

Love Your Enemies

Key Verses: *“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*
—*Matthew 5:43,44,*
English Standard
Version

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 5:38-48

IN TODAY’S LESSON, THE

Lord describes the transition from the Law Covenant to a higher standard for God’s chosen people. Indeed, Jesus satisfied the requirements of the Law for all Jews who were condemned under its ordinances. “Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile against us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Col. 2:14, *New American Standard Bible*) A higher law now came into view where love for others

would be more important than the letter of the Law.

In today’s lesson we hear the Master telling his disciples that they are to take their love for friends and brethren and extend it to even their enemies. We can only imagine the confused thoughts of his Jewish audience. God had told them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) Surrounding nations had persecuted them for their entire existence, and many were intent on destroying them. Now, Jesus says, they were to love their enemies.

By contrast, Israel was accustomed to protecting itself from surrounding enemies, lest they be destroyed. When Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew 5:38, “Ye have heard

that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” the disciples no doubt felt he would confirm their favored relationship with God. However, they were probably perplexed when he continued in verse 39, saying, “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” This was not a course of action they had ever known or lived by.

Jesus knew these Jewish disciples did not yet understand this commandment. We see in hindsight that he was instructing them as to the character which would lead the true Christian into the kingdom. This understanding would only come after he had fulfilled the Law through his death on the cross, after which the begetting power of the Holy Spirit would come upon those who the Father would draw to him. It was imperative, however, that Jesus instruct his disciples while he was present with them concerning the kind of love which would be required of them. It would exceed the love which should have made them appreciate and keep the Law Covenant. It would also exceed brotherly and neighborly love because “if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?”—vs. 46

Jesus finished his lesson on this subject by saying, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (vs. 48) This instruction must have been bewildering to the Master’s audience. The apostles would later clarify how that God has set himself as the grand copy that we are to emulate. We must love all without exception. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8) The Apostle John said, “God is love.” (I John 4:8) Just as God’s perfect standard of love includes all sinners, or enemies, we are to likewise develop that heart quality as his children. We cannot do this perfectly, but God makes up for our shortcomings in this regard by clothing us with the “garments of salvation” provided through the redemptive merit of his Son’s ransom sacrifice.—Isa. 61:10 ■