

"Love Your Enemies"

(Matthew 5:44)

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Introduction: We must be VERY careful with Matthew 5!

- A. A popular take is to treat it as hyperbole. A mistaken view is that God's whole purpose here is to make us think that these things are impossible! Therefore He shows us our sin. Be careful!**
- B. Just because there is extraordinary language here doesn't mean that these descriptions of the new life are unrealistic (nor do these contradict grace alone). Not in the least.**
- C. We just need to know what our Lord's words *mean*.**
 - 1. Matthew 5:23-24. Should lead us to be reconciled...and after last Sunday's sermon through Dr. Stoterau...it happened! A member of our congregation shared what *actually occurred! What a gift God's Word really is...the Holy Spirit works through the Word for us to live differently! That is the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus and Jesus lives in His people and leads His people! This is the new life! It is transformative...and this too is by grace!***
 - 2. But "tearing out your eye" and "cutting off your hand" is not in the realm of what is impossible. No the Lord is not teaching self-mutilation which would set up an interesting dilemma: in that case God who prohibits suicide would be inviting you to break His own Word. Of course not! We must understand the images: these words describe repentance: we are led to crucify the flesh; mortify it; kill it; drown it...now apply these biblical concepts/real Christian life concepts to what Jesus teaches here: how do we tear out the eye in respect to repentance? How do we cut off the hand in respect to repentance?**

Answer: you "pull these away" from the committing of sin; you tear away from what would lead you to sin; you cut off what would permit sin to engulf you.

Think of King David on the balcony...God called him to tear out his eye in regard to Bethsheba. Because he did not, sin took over and engulfed David.

3. This is why we pray the 6th petition in the Lord's Prayer: "and lead us not into temptation."

a. We are NOT praying for no temptation.

b. We ARE praying that while being tempted, we are not overcome by it!!!

Part I: The Same Realism Permeates Our Focus For Today:

A. Love your enemies.

B. We have to be up front and honest.

1) Totally impossible on our own.

2) The flesh will never in a million years love an enemy.

3) In the flesh we LOVE to HATE our enemies.

4) This enters into what Bonhoeffer warns in his book Ethics...we take the Law and become Pharisees...we LOVE to judge other people with our exalted knowledge of good and evil. And when our pride can accuse someone else as evil, then we feel so good about ourselves.

C. However, there is more to the story...you Christian are baptized; you Christian are a new creation; you Christian are "not alone"! There is a movie coming out called Noah. There is a scene that has captivated me. Noah's enemies come out to meet him while he's building the ark and the enemy says that he has many with him and that Noah is alone; Noah in the movie says, "I'm not alone." That's it...you're not alone.

D. There's a real biblical account: 2nd Kings chapter 6. The king of Syria wants to kill Elisha...and Elisha prays that the Lord would open his servant's eyes (vs 17), but prior to that Elisha says to the scared servant: "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us, are more than those who are with them." (vs 16) Again, you're not alone.

E. The Holy Spirit is with you! God is with you! Christ is in you! God is with you!

F. So you can't leave it at: it's impossible to love my enemy! No it's not, because you're forgetting the rest of the story. You're not alone! The disciples eager for help came to Jesus: "I believe, help my unbelief!"

- G. **"Corrie ten Boom...recounts how after the war she met a guard who had been her captor in the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Corrie's sister had died in that camp. The guard came forward after she had spoken at a church in Munich, and (though he did not recognize her) said he had been a guard at Ravensbruck, and reached out his hand to her, asking for her forgiveness. For a moment, says Corrie, she hesitated, recalling his cruelty to her sister and all those around her. Then, knowing God's warning to forgive or we cannot be forgiven, and yet still not feeling the ability to lift her hand toward him, she prayed silently, 'Jesus help me!...I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.' And as she woodenly thrust out her hand, the current of God's healing warmth flowed through her and out to the former guard. 'I forgive you, brother!' she cried. 'With all my heart!' Corrie says she never has known God's love so intensely as she did at that moment. But she knew it was not *her* love, for she had tried and did not have the power, "But it was the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Romans 5:5: 'Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us'" (Tramp, Page 55 as quoted in The Lutheran Witness, January 1992, pp 2-3 "Is Forgiveness Really Possible?" by Rev. Dr. Donald L. Deffner)**

Part II: In Christ, with our Eyes of Faith upon Christ, we Live Christ's Life Towards Enemies!

- A. **But you must begin with yourself.**

Romans 5:10: *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."*

- B. **To what extent were you an enemy of God?**

1. **On account of your sin, the Lord gave His life!**
2. **The cost of your sin was the death of Jesus.**
3. **How costly was that?**

- C. **Good question, Matthew 18 helps us get a better understanding through the parable of the unmerciful servant (read Matthew 18:23-35).**

1. **We are that servant.**
2. **To the extent of the inestimable payment that we owed God. How bad is our sin? It amounts to owing God MORE THAN WHAT WE COULD EVER REPAY!**
3. **Matthew 18:24: He owed 10,000 talents. We can't know the exact modern equivalency, but a single talent could be worth as much as 6,000 denarii. A denarii was a day's wage. One talent might have covered day's wages for years.**

But we're not talking about one talent, but 10,000 talents. The unmerciful servant owed the king tens of millions of dollars.

- 4. The picture is that our sin is so bad that you get called before God and you're flat broke...a big ZERO represents your condition of sin, but while you have "0" because of your sin, you "owe" God tens of millions of dollars.**
- 5. Your enemy status has you in a gigantic ditch, a deep dark hole, you're helpless and deserve to die, because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a).**
- 6. And then something AMAZING happens, the King has mercy...the King has mercy...He loves you and He extends His kindness to you – even though you are His enemy...He dies for you and forgives you're debt. Your ledger is clean. You now owe nothing.**

D. But in the parable this servant who was cleared of his multi-million dollar debt finds another servant who owed him a hundred denarii and instead of doing what God did for him, he begins to choke him and demand payment!

E. Surely we can see what the problem is.

F. If we believe and accept what God has done for us...that when Christ paid the multi-million dollar payment with something more valuable than all the gold in the world (His precious blood) *while I was God's enemy...what should this do to me when it comes to my enemies???!?*

Part III: The Secret's Out Now:

A. Your enemies are fantastic blessings!

B. They are God's reminders of what Christ did for you.

C. They are those who also need to see God's love.

D. That is, they are now a benefit to you; and you become a benefit to them!

E. Jesus in Matthew 5 is not taking exaggeration or hyperbole...He's being serious and realistic.

1. Love your enemies...this is not about pleasant feelings inside...it's about a commitment to action...the right action, Godly action.
2. What is that?
3. It's described in Romans 12 (read Romans 12:16-21):
 - a. Verse 20: if your enemy is hungry, feed him.
 - b. Verse 20: if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
 - c. Verse 20: heap burning coals on his head (not wrath, not vengeance), but such acts of unconditional love cause the enemy to reconsider their conduct and it will – perhaps – also lead them to repentance.
 - d. Verse 21: Love lives out this principle...you counter evil with good!
- F. And pray for your enemies...get back to our Savior on the cross...one of His last words: "Father, forgive them..."
- G. And this is how He prayed for you...this is how He prays for you...and this is what God DOES for you!
- H. This is why these words are not hyperbole...they are not unrealistic, they describe Christians who know how much they are loved and how much they are forgiven.

Conclusion: The Final Nail In The Coffin of Matthew 5 Presenting the Impossible is verse 48: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

- A. It doesn't mean morally without fault.
- B. That would be impossible!
- C. The Greek word *teleios* = *means be complete*.
- D. Just as we are taught in this text: God sends the sun and the rain on the good and evil...there is a certain consistency...be like this. If you have two hungry people standing in front of you – let's say one is a friend and the other is an enemy – give them BOTH food. This is the fulfillment of the Word.
- E. Be like Jesus toward you...you were His enemy...and He gave you food, He gives you food; He gave you light, He gives you light; He gave you life, He gives you life; He forgave your sin; He forgives your sin...He does not hate you...He loves you; He does not forget about you, but He prays for you even now...now go forth born-again Christian and do this for those who really need it and keep thanking God for all that we learn through our enemies...they too are our neighbors; they too are the ones for whom Jesus died!