



Why is it difficult to love those whom we consider cruel and despicable?



Matthew 5:48

'You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'



The real test of love comes in how we relate to those who we think deserve our hatred.



LOVING THE UNLOVABLE, IS IT POSSIBLE?

Read Matthew 5:38-48

1. In verse 38, Jesus quoted the Old Testament law of retaliation "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:24). How are we to understand the meaning of justice from this law?

And how was it misused by the religious leaders in Jesus' day? Do we still encounter similar attitude today?

2. What did Jesus mean when he said that we must not 'resist the one who is evil' (v. 39)?

How would you naturally respond in the examples Jesus gives in verses 39-42?

How could we apply these examples today? In what ways we might apply these examples wrongly?

3. Compare verse 43 to Leviticus 19:17, 18. To what extent has the original commandment been misinterpreted in Jesus' day? What does it say about our natural inclination when it comes to loving other people?
4. What did Jesus say in relation to how we must treat our enemies? (verses 44-45)

A tendency to insist on our own rights lies deep in the heart of man, and it is nowhere more apparent than in the natural human instinct for retaliation. We believe in fair play. So strong is our sense of it that we naturally tend to justify retaliation as "evening the score" or "giving the other man what he deserves." C. S. Lewis found this idea so universal in the human race that he even used it as the basis of his argument for moral law and for the existence of God in the opening pages of his most popular book, Mere Christianity.

Jesus says that this is not the way Christians are to live. Instead of insisting on our rights we are to yield them up, particularly our imagined right to retaliation, in order that the preaching of the gospel might not be hindered. We shall be abused. We shall be persecuted often, but we are not to fight back.

(James M. Boice, The Sermon on the Mount, 136)

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5. What makes Jesus' command in verses 45-48 remarkable?

Our obedience to Jesus' teaching should overflow from a heart attitude that is rightly oriented toward God. We must not be satisfied simply with following the letter of the law, which takes us back to the error of the scribes and Pharisees, but we must seek the intent and motive of the law. The obedience expected of all disciples [is] an obedience that becomes qualitatively more righteous as we operate from the proper motive behind them. Jesus did not come to abolish the intention of God as expressed in the law but brings us back to it, expressed most fully in his reaffirmation of the Old Testament imperative to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and ... [to] love your neighbor as yourself" (22:37).

(Michael Wilkins, The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew, 258)

THINK THROUGH FURTHER

6. What did Jesus mean when he said that we are to perfect just as our heavenly Father is perfect? (v. 48)

Is it possible to achieve such perfection that we no longer sin in this world?



THINK &
APPLY

7. How did Jesus practice what he preached in regards to not resisting an evil person (v. 38) and loving his enemies (v.44)?

8. In what ways we can reflect our heavenly Father's character towards those who are mistreat and cruel towards us?

PRAISE GOD that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees that true justice has been and will be served.

CONFESS to God our failure to love our enemies the way he has loved us.

ASK GOD to help you to see how suffering for the sake of Christ is to be expected and embraced by his followers.

PRAY ALSO
For Scots' Church in our witness in the City. Pray that we may become an agent of reconciliation through our ministry and attitudes towards the city.

PRAYER



Praise God for the challenges raised by God's Word through this study.

Praying for others in your group:



FAMILY
DISCUSSION

How does this passage apply to our daily life?



READ AHEAD

For next week's study read Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18