

Love Your Neighbor

Matthew 5:38-48

Intro

Let's begin by opening to...

Matthew 22:34-40 (NKJV) [give context...]

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

These are ***the greatest commandments*** — they are absolutely essential to all that we ***are*** and all that we ***do*** as believers — discipleship to the Lord Jesus is ***impossible*** without them...

- And these commandments highlight the fact that the abundant life — the life that counts for time and eternity — is an ***others-centered life***...

It is a life that is focused, first of all, on loving the Triune God Himself...

- And as a result of that God-centered focus, we are enabled to properly love our neighbor as we love ourselves...

Turn now if you would to...

Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV)

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

So, to repeat, the abundant life — *the life of joy, peace, hope and fellowship* — is an ***others-centered life...***

- It is a life that is focused *first* on **loving God** *then* on **loving others** — ***always in that order...***

And there is no other way to live a life that is truly and finally satisfying...

- There is no other way to live a life that truly matters...

With that said, choosing to live an others-centered life will present us with all sorts of difficulties...

- Sometimes it will seem impossibly difficult to **love** God because in that season we don't trust what He ***is doing*** or ***not doing*** — what He is ***allowing*** or what He is ***preventing***...

But if we truly understand the *nature* and *character* of God then we know that ***God is good, all the time — all the time, God is good...***

- So, even if we are struggling with His plan, we understand that ***He is still good...***

Now, we are confronted with a different problem when we seek to obey the commandment to ***love our neighbor as we love ourselves...***

- Because, unlike God, we know that even the best of our neighbors are not truly good — because they are like us...

And this presents us with difficult questions — questions like...

Are we commanded to love those who do not love us?...

Are we really expected to love people who treat us poorly?

Are we called to love those who make life difficult for us?...

The answer to all three of these questions is an emphatic YES!...

As disciples — as apprentices of the Lord Jesus Christ — we are called to ***Love God*** and ***Love Others*** just as He did...

- *And the Lord Jesus didn't love others because they were lovely or because they treated Him well or because they made His life easier...*

He loved them because of who **He** was — because of **His** character — because of **His** supernatural ability to love...

- Likewise, if we are to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God here and now then we too are called to love in this way...

As believers, we are new creations — our character is being conformed into the image of Christ's character...

- And we too have a supernatural ability to love because **Romans 5:5** tells us that the love of God *has been* poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit...

Now, as we finish up our study of Matthew 5 this morning, the Lord Jesus is once again challenging *the externalism of outward obedience* and teaching that kingdom living is about *what is happening in the heart of the individual*...

So, please turn to Matthew 5 and follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying this morning...

Matthew 5:38-48 (NKJV)

38 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

43 "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

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,

45 that 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.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Let's move into our passage...

38 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

Here the Lord Jesus is quoting straight from the Pentateuch...

- **Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy** each record this law...

And there are a three truths that I want to point out regarding the *lex talionis* — **an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth...**

1) This law shows that there are consequences for injuring another person...

2) This law prevents unjust and disproportionate retaliation...

3) This punishment was to be carried by the ruling authorities, not by individuals...

So, this law was actually a safeguard for both the victim of the crime *and* the perpetrator of the crime...

- With that said, by the time of Jesus' earthly ministry **an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth** had come to mean just what you think of when you hear it today...

It had become a battle-cry for **revenge** and **retaliation** — ***“you did this to me and I am going to get you back”***...

But this is not the way of King Jesus — He calls on His kingdom citizens to live a different sort of life — we see this in vs...

39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

I believe that the Lord Jesus is teaching His followers to *refuse to retaliate or avenge themselves* on those who strike them or insult them...

- [ex. Suffering of Stephen, James, Peter, Paul, John, etc...]

Now, we must use wisdom regarding when to resist and when not to resist / Jesus escaped from a crowd that tried to throw Him off a cliff / Paul escaped Damascus in a basket...

CS Lewis — Why I Am Not a Pacifist

...insofar as the only relevant factors in the case are an injury to me by my neighbour and a desire on my part to retaliate, then I hold that Christianity commands the absolute mortification of that desire. No quarter whatever is given to the voice within us which says, “He’s done it to me, so I’ll do the same to him.” But the moment you introduce other factors, of course, the problem is altered. Does anyone suppose that Our Lord’s hearers understood Him to mean that if a homicidal maniac, attempting to murder a third party, tried to knock me out of the way, I must stand aside and let him get his victim? I at any rate think it impossible they could have so understood Him. I think it equally impossible that they supposed Him to mean that the best way of bringing up a child was to let it hit its parents whenever it was in a temper, or, when it had grabbed at the jam, to give it the honey also.

With this in mind, I believe the big idea behind “*turning the other cheek*” is that *apprentices of Christ are not to return evil for evil...*

- Instead, we are to do good to all — even to those who are our enemies...

To see something that the Apostle Paul wrote on this subject, please turn to...

Romans 12:19-21 (NKJV)

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

20 Therefore

**“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”**

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Imagine how different life would be if you chose to *never retaliate* when you were insulted or slighted — no snarky comebacks, no venting to friends about you have been mistreated, no harboring bitterness for past wrongs...

- Imagine the increasing freedom you would experience — your life would not be dependent on how others treat you...

You would not be controlled by the attitudes and actions of others — you would be able endure the slings and arrows of others with humility and grace...

As we consider these ideas, here’s a saying that a friend shared with me yesterday...

An attitude of gratitude gives spiritual latitude...

If I am living in an attitude of gratitude — trusting that my good Father is working all things together for His glory and my good — then I will have the spiritual latitude to endure difficulty...

- Things will not have to go just as I want them to go for me to be joyful — because I am grateful that God is always up to something good — even when I cannot see what that good is...

I believe this is just what we see in...

Acts 5:40-42 (NKJV) [apostles have been arrested...]

40 ...and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

We must understand that the need to retaliate — to have my rights — to restore my honor — it is slavery...

- The Lord Jesus wishes to free us from all of that nonsense...

Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

In context, Paul was writing about legalism but the truth applies to any idea that enslaves — and bitterness at past wrongs, the desire to retaliate, the drive to make the other person pay for what they have done to me — it is all slavery...

We must remember that as believers we are the children of God — we have been adopted into the family of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ...

And no insult or injury can ever change that...

With this in mind, would you please turn to...

Romans 8:35-39 (NKJV)

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written:

**“For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”**

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, when we have been insulted or injured, we feel like we have lost something — something has been taken from us and *we must retaliate in order to get it back...*

- But if you are a disciple — an apprentice of the Lord Jesus — fellow human beings can't truly take anything away from you...

Because nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus...

*And if you cannot be separated from the love of God then you have nothing to worry about — because you are **in Christ** — and every blessing imaginable is yours in Him...*

Ephesians 1:3 (NKJV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...

Let's turn back to Matthew 5 and continue on to vs...

40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

Here the Lord Jesus commands us to be gracious even to those who mistreat us through legal means...

- And it is only possible for us to be gracious in this way if we are trusting that God is able to provide for all that we need...

Please turn forward to...

Matthew 6:31-34 (NKJV)

31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Turning back to Matthew 5 we move on to vs...

41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

- [expand — Roman soldier compelling you to carry His pack for one mile — and you choose to carry it an extra mile...]

This would likely open the door for sharing the gospel...

- The big idea is to go above and beyond what is asked of you — even if the one asking you is a jerk...

Colossians 3:22-24 (NKJV)

23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Moving on in Matthew 5 to vs...

42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

Again the Lord Jesus is calling us to generosity — to give to others and to let others borrow from us...

- And as with all that the Lord Jesus says in this section, we must seek divine wisdom on its *application*...

We understand that the Lord is not saying that we should *indiscriminately* give to a person whatever they ask from us...

We are not to give a handgun to a child who asks for one...

We are not to give our house-key to stranger...

And we are not to give our credit card information to the Nigerian prince who emails us...

And we know that this is true because God Himself does not simply give us everything that we ask for — He only gives us what is good for us...

- So, we should be generous and give — we should let people borrow from us — but always with their best interest in mind...

43 "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

The command to **love your neighbor** is first found in **Leviticus 19:18**...

- Unfortunately, somewhere along the way people added the ungodly admonition of hating your enemy...

But the Lord Jesus lets us know that this is an unwarranted addition and He offers us a better way...

44 But I say to you, love your enemies,

Please notice that King Jesus moves all the way from ***hate*** to ***love*** with *no stop at neutrality*...

Instead of *seeking the worst for our enemies through hate* — we are actually to *seek the best for our enemies through love...*

And so we can all be on the same page, I want to share once again what I believe to be the best definition of love...

Love is a genuine inner readiness and longing to secure the good of others...

Now, as we continue on in **Matthew 5:44**, the Lord Jesus gives us some very practical instructions...

*We are not simply to respond by **not retaliating**...*

Instead, we to *actively seek the good for our enemies through purposeful action...*

As believers we are deputized agents of good — we are to go about doing good to all — even to our enemies...

Jesus instructs us to...

bless those who curse you,

If someone curses us, we are to respond by asking for God's blessing on their life...

do good to those who hate you,

If someone hates us then we are to respond by actively seeking their good by doing what is best for them...

and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

If someone maliciously mistreats us and persecutes us for our faith, we are to respond by praying for them...

- [ex. the Lord Jesus asking forgiveness for those who were crucifying Him...]

Now, as we move into vs 45 we see the beautiful result of this active love directed to those who do not love us...

45 that 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.

- [expand — you can be a member of a family without necessarily behaving according to the values of the family...]

Likewise, we can be adopted children of God without bearing a resemblance to God in our behavior...

- However, it shouldn't be this way — and we can begin to look more and more like God as we love our enemies *because that is exactly what He does...*

He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on both the good and the bad — on both the just and on the unjust...

- *And imitating God's example makes life much easier for us — we do not need different categories of people — some to bless and some to curse — some to love and some to hate...*

Instead, we are to *bless all* and we are to *love all* as the Lord gives us opportunity to do so...

- And God is able to love all of mankind because He is *infinite* — we are simply called to love our neighbor because we are *finite*...

And our neighbors are simply the people we interact with wherever we find ourselves...

- Wherever you are — simply look around — those people that you see are the neighbors whom you are to love — whether they are friend or foe — whether they are companions or strangers...

You and I are not called to do good to everyone, everywhere — that would be impossible...

- But are called to do good to those who are near...

Continuing on in Matthew 5 to vs 46-47...

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

It is only natural to love those who love us and to greet those who are members of our family...

- None of that is worthy of reward and none of that is evidence of a supernatural relationship with the Lord...

But when we choose — in God’s enabling — to love those who do not love us and be friendly to the stranger and the enemy — then we are living a life that is worthy of reward...

We are then living a life that gives glory to God...

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

perfect — *fully developed morally; brought to full maturity morally...*

In other words, ***loving our enemies brings us into spiritual maturity...***

Nothing makes us more like God than loving our enemies — because loving enemies is what is at the center of His heart...

To prove my point please turn to one last passage...

Romans 5:8-10 (NKJV)

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

We will stop here for today...

Conclusion

And as we wrap up this study, I understand that what King Jesus is calling us to may seem impossible but it isn't — this has been proven again and again throughout the history of the church...

- And because it is possible, I want to offer 4 practical steps that will help love our neighbors...*

And these four steps will be helpful in any and every area of obedience to the Lord...

**Taken from Chapter 8 of Renovation of the Heart - Dallas Willard*

1) Surrender — *We surrender our will to God when we consent to His supremacy in all things. We may do this grudgingly. We recognize His supremacy intellectually, and we concede to it in practice—though we still may not like it, and parts of us may still resist it...*

2) Abandonment — *Letting go of everything that is opposed to God's will. At this point, surrender now covers all the circumstances of life, not just the truth about God and His explicit commandments...*

3) Contentment — *At this point in the progression toward complete identification with the will of God, gratitude and joy are the steady tone of our lives. We are now assured that God has done, and will always do, well by us—no matter what!...*

4) Participation — *We are no longer spectators, but are caught up in a vivid and eternal drama in which we play an essential part. We embrace our imposed circumstances, no matter how tragic they seem, and act for the good in a power beyond ourselves. We look toward an eternity of reigning with God through the ages to come. We take action to accomplish the will of God in His power. Our tiny “willpower” is not the source of our strength. We hardly notice any exercise of it, though it is fully dedicated to carrying out God’s purposes in every respect. But we are carried along by the power of the divine drama within which we live actively engaged.*

[expand & close in prayer...]