

# Jesus: "Let me clarify this 'hate your enemies' thing..."

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 18 September 2016

Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] Matthew 5, verses 43-48. Jesus is going to say to us, let me clarify this hate your enemy thing.

An enemy is someone who is a constant threat. An enemy is someone who is constantly looking to make life hard for you.

Now, we know our enemies, spiritually speaking, the devil is our enemy, sin in us is our enemy. But Jesus has been talking about really kind of personal relationships all throughout this section in the Sermon on the Mount.

This morning we're talking about other people who've got it in for you. Who hate you. Who see you as their enemy. Maybe you hurt somebody years ago and they've had it in for you ever since. Or maybe you're just looking to follow Jesus. You're just looking to be faithful to your Savior and King and you've taken a stand for Jesus in some areas and you know what?

[1:10] Now you suffer for it. People actually hate you for it. This morning, right now, the beginning of this message, I want to ask you, is there someone in your mind right now?

Is there someone in your mind right now that you know has it in for you? Another person. They hate you. They want to make life hard for you.

Well, if you have an enemy who hates you, the temptation is to hate them right back and to be justified in that. But Jesus tells us this morning, not my followers.

In Matthew 5, 43-48, Jesus commands us Christians, His followers, citizens of His kingdom, to love your enemy.

Let's look at what Jesus actually says. Matthew 5, 43-48, you've heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

[2:19] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so 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 only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. I can summarize what Jesus is saying to Christians in five words.

You must love your enemy. It's a command. Jesus is commanding you.

[3:19] You must love your enemy. And this morning, I want you to see five reasons why you must love your enemy.

So here's reason number one. You must love your enemy because according to Jesus, your enemy is actually your neighbor.

In verse 43, Jesus quotes what the Pharisees, the religious leaders and teachers of the day were teaching the people. They were saying, look at verse 43, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

That's what they were teaching. It's a reference back to Leviticus 19, verses 17-18. Love your neighbor as yourself is what verse 18 closes with.

And what appears to be happening is this, that the Jewish leaders of the time understood that word neighbor to mean just their fellow Jews.

[4:26] And everybody else fell into some kind of non-neighbor category. Do you remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? It's one of my favorite parables of Jesus.

It's in Luke 10. In this parable, Jesus totally reorients this word neighbor. There is a lawyer who puts Jesus to the test.

There seems to be a lot of lawyers putting Jesus to the test throughout the Gospels. And he asks Jesus, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus responds by saying, well, what's written in the law? The lawyer responds by saying, in a session, this is my summary.

Love God with everything you got and love your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus replies, well, that sounds right. You do that and live. And then in verse 29, we see a little kind of the truth of where this lawyer's heart is.

And he asks, and who is my neighbor? In other words, who am I obligated to love? And that little verse 29 gives you a glimpse into the mindset of the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

[5:42] What they were doing is they were drawing lines along all the people around them. Who is my neighbor? And if this person is my neighbor, I'm obligated to love them.

Anybody not, I'm not obligated to love. And it's to that question, who is my neighbor, that Jesus speaks the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And ironically, He makes the hero in the Good Samaritan to be a Samaritan, a Gentile, whom the Jews hated. And that Good Samaritan showed mercy on a beat up Jew outside of a road in Jerusalem on the road to Jericho.

That Samaritan, in that parable, he did not discriminate. He did not discriminate along the lines of race, ethnicity, appearance, gender, political position, background.

Background. The Samaritan saw a beat up Jew on the side of the road, saw him as his neighbor. And then he showed that Jew mercy.

[7:02] Jesus' point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is not just speaking to Jews and saying, yes, your Jews are your neighbors. Jesus is saying, everybody's your neighbor.

Everyone is your neighbor now. Nowhere in the Old Testament is God's people explicitly commanded to hate their enemies.

Nowhere. And so what the Pharisees have done is they limited love your neighbor to their own people who look like they do and eat what they eat, and then they added to it and hate your enemy. There are Scriptures that can be wrongly used to justify hating your enemies. But nowhere is there a command to hate your enemies.

And so the Pharisees had added to God's Word. And were just seeing their fellow Jews as their neighbors. They conveniently dropped, too, if you didn't notice this, the as yourself.

[8:12] Love your neighbors and hate your enemies. There's no real reference of how they're to love their neighbors.

So what we see Jesus doing here in verse 44 is this. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Jesus is correcting this wrong teaching of the day.

What were the Pharisees teaching? Love your neighbor, hate your enemy. And Jesus is saying, no, love your enemy. And in so saying that, He's saying, because your enemy is your neighbor.

Jesus doesn't give us this non-neighbor category. Everyone is our neighbor now. So, a little while ago, I asked you to think of a person that is hostile towards you.

That you would consider an enemy. Jesus is wanting to help you this morning. And help you see this person who's hostile to you.

[9:25] Not to ignore the hostility. But to see them as a neighbor. A fellow image bearer of God. And when you begin to see an enemy as a neighbor, it starts to change your heart towards them.

Don't do what the Pharisees have done. They make a convenient, compartmentalized approach to people. My neighbor and my enemy.

What Jesus does is He says, no, no, no. Your enemy is your neighbor. That's the first reason why we're to love our enemies.

They're our neighbors. And we're going to treat them a certain way. The second reason why we are to love our enemies is what we see in the latter part of verse 45.

It's because our Heavenly Father loves His enemies. We read, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

[10:37] For He, your Father in heaven, makes His Son rise on the evil and on the good. And sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Our Heavenly Father doesn't discriminate when it comes to causing the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people. This is a common grace of God to all.

God is lovingly causing the sun to rise and the rain to fall both on the evil and the good. On the unjust and the just. Out of mercy, God in His love treats all people with kindness regardless if they fear Him or not.

We've got an amazing God. He literally causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people so that they can eat and live.

He also gets at the scope and scale of His sovereignty. He's in control of all things. This is called common grace. Out of mercy, God shows kindness to even those who oppose Him so that they can live.

[11:50] And we learn from Romans 2 and Acts 17 that this common grace, this common love for all is intended to lead people to God.

And the point that Jesus is making here is that this common grace is an outworking of His indiscriminate love for all mankind. He's kind. He's kind to all.

So here's what Jesus is getting at. If God loves His enemies this way, so should we. We should look out for the general welfare of our neighbors which includes our enemies.

And so we read something like this in Romans chapter 12 the Apostle Paul says don't take vengeance. Vengeance is mine says the Lord. And then he goes on to say if you have an enemy who's hungry, feed them.

If there's an enemy who's thirsty, you give them something to drink. He's quoting Proverbs 25 and he says you'll put kind of coals on their lap. But it's also showing them kindness.

[13:09] And so vengeance is in God's hands so we overcome evil with good. good. But I just got to remind you of the guy who's speaking these words.

So not only does God show His love for all people with common grace, sun and rain, God has shown His love for all people including His enemies with a saving grace.

Jesus and the cross. And it's the one who's speaking. In just a couple of years, Jesus, who is saying these words, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

In just a couple of years from Him saying this, He's going to be on a cross. And do you remember what He prays on the cross? Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.

Do you know what He's doing right there? He is praying for His enemies while dying for His enemies. That's Luke 23, 34.

[14:17] What we see happening at the cross is the single greatest demonstration of God's love the world has ever seen.

There, our holy, loving God dies for a sinful, rebellious people. God's love is at the is the genesis, the drive of His saving grace.

Do you remember John 3, 16? For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Why would the world be in danger of perishing if the world was not a composition of sinners and rebels?

God's love demonstrated by sending His Son to die on the cross. A.J. quoted from Romans 5, 8 earlier when he was talking about life groups.

But God demonstrates His own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ, the Messiah, King, died for us.

[15:36] And in 5, 10, if there's any question, Paul talks about these same sinners as enemies. God's demonstrated His common grace, His common love to all mankind in sending the sun and the rain so that people can live.

But He's demonstrated His saving grace, His saving love very clearly at the cross of Jesus Christ where He gives spiritual life.

He offers that to all mankind His enemies. Now, if you have any question, you were God's enemy. You were rebelling against Him. I was an enemy of God. And despite my rebellion, God loved me and Jesus died for me and He died for you and He offers salvation to all.

This is the kind of love our God loves with. This is the wonderful agape love that we read about throughout the Scriptures. The agape love, that's a Greek word, agape.

[17:02] It's a love for the unlovely. Loving those who don't deserve to be loved. And furthermore, it's loving people with the realization they're not going to love you back in and of themselves.

That's the kind of love with which God loves His enemies. And so, we see here in verse 45, God loving His enemies, both the evil and the good, the just and the unjust, with a common grace, and what I've sought to show you this morning and a saving grace.

It's the guy speaking. We're at least to love our enemies with a common kindness. Jesus points to something very specific.

He says, pray for those who persecute you. You know that person I ask you to be thinking of at the beginning of the sermon? This person who is a threat to you?

Who's hostile to you? Do you pray for them? Do you show love for them and praying for them?

There was a time years ago where there was someone who was hurting someone I loved.

[18:30] And that person I saw as an enemy. I saw as an enemy. I hated this person for what he was doing. I did. And I began to pray for them because of this command.

And I began by praying what's called the precatory psalms. Calling down God's wrath on this person. But what this person was doing was wrong.

Hurtful. And over the course of months I started to hear my own prayers. And I started to realize God I don't want this person damned.

I don't want them to be apart from you for eternity. I don't want that. And it was actually through my praying that God transformed my heart from seeing this person as an enemy to finding myself praying for mercy for this person.

That God would rescue this person. That God would deliver this person. This person never became my friend.

[19:54] But I began to love this person. are you praying for your enemies? God is good for you as you pray for your enemies.

Pray for the one who's your threat. And if they're not a threat to you and a threat to somebody else but you still feel anger towards them, pray for them nonetheless.

us. The second reason why we must love our enemies is because our heavenly father loves his enemies and we were one of his enemies.

Reason number three. We must love our enemies because we are now children of God.

We love our enemies because it's who we are now. now. Look at verse 45, the beginning of verse 45. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven.

[21:10] If Romans 5, 8, and 10 are true, we were sinners, enemies of God. We were once enemies of God. We were hostile to God.

We were rebellious. We were worshipping anything but God. But God loved us anyway. We were unlovable and he loved us.

We had no interest in loving him back and he loved us. He sent his son for us. And when we received Christ, having believed, God gave us the right to become his sons and daughters.

On the basis of what Jesus did on the cross, he gave us the right to become the children of his father. We were once enemies, opposed, but now by God's grace, we are children who are fully accepted into God's family, fully, fully loved.

That's who we are now. love. We've been given all the rights and privileges of children of God. We have been brought into a new family.

[22:26] We've been given a new status. We've been given a new nature. The Spirit of God comes and indwells us. We have new hearts. We are now capable of what we were never capable before.

To love like our Father loves. So when Jesus says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven, don't think that he's saying, love your enemies in order to become sons and daughters.

We cannot earn the right to become children of God. We receive that as a gift of God's grace. What he's saying is that our love for our enemy and praying for those who persecute us is evidence that

we are children of God.

Sons and daughters of God most high. It's because we're children of God that we are able to love our enemies with the kind of love our Father has loved us. And it's a distinct family trait.

It sets us apart. We love as our Heavenly Father loves us. You must love your enemy because you're a child of the Heavenly Father.

[23:53] Reason number four. We love our enemies because this kind of love sets us apart.

love makes us distinct. This makes us salt and light in a decaying and dark world.

This kind of love is a witnessing kind of love. It speaks a word. God uses our enemies hatred for us as an opportunity to advance His kingdom in the way we love them.

Look at verses 46 and 47. It's really kind of interesting. He's making a point. He has four rhetorical questions here and there's a point to it all. Read with me.

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 only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

[25:09] Do not even the Gentiles do the same? What is Jesus getting at here? What are all these rhetorical questions getting at? Well, He's kind of saying this. If you just love those who love you, what's the big deal in that?

Everybody else does that. The Heavenly Father doesn't reward that kind of everyday, common loving of one another because you're being loved back.

That's an easy and convenient kind of love. Jesus' point is it's relatively easy to love someone who loves you back. When someone hates you, that is the challenge to love them.

Jesus is saying, hey, if you love those who love you, it's nothing to write home about. Even the tax collectors do that.

Who are these tax collectors? Well, Jesus is talking about Jewish tax collectors. And in Jesus' days, Jews did not like Jewish tax collectors.

[26:18] And here's why. They were seen as a kind of traitor. A Jewish tax collector was a representative of the Roman government.

They were collecting money for the invaders. They were fraternizing with the enemy. They were not looked well upon because of that.

And then there's the whole tax collecting system. tax collectors were seen as thieves because the way that these taxes were collected was you charge a little bit for your service to collect the tax.

So you put a little surcharge on it. But the system was such that extortion was just shot through it. And everybody knew it. So they were seen as traitors and thieves.

And they were also seen as unclean because a lot of their tax collecting had to do with Gentiles. They were interacting and becoming unclean because of that. So Jews were kind of put out because tax collectors were traitors, thieves, and unclean.

[27:24] And so Jesus is saying, hey, these people you despise, they love each other. What's the big deal? There's nothing to be impressed about if you love each other like that.

In verse 47, he goes in another direction. If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do that?

Hey, if you greet your brothers, hey, isn't everybody else greeting those who look like them and they like? Gentiles greet each other on the street.

What's the big deal? If you just greet your brothers, you're just like the Gentiles. What's so distinct about that?

By the way, Gentiles were seen by Jews as being perpetually unclean. Eating things they shouldn't eat. Doing things they shouldn't do. Touching things they shouldn't touch.

[28:27] They're gross. And so do you remember in Acts 10, the story of Cornelius who was a Gentile? God calls Peter to share the gospel with Cornelius in Acts 10.

We see Peter walking into the home of Cornelius. Do you realize what was happening right there? That would have been the first time Peter, as a Jew, would have entered a Gentile's house.

Look at verse 28 of chapter 10. Gentiles were seen as unclean. And so Jesus is saying, hey, if you're just going to greet one another, hey, the Gentiles who you despise, they do that too.

What's the big deal? There's nothing distinct about that. The argument here is that that kind of love, that kind of greeting, that's common.

That's normal. That's usual. Loving those who love you, greeting those who you like, you're peeps. There's nothing unusual about that.

[29:41] Here's what's unusual. I think Jesus is being very subtle. But if you, as a child of God, love those tax collectors who extort you and greet those Gentiles who make you unclean because they are your neighbors, that's distinctly a God-like love.

That's something to be rewarded. That's something to be commended. That's something to write home about. When you love your enemy as your neighbor, that is the fulfillment of the law. We are to love our neighbors because it's distinctly God-like. You overcome the evil of those who hate you with good.

That's Jesus-like. When someone insults you with a hurtful word, you respond with a word of kindness. You pray for those who are hostile to you.

You greet someone who hates you on the street. That, this is all being salt and light in a decaying and dark world. People take notice of this kind of love because it's uncommon.

[31:09] It's abnormal. It is unusual. God even uses our enemies' insults and attacks to further His kingdom and the way we respond to them.

That's the upside-down way of Jesus. So Jesus is saying, you must love your enemy because it's an opportunity to be salt and light.

It sets you apart. It is distinct. You're a child so that God would get the glory. Reason number five. You must love your enemy because you are commanded by Jesus to be perfect.

It's Matthew 5.48. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. That word perfect means complete. Fully mature. And if you were to read Leviticus 19.2, it's that what God says, be holy for I am holy.

When you read Matthew 5.48, there's a similar cadence. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Be holy for I am holy.

[32:22] There is this holiness component to this perfection. Moral rightness. A righteousness that exceeds even the Pharisees.

What I want to help you see is that verse 48 is the concluding verse of this entire section that began in verse 17.

Look at verse 17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. And then Jesus gives six examples of how the law is fulfilled when it comes to anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and now love for your enemies.

Jesus is showing us through this teaching what the perfect fulfillment of the law looks like. To be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

To be perfect in how you perfectly fulfill the law. It's time to be honest.

[33:34] Does anybody in the room love their enemy with a perfect God-like love? No.

We don't. And we all know it, don't we? None of us can perfectly obey this perfect fulfillment of the law and prophets that Jesus has just laid out for us.

None of us can. What are we to do? This command to be perfect is a command to the impossible. This is out of our reach. We can't do it. How can we do the impossible? What's impossible for man is possible for God.

What we're unable to do, God has done. We're unable to do it. We're unable to do it. We're unable to do it. So what are we to do when we are tempted to hate our enemy instead of love our enemy?

[34:36] We're to preach the gospel to yourself. We're to call to your mind your perfect Savior who is perfecting your faith.

Jesus, God incarnate, is the only human being that has perfectly lived out this perfect fulfillment of the law and prophets. He's the only one.

So Jesus never murdered, and He was never sinfully angry. Jesus never committed physical adultery, and He never committed adultery in His heart. He never lusted.

Jesus never divorced, and you may be saying, well, He was never married. Actually, He is married. To the bride of Christ, the church.

And He will be faithful to us all the way through. He will never leave us or forsake us. When it comes to oaths, He never spoke a word He didn't keep.

[35:34] His yes is always yes. His no is always no. He perfectly keeps His word. He lived out perfectly that what He said, do not resist the evil one, the one who is evil.

When He was reviled, this is 1 Peter, when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He didn't threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to the one who judges justly.

It's perfect. And with what we saw this morning, He perfectly fulfilled, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.

He lovingly died for us who was His enemies. He's praying for them on the cross. He did what none of us could do in order to accomplish the impossible.

To make imperfect sinners perfect in God's sight. In Christ, remember, He is the perfect Savior and He's the perfecter of our faith.

[36:48] I want to encourage you just quickly with a couple things here. Do not forget that Jesus has made perfect your record.

He's made it perfect. He died for your sins, erasing all sin, and He imputed to you His righteousness. He justified you.

And He is in the process of making us perfect. For one sacrifice, He made perfect for all time those who are being sanctified.

in the process of being made perfect. And there's coming a day when He will complete His work in us.

He will perfect it. We will be completely released of all sinful inclinations. Unhindered by sin. That's when we're glorified.

[37:49] His perfect work of salvation is past, present, and future. He's the perfecter of our faith. And when we are tempted, when we are confronted with this call to perfection and we look to ourselves, don't go there first.

Go to your perfect Savior. He is your confidence when we are faced with our imperfections. You have a perfect record. He's making you perfect.

And there's a day when you will be perfect. What ends up happening is this call to be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. It's a call to trust your perfect Savior.

We've looked at five reasons this morning as to why you love your enemy. Love your enemy because your enemy is your neighbor. That person you thought of, that person's your neighbor. and your Heavenly Father loves His enemies and you were one of them. That's the second reason. The third reason is you're now a child of God. You're able to love your enemy.

[38:57] The fourth reason was you can distinctly love your enemy with the Father's love. It's an opportunity to advance the kingdom. And the fifth, you're to love your enemy because you've been called to be perfect.

And we obey that by first looking to our perfect Savior. So this morning, the question you may have is where do I start? I've got an enemy.

I'm going to walk into an office tomorrow into hostility. What do I do? On your way in, pray for your enemy. That's where to start.

Let's pray now. God in Heaven, thank You for loving us. We were Your enemies and that did not stop You. We were unlovable and yet You loved us.

You knew we didn't have it in ourselves to love back, but You loved us still. God, would You perfect us? Would You make us a people that when we encounter hostility, we respond in a way that pleases You.

[40:09] In Jesus' name, Amen.