**Good Kids Love the Bad Ones**

Matthew 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44**But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45**so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46**For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47**And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48**You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (ESV)

Let’s be clear about one thing: the Old Testament nowhere commands that a person hate their enemy. When Jesus says “You have heard it said” the saying was not done by Him in the Law, but by people that had twisted the Word of God to their own liking. It is likely people looked at God’s commands to the Israelites in the Old Testament—the ones that commanded them to exterminate certain people groups—and took this as license to hate and fight against those who we consider our enemies. And how often do we do that? Using Scripture to justify our own desires, our hatreds, our prejudices, our anger and rage towards another.

Jesus shows us a better way. Actually, Jesus’ demands are more strict than those of the Law in the Old Testament. He commands that we love those who we are inclined to hate—that we demonstrate love to those who hurt us. That is a much harder command to follow than to love your neighbor. We all love the people that love us—the people that treat us right. But love is active. Love is a decision to treat others with kindness and care regardless of how they may treat us. Love is a choice. Often we think of love as a feeling—and at times it is. We feel love for our significant other and our family, but we choose to treat them with love. In the same way, Jesus isn’t telling us we have to FEEL a certain way about our enemies, but that we SHOW love to them. It is hard to FEEL love towards someone that has hurt us and treats us like an enemy, but we are called not to FEEL love but to SHOW love. But then we find something amazing God does in our heart. C.S. Lewis puts it best:

*“Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love him.” – C.S. Lewis*

When we are acting in love towards others we find that suddenly we don’t hate them or dislike them like we did before. Acting as though we love someone brings us to a place where we do really FEEL love for them. It is the beauty of the Gospel. Jesus knows when we SHOW love we will soon FEEL love. It may not work that direction in a dating relationship or even family relationship, but in our general social relationships we are called to approach it from this angle. We often live our lives showing love to those who we feel love for first. We often FEEL love first and then SHOW love second. But Jesus calls us to SHOW love first—FEEL love second. But then, Jesus takes it even further and says not just to love those who hurt you but to pray for them. He wants us to SHOW our love for them first by praying good things for them. He’s not telling us to pray for their downfall or pray judgement on them, but to pray loving things such as the blessings of God and salvation for them. What better way to demonstrate love towards someone else? Let us not forget showing love doesn’t just have to be done in person. One of the most loving acts you can do for a person is pray for them, because it is very selfless to pray for a person—and love is not selfish. If you’re showing love to be seen you are doing it wrong. But just like C.S. Lewis said: when you show love to a person your heart changes, you will find that it is hard to hate someone when you are praying good things towards them.

There are things that come naturally to children. When a child grows up in a family that farms the child, most of the time, finds farming and the things of the outdoors to be most natural to them. When a child grows up in a musical family, musical talent tends to become their strong point. A sports-crazy family typically produces natural athletes. When it comes to internal attributes, a child raised in a family of drug addicts sometimes finds themselves naturally leaning towards similar ungodly practices, while a child raised in a godly home often stays away from sinful behavior at a young age. IN THE SAME WAY, children of God naturally love their enemies, because this is what God does. Just as God sends blessings upon both good and bad people, we should be prepared to treat both good and bad people with kindness and love at all times. It is what our Father does, how much more should us children seek to imitate Him?

It is natural of us as human beings to love those that love us. We all like the people that like us. That is normal human behavior, but it is the behavior of a believer to love those that hate us. When we love those that love us there is nothing special about that. It is what all us humans do. It is even what the bad human beings do. They love, but they only love those who love them back. But what does not come naturally to mankind comes naturally to children of God: loving your enemy.

Jesus finishes all of this by saying we must be perfect. What kind of demand is Jesus making? No one is perfect and no one can be perfect. We all know that. It doesn’t take a Christian to realize people aren’t perfect. We have even discussed that during this series. Jesus Himself said that no one is good, but now He is telling us to be perfect? Why this discrepancy? There is no discrepancy in what Jesus says. He wants us to realize that God is the standard of morality and His standard is too high for us to reach. To be truly holy in God’s eyes we would have to be perfect, never sinning or missing the mark. But we have already failed at that. That is why Jesus sent His Son, who was perfect, to be perfect in our place, dying for our sins. He demonstrated ultimate love for those that were His enemies. We were Christ’ enemies before we came to saving knowledge of Him. And yet He died for us!

Romans 5:7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8**but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (ESV)

The only perfect person to ever live showed love to His enemies in the ultimate act. And because He has shown love to His enemies (us) we are now empowered by His Holy Spirit to show love to our enemies as well. We CAN because Jesus DID. The love that we SHOW to our enemies is love only God can give us. Put your faith in Jesus and let the love of God overflow in your hearts towards all those around you. When we come to know God in a saving relationship, we come to know love.

1 John 4:8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (ESV)

To love without reserve is the height of perfection. And this perfection is only found in Jesus Christ and in faith in Him!