

God-Likeness

by Dick Woodward

The Sermon on the Mount teaches us to love our enemies and be perfect just as our Heavenly Father is perfect, which is possible only through Christ in us.

Duration: 22:08

Scripture: Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 5:17-20, Matthew 5:42-48

Topics: "God"

Description

In this sermon on the Sermon on the Mount, the teacher focuses on the challenging teachings of Jesus regarding how to relate to others. Jesus contrasts his teachings with those of the religious establishment, emphasizing that his teachings align with Scripture but challenge the traditional norms. The teacher highlights six paragraphs in which Jesus addresses various relational situations, such as dealing with adversaries, women, oath-taking, evil people, neighbors, and enemies. The teacher acknowledges that these teachings can be difficult to understand but emphasizes the importance of understanding them in the context of the overall message of the Sermon on the Mount.

Transcript

It is one thing for a person to slap you on the head, it hurts, but are we to return the blow? Hello, and welcome to our class here in the Mini-Bible College, where we are studying the teachings of Jesus Christ, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Our teacher will explain in today's lesson, so listen carefully to today's study entitled God-likeness. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you not to resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him as well.

If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, and do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even tax-collectors do so? Therefore, you shall

be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Some people feel that these are the two most difficult passages in the entire New Testament. Any time you announce that you are going to teach the Sermon on the Mount verse by verse, people cannot wait for you to get to these verses. They want to see what you are going to do with them.

Well, these are difficult passages to understand. In fact, unless you have some things really in perspective, unless you focus on certain truths, I believe it's impossible to understand these teachings. There are some things we must get into focus, into perspective, as we approach these paragraphs.

First of all, let us remember where they appear in the content of the Sermon on the Mount teaching. Remember this Sermon on the Mount began with a checklist about our spiritual health, with those eight beautiful attitudes. They challenged us to look inward and see whether in our hearts, by the grace of God, we have the attitudes that God wants us to have.

Those attitudes are essential if we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, part of Jesus' solution and part of his answer to all the problems in this world that were represented by the multitudes at the bottom of the mountain who had all those problems. Jesus, having told us to look inward in the beatitudes, then tells us to look around. What Jesus is suggesting in the largest part of Matthew chapter 5, actually beginning at verse 11, where he gives those illustrations about the candle on the candlestick and our being the salt of the earth, is not a profile of what the disciple is in his heart of hearts, but rather Jesus is talking to us now, when we get to verse 11 and following, about the disciple in the world.

We said that as you consider the context of this teaching, you see things like the crises involved in becoming a Christian, which according to Matthew is really not a matter of what is in it for the disciple as much as what is in it for his Lord. Is the disciple willing to be part of the Lord's solution, part of the Lord's answer? That is what we need to consider, the context in which the Sermon on the Mount is given. In the beatitudes, we see the character involved in being Christian, but then from verse 11 throughout the remainder of chapter 5 of Matthew, we see the challenge involved when that kind of character impacts its culture.

Beginning at verse 17 through verse 20, Jesus challenged the religious establishment when he said to his disciples, everything I'm going to teach you will agree with Scripture, but it will not agree with the religious establishment. And so in paragraph after paragraph, six paragraphs altogether, Jesus says, they have been telling you, but now let me tell you the truth. Six paragraphs begin with, it has been said and end with, but I say unto you here in Matthew chapter 5, they are very relational and show the disciple how to relate the beautiful attitudes and the reality of this new life in Christ to his brother, his adversary, to women and to his wife, to oath-taking, to evil people and to the neighbor and to the enemy.

In addition to doing that, and it is intensely relational. In this part of Matthew 5, our Lord is showing us how to approach Scripture and how to apply Scripture to our own lives and to the lives of others in the context of all these relationships we've just named. Jesus again is showing us the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law.

Jesus by example and by precept teaches that before you apply the law of God to the lives of people, pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God, through the prism of the law of the spirit, through the prism of a purpose of the law, and then apply it to yourself and to other people. In these two paragraphs of Matthew chapter 5, we have teaching that is very relational. If someone strikes you on the

cheek, if someone sues you, if someone forces you to go a kilometer, if someone asks something of you, if somebody wants to borrow from you, whether it's your neighbor or your enemy.

You see, this is intensely relational, and it is a very difficult part of this chapter as we've said. But before we approach these difficult paragraphs, we need to see them in their context, and the context has to do with the things that we have shared. Another important thing that we should focus on as we come to these difficult paragraphs is this.

All of this teaching on the mountaintop was given to disciples, not to the mixed multitude. The story at the end of Matthew 4 begins with a great multitude of people with all of their problems. But remember, out from that multitude, Jesus invited certain disciples to a retreat.

And the teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount was all given to the disciples. They were on the mountaintop with Jesus, looking down on that multitude, and all the teaching of this great Sermon on the Mount should be seen in that kind of perspective. They are looking together at the multitude and all the problems in the multitude, which of course represent the world and all of its problems.

All the teaching should be seen with that perspective. Jesus is saying, this is the teaching that will show you how to be part of my answer to all that down there, part of my solution to all that down there. But it is very important to understand this.

The teaching was not given to all those people at the bottom of the mountain. The teaching was given to the disciples who were saying by their presence there on the mountain that they wanted to be part of the solution and part of the answer. The very fact that they are called disciples means that they have a high level of commitment to Jesus.

What is a disciple? A disciple is a person who wants to be part of the answer and part of the solution. A disciple is willing to give his life to be part of the answer and part of the solution. A disciple is willing to sacrifice every possession he has.

Disciples are willing to put Jesus Christ and this mission of being a solution and an answer ahead of all the people in their own lives. Luke 14 shows us what we might call the cost of discipleship or you might say the commitment of discipleship. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Jesus is saying if you come to follow me and you're not willing to take up your cross and die for me, you cannot be my disciple. If you're not willing to put me first ahead of all the people in your life, husband, wife, father, mother, children, parents, you cannot be my disciple. I believe that kind of scripture needs to be understood as we approach these two difficult paragraphs, otherwise we will never make any sense out of them.

If we come to this teaching thinking that the first law of civilization is self-preservation, we are never going to understand this teaching. I believe that what we are saying now is that the key to understanding the last two paragraphs of Matthew chapter 5 is what you might call death to self or self-denial. The Apostle Paul understood the commitment of discipleship when he said, I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. That's in Galatians chapter 2 verse 20. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? It means to be willing to pick up your cross and follow him.

In the twelfth chapter of John, verse 24, when Jesus faced his own cross, he said, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it is a grain of wheat. It is only if it dies and is buried that it bears fruit. And then as he faced his own cross, he said, Father, my soul is greatly troubled, and what shall I say? Save me from this hour, but for this cause I came into the world.

John chapter 12 and verse 27. And so all he prays is, Father, glorify yourself. And the voice from heaven says, I have done that before, and I will do it again.

The American pastor, Dr. A.W. Tozer said, based upon John chapter 12, all of us should pray this prayer, Father, glorify yourself and send me the bill. Anything, Father, glorify yourself. If we have that as a premise, if we realize that it is possible to be crucified with Christ and yet still live, but like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, no longer are we living for ourselves, but for him who died for us and rose again.

If we have that in place, in our thinking, then these paragraphs make sense. If we have come to Christ to be part of his solution and part of his answer, and we have said to him, I am willing to die for this, show me where you want me to die, how you want me to die, and for what and for whom. Where do I pour my life out and sacrifice it for you? Then this teaching makes sense.

Jesus is saying, listen, if you want to impact the world and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, then when they strike you, don't resist, turn the other cheek. When they sue you and take away your inner garment, let them have the outer garment as well. It's my understanding that the Jewish people used to sleep using their outer garment as a blanket, and so it was considered illegal to take somebody's outer garment.

But Jesus is saying, let them have the outer garment as well as the inner garment. And if some Roman soldier forces you to carry his gear one kilometer, carry it too. And when someone asks something of you, let them have it.

If somebody wants to borrow from you, lend it to them. If you look at this kind of teaching and say, if I did that, I would lose everything, then this teaching is not going to make any sense. But a true disciple of Jesus Christ who understands the cost of discipleship and the commitment of discipleship has already lost everything.

He's already died to himself and denied himself. And so there's a sense in which he has nothing to lose. I understand there are places in the world like Ethiopia, when a fighting man goes off to war, his family has a funeral service for him.

When he leaves to go into battle, he's already dead. And there's a sense in which he has nothing to lose. He has already died before he's ever left home.

When five missionaries were martyred more than 40 years ago in Ecuador, one of the wives said that her husband had already died when he was in college. Because when he was in college, he faced this great crisis in his life, and he decided to take up his cross and die on it. And so he had a death to self kind of ceremony while he was in college.

She said he had died many years ago before he had ever gone out to be a missionary. I believe we have to have that kind of thing in focus in order to understand this kind of teaching. Jesus is saying in the first paragraph, and it is a negative statement, that what they are telling you is the old ethic, and it is found in the Scripture.

But as we saw, it was a limitation upon vengeance. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Then he gives teaching.

And the thrust of the teaching, the spirit of the teaching, and Jesus is saying the spirit of the law, always was this. You need to go down there off this mountaintop and tell those people down there that life is not just a rat race and a dog fight, because we are not rats and we are not dogs. You need to go down there and show people at the bottom of the hill that it does not have to be the way that it is.

The second paragraph, verses 43 through 48, is a positive statement. You have heard it said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That's Matthew chapter 5, verse 43.

Now there are places in the Scripture where it says love your neighbor, like Leviticus 19.18, but there is no place in the Old Testament where it says hate your enemy. It's understood in the Old Testament, as in the Psalms. You find these prayers that if you love God, you hate sin.

And so David, a devout man, would say that he hated the enemies of God. But there's no mandate that tells us to hate your enemy. It's like we saw with the divorce law.

There was no place where Moses commanded people to divorce. He just said that if you're going to divorce, in fairness to the wife, give her a certificate of divorce, explaining the conditions or the basis of that divorce. He was not really commanding people to divorce, but the scribes and the Pharisees were teaching it that way.

They were interpreting it and applying it as if Moses had said it that way. Here you have another example of that. Remember that question asked by the lawyer in response to which Jesus taught the parable of the Good Samaritan? Who is my neighbor? That was a very profound question because of the ethic of the time was not really taught by the Scripture, but was simply this.

Your neighbor is your fellow Jew, but everybody else, every non-Jewish person in the world is your enemy. And then this insinuation at least was given. Love your fellow Jew, but hate all those other people.

Jesus is a revolutionary, of course, but he is consistent with the spirit of the law when he says, let me tell you how it really ought to be. Love your enemies and bless those that curse you. Do good to those that hate you.

Pray for those who persecute you. Now this is the highest ethic that has ever been given or has ever been taught by anyone. And again, I don't think you can understand this kind of teaching unless you understand some of these basic perspectives that we have been sharing.

But if you have those basic perspectives in focus, then add to them this one. The motivation for loving your enemy and for responding to those who curse you and those who hate you and those who persecute you, the way that Jesus said that we should respond is this, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. Notice how the teaching ends.

Therefore, you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect. You see, all Jesus is doing is saying to be like God, to be like your Heavenly Father. Well, he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

He causes his son to shine on the evil and the good. If a farmer is a wicked man, he still lets the rain fall on his crops. Whether the farmer is good or whether the farmer is bad, God still does that.

The theologians call that common grace. But Romans chapter 5 tells us that while we were enemies of God, that is when he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son and sent him into the world to be nailed on a cross for the likes of you and me. So really, what he is saying in Matthew chapter 5 verse 48 is, therefore, you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Now the word perfect does not mean sinless perfection. It means be mature, be complete, be all that God created you to be. But if the word perfect bothers you, just leave it out for a minute, and as you look at verse 48, just emphasize these words.

Therefore you shall be just as your Father in heaven. Drop the word perfect at the beginning and the end of the verse and realize that what Jesus is teaching is simply this. And this is the summary of all this teaching about the spirit of the law.

Be ye therefore even as your heavenly Father is. Just be as God is. This sounds impossible, and of course it is impossible unless the basic Christian gospel is true.

You see, the most dynamic teaching in the New Testament will come later in the teaching in the epistles and on the other side of Pentecost. What is the most dynamic teaching in the New Testament? To me it's this, Christ in you, the hope of glory, Colossians chapter 1 verse 27. The fact that Christ can be in you, the fact that you can be in Christ, the fact that you can move through life together with him, to me that is the most dynamic teaching in the New Testament.

If that is not true, then the ethical teaching of the New Testament simply mocks us and it should do nothing but depress us and make us feel terrible about ourselves. But notice that throughout the New Testament there is a teaching that is assumed. And what is it? When the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5, husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church when he gave himself up for it.

When the Apostle Paul says, love even as Christ loves, give even as he gave and gives, Paul is really saying the same thing Jesus is saying here, be even as Christ is. Now is that possible? Well, I believe it is possible only because the most dynamic teaching in the New Testament is Christ in you, you in Christ. The Apostle Paul says in Colossians chapter 1, I've been raised up by God to share a secret with the church and that secret is simply this, that Christ in your heart is your only hope.

Colossians chapter 1 verse 27, has that come through to you yet? The teaching of the New Testament is absolutely impossible, it's ludicrous unless this great miracle is in place, Christ in you, you in Christ together with him. You see, the most dynamic teaching in the New Testament is true and that miracle is possible in your life and mine. That's what we see in the upper room where Jesus shares this great truth with the Apostles.

Jesus says, after I leave, we are going to be closer than we have ever been before because I'm going to be in you and you're going to be in me. Just as branches are connected to a vine, we're going to be connected to each other so that the reality of these things can come from the vine through the branch that you are and produce fruit at the end of the branch. I believe that the teaching of Jesus in these two paragraphs is possible.

It is as possible to obey these last two paragraphs of Matthew 5 as it is possible for a husband to love his wife and family even as or in exactly the same way as Christ loves us. It is possible for a husband and father to give even as Christ gives and to be even as Christ is because Christ is in that husband and that husband can be in Christ. And if Christ is in that husband and father and that husband and father is in Christ, it is not only possible, there is a sense in which we can say it is the normal Christian experience.

Here is the way normal Christian living responds to the evil in this world and the evil persons in this world like enemies. When they strike you, whenever they sue you, whenever they force you, whenever they ask you, whenever they borrow from you, whenever they persecute you or curse you or hate you, now how do you respond to that? Again, you cannot control the way that they're acting towards you. The only thing you can control is your response to them.

The commandment, the teaching is simply this. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. He came into the world to affect God's solutions and God's answers.

Remember the whole purpose of this first Christian retreat was to recruit solutions and answers who would be solutions and answers for God in exactly the same way that Jesus Christ was a solution and an answer by being in alignment with God. Now he says here in so many words, if you really are the sons of your father in heaven, if you really are his children, then be even as he is. Respond to all the evil in the world the way he responds.

Love your enemies. That is the way you become an answer and a solution for Jesus. God bless you until next time.

Our hope is that these lessons are helping you to grow in the knowledge of the scriptures and to discover their devotional meaning as it applies to your life. Until we meet again, may the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you and your family, giving peace and joy as we serve him by serving others.

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