

Apprenticed to Jesus: Indiscriminate Love

Matthew 5:43-48

Introduction: Today we look at one more example that Jesus gives of what it looks like to have a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). In this passage, Jesus addresses how we are to treat our enemies and those who persecute us. His challenge to us is to live with an indiscriminate love.

Opening Discussion: Have you ever felt as if you've had actual enemies?

Read Matthew 5:43-48

1. What was the tradition of teaching that Jesus' listeners had heard?
2. Did the Old Testament actually teach that one should hate his enemy?
3. If you were in the original audience listening to this teaching from Jesus, how radical would these words have seemed to you?
4. How do verses 45-48 relate to the command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?

Steve said:

The command of Jesus is clear: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. As I mentioned last week when we talked about replacing revenge with generosity, this sounds good here on Sunday morning, but how can we actually do this in everyday life? When our enemies try to make our lives miserable or when people belittle us for our faith, everything within us wants to say, "Fine! Two can play this game. I'm going to try to make you miserable and I'm going to belittle you!" How do we learn to live better than that?

5. How CAN we learn to "live better than that" and therefore love our enemies?
6. What would have to happen in your heart to pray for someone who mistreats you?

7. What difference might it make to pray for an enemy?

Steve said:

. . . we are bound by covenant to a God who says, "I love My enemies, therefore you should love your enemies." This demands that ***we pay attention to the heart of God toward people.*** We don't act on the basis of what people "deserve" or on the basis of what seems fair; God hasn't given us what we deserve and hasn't treated us "fairly" – He has lavished grace on us in Christ Jesus. Therefore we treat others the same way. We act in a way that shows off our family resemblance with God.

8. How can we learn to not act on the basis of what people "deserve" or on the basis of what seems fair?

9. What helps you "pay attention to the heart of God toward people?"

Steve said:

A short-term strategy for learning to love indiscriminately: ***Pray for people who wrong you.*** If we want to develop the capacity to pray for those who persecute us – who are antagonistic to us because of our loyalty to Jesus – we need to be in the habit of praying for people who wrong us in everyday situations. Unless we are in the habit of praying for disagreeable people in general, what makes us think we'll be prone to pray for people who actually persecute us?

10. Do you have any situations in which you can apply this short-term strategy?

Steve said:

A long-term strategy for learning to love indiscriminately: ***Receive and experience the cleansing, healing, refining love of God every opportunity you get.*** Jesus' teaching presupposes that His disciples experience and grasp the love of God. Without that experiential knowledge of God's love, the idea of loving our enemies will seem like a strange, unreasonable way to live. With a deep experiential knowledge of God's love, we will perceive things that others miss; we will develop skills that allow us to treat people with more generosity than we ever imagined.

10. Why is it so important to receive and experience God's love in order to learn to love our enemies?

11. How would you summarize what you sense God is calling you to do in response to Jesus teaching?