

“HOW TO HANDLE ENEMIES?”

Text: Matthew 5:43-48

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INTRODUCTION:

1) Teaching of a grandma: When I was a small child, grandma lived with us and she was a blessing to all of us, especially me. Being a very devout Christian and a traditional Chinese, she taught me a lot of things on how to handle life. Among the things she taught me was how to handle “enemies.” She told me to behave well to all people, be patient, never argue, don't get in fights, resolve problems with reasoning instead of shouting. She also taught me to be nice, be helpful, be friendly to all people, and be honest. She said that things would go well with me if I follow her instruction and I won't have any enemies. Although I always love and admire my grandma, tried very hard to do what she asked me to do, but life didn't turn out the way she thought it would. I won't say she was ignorant, but she was definitely naive on what this world is really like. I have lived long enough to know that you will have enemies no matter how well you do with life and people around you.

2) Teaching of the Bible: The Bible, especially from Jesus, the teaching on how to handle enemies is clear and cordial: “But I tell you: Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other side. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 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.” (Matt 5:38-42) Who could compete with the giants of faith in the Bible like Moses, King David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jesus himself and his faithful disciples John, Peter, Paul, etc. the way they lived their lives and the number of enemies they had in their life time. Yes, being nice, humble, friendly, patient and cordial is good, but that alone isn't a guarantee that you won't have enemies. To have enemies is part of being human regardless how you lead your life.

WHY ARE THERE ENEMIES? No one may know all the reasons enemies are there in this world. Here are some of more obvious reasons:

1) They oppose you because you do right: “The Lord said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crunched at your door.” (Genesis 4:6-7) Cain became enemy of his brother Abel not because of anything Abel did wrong, but because Abel did it right. There are times we

become targets of slander and attack because we do the right thing. This was in Cain's time, it is still true today. If you are faithful, diligent and honest in school or at work, you can easily become enemies of those who are lazy and cheating on their homework or tests or on their job at work. If you are not a party animal you can become target of ridicule, slander, boycott, etc.

2) They oppose you because of jealousy: “But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles, he sees the form of the Lord. Why then you were not afraid to speak against my servant?” (Numbers 12:7-8) Miriam and Aaron opposed Moses because they were jealous of the way God treated Moses and talked to him face to face. God bestowed favor on Moses because he was faithful in serving God and following his commands. Sometimes enemies will rise against you because God showered on you his blessings because you are faithful in following Him. This can be in your school, at your job, at home or among friends. Being faithful to God and people may become cause of opposition, even from those closest to you, as in the case of Moses.

3) They oppose God, so they oppose you: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil things against you because of me.” (Matt 5:11) This is about enemies who oppose us because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Christians around the world, including here in the United States, are being persecuted, slandered, attacked, smeared with all evil words and thoughts even vapors of murder completely because we live by the word of God. They become enemies of us because of our standing with Jesus Christ. Law were passed to protect the vile and evil but to persecute those who believe in Jesus. Today, September 24, Pope Francis, addressed the US Congress to create laws that will protect religious freedom. Jesus promised us that if we become enemies of anti-God people, “Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (5:12)

4) They oppose you when they feel threatened: “The whole city was roused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar.” (Acts 21:30-31) This is exactly the same as when the temple guards came to arrest Jesus in John 18. Both of these happened because of the power base, the priests, scribes, the Pharisees felt threatened of their position, power and all the privilege they enjoyed. You

will become targets of persecution, smearing, false accusation when you are a direct threat to those who hold power over you. This happens in politics, in business, in society, sometimes at home and even in the church.

COMMON HUMAN PRACTICES:

1) Most of us love those we like: This is from Lev. 19:18, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” To love means to care, to help, and to forgive as explained in Ex 23:4-5, and Deut. 21:1-4. The theme of loving neighbors is also repeated in Mt 19:19, 22:39, Mk 12:31, Lk 10:27, Rom 13:9 and Gal 5:14. Most people will love their families, but not their neighbors, at least not that much. Many of us are friendly to those whom we like, with similar background, speak same language, or similar social-economic and education level. It is common that we find it hard to mingle with people we don't like or have little in common. This is true even among Christians, or people in the church. Some don't even love people in their families, between parents and children or among siblings. Paul said those who don't provide for family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim 5:8) May God forgive us of our sin against our loved ones, family and neighbors.

2) Many of us hate those we don't like: Here “enemy” doesn't mean soldiers we meet in battle fields, but those who are antagonistic to us. God cannot have a double stand for us to love some people and hate others. Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, hate your enemy”, that isn't from God's word but from words of the scribes and Pharisees, human standard from selfish and self-righteous perspectives. Many cultures, including Chinese culture, glorify hating enemy or taking revenge against enemies. Recently Ben Carson was involved in some controversy on if a Muslim could become the president of the United States. His point of view: How can a Muslim who believes in a religion that promotes hatred and violence against non-Muslim people, to execute his duty as a president to follow the US Constitution that is based on love, tolerance, mutual acceptance and democracy. But you don't have to be a Muslim to hate your enemies and do things that are in direct opposition of the law of God.

HIGHER COMMAND OF THE LORD:

1) He commanded us to love enemies: “But I say to you: love your enemies.” (5:44a) Human tendency is to base love on desirability of the object of our love. We love those who are attractive, who are nice to us, hold similar value of life as ours, on similar life style and habits. To sum it up: We love those

who are lovable in meeting our criteria. But that isn't what Jesus wants us to love. God loves us not because we are qualified or lovable and he doesn't need to love us to make Him complete, but we need His love to make our lives complete. "Our enemies" may not be people who threaten our safety but those who are mean, impatient, judgmental, selfish and self-righteous, always disagree with you, those you don't want to associate with but want to keep them away. This is mostly about personal relationship, and God wants us to love them, all of them. This is in complete opposite to our human practice, but is exactly what God wants us to do.

2) He commanded us to pray for them: "And pray for those who persecute you." (5:44b) When men live in sin, there is some conviction of sin in their hearts. Some tried to buy themselves out by relying on religion and practice self discipline. Others will completely deny the existence of God who will ultimately judge all sinners and their sins. These were and are those who will go all the way to persecute those who hold God's rules to their hearts and lives. We see this happening in our society vividly today: The vile people of our country, led by a godless government and the Supreme Court, now making laws to persecute those who follow God's law. What are we going to do with these people who willfully persecute us? Jesus wants us to pray for them. To pray for someone is to have a merciful heart with concern and love. Instead of doing "pay-back" to these people, God wants us to show these people who we really are by doing the unexpected. In this way, we show them the sweet character of true disciples of Christ. (John 13:35)

THE PURPOSE OF DOING IT GOD'S WAY: (5:45-48)

1) Demonstrating the true sonship: "In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (5:45) To love our enemies and to pray for our persecutors shows that we are truly sons of our heavenly Father. The aorist tense of *genesthe*, to become, indicates a once and for all action. To love enemies and to pray for our persecutors doesn't make us sons of God, but gives evidence that we are already his children, for we do what God did to the good and the evil. Everyone loves the lovable. We are to love both, and particularly the unlovable. In this we demonstrate the true character of God and His love for us and the rest of the world.

2) Attaining the perfection of God: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (5:48) The sum of Jesus' teaching here and all He teaches in the Bible is in these verse: Attaining the perfection of our God.

The purpose of all the teaching in the Bible is to point us to a direction and a path on which we may achieve what God desires us to achieve: To be like Him. *Teleios* (perfect) basically means “to reach an intended goal or to complete”, and is usually rendered “mature”, but the meaning here is to perfect because God is the ultimate standard of perfection. The perfection of God is utterly impossible in man's own power. Jesus knew this and later he said, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matt 19:26) When God demands, He also provides the power to accomplish. Man's righteous-ness is possible but is imperfect and therefore worthless. God's righteousness is perfect but is impossible for man. This impossible righteousness of God becomes possible for those who are children of God through their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only way we can do the impossible.

THINGS WE CAN DO:

1) Be peace-makers: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as you can do, live at peace with all people.” (Romans 12:17-18) Everywhere you go in the world, there are people who love to be your enemies. There is never short supplies of people who love to make your life miserable and very difficult. They will always oppose you, irritate you, disagree with you, try all they can to stop you from achieve any thing. This happens in politics, in business, at work place, in schools and even in some churches. But we are called to be peace-makers, to forgive, to bring harmony, so solve conflicts, tear down walls, building bridges. We are to be a blessing to all who live with us, work around us. Do your best to be a peace-maker wherever you are as God wants you to be.

2) Be peace agents: “I have become all things to all men so that by by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”” (1 Corinth 9:22b-23) All men without the faith in Jesus and forgiveness of sin are enemies of God. We are here in this world to bring them to God for eternal life. So, we need to be instruments of God's grace to all people, not just make peace with us, but make peace with God through Jesus Christ. Like Paul, we all are called to be messengers of the gospel message. We are to do all we can to bring people to make peace with