

John Piper: Woe to You When All Speak Well of You

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person. But whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other as well. And if anyone sues you in a court of law and takes away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go a mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who would borrow from you do not turn away.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 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, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:38–48).

Now those are some of the most difficult, controversial, radical demands Jesus ever put on the world, and they are real. They are in the Bible. We should live like this. His words raise serious questions: Do we really need to do that? Do Christians even have enemies? We’re generally nice people. I hate to have enemies. Secondly, how do you do that? It seems very complicated and difficult to love an enemy. Third, how in the world can you get to the point where your heart really wants to bless an enemy? I can maybe imagine doing nice things for them, but Jesus says to *love* them. He says to *bless* those who curse you and abuse you.

You Will Have Enemies

Do we even need this command? Do we really have enemies?

Jesus said, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household?" (Matt. 10:25). If Jesus got criticized, how much more you? So if you are a follower of Jesus, it's a given that you will have enemies.

Paul said, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). If you don't have any enemies, your godliness is probably not showing very well. Jesus said, "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26).

We need this. Christians will be maligned, especially as American culture collapses around us and we take biblical stands against worldly stands. We will be accused of things falsely. How will we respond to those who rise up against us? Love your enemies.

How About in Suicide?

Matthew 5:38–42 and Matthew 5:43–48 are quoted above. If you look at those two units, the first one emphasizes giving to the one who asks. He wants to borrow? Just give. Give even above what he asks. The second unit emphasizes blessing them. Seek their good.

Do those two things always cohere? No, they don't. Jesus says: Somebody asks you? Give. Somebody demands? Give. He means that this is one crucial, important way of loving your enemy. It is not the only way. Let's look at a couple illustrations of this.

You are dealing with a suicidal friend. He calls you. It's interesting how many people who are on the brink of taking their lives reach out for help. You show up. You know where he

keeps his medicine. You see it there and you take it. You take the medicine bottle, because he is contemplating taking it. And he says to you, "Give me my medicine and get out of my house." Now let's apply Jesus' words.

Jesus says give to him who asks. He *also* says do good or bless. You realize this friend, in a moment of deep depression and irrational thinking about the immediate future, is drawing conclusions that will be deeply self-destructive. You hold the means of saving his life in your hand, and he is asking you to give it to them. Should you?

No, you do not give him the medicine. And you don't leave him alone either. He says leave, and he says give. And you don't leave and you don't give, because you love him.

At that moment he is treating you like an enemy. He may get mad. He may beat you, slap you, throw something at you. And you will not give it to him. From this example, we know that Jesus is only giving us one way of loving when he says, "Give to him who asks."

Forgiveness and Trust

Here's another way to get at the complexity of loving our enemies. You've got a babysitter, and you find out he has been sexually abusing your children. A week later, while this 14-year-old is being handled by the court system, that 14-year-old calls you on the phone and says, "Would you forgive me?" Will you? Yes, you will.

Jesus said: How often shall we forgive them? Seven times? No, seventy *times* seven. Forgiveness is free and forthcoming. Then the babysitter asks on the phone, "Can I have my job back?" The answer should be no. Forgiveness and trust are not the same thing. When you have somebody who has been an adversary and has abused your children, you do forgive, but you do not trust. Trust is something that is earned over years of faithful obedience. It is not a gift of love.

Give in Every Circumstance?

Here's one more illustration. You want to give to a poor neighbor down the street. She's on welfare, has six kids and doesn't have a washing machine. To go to the Laundromat down several streets over is a huge burden for this mom. You'd like to buy her a \$600 washing machine, and a dryer too.

You save and save, and just when you have got enough to bless her, another person says, "Can I have that 600 dollars for a car repair?" Give to him who asks. What are you going to do? I don't know what you are going to do. I just know Jesus knew those kinds of perplexities and complexities exist in life. So when he says to give to him who asks, to go the extra mile, to turn the other cheek, he meant sometimes you must discern what is the loving thing to do.

Here's another reality. We live in a world where we not only function as individuals, but we function as parents to children. Do you turn the other cheek with a child? We function as citizens to police. Do police turn the other cheek when they are trying to rescue someone from assault? We have employers and employees. An employee says, "Give me my wage. I am not showing up for work. I just want my wage." "No, you are fired." Is that love? Yes, it is.

We middle-class, wealthy Americans—that is who I am, anyway—we love to get off the hook to give to him who asks. Oh, thank you, John Piper. You just got me off the hook. I don't have to give to him who asks.

We Don't Need Anything

Do you know why Jesus said those radical commands—go the extra mile, let a person sue you, give? He meant for that to be your default response. Each example says that Jesus is our satisfaction. We don't need money. We don't need revenge. We don't need security. We have Jesus. I can display the worth of Jesus to the world by giving to the one who asks, by

endangering myself to serve you. That should be our default response.

You can tell who people are when they are studying this issue. You will know in just a few minutes who the people are who are trying to weasel their way out. They are not broken-hearted because they are unloving people. They try to get out of the trap of Jesus' demand that we be changed at the root of our being, which brings us now to this last question.

Four Motivations to Love Our Enemies

How are you going to become a person like this, a person who loves your enemies? Let's look first at Romans 5:10: "if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life?" God saved you while you were His enemy. You didn't befriend Him before He moved in on you and saved you. So the root origin of how to love our enemies is to experience being loved as an enemy of God.

Secondly, Matthew 5:44-45 says, "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, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." In other words, another motivation is that we show ourselves to be a child of God. We prove we have the same DNA as the Father.

One of the reasons it's hard to love our enemies is because it feels like we're letting them get away with murder. Nobody gets away with murder or anything else.

But Paul rebuked this line of thought: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to God's wrath, for it is written: 'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him'" (Rom. 12:19-20).

Hand vengeance over to God. Don't think justice won't be done.

It will be done. All sins will be punished, either on the cross for those who repent—and you can't improve upon that punishment—or in hell for those who don't repent and you can't improve upon that punishment.

Jesus said: "Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be very glad, because great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-13).

There is a reward in heaven, spectacularly beyond anything you lose on this earth in loving your enemies. Let's show the world how free we are from vengeance, free we are from the love of money, free we are from the need of security, and how much love we have for those who persecute us. {eo}

This video is part three of a six-part series through John Piper's *What Jesus Demands from the World*. In the book, Piper looks at the demands of Jesus as found in the four Gospels. It's an accessible introduction for thoughtful inquirers and new believers, as well as a refreshing reminder for more mature believers of God's plan for his Son's glory and our good. has provided a PDF of the group study guide for each session.

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