us to like our enemy. He's calling us to love them and that begins with how we treat them.

B. Love in Word

So we love in action, and secondly, we love in word. We live in a culture that specializes in insult. We praise the barbed comment, the witty zinger, the sharp comeback. Here are some classics.

- "Are you always this stupid or are you making a special effort today"
- "Don't let you mind wander - it's far too small to be let out on its own"

- "He's lost in thought - it's an unfamiliar territory"
- "He doesn't know the meaning of the word "fear" - but then again he doesn't know the meaning of most words"
- "I don't know what makes you so dumb but it really works"
- "I don't think you are a fool, but what's my opinion compared to that of thousands of others"
- "He does the work of three men: Larry, Curly & Moe"
- "Anyone who told you to be yourself couldn't have given you worse advice."
- "Are your parents siblings?"

But Jesus doesn't call us to return hateful words with sharply barbed insults. We return hateful words with kind words. In response to insults we offer compliments. If they wish us ill, we wish them well. We return curses with blessings.

Loving in word can be much more difficult than loving in action. Many times we have time to think about the action. We have a moment to deliberate, and we can plan to act in a loving way, but our speech is so often a spur of the moment response. We speak without thinking. We blurt out with our hurt feelings, and say hateful things before we have a chance to think about loving with our words.

Next time you are speaking to your enemy, or about your enemy, keep the following in mind. 1. Wait to respond. Don't just blurt out the first thing that comes to your mind. 2. Weigh your response carefully. Or your words designed to bless or curse?

C. Love in Prayer

The third way we can love our enemies, Jesus says is to love in prayer. We may not always be able to treat our enemies kindly or to speak to them kindly. We may even find it impossible to bring ourselves to that level of obedience. However, we can always pray for them. In fact, if you are struggling to love an enemy in your life I would recommend doing these three things in reverse order. Begin by loving them in prayer, then start loving them in word, and then build that up to where you love them in action.

There is no greater place we can go with our enemy than to God in prayer, for it is only with God's strength that we can truly learn to love our enemy, and it is only with his help that he may cease to be our enemy and become our brother.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was a German Pastor who wrote a book about the Sermon on the Mount and he wrote it under the rising tide of Nazism in his country and he would die a martyr's death in Nazi concentration camp during the war, and here is what he writes about praying for our enemies, "Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God."

Do you get the gist of what he is saying here? We aren't just praying for God to do something about our enemy, for God to put our enemy in his place, but we are seeking God to bless them. Even when we are struggling to find the strength to love them ourselves, we can ask God to love them with his perfect love. By praying for someone you are investing in their life, the more you invest in someone's life, the more you will care for that investment. The more you care for an investment, the more you will want to look after it, and thus in prayer we learn to love our enemy.

So the next time you really want to tell them off; you want to give them a piece of your mind; you're tempted to really put them in their place, bow your head and pray, "Heavenly father, my enemy is your creation. You put them on this earth and in my life for a reason and a purpose. You love them, Lord. You sent your Son to die for them that they might have eternal relationship with you, and with me. Lord, I pray that they would know just how much you love them, and that they can see how much you want to bless their life. Lord, I pray that you might give me the same love for them that you have, and may we begin to experience on earth just a taste of the relationship that we can have in heaven."

As you go to God in prayer for this person, just watch the hate begin to melt away, and God begins to open the door to loving in word and loving in action. Loving our enemies may seem impossible, and on our own it is. But with God's help we can do what we never could on our own, that's why we must learn to love our enemies in prayer.

If you do these three things; if you can say a prayer of love for your enemy, if you can find a loving word to say, and if you can find a loving thing to do, then you are well on your way to loving your enemy. And when you do these three things, you look just like your father.

Jesus concludes this passage with what seems to be an impossible ideal, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.*" Now we will never reach a state of absolute sinless perfection while we're still here on earth, but that may not even be what Jesus means. This word literally means to be mature, and it is often translated that way. Jesus is saying that we need to be grown-up in our love, and when we do we look just like our father in heaven.