

# You and Your Enemies

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 5:43-48  
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Today, we're going to turn and complete our study of Matthew chapter 5, and I invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 5, and I want to read verses 43 through 48 together with you. Jesus said,

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 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. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Here in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 20 and all the way through verse 48, Jesus is expounding on the kind of righteousness that God requires, and the kind of righteousness that is produced in us as a result of our conversion, and he has gone through and given us six different illustrations of the fact that it is an inner righteousness, not an outward righteousness. The outward part comes as a result of an inward work but you cannot neglect the inward work of the Holy Spirit and simply think that you are following Christ and obeying God by some kind of external conformity that is not true to a reality that is in your heart and this is a very significant, profound teaching from our Lord. And just to remind you of the surrounding context, in verse 20 of chapter 5, Jesus said, "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." That was a remarkable statement in the context of the day because the Pharisees and the scribes were seen as the highest level of spirituality in the entire culture. The Pharisees were the keeper of the law. They sat on the seat of Moses. They were the authority. They walked around in impressive religious clothing that made everybody think that they were the top of the line when it came to spiritual matters, and Jesus came using the word of God, as it had been completed at that point in what we now know as the Old Testament, was showing that the Pharisees had it all wrong, that the Pharisees were not even believers, they were unregenerate, unsaved, wicked men. And so the whole concept of spiritual life among the Jews was being upended by what Jesus said. Jesus knew that it was going to be so disturbing and so unsettling in the confrontation that

it made in the modern mind that he had to preface it in verse 17. Look at chapter 5, verse 17 with me. He had to clarify and tell the people up front that he was upholding the law with his teaching, not undermining it. He said in 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." What he's saying is, "What I am teaching you is so contrary to the prevailing wisdom of our day that you must understand that I am teaching consistently and advancing the law of God with my words, I am not contradicting it." What he was contradicting was the spirit of the age, not the Old Testament, not the law of God that had previously been given but because people had so identified their mindset and expectations and their thinking of who led and spoke for God, that to contradict the Pharisees seemed to them to be a contradiction of the word of God itself. And Jesus said, "I'm not doing that at all. Yes, I'm contradicting the Pharisees, but the problem is not that that's a contradiction of the word, it's the problem is that the Pharisees have contradicted the word with their teaching, their lifestyle, and everything that you've learned from them."

We're dealing with a massive head-on collision, you might say, if you picture the sad reality of two vehicles coming from different sides, and they hit head-on, both going 60 miles an hour. That's a massive collision. There are casualties as a result of it. Well, in a spiritual, philosophical, biblical sense, Jesus is creating a collision that left the Pharisees as casualties in the wake, you could say so that in verse 48, he says, chapter 5, verse 48, he says, "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." And so he's saying the Pharisees have it all wrong and what he did was he went through six different illustrations; we've looked at five of them before today. That the commandment against murder also includes a commandment against unrighteous anger. The commandment against adultery includes the prohibition against the inner sin of lust. That God's standard in marriage meant that there could be no easy divorce. Truth-telling is to be a matter of not swearing oaths and saying, "Honestly, now I'm telling you the truth." It's a matter of integrity all the way along. And in verses 38 through 42, he addresses our impulse toward retaliation when we've been wronged.

I've taught on the Sermon on the Mount so many times, I never cease to be amazed at the depth of what it does. Jesus is fundamentally overturning the prevailing spiritual culture of his day, and also simultaneously at the same time laying before you and me, exposing our hearts and showing all the ways that we fall short with the goal of calling us to the grace of God and to faith in Christ and a true repentance that is based on an inner reality, not an outward conformity. And if I could say such a thing, these things rightly understood today in the 21st century, if there was a way to have a comprehensive confrontation with the prevailing spirit of the evangelical church today, the effect would be no less catastrophic for what prevails among us. And so we just teach the word and trust the Lord to use it with the sphere that it pleases him to do so.

One other thing that I would say, as we're coming to Jesus' teaching on loving your enemies here in this passage, I just want to make a very general comment that's informed by a lot of interactions I've had over a lot of recent days, is that there comes a point where you just have to say, even if someone has sinned against me, it's time for me to forgive them and to move on. It's time to let the past go and to reach forward, as it says in

Philippians 3, to reach forward to what lies ahead and forgetting what lies behind. My dear friends, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a fundamental place in the Christian life to forgive your enemies, even if they don't ask for it, to let the past go and to move forward rather than trying to go to the spiritual dumpster and sort through all of the refuse that is in there, looking to find a bone that you can gnaw on that might justify yourself and things that have happened in the past. Let that sink in, because Christ calls us to love our enemies. You were an enemy of God and he forgave you. Christ came to save you, to forgive you 2,000 years before you were even born. He was proactive in his forgiveness. If God held our sins against us, like so many hold perceived sins against them, and I emphasize the word perceived sins against them, if God was like that toward us, we would be in a miserable place indeed, wouldn't we? And yet, somehow, people who name the name of Christ can hold on to vengeance and retribution and resentment in ways that are just stunning, and frankly, they're impossible to deal with. You can't fix a resentful, unforgiving heart and Jesus is addressing that very real reality in what he says here in Matthew chapter 5.

And so what we should expect in what's about to come, I'm just giving you a kind of, I like to kind of give you a sense of what's about to come, so you have a little bit of a framework on how to receive it. I'm not here to rebuke anybody here this morning, but I do want you to know that you should be receiving the word of God and what Christ says here today with a sense that this is probably going to be humbling, it's going to sting a bit, and there's going to be, for some of us, maybe multiplied instances and illustrations of how we have fallen short of what Christ speaks here. It is so vital for each one of you not to resist that, not to resent that. God brings his word to us to sanctify us, to conform us to the image of Christ. And in a most fundamental way, the image of Christ is one of forgiving his enemies, and he calls his people to be like him, and it is just stunning to watch so many in the name of Christ and in the name of fidelity to the word of God justify their unforgiving spirit and try to bring everybody else into the vortex of it. Beloved, that is forbidden by the word of God. No matter how it's presented, it is fundamentally opposing the very spirit of biblical Christianity, and we need to own that, we need to embrace the rebuke that the word of God might bring to us today, and rather than continuing in resentment, falling down in repentance before our heavenly Father this afternoon and saying, "Lord, forgive me for not being more like you," and letting that, I say those things in hope that the Spirit of God would change the trajectory that some people are on because a life of grudges and long-held resentments is not a life that God will bless. It's a life that will pass on resentment to children and grandchildren. It's a life that poisons the spirit of everything around. And so it's just so fundamental and I say this in love, I say this pleading with you to embrace what Christ has to say here because in this passage, Jesus is not affirming us in our self-righteousness. He is not affirming us in our bitterness. He is coming and saying, "You have to let all of that go for my sake." And so may God help us as we turn to his word now.

Let's look at verses 43 through 48. Jesus said,

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for

those who persecute you, 45 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. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And so we come to this final illustration that Jesus gives of the surpassing righteousness that God requires from his disciples, and we're going to start with the first point here this morning that we'll call the Pharisees' distortion of biblical love. The Pharisees' distortion of biblical love, and we're going to break this message into three sections, as I usually do. There's something about triplets that my mind responds to. Jesus opens this passage in the same way that he's done in the prior five sections. He says, "You have heard that it was said," and what he's doing is, as we've said so many times, he is, in a sense, he's quoting, he's summarizing, he's stating the prevailing mindset that his first century audience had been taught, and he's doing that so that he can refute it and correct it and lead people in true righteousness. And so he says there in verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" It's that "hate your enemy" that we're going to need to focus on for a bit. What Jesus is doing is he's quoting the prevailing teaching of the Pharisees, and he alludes to a portion of the Old Testament law and I'm just going to read this for you in Leviticus 19 verse 18. Leviticus 19 verse 18 says this. I may be quoting from the NASB rather than the ESV, doesn't matter. "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

So even in the Old Testament law, the people were commanded not to take vengeance, not to bear grudges. Someday we might look at the book of Leviticus in a series of messages; you would be astonished in that book that people associate exclusively with sacrifice and external ritual and all of that, how it's filled with calls to love and repentance. Leviticus is a very spiritual book but it gets twisted and distorted because of poor interpretation, ultimately. Jesus points back to that book and says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," and what the Pharisees had done is they had utterly distorted that. The focus of that command is to love. What the Pharisees did was change the focus to your neighbor. They said the main thing was to love your neighbor and it's not about love being the predominant spirit in your heart, it's about where you focus the object of your love, and so what they did was they extrapolated, they made certain conclusions and implications and inferences that if you're supposed to love your neighbor, then what you do is you hate your enemy. A complete reversal of the significance of the Old Testament laws that applied to personal relationships.

What makes it difficult, and if you study the Psalms, if you studied the Psalms with us, you would perhaps remember some of these things, there were enough things in the Old Testament to give a certain plausibility to what the Pharisees were saying. And we need to handle this really, really carefully because think about biblical history, think about the Old Testament. Israel, the nation Israel, they did wage war on their enemies. They waged

war on the nations in the Old Testament. Some of the Psalms, the so-called imprecatory Psalms, pray for God's judgment on Israel's enemies. And so there's this national environment and there's this biblical history that gave a certain plausibility to what the Pharisees were saying. "Love your neighbors and hate your enemies. Look at our history. We waged war against the nations," and all of that. But beloved, even on Old Testament grounds, they were mistaken and here's what we need to understand. I did a few messages on imprecatory Psalms; you could search for those and see the underlying foundation of what I'm about to say. In the wars, and in the imprecatory Psalms, there was something much different going on than what the Pharisees were doing and what Jesus is speaking about here at the end of Matthew chapter 5. In those situations, Israel, the nation Israel, was acting as an instrument of God's judgment against God's enemies. The nations were opposed to God, and God used the nation Israel to bring judgment upon them. That is much different than the way that, as individuals, we respond to those that have offended us personally. We don't claim the kingdom of God for the fact that someone has offended us. We don't do that. That's, in a sense, it's our business in a way that is distinct from the business of God as he rules over nations and he uses one nation to bring judgment upon others. That's a completely different matter.

Turn to Psalm 139, and you can see the spirit of this, and the distinction that we must make between identifying God's purposes with our purpose, and what my purpose is becoming the purpose of God in all things. That's a distortion of it all. In Psalm 139, David is basking in the knowledge that God has of his soul, of the fact that God has appointed the days that each one of us shall live. In verse 16, David's praying to God, says, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." God, you appointed the days of my life so you obviously appointed the things that fulfill those days also, and he's just recognizing that all of life and what God has comes from his hand. As someone said recently, you have the life that God has given to you and that shapes the way that you think about things. But he goes on in verse 17, he says, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand." In other words, they're innumerable, they're infinite, they can't be counted. "I awake and I am still with you."

And so there's this humble submission and gratitude and spirit of worship that fills those opening 18 verses of Psalm 139. But then the tone changes, and notice how it changes. "Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!" Now he's still praying, and notice who he is concerned and preoccupied with, he's preoccupied with the God who has appointed and filled his days. He is offended by the fact that men have offended God, not himself.

Verse 20 says, "They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain." God, I cannot tolerate the assault on your name. I can't tolerate the sins against you. I am so identified with you and your purpose and my worship of you that when I see you being assaulted, you being sinned against, God, that riles me up. And it's on God's behalf that David is motivated and praying.

Verse 21, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies." It's not that they're my personal enemies, it's that they have made known that they are your enemies, and God, I am so identified with you, speaking in New Testament terms, in my union with Christ, I cannot tolerate seeing that happen. God, I love you too much to share a table with those who hate your kingdom. Can't have it. My heart is too much identified with you.

I can't be neutral. I can't be passive. I can't be so embracing and encompassing in my affections that I embrace the people of God and the enemies of God equally. There comes a point where you have to decide who you're going to stand with, my friends. The message of Scripture is not an indiscriminate love to all men everywhere at all times, regardless of how they respond to Christ. So when Israel, when we see biblically, we see this reaction against enemies, it's reactions against God's enemies, those who hate and oppose him, not the way that it's affected us. And it's very easy to contrast this. We won't turn there but as you read and study the life of David, you see when it comes to a personal insult against David himself in his own person, he reacted completely differently. In 2 Samuel 16, there was a man who cursed David and wanted him to be dead. And he's king at this point. He could have commanded the execution of this man for his treason against the crown. In fact, David's servants wanted to cut off his head. David said, "No, that's not the way we do it." He said in 2 Samuel 16 verses 11 and 12, he said, "Let him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him. Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day." This man was a vile enemy of David and David says, "Let him go. The Lord sees, the Lord knows. Maybe he's speaking words of correction to me, but maybe the Lord will turn it, his curse, into a blessing to me. I bear him no malice. I don't need his blood. My servants, you let him go." A difference between the enemies of God and the enemies personally. The Pharisees would have had none of that spirit about them. Love your neighbor, hate your enemies. As we saw last time, you know, you knock out my tooth, I'm going to knock your tooth out. I'm going to retaliate against you. And what you do to me, I'm going to do back to you and maybe just a little bit more. And that spirit of vengeance, retaliation, all in the name of biblical religion. It's sick. That's not it at all and in the light of Christ, it never could be, could it?

So we see that the Pharisees had it all wrong. Scripture, Leviticus 19, said, don't bear a grudge, love your neighbor. The example of David and other places that you could look at, there's a forgiving spirit toward personal enemies. And that's what Jesus is talking about, is personal enemies here. He's not talking about letting sin run rampant in the church because we don't want to confront and offend anybody. It's none of that stuff at all. Beloved, it is about the way you and I respond to the inevitable difficulties of relationships, the inevitable infractions that people make against us and how we respond to that. And so it's a completely different realm. This is totally in the realm of personal life not national Israel, not the nations or anything like that. Set all of that out of your mind and realize that Christ is addressing the inner man of his disciple and saying, how are you going to respond when you're offended? And what he does, second point for today, we see Christ's call to biblical love. Christ's call to biblical love and let's talk just a

moment about this word enemy. An enemy is someone who is hostile to you, just to not try to be too technical about it. It could be, you could think about enemies in a macro level of, you know, of Muslims that want to put to death infidels who say anything against the prophet Mohammed. You can think about it like that. But really, for our situation, let's just take it in more subtle terms, things less dramatic, and simply address it in terms and think about it in terms of someone who has hurt you or has irritated you with their words or their conduct, either in an incident or over the course of time. Okay, so it's all very, very directly personal. There is no possibility whatsoever that I am saying words today that have no application to your life and heart. There is no possibility that I'm doing that today. This is directly, immediately applicable to each one of us, okay? And so let's just submit to the word of God. Let's just embrace it with a spirit of, "Lord, here I am, send me."

Let me step back for a moment and just say something that was on my mind a little earlier this morning. We've been conditioned to think, at least some of us, conditioned to think wrongly about what it means to live a courageous life for Jesus. You know, in days gone by, there have been people, you know, you need to do big things for Jesus. And it appeals to, "Okay, I'm going to rise up and do something new and different because now I'm serious about Christ and I'm going to go do something big for Jesus. I'm going to pack up and take my family to Africa," or whatever it may be. Beloved, that's entirely a bogus way to think and to preach. If we actually want to be true to Jesus and faithful to our Lord, if we really want to do what the Lord wants us to do, we're going to embrace what Jesus said where he commended those who are faithful in little things that will be faithful in much. We don't need to be planning out how we're going to be faithful in big things when we've got a lot of little daily things, daily relationships, daily responsibilities, daily repentance that we need to do when no one's watching. And the one who actually wants to be faithful to Christ rather than being congratulated on being faithful to Christ, notice the distinction, says what's in front of me today that I need to do, that I need to be faithful with? Christ brings our enemies, those who are hostile to us, and brings them immediately to mind and says, this is what you are to do.

Now, sometimes I think about, you may remember the story of Naaman in the Old Testament. He had leprosy. And he went to the prophet, and the prophet said, "Here's what you need to do. Just go wash in the river seven times, and you'll be cleansed." And Naaman did not like that. He said, "Why can't he wave his hand over me? Why can't he do something dramatic? Why do I have to go bathe in this muddy river?" The humble prescription of faithfulness did not satisfy his immediate reaction of pride. "I'm a player here. You need to give me something big to do." And we're all kind of tempted in that direction. We think we're too big for little acts of faithfulness. Well, the little acts of faithfulness come up in Jesus' word that said, you know, you give a cup of cold water to one of my disciples, you won't lose your reward. Jesus focuses on little things that no one's paying attention to here in Matthew 5. No one is searching your heart. No one knows your heart for its anger, for its lust, for its approach to marriage, for its retaliatory spirit, for its dishonesty, its fundamental dishonesty. This, my friends, this is what Jesus says righteousness looks like and you don't skip over that in order to do outwardly big things that God hasn't even given you to do.

If we want to be faithful to Christ and live in response to him and to love him because he first loved us, then we embrace these things. We say, "Lord, what would you have me do with my enemies?" And Jesus calls us to biblical love. What's the Christian response? He makes it really plain. Verse 44, look at it there with me. It's not only plain and clear, it's also very practical. He says in verse 44, "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." That's what he says. You have someone that's hostile to you, you respond in this way. We can kind of break it down. We can break it down in a couple of different ways and make it really simple. What Jesus is teaching, you have someone like that in your life. I can't imagine, but that maybe a thousand different names are coming to our collective minds right now in the room that this invokes. Jesus breaks it down: do good to them, pray for them. Do good to them, pray for them. This isn't complicated. What makes it difficult is the grudge-bearing hearts that we live with and nurse and nurture, but in terms of concepts, this is not difficult to understand at all.

What Jesus is saying is you respond to them in a way that somehow profits them, that does good to them. And so, for example, you could turn for an illustration to Romans chapter 12 with me. Romans chapter 12, in verse 17, "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Look at how simple Scripture is. You have an enemy? Pharisees said, strike him. Hate him. Scripture says, love him, do good to him. Is he hungry? Give him something to eat. Thirsty? Bring him something to drink. Do good to him. Meet his need in the midst of it.

Imagine, you know, if we only limited this to the sphere of marriage, we would revolutionize so many lives. "You don't know what my spouse did to me. You don't know what it's like to live with that witch or that demon." I had somebody call me a demon this week online. I embrace it. Look, the idea of being kind to our enemies is an overflow of the kindness that Christ has shown to us in his dealings with our soul and the form of the command is it's a call to repeated action. Every time this comes up, you respond this way. And going back to Matthew chapter 5, he says, love your enemies, love them with a sacrificial goodness to them, and he goes on, he says, and you pray for them. Look at it there at the end of verse 44, "pray for those who persecute you." Pray to God for their welfare. If they're unbelievers, pray for their salvation. If they're Christians, pray for their spiritual growth.

My dear friends, how often have each one of us tried to leverage prayer to get God to take our side against our enemies, against those that have offended us, when instead Jesus says, pray for your enemies. Entrust your case to God. Let God take care of the matter and seek their good. Do good to them horizontally. Vertically, pray for them and pray for their welfare. You say, "I don't want to do that. I'm too hurt. This has been too unfair for too long, and I've called the line. I'm drawing the line." People do that. It's appalling to

see it as a pastor. Have we so quickly forgotten, do we so quickly forget and run past what Christ did? I've alluded to this multiple times, as he was on the cross itself, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Now, by what contortion of human thought, by what distortion of human language, by what offense against divine love can we look at that and appropriate it for ourselves? "God, thank you for your mercy to my sinful soul," and then as Jesus described in one of his parables, go and grab the person who has a debt against us and spiritually, if not literally, grab him by the neck and say, "Pay back what you owe! I've been forgiven, praise the Lord. Pay back what you owe! I'm going to get my pound of flesh from you." Good night, people. What is wrong with us? It's like R.C. Sproul said, what's wrong with you people? You've seen that little thing, right? It's a great line. What's wrong with you people? How can you not connect point A with point B? Christ for you, but that doesn't apply to you and your enemies? It's unthinkable. So in the silence of a moment, even within the sermon itself today, there's room for your repentance. "God, be merciful to me, the sinner."

Now, Jesus reinforces this. I've kind of anticipated the third point with what I've already said. Third point, why should you love your enemies? Why should you love your enemies? We've seen the Pharisees' distortion of biblical love. They said you should hate your enemies. We see what Jesus calls us to do instead. You do good to them, you pray for them, you have a completely different spirit that is reflective of his. And then, you know, if ever there was going to be a perfect attorney, Christ would have been a perfect attorney. In fact, that word's used to describe him, isn't it? He's an advocate, our advocate with our Father who is in heaven. But just the way that he makes his case and reinforces it with unassailable logic here, just that in itself calls for great respect to him and great worship. Christ calls you to this character and then gives you reasons why and I'm going to just list out two of them for you. Why should you love your enemies? You consider the actions of God and you consider the actions of sinners. The actions of God and the actions of sinner. In other words, what we're about to see, Christ removes our personal enemies, our personal opponents entirely from the equation. He's saying, "We're going to set them aside, and I just want you to think about something else. I want you to think about God and the way that sinners themselves interact with one another, to see that what I am saying," what Christ is saying, "is perfectly reasonable and the only way that it could possibly be."

So consider the actions of God in verse 45. Verse 45, the actions of God. Verse 45 reads, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." The son has a nature like his father. So I want you to have a nature in your inner man like what characterizes that of your Father who is in heaven. And what does he do? "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." When we have a beautiful day like we've got today, sinners against God get to enjoy it just as much as you and I who are in Christ do. When we need rain, when the ground is dry and parched, God sends the rain, not simply on those, he doesn't go house by house, lot by lot, apartment by apartment and say, "Oh, this one's mine, here's an inch of rain for you, nothing for you next door." He just generously pours it out on everyone without regard to their response to him. God gives common grace to all people. He provides blessings even for the unsaved, hostile people against him so that they enjoy blessing in this life. When an

unsaved man, a vile blasphemer, sits down for a nice dinner at a restaurant with his family, he is enjoying a grace from God that he's not entitled to. God could withhold it from him, but he just generously provides it all the same, even when that pagan gives him no thanks and no regard in response. God could condemn everyone, but instead he shows patience, long-suffering patience for some men and women, 70, 80 years of patient forbearance toward their idolatry and their opposition to him.

Jesus' point here, my dear friends, is that if God can treat his enemies like that, you should too, even if it is an ungrateful spouse, even if it is a disobedient child, even if it is a stingy, unappreciative boss, even if it is an inconsiderate coworker, even if it is a bad neighbor, even if fill in the blanks with the one who comes to your mind right now. You see, the nature of the horizontal offense against you doesn't control, doesn't define or determine your response as if I'll just do good to people who do good to me. That's not the way God is. So on what grounds do you distinguish yourself from God? It's unthinkable, isn't it? When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.

But Jesus brings it even further. You say, "Well, that's too high and lofty. God, you know, is God. He has resources I don't have." Well, Jesus takes it further. See, the whole idea is Jesus is speaking to his disciples and to be a disciple of Christ is to be in union with him, to have your sins forgiven, to have his righteousness imputed to you, to be called to a different life, a godly life, a Christ-like life that is on a completely different plane. And yet the Pharisees were saying, no, you love your neighbor and you hate your enemy. Keep that in mind. Love your neighbor, hate your enemy. You don't have to be good to people who aren't good to you. Jesus obliterates this in verse 46. He said, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" What have you done that's so great if you love someone who loves you back? "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?" The tax collectors were universally reviled by the first century culture. They were traitors to the Jewish nation. But they could at least be kind to one another. They were outcasts, and yet they are kind to those who are kind to them. Jesus is saying, "As my disciple, if you only show favor to those who have first shown you favor, how are you any better than the worst of sinners around you?" There's a camaraderie and there's a code of honor even among thieves. That doesn't make us justify thievery.

The whole point, the whole point is this, is that you must show higher virtue than sinners, including the way that you respond to those who wrong you. Don't think the fact that you say hi and you can be warm and friendly to people who are warm and friendly back, that that shows what a righteous person you are. That is not the righteousness that God calls you to. He calls you to something higher than that. Sinners can do that. Sinners do that. Sinners can say hello to friendly people. No, what Jesus says is, "I call you to go way beyond that. I call you to something utterly higher than that, including the way that you respond to those who wrong you." Look, in our natural man, this is impossible to do. This is more than just difficult, this is impossible, and what Christ has done here as he's gone through these six examples is he has shown us our inner man and shown us how much we

need divine favor and we need salvation in Christ because our nature is not like his. We need to be redeemed. We need to be delivered from our sinful, selfish selves.

How do we sum all of this up? What's the righteousness that Christ calls us to? Look at verse 48, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." What is the righteousness that God calls you to? Christ himself says it's nothing less than the perfect character of God himself in all of his purity, all of his honesty, all of his truth, all of his love, all of his charity, all of his kindness. And we see how we fall short is set forth in the clearest relief when we see how God responded to his enemies and how we respond to ours and it's devastating to see how far short we fall.

Let me ask you a question: in light of these things, aren't you glad that Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and to save the lost? When your lostness has been exposed, when the depth by which you fall short of the glory of God is exposed, isn't it wonderful to know that there was a Savior who loved us, who came and died and rose again in order to reconcile us to a God whose holiness we could not meet? If we know Christ, if he saved us and he's responded to us, then we embrace even the way that he loved his enemies as the pattern by which we love our own. Look, trust me, trust me, trust me, I know what this feels like. I know what you feel like. This is hard. This is painful. But in Christ, we have every motivation, every reason that we could ever want or need to embrace it. Having received mercy, we give mercy. Having received undeserved favor, we dispense it. To the extent that this is you and you've believed in Christ and you see how far short you fall, you've been forgiven, the blood of Christ covers even your failure to love your enemies like he loved his. If you're not a Christian, look at the standard and look at the divine love that has already been showered upon you in common grace and the life and blessings that you've gotten to enjoy, and let the love of an offer of salvation draw you and compel your heart to come to Christ in repentance and to put your faith in him today. Trust in Christ. Rejoice in him. And then go and sin no more.

Let's pray together.

*It's inevitable, Father, in a fallen world, there will be people that we offend and that offend us. Let us never forget the gracious way that you have dealt with us and help us to respond to those who have offended us with a like generous spirit. Father, it's never at the price of truth. We speak the truth in love. We never embrace lies for the sake of an outward peace. But Lord, give us that non-angry, non-lustful, non-retaliatory, honest, loving, gracious spirit. Give it to us by your Spirit, dear Father, that we might walk in the steps of the one who first loved us and gave himself for us on the cruel cross of Calvary. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

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