

Lesson Seven

Obeying Jesus, I Love My Enemies

As we come to this place in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we come to that something that may be the most difficult thing that Jesus tells us to do. Jesus' teachings that are found here in Matthew 5:38-48 command us to do things that we do not normally do. Our faith is tested as we listen to Jesus and seek to obey him. Can we really do good to those who hurt us? Can we really love our enemies? Can we give to those who have hurt us in the past and probably will hurt us in the future? Is it really possible for anyone to live by the teachings of Jesus that we find here?

We know for certain that this is difficult. This is a challenge. But we also know that Jesus commands us so that we will obey. These are not just suggestions for us to consider. They are commands for us to carry out in our lives. The Holy Spirit will help us as we seek to obey, and we will need his help. These teachings are some of the most distinctive things which Jesus taught. As we obey them, we show the world the way that Jesus truly intended his disciples to live. If we disobey these commands, our Christianity is something far less than what Jesus wants it to be.

All of the world is caught in a cycle of revenge. One person hurts another person and that person seeks revenge. When he takes revenge, the other person is deeply wounded and angry. That person then takes revenge on the one who has taken revenge on him. If one of these persons dies, often their families will continue the cycle. This cycle can be seen in every corner of the world. Witch doctors and Sorcerers love this cycle of revenge. People come to them, bringing money, to help them take revenge on another person. That person comes for protection, and then he comes seeking to harm the person who is trying to take revenge on him. Witch doctors become wealthy, while only death, harm and hate come to people who are trying to take revenge.

The apostle Paul wrote to Titus about this attitude which is found all over the world. In Titus 3, Paul is telling Titus to urge Christians on the island of Crete to be kind and patient with those who are not Christians now. To help them be patient and kind with non-Christian neighbors, family and friends, Paul reminds them of how they lived before they were Christians:

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Titus 3: 3

Before they became Christians, they followed their evil desires. This caused them to live lives of immorality. They were slaves to their desires. But their desires also led them to hate other people. People hated them, and they hated people. That was the way they lived before they became Christian. But they were saved, and their lives changed.

What do we do when someone wrongs us? How do we treat them? How do we respond to what they have done? This is what Jesus is talking about as he teaches us how to respond to those who seek to harm us:

38" You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:38- 48

When we read these verses at first, it seems as if Jesus is speaking about two different things. As we look closer, we can see that Jesus is talking about the same thing in both of these sections. He is teaching us about how we act and treat those who wrong us and hate us.

Jesus speaks two times of things that have been said in the past. The first statement is found in verse 38. Jesus told them that they had heard that it was said, **“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”** These words and this principal was used often in the law of Moses. We find it in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:19, and Deuteronomy 19:21. In all of these places, these words describe the punishment that should be given for a wrong that was done to another person. It referred to penalties that were given by a judge in deciding the right punishment for a wrong done to another person. But many people were using it as a principal for life. This was not what God wanted people to do. When these words become a principal for life, then we are always trying to make things even. We seek to take revenge to make things right. Jesus tells us not to do that. Instead, turn the other cheek. Give to those who want to take from you. Help those who are forcing you to do something for them.

The second thing that Jesus referred to was a saying that was partly the Word of God and partly the word of man. Jesus told them that they had heard that it was said, **“Love your friends and hate your enemies.”**

Which part of the saying do you think was the Word of God? Which part was the word of man?

Read Leviticus 19: 18. What does God command the people of Israel to not do?

What does God command them to do in this verse?

Jesus takes the command of God in Leviticus 19: 18 and applies it to all people, even to those who have wronged us in some way.

Read Matthew 5: 38 – 42 again. Jesus speaks of three things that people might do that would hurt us. What are those three things?

1.

2.

3.

Jesus tells us to do three different things in response to these three things that might harm us. What are these three things that we are to do?

1.

2.

3.

There is a fourth thing that Jesus tells us to do in verse 42. What is it that Jesus commands us to do?

In Matthew 5: 43 – 48 Jesus speaks about those who are our enemies. Everyone hates their enemies. Everyone believes that they should hate their enemies. When someone is against me, it is very easy to hate them. When they do things to hurt me, it is very easy to hate them and try to hurt them in return. Instead of hating our enemies, what does Jesus command us to do?

Jesus gives very specific things for us to do to show our love for our enemies. There are two specific things that Jesus mentions in these verses. What two things does Jesus say that we are to do for our enemies?

1.

2.

Jesus also explains why it is important for his disciples to love their enemies. What are two reasons Jesus gives for loving our enemies?

1.

2.

In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus teaches his disciples to return good for evil. In Matthew 5:43-48, he commands them to love their enemies. These two sections are very similar. People who harm us and try to hurt us are usually the people we would call our enemies. Are these two sections really talking about the same thing?

Luke 6 helps us to answer this question. In this chapter we read about another times that Jesus was teaching. It is not talking about the same time as Matthew 5, 6 and 7. In Matthew 5 we are told that Jesus went up on a mountain, sat down and began to teach his disciples. In Luke 6, we read that Jesus went down and stood on a level place. The lesson in Luke 6 is sometimes called the sermon on the plain.

Read Luke 6:27-36. Jesus teaches us about the same things that we read in Matthew 5:38- 48. In Luke, it is clear that Jesus is talking about the same thing when he talks about loving our enemies, and doing good to those who do evil to us. In your own words, explain the principal that Jesus is trying to teach us here:

In the words of Jesus, we have a principal that can change the world. As we follow Christ, we can stop the cycle of revenge. We can change the lives of many people. How does following Jesus' teaching stop the cycle of revenge?

Most all of us have some enemies. These are people that we know are against us. They will try to hurt us if they have an opportunity. What do we do about them? In the world, the answer is always the same. If you hurt me, I will hurt you. If you hurt me again, I will hurt you again. If you try to kill me, I will try to kill you. This is the way of the world. This is the way that many, many people live all of their lives. Jesus commands us to break the cycle. Do not resist an evil person. Do not retaliate. Do not strike back. Instead, do good to them, give to them, help them, and greet them as if they were your brother. This is what Jesus commands us to do.

Everyone loves their friends. Even the most evil person will love that person who helps them and does them good. Jesus commands us to be different. He wants us to live by a different principal. As we live by the words of Jesus and follow his example, we can help people break the cycle of revenge in their lives. There is probably nothing that can change the lives of people more than this teaching of Jesus. If you obey the teaching of Jesus and begin to love your enemies, you will begin to change the world where you live!

Assignment:

Read and summarize what is taught in these other Scriptures in the New Testament:

Romans 12: 17 – 21

I Peter 2: 21 – 23

I Peter 3: 8, 9

Think about a person that you know who is truly your enemy. Pray for that person every day this week. Do not neglect to pray for them, but pray that God will bless them and help them overcome sin in their lives. Pray for them every day.

As you consider what Jesus had commanded us to do, what changes do you need to make in your life?