

“But I Don’t Want to Love My Enemies!”

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Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said,

‘You shall **love your neighbor** and **hate your enemy.**’ [Lev 19:18; Ps 139:22]

⁴⁴ But I say to you,

Love your enemies

and **pray** for those who **persecute (pursue/oppres)** you,

⁴⁵ so that you may be **children 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.**

⁴⁶ For if you **love those who love you**, what reward do you have?

Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁷ And if you **greet only your brothers**, what more are you doing than others?

Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

⁴⁸ **You therefore must/shall be perfect,**
as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 22:35-40

³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [Deut 6:5] ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [Lev 19:18] ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Luke 6:35-36

³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Leviticus 19:17-18

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Yahweh).

Psalms 139:19-22

¹⁹ Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!

²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.

²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Yahweh? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

Acts 14:16-17 Paul and Barnabas speaking to Greeks in Lystra

¹⁶ “In past generations he [God] allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

Romans 5:8-10; 12:14, 17, 21

⁸ But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath. ¹⁰ For if

while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ...

12:¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ... ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ... ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 John 4:7-9

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love**. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

Climax of Contrasts

This is the last in the series of Jesus' antitheses: "*You have heard...but I say...*" It ends with the amazing words: "*You shall be perfect...*" It starts with the equally surprising, "*Love your enemies...*" Often thought of as over the top, unrealistic, impossible ethic.

As with others Jesus starts from a known practical standard: proper love and hate, universal practice. The law doesn't command hate, but many texts are about destruction, overthrow, thwarting of enemies. Israel had many enemies. Roman oppression! So also individuals. You don't have to command people to hate. Fear, frustration, difference, etc. lead to it. Wisdom helped to appropriate responses: love good people; hate bad, hateful people.

Why Love? Why Enemies?

Jesus is intentionally "over the top." Not a new regulation but real transformation. He is realistic: There are real enemies, with malice, hatred, evil, unjust. He doesn't assume they'll be won over. He could have said: Don't treat unjustly ... seek to reconcile ... fight fair. But LOVE?! Someone who's hateful and evil? What's the point? They'll just hurt you!

I and my heart / self are the point. Who am I? Am I shaped / controlled by my enemy? Almost inevitably, unless.... Jesus urges prayer, actively bringing God in. Then a new process can work. I learn to think, talk, act as God's creature / child, defined by God's values, love.

Just How Broad is Love Supposed to Be?

Jesus uses the same word (*agape*) for loving enemies as for loving God or neighbor. A complex, all-inclusive love, actively positive, seeking the good of another, self-giving. *Agape* overlaps *philia* (friendship) and incorporates elements of *eros* (passion) and *storge* (family love).

Is love weak? No. It's strong resistance to hatred / enmity. Seeking real good not surrender.

Jesus doesn't let us narrow the love. It's like God's sunshine and rain, life-giving for all. Never settle for the appropriate response (love friends, family); seek God's life-giving way.

Impossible Command – Never-ending Promise

When Jesus speaks of becoming children of your Father in heaven, he's preparing the hearts of his hearer for the great work he is doing that they can't yet imagine. Ultimate Love.

"*You shall be perfect...*" Future tense: command or promise. As command it is impossible but important. Never settle for managing evil. It sets a standard for life that is always out ahead. Life becomes a never-ending quest. As a promise it defines the work that Jesus wants to do, will do in our lives. He knows what we were created to be. He starts now.