

Readings

Scripture

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 and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons 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 be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- Matthew 5:43-48 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

As Jonathan Edwards observed in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, a man must first love God, or have his heart united to him, before he will esteem God’s good his own, and before he will desire the glorifying and enjoying of God as his happiness. The real problem of ethics is not in finding the rule to direct us how to glorify and enjoy God but in having the will to make this our aim in the first place. Leopards are not in the habit of changing their spots. Something drastic has to happen for human beings to make God their goal, a change of heart so profound it is like being born all over again, this time from above.

- David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (p. 37)

Affection for God flows out in affection for other persons as they are in relation to him, willing and doing what love requires appropriate to each relationship. Persecutors, for example, are to be loved and prayed for, not hated and cursed, for they are God’s image and the gospel is offered to them (Matthew 5:44; James 3:9; 2 Peter 3:9). Hungry enemies are to be loved and fed, not despised and starved, for they are God’s creatures and he is merciful and kind to them (Luke 6:35; Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21). Paul’s great text on the use of Christian freedom joins affection and volition as he calls upon members of that body of Christ to “serve one another through love” (Galatians 5:13). Actions laudable in themselves, such as giving one’s possessions to the poor, do not count as Christian obedience if they are void of affection (1 Corinthians 13:3). On the other hand – and far more common – professed affection that does not lead to action is certainly not love. “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:17-18)

- David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (p. 50)

Sermon Outline

Love Doesn’t Contradict Itself
Matthew 5:43-48

And His Disciples Came to Him
Brad Anderson

We are called to love perfectly because we have been perfectly loved...
(Matthew 5:45a, 48)

How does Jesus describe the standard of his perfect love?

Jesus’ standard of love includes love for his enemy... (Matthew 5:43-44)

Jesus’ standard of love includes prayer for his persecutor... (Matthew 5:43-44)

Jesus’ standard of love includes an impartial common grace... (Matthew 5:45b-47)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- What is the best love story you have seen in a movie or read in a book? Why do you find yourself unavoidably drawn to stories like this?
- Read Matthew 5:43-48. In this context, what does the type of love Jesus calls for involve?
- In the reflection quotes at left, observe how God’s transforming work of love must precede our doing what love requires. Why is this the case? What would happen if the order were reversed? How would you approach the challenge of love?
- How does this deepened standard related to love impact you? Does it move you to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Does it move you to mourn? Does it move you to consider your own spiritual poverty? Does it move you toward greater humility?
- How does Jesus meet you in your need related to this command?