

Who Is 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” (Matt. 5:44).

In a few simple words, Jesus captured a counter-cultural way of living that goes against our inclinations to throw gas on a fire and escalate and conflict. To love people who are enemies determined to harm you, and to pray for people who have decided that their part-time job is to make your life miserable will take a miracle from God to regularly practice.

Verse 45 of Matthew 5 helps explain what Jesus means in verse 44. He says that loving our enemies means living like God the Father, who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” The being that God is patient and long-suffering with all people, whether they are righteous or not (Ex. 34:6, Num. 14:18). Theologians call this common grace.

In Jesus’ day, the Jews had many enemies, such as the Romans and Samaritans. Jesus’ answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” in the Good Samaritan story of Luke 10:29–37 is that Samaritans are your neighbor. Even your enemy can be your neighbor. So don’t be too quick to divide people up into neighbors and enemies.

Who are your enemies?

Right now in your mind, see the face of your enemy, the person who has done you the most harm, the most damage, the most evil, the most injustice, has caused the most grief, the most stress, the most anguish, the most strife, and Jesus says, “Love.” The call to love extends to every type of enemy we may face.

In the context of this passage, then, Jesus is saying that our love should be like the common grace of God. This love goes beyond tolerating. It actually seeks the good of the enemy. Paul says, “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. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:20–21). That is the idea here, too. Overcome evil not with more evil, but with goodness and love.

Why? This is how God treats us. God decided to be good toward us when we had no interest in Him or regard for Him. It is God’s love that changes us to become loving. Without God initiating, we would not be changing or capable of really loving.

Therefore, part of our response should be thankfulness at the mercy given at the cross, where Jesus died a murderer’s death in our place. We were an enemy to God, and in Jesus Christ, God loved us. It is this love that changes us to become loving.

Who do you need to stop persecuting and start loving? {eoa}

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