

The Hardest Command Jesus Ever Gave

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As I studied this week and began preparing this very difficult message, the title became obvious. But it occurred to me Jesus gave a lot of hard commands. The more I study His life and teachings, the harder it gets—not to understand them, but figure out how to obey them!

Which one is the *hardest* command He ever gave to His disciples? If I took a poll of Christians familiar with His teachings throughout the gospels and epistles, several good answers would surface.

- Take up your cross daily
- Die to self
- Love your neighbor as yourself

But the command that tops the list (IMHO) is found in Matthew 5. Jesus was teaching the greatest discourse in history known as the Sermon on the Mount. He completed the first section known as the Beatitudes. Then He proceeded to explain the Law in a way that changed how we are to understand them forever. He reframed teaching and understanding on hard subjects like:

- Murder
- Adultery
- Divorce
- Vows
- Retribution

Jesus' intention was to change how born-again followers live and interact with others. This was very difficult teaching then and now. Application seems impossible. (We will come back to that.) Jesus saved the hardest command for last,

which brings us to our text and message for today.

"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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5: 43-48

"Love your neighbor as yourself" is straight out of the Levitical law (Leviticus 19:18). *"Love your neighbor"* is quoted nine times throughout the Bible. It is interesting to note *"hate your enemies"* is not found in the Law or the Bible. When we study various commentaries on this passage, we learn the Pharisees created that part. Perhaps it seemed intuitive or they cobbled together some of the verses in David's Psalms referred to as *imprecatory psalms*. These were the psalms in which David asked God to destroy or defeat his enemies. Whatever the source, **Jesus issued (what I believe is) the hardest command of all** to stomach—much less understand and obey.

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"

Out of my own struggles with this command came three questions.

- Who is my enemy?"
- Why do I have to love them?
- How do I love them?

The balance of our time will be spent answering these

questions.

1) Who is my enemy? Most of us have little trouble identifying people we consider enemies. We would say people who hate us and seek to do us harm. This is not to be confused with an adversary or opponent. [I want to remove Satan and demons from thought because they are our natural, spiritual enemies. Jesus was speaking to enemies being people.]

Christians have one (visible) enemy: *people who hate or oppose Jesus and those who identify with Him and (attempt to) live according to His commands and example.*

Three examples from Scripture that describe/define enemies of God and Jesus.

"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." John 15: 19

"For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." Philippians 3: 18-19

"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity (hatred) with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." James 4: 4

Thus, Christians should expect to be hated by our enemies—the world (evil) because they first hated Jesus. How do we respond? Hate them back? Bringing us to the second question.

2) Why should I love my enemies? The first, and most obvious, answer is Jesus commanded us to. (Matthew 5: 43) There is another compelling reason many Christians forget to

consider when we hate on left wing radicals, violent demonstrators, murderous criminals, atrocious people engaged in sex trafficking, abortionists and those who support them...the list goes on.

*"For if while **we were enemies** (of God) we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* Romans 5: 10

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5: 8

Before you begin to hate on your enemies, remember this.

We were enemies of Christ before God's love, mercy, and grace provided for our salvation.

God hates sin—theirs and ours. The most life-changing words the Holy Spirit ever spoke into my life in this difficult area were these:

Walter, hate your own sin first and worst!

John wrote, *"We love because He first loved us."* (1 John 4: 19) Jesus commanded us to love and pray for our enemies. That leads to the last question—**How?**

3) How do I love my enemies? The short answer is we cannot. The biblical answer is we can, BUT not in and of ourselves. To answer this most important question, we must step back a bit and consider what Jesus said and how He prepared His disciples for His death and departure from this world. The disciples were rightfully distraught at the thought of Jesus leaving them to a world that would hate and possibly kill them. AND where would power come from to do "greater things" than He did that He also promised? Jesus answered...

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it

does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." John 14: 16-18; 26 (See also John 16: 7-11; 13-15)

The third person of the Holy Trinity Who is Himself fully God – the Holy Spirit- is the answer to this question. He comes into the lives of true born-again Christians. When Jesus said, "I will come to you", He was speaking of coming in the Third Person of the Godhead.

We need to also remember the Apostle Paul spoke much on the ministry of the Spirit and gave us a list of **fruit** He can produce in our lives if we continue to seek God and submit to Him. So by the power of the Holy Spirit and putting to use the first fruit, we land on loving others– including our enemies.

Following is a great example of how we should love our enemies.

"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:17-20

One final word on *loving our enemies*. It is the word love. For those who wonder which of the four Greek words for love Jesus and Paul used, the answer may shock you. It is **agapao**. Most think of this only as the unconditional love of God toward us. That is only one of the meanings. Most words in

all languages have multiple meanings. In these verses and contexts, love means,

Choosing to show them favor and good will—not trying to please them.

What “love your enemies” does not mean.

- This does not mean we condone, in any way, their sin or sinful lifestyles or actions that are in direct conflict with or opposition to the clear teaching in God’s Word.
- It does not mean we allow them to harm us or our families or property. Christians have a right to protection. “Turn the other cheek” is incredibly misunderstood.

We are to love our enemies as God does. He knows they are His enemies first even before becoming ours. We must always value them as people for they are, like all people, also “created in the image of God”.

We treat them with respect and dignity. You do not know whether you are the one light in their dark world God sent to show them the way to the Cross and salvation in Christ. People are drawn to love and light—not hate and darkness. They already live in darkness. **Be the light!** Some want out, but do not know the way. **Show them the way out!**

Finally, the greatest way to express the love of God is like Jesus did. **Tell them God sent Him to save us from our sins.** That may get you killed or beaten, but so what? Many NT Christians and the apostles suffered greatly for their love for their enemies. We are not exempt.

Our flesh wants to meet out vengeance and wrath on our enemies. God said He would ultimately take care of that. Jesus said those who remain His enemies wind up in Hell.

Do you really hate anyone enough to pray that God would send

them to an eternity in Hell? That kind of hate demands, as John did, that you search your heart to see if you truly experienced the salvation of Christ. ***"We love because He first love us."***

For Christ's sake,

Walter