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Love your enemies

We lived in Alberta for thirty-one years. You don't have to live there to know about the rivalry between the Edmonton Elks and Calgary Stampeders, the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames. The rivalry is intense. You don't find Elks and Oilers fans cheering for the Stampeders and Flames. That's just the way it is.

That is the way of the world. When it goes beyond rivalry to enemies, the feelings can become all-consuming hostility and hatred.

It should not surprise us then that many people have great and profound difficulty with what Jesus tells us about how we are to think of and relate to our enemies, as recorded in Matthew chapter 5.



“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may prove yourselves to 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (verses 43-48).

“How can that be?” “Why?” “How does that work?”

Let me sketch an outline of two questions.

First, what does it mean to love and pray for our enemies? We are to love all people with God’s love, to love them in the same way God loves us. How does God love us?

The apostle John wrote, “We know love by this, that He [Jesus] laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16).

Again, the apostle Paul tells us, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God’s love is His pure, grace-filled action of giving to us, providing what we need, what is good and best for us. Before we came to God through Christ, Romans chapter 5 verse 10 tells us we were enemies of God, that is, we rejected Him, His truth, His ways for us, His love for us. As He loved us when we were His enemies and now loves us as His children we are to love everyone — not any evil or sin in them, but love them as God loves us.

Then we are to pray for them, to pray that God would open their eyes to see His love for them, His grace that offers them everlasting life with Him.

The second question is “Why?” We can, and should start with this being God’s command to us. That is sufficient. In Matthew chapter 5 Jesus gives us another reason: by loving our enemies we will demonstrate, we will prove that we truly are God’s children, that we have been transformed by Jesus.

Love and hatred cannot coexist (for example, see 1 John 4:10).

Question: What is your *love quotient*? Spend some time with God walking through your feelings, attitudes and actions to people you know and people you don’t know. Deal with any non-loving attitudes and actions so that through love you will demonstrate, prove yourself to be one of God’s children.

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