

Loving Like Your Father Loves by Jeff Strite

Matthew 5:43-5:48

OPENING:

There once were 2 cats from Kilkenny
Each thought there was one cat too many
They fought and they spit,
They clawed and they bit.
Till instead of two cats ... there weren't any.

APPLY: Hatred is an interesting topic.

As Christians, we are taught that hatred is not a good thing. We are NOT to hate. But in the days of Jesus one of the common sayings of the day was "Hate those who hate you."

In fact, they could point to what seemed to be a Biblical foundation to that concept: Ps 139:21-22 says "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."

In addition... there seems to be some logical reasons to hate others.

ILLUS: In the April 2010 edition of Readers Digest, a man named Bob Brody wrote this: "I've discovered that nothing feels quite as satisfying as a grudge well nursed. I had a boss who took a dislike to me from my first day on the job, even though she'd hired me. There were no complaints about my performance, but I later learned she'd lied to co-workers about me. Without explanation, she laid me off after only ten weeks, just before Thanksgiving. I had a family to support.

Was I to forgive her? Should I now? Give me one good reason.

My grudge against her, balanced out that injustice, somehow righted the universe. It has kept me warm on many a cold night.

A long-standing grudge suggests that we hold certain standards, that we respect ourselves enough to reject bad behavior. Failure to forgive can be just as righteous, just as honorable, as forgiveness itself."

So, there are people who feel justified in hating their enemies/ in refusing to forgive because:

- It shows they have "standards"
- It shows they respect themselves
- It shows they refuse to accept "bad behavior"

They believe that hating their enemies makes them righteous, honorable.
Even Godlike.

And that was the mindset of the religious community in the days of Jesus.
Love your neighbors and hate your enemies (they taught) and you'll be like God.
Then along comes Jesus and He says – "Wait A Minute... that's not true."
Jesus said: "I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"
Matthew 5:44

But that doesn't make any sense.
Why would I want to love my enemies... they're my enemies for a reason.
They've hurt me, lied about me, betrayed me.
If I could love them... they wouldn't be my enemies now would they???

But Jesus says: love your enemies.
(PAUSE) Now, why would I want to do that?

Well, someone listed 3 reasons why we should love our enemies:

1. It's cheaper than getting a lawyer.
2. It decreases the likelihood you'll end up being a guest on a Jerry Springer show.
3. BUT – most importantly - Jesus said so.

Jesus said I should love my enemies.
It doesn't have to make sense.
All I have to know is that this is what He wants.

(PAUSE) You see, I need to understand that God's ways and God's thoughts aren't like mine:
"my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9

God doesn't think like we think... and His ways aren't like our ways
And that is especially true when it comes to loving my enemies.

Loving our enemies has always been God's will for us. Even back in the Old Testament God taught that. In Exodus 23:4-5 God told His people...
"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do

not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.”

In Proverbs we're told “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”

Proverbs 25:21-22

And this command from Proverbs was repeated in Romans 12:20 telling us Christians that God had not changed His mind.

God has always wanted His people to love their enemies.

But why?

Well, there are three reasons I can think of.

The 1st reason is this:

I should love my enemies because it's in my own best interest to do so.

In verse 46, Jesus says “If you love those who love you, what REWARD will you get?

Matthew 5:46

In Luke 6:35 Jesus preaches essentially the same sermon, but there He says: “love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your REWARD will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”

There's a reward for doing this?

God will reward me for loving my enemies?

Yes, there's a reward. For God knows how difficult this can be to do this - so He specifically promised He would reward us for making the effort.

And what is that reward?

According To One Resource:

People who do not forgive the wrongs committed against them

- tend to have higher rates of divorce
- experience more stress,
- have more depression
- and suffer from more cardio-vascular disease (strokes and heart attacks)

By contrast (as a group) people who forgive,

- tend to suffer less from depression
- and have more friends and family to support them.

- In fact, forgiving people are better at making friends than those who carry grudges.

Now that last makes sense because - people who don't forgive, people who hold grudges and dwell on the wrongs done to them, don't make very pleasant companions. They're extremely unhappy people to be around.

Forgiveness is good for you.

You will be rewarded physically for loving your enemies

By contrast, according to one observer, hating your enemies is just "... a prolonged form of suicide." Doug V. Steere

But wait - there's more to this reward than just physical benefits. 2 Chronicles 16:9 tells us that "... the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth, to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him..."

In other words, God is looking to reward you when you obey Him in things like this. God is looking to strengthen you, to bless you, to actively work in your life to do good things for you. All because He knows how hard this is for us to do.

So Jesus teaches me that I should love my enemies because it's in my best interest.

God will reward me if I'm faithful to Him in this.

2ndly, Jesus teaches me that if I love my enemies, I show that I'm not like the pagans.

Jesus said: "if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even PAGANS do that? Matthew 5:47

Now let's think about this for a minute.

The Bible teaches us that once we become Christians, we belong to Jesus.

So, if we belong to Jesus... who does everybody else belong to???? (Satan)

Now here's the deal:

Before I became a Christian I used to belong to Satan.

I used to be a soldier for him.

I learned to live my life the way Satan would live.

When I got mad I got mad as Satan would.

When I fought fights... I tended to fight my fights like Satan fights.

And Satan is a hater of his enemy.

He hates God, and He hates us because we are made in God's image.

And how does Satan fight?

He's the accuser of the brethren. He's the DESTROYER of everything God holds precious
SATAN HATES. And he hates. And he hates.

And he teaches his followers to hate.

And when we hate our enemies, we live like we belong to him.

We end up living as pagans live.

Jesus says: Don't be like that.

I called you to be a people of love... not of hate.

1 John 4:20 says "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet HATES his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."

Galatians 5:19-20 tells us that – if we're going to live like real Christians we need to understand

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: (amongst which are) ... HATRED, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions"

As Christians we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of living in that pagan way.

To allow myself the luxury of hating my enemies, is to go back to my pagan roots.

It's to go back to living the kind of life I lived before I came to Christ.

But we were called to live differently than the world does.

We were called to be light in a dark world.

A city on a hilltop that draws people out of their darkness.

So Jesus says – don't do that!

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." Matt. 5:44

And that leads us to the third reason we should love our enemies.

We should love our enemies because that proves we are children of the most High God.

In Matthew 5:45 Jesus says we should love our enemies so "that you may be sons of your Father 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."

You see God loved His enemies.

You did know that God had enemies didn't you?

How many of you knew that? (ask for a show of hands)

Romans 5 tells us that "...when WE were God's ENEMIES, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..." Romans 5:10

Before you and I became Christians, we were God's enemies.

In fact, Ephesians 2:3 tells us that at that time we were "objects of wrath."

"All of us also lived among (the world) at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."

So, we were God's enemies. We were objects of wrath.

If God had NOT loved us... we would have ALL gone to hell.

But God so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us... even when we were His enemies. In fact, God cared so much for us that He never withheld even the most basic of blessings to us. Jesus said "(God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Matthew 5:45

Now, if it were me, if I were God, only the good and righteous would see sunshine and rain. The other guys could stand out in a cold, cold desert for all I cared and they could whistle for all the sun and rain they want... but they wouldn't get any.

But God's not like that.

Why not?

Because II Peter 3:9 tells us that "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

You see, people who want to hate their enemies want to "play God."

They want to be celestial enforcers. Powerful destroyers that can squash the evil that is their enemy, with a mighty hand.

They feel almost God-like as they lay awake at night and consider the terrible ways they would destroy those they hate... if only they had that power.

They would want the power of God.

But that isn't what God is like.

God wants everyone to be saved.

And if we're going to be like God, we need to realize that playing God means that we need to forgive our enemies like God forgave us.

Ephesians 4:32 tells us to "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each

other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

ILLUS: A few years back I read a powerful story of an African boy named Damare. He was a slave who had angered his Muslim master by attending a church service. So his owner took him out into the wilderness, nailed his feet and knees to a board, and left him to die. Fortunately, someone found him and nursed him back to health. Damare later told “The Voice of the Martyrs” that he forgave the person who did this to him. Why?

“Because Jesus was nailed and forgave him.”

That young man knew what it was to be like his Father.

That young man forgave as God had forgiven him when Christ was nailed to the cross.

But if we don’t learn to forgive our enemies, we become like our enemies. And we end up hurting our Jesus... the Jesus who died for us when we were His enemies.

ILLUS: I once read the story of a Sunday School class. The teacher known for his elaborate object lessons and that Sunday was no different. On the wall was a big target and on a nearby table were many darts. The teacher told his students to draw a picture of someone that they disliked or someone who had made them angry . . . and he would allow them to throw darts at the person's picture.

- One of the girls drew a picture of another girl who had stolen her boyfriend.
- Someone else drew a picture of his little brother.
- One even drew a picture of the teacher.

The class lined up and began throwing darts, and everybody got into the fun. Some of the students threw their darts with such force that their targets were ripping apart. When everybody had had their turn, the teacher began removing the pictures from the target and then he took down the target. The whole room gasped as they saw that under the target was a picture of Jesus.

The teacher spoke these simple words to close the class:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Matthew 25:40

CLOSE: Now, here’s the deal. Loving your enemy can be tough.

Even when your enemy is being fairly nice to you, it can still feel awkward

But many times it can be a painful experience, filled with embarrassing feelings that can make the effort seem nearly impossible

As I close today, let me explain that forgiving your enemy is hard to do. Enemies are enemies because they've hurt us – sometimes in terrible and unspeakable ways.

God knows that... and He knows how deeply our pain can go.

But He believes in you.

And He calls you and I to go beyond what mere mortals could do

And He is proud of us when we risk ourselves to love as He has loved.

ILLUS: Years ago a woman named Corrie Ten Boom wrote a book called "The Hiding Place" which described the terrible things she and her sister Betsie endured as prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps. The conditions were bad enough... but the guards were men and they humiliated the women in unspeakable ways.

After the war, Corrie struggled with her hatred of the Nazis and she was especially frustrated because she knew what Jesus said about forgiving enemies. But she prayed and prayed until she finally came to understand why she should do that and she became a popular speaker throughout Europe as she helped thousands of people overcome the bitterness of war.

But one day, she came face to face with one of her Nazi tormentors. She wrote:

"It was a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck.

He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there -- the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing.

"How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine.

And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more?

She prayed "Lord Jesus forgive me and help me to forgive him."

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer.

“Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.”

She managed to lift her hand and take his and she wrote “As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

This is God’s promise to us.

If we seek to honor Him in loving our enemies, He will supply what is needed. It will still be difficult, but God will show you how to make your way through the pain and struggle of your effort, to give you the power to do what needs to be done. To heal that which is hurt and fix that which is broken.

INVITATION: But in order for you to have this power to love your enemies, you must receive God’s love first. You must belong to Him to be able to obey Him.