



Lesson 7 – Loving Those Who Hate You

Matthew 5:38-48

You wake up in the morning and walk out into the street. You find yourself in the market and standing there are several soldiers from a different country. They stand as a reminder that you are not a free people. They run your courts. They collect burdensome taxes that are used to pay the soldiers you didn't ask for and don't want. They will sometimes conscript your services against your will and take your valuable time. Worst of all, you know that your God is more powerful than these puny invaders and has promised to show up one day and teach them a lesson. You can't wait for that day, especially when the soldiers hear of your beliefs, smile, and say "That's nice." You hate the enemy.

This is what life was like in first century Israel, and this is how Jesus' followers thought of Rome. Against this backdrop, Christ comes with a startlingly different message. Love the Romans. And those who are Jewish and have allied with Rome (tax collectors). And those who have personally hurt and abused you, taken advantage of you, and hurt you. This was far more than the Pharisees asked for. This was way different from the thinking of the culture then and it still is today.

In this final section, Christ takes two more common teachings of the law and gives a kingdom view of them. These two related topics tie back in with the end of the beatitudes, confronting us once again on how we respond to those who hate us.

“An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth”

We have consistently seen the phrase “You have heard it said...” point back to the commands of the Old Testament. Christ clarified before he launched into this section that his teaching is not going to nullify the Old Testament, but to fulfil it. Now we come across a couple phrases where

we have to ask, did the Old Testament really say that? And if this is the teaching of the Old Testament, isn't Christ contradicting it?

Did the Old Testament in fact tell people "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"?

Yes, this is in fact a direct quote of Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. That principle was a standard of justice to be considered when deciding legal disputes. The Jewish legal system worked differently from the American legal system. Whereas we have unlimited paper and therefore have a specific law for every imaginable circumstance, Jewish legal thinking was much like other ancient system of laws that operated on general principles of wisdom that could be applied to specific situation.

Why do you think the Jewish people tended to make this legal requirement a personal philosophy? How might we do the same today? _____

Do I really have to give away everything I own if someone asks for it?

Christ's teaching in this section is honestly hard to swallow. We can think of many instances where this teaching would look dangerous and foolish to us. Is Christ teaching that a father of four, on a tight budget, give a thousand dollars to a homeless person if they simply ask for it? Does a college student have to give money to their roommate who plans on buying drugs and alcohol if their roommate asks for it? Is it wrong to buy a firearm to protect oneself?

Is Jesus really teaching this radical of a lifestyle? And if not, why does he say this? _____

What will this teaching look like lived out in our lives? _____

“Love Your Neighbor and Hate Your Enemy”

Did the Old Testament actually tell people to “hate your enemies”?

Next, Christ quotes his final statement, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” Did the Old Testament say, “hate your enemies?” No, but it was common to understand certain passages that way in the times in which Jesus lived. Here Christ is not quoting the Old Testament itself but the common interpretation of the Old Testament.

Israel was given specific instructions when they conquered the land to punish certain nations (Deuteronomy 23:3-6; 25:17-19). This was because God was using Israel to punish them for their sins, and this was not supposed to be a general pass to hate anyone who happened to cross Israel. What God had designed as a plan to protect the purity of his people and to bring his judgment on specific nations at specific times had become a license to treat individual image bearers with contempt. This is not what the Old Testament had in mind, and Christ confronts this wrong thinking head on.

How might we be guilty of similar thinking to what Christ is calling out here? _____

Is Christ really asking that I live a perfect life?

There are two answers to this question. Some will say that yes, Christ is telling us that we need to be completely without any error in word, thought, or deed. He knows this is an impossible standard but it is one we should shoot for and he knows that it will point us to our need for him. The other view says that what Christ is asking for us is that we would be mature. While we won't be sinlessly perfect in this life, we should aim for Christian maturity and that this is what Christ is after here.

So who is right? The Greek adjective here, *teleios*, is used 19 times in the New Testament. A couple of important passages will help inform our thinking about this word.

Look up the following passages that use the word *teleios* and decide whether this word means “mature” or “perfect” here: Matthew 19:21, 1 Corinthians 2:6, 14:20, Colossians 1:28, 4:12, James 1:4. _____

Why is this tied to the Father, and how does Luke 6:36 have to say about this question? _____

What types of people do we naturally tend to resist? _____

How would this teaching change the way we interact with them? _____

As we conclude, I think one commentator summed up this teaching quite well in his commentary on Matthew: “Almost all people look after their own. The true test of genuine Christianity is how believers treat those whom they are naturally inclined to hate or who mistreat or persecute them.”¹ Once again we see that Christ is looking for salt and light. He wants a different kind of person to populate his kingdom, a kind of person who runs against the grain of what we see in the world. Are you ready to be this kind of person?

¹ Craig Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: Matthew*, page 114.