



Active Love: Loving Our Enemies

(Matthew 5:43-48)

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But 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, ⁴⁵that 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. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? ⁴⁸Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV)

I. WHAT KIND OF LOVE?

- A. Typically human love is rooted in being passive, detached, and distant. Outside of predictable exceptions for family members, human love is decidedly conditional.
- B. Pharisees had perverted teachings of the Torah.
 - Leviticus 19:18, 34 ¹⁸*‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. ³⁴The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*
 - 1. They took out ‘as yourself’ and added ‘hate your enemy’ (Gentiles).
 - 2. Who is our neighbor?
- C. Divine love is unconditional and non-situational.
- D. God wants us to move from the detached distant kind of love to an active love that is present in our hearts all the time. This is difficult because we tend to attach love to those who have first loved us or respond well to our love for them.

II. THE WORLD’S RESPONSE: GET EVEN

- A. Hatfield and McCoy story. In 1863, at the end of the Civil War, a man and his cousin heard that another man had killed the first man’s friend earlier in the War. The two men began a vendetta to kill that other man. The man on the vendetta was Devil Anse Hatfield and the victim was Asa Harmon McCoy. And thus started the 28 year long Hatfield-McCoy familial feud that ended up costing a dozen lives plus others who were jailed or executed. The feud did not officially end until the families signed a truce in 1976. This feud is the antithesis of the lesson in these verses.

III. GOD’S RESPONSE: ACTIVE LOVE

- A. Matthew 5:38-42 Eye for an eye is a wise judicial limit within the court system enacted by a loving God
 - 1. This passage does not deal with a judicial process but teaches that we are not to seek revenge or retribution *personally*.
 - 2. This is only a first step towards victory and freedom from judgement. It is not complete and doesn’t finish the journey. The next passage provides that next step.
- B. Matthew 5:43-48 Love for enemies
 - 1. Most of us don’t really have enemies; no one is actually out to hurt us
 - 2. We do at times have situational adversaries. There are benefits of loving our adversaries
 - 1) Jarring them into repentance.
 - 2) Strengthening our own spiritual walk---the main point.
 - 1) Intersects us with the supernatural realm.
 - 2) Reveals our own fears and discomfort in certain situations.
 - 3) Strengthens the ‘forgiveness muscle’ God wants us to use regularly.
 - 3. What kind of love do we have in our heart?
 - a. The natural person --- loves those who first loves him.
 - b. The enlightened person --- loves those who he is neutral towards.
 - c. The righteous person --- loves those who dislikes him and even those who actively works against him.

IV. CHANGING RESPONSE PATTERNS

- A. Loving our enemies seems impossible.
 - 1. We have a hard time just doing the possible---

- a. like loving our neighbor as ourself.
 - b. like loving our loved ones.
 - c. even at times loving God whose ways we often don't understand.
2. Loving adversaries goes against the grain. i.e., what good is having an adversary if you can't enjoy hating him?
- B.** God's way around that impossibility: vs 5:44

⁴⁴ 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,

1. **Love (Demeanor).** Love is God's currency; God loves all His children, even those who turn away (Prodigal Father). When we love others, esp. those actively against us, we engage the supernatural realm in our life.
2. **Bless (Words).** Blessing includes loving; if you bless with an attitude you are not blessing optimally. Not 'Bless you' (with a sneer) like in *Sister Act*. Blessing is primarily using our words to speak positively about our adversaries. When we speak about our adversary to others, God's standard is that we speak positively about this person. We are not to lie about the other person but can find positive traits in their life and then can be discerning and selective at speaking truthfully and graciously.
3. **Do Good (Actions).** We should actively seek ways to do nice things for our opponent. We can ask God what actions we can do to bless our adversary. A change of attitude will often follow a change in behavior.
 Example: I read a story about a woman who completely resented and disliked (maybe hated) her supervisor because of unjust treatment of herself and others. Rather than quit, she resolved to get to know her as a way to learn to love her. They had lunches, coffees, and the like and eventually she began to actually like her. Eventually the woman's anger was not in charge of her emotions.
4. **Pray.** Talking to YHWH about our adversary can help us move towards loving. Praying actively involves oneself in the other person's life. When we actively seek God's help by asking Him to help us, He often shows us things about that other person's life, hurts, and struggles. When this happens compassion and loving actions are more likely to follow.
 - a. A good prayer: "Holy Spirit help me to see this person and feel about this person the way You do."

V. APPLICATION

- A.** Verse 48 essentially says that if we do these things, we will be perfect because God is perfect.
1. Our 1st response is that can't possibly be true: I am not now, nor ever will be perfect.
 2. God only wants us to do our best. Part of doing our best is realizing what God's standard is.
 - a. Sanctification is all about becoming more like Christ every day - in big ways and small ways.
 - b. It is no accident verses about avoiding retribution are followed by verses about active love.
 3. 'Perfect' in the Greek does not mean 'perfection' as in English. It means 'complete' or 'mature' - which is a life totally integrated to the will of God.
 4. Failing to seek good for everyone including our enemies means we have not yet reached God's ideal.
 5. Being a child of God carries the implication of having the character of God; God is merciful towards everyone in the hopes that they will repent before the coming day of His judgement.
 6. Active love **is** the chance to be like God.
- B.** How do we implement these verses?
1. Realize sanctification is about the journey, not the destination; small successes count.
 2. Repent where we have fallen short.
 3. Ask Him for help in walking in His standards.
 4. Commit to walk in obedience to God's standards found in these verses.
 5. When we fall short, repeat steps 1-4.

VI. REFERENCES

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