

DOES GOD LOVE ALL MEN?

Matthew 5:43-48

Intro: Many Christians would answer this question in the affirmative without any qualification. They believe that God loves all men, all people, and that He loves them equally.

There are others who would say that God loves only the elect. They believe in what has been called, the distinguishing love of God. They believe that God has no place in His affections for the non-elect.

And then there is a third group. They believe that God loves all men, but that He loves them with a difference. They believe that He sets His special, redeeming love upon the elect, but that He still has a place in His heart for those who are not, and will not, be saved.

Which group is right?

The only place to find the answer is in the Word of God. Let us look at our text in Matthew 5:43-48 because there the Lord was dealing with this very question.

I. THE OLD COMMANDMENT (Matt. 5:43a).

For the fifth time in this chapter the Lord said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old." Cf. vv. 21, 27, 33, 38, and here. Matt. 5:1 makes it clear that the Lord was speaking to His disciples, and this statement indicates that they were Jews who were well-acquainted with the Law.

It is very clear that the Lord said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour." We see that in Lev. 19:18 where we read,
Thou shalt not avenge,
nor bear any grudge against the children
of thy people,
but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:
I am the Lord.

But it is a little more difficult to find where the Lord told them to hate their enemies.

The early part of the verse shows that a "neighbour" was a fellow-Jew. Thus, it was assumed that anyone outside of the pale of Judaism was to be hated.

But some have suggested that the Lord was thinking about Deut. 23:5, 6:

Nevertheless the Lord thy God
would not hearken unto Balaam;

but the Lord thy God turned the curse
 into a blessing unto thee,
 because the Lord thy God loved thee.
 Thou shalt not seek their peace
 nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.

This leads us to raise the question,

II. WHAT IS LOVE?

Deut. 23:6 gives us a definition by contrast. Loving means to seek peace for the one we love, or to seek their prosperity--every kind of prosperity.

We delight in the people we love. We pray for them. We pray that the Lord will keep them, and bless them, and provide for them, and prosper them.

This command to love their neighbors, but not to love their enemies was given at a time when God was leading the children of Israel into the promised land. They were to destroy all of the Canaanite nations--men, women, children, and, in some cases, perhaps most cases, even the livestock. The Lord was executing judgment on nations that had despised His grace for over 400 years since the days of Abraham. God's wrath was executed against the Canaanites, and the Israelites were not to do anything to help them, nor to seek their blessing in any way.

Hated did not mean to despise with bitter hatred, nor to delight in their downfall. We need to remember that the Lord used this word "hate" with reference to parents, wives, children, brothers, and sisters--even one's own life, in Luke 14:26. There it was a question of preference. The Lord was not encouraging the hatred of those in our families who are very dear to us.

And so this brings us to:

III. THE LORD'S COMMANDMENT (Matt. 5:44).

This was not exactly a new commandment because we have this very thing stated in Prov. 25:21, 22,

If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat;
 and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
 For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,
 and the Lord shall reward thee.

And you may recognize that Paul quoted these verses in Rom. 12:20.

Thus, according to the words of our Lord, we are not now

to hate our enemies, but to love them--which means doing good for them, and even praying for them. We may not like what they are doing to us, nor their attitude toward us, but we are to set that aside in favor of bringing help and blessing into their lives.

-- Then the Lord cited:

IV. OUR TRUE EXAMPLE (Matt. 5:45).

Our Example is our heavenly Father. What does He do? "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain of the just and on the unjust."

God is a God of mercy and of grace. His sun shines on the most wicked people, as well as the most righteous. The rain not only falls on the fields of the righteous farmer, but on the fields of the wicked farmer. God's goodness is seen everywhere in our universe and in His providential dealings with all men--if only we have the eyes to see what He is doing.

Now, if we hate our enemies, and love only those who love us, no one will ever think that we are the sons (lit.) of our heavenly Father. The word for "be" here is the Greek word for become. But it does not mean that we become the heavenly Father's sons by loving our enemies, but that we become that in the eyes of people when they see how we treat those who "hate" us and "despitefully use . . . and persecute" us.

\to pursue in order to harm.

\to threaten + insult.

Remember that one of the men who saw Stephen stoned, and who heard him pray, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," was Saul of Tarsus. Cf. Acts 7:58-60. Who knows what kind of an impression was made upon that future child of God and servant of our Lord Jesus Christ? He certainly reflected the attitude of our Lord, who, in similar circumstances, prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

So the people of God are to be known as people who love people, who seek their blessing, who pray for their enemies, and who will do all that they can to help them.

V. THE BAD EXAMPLE (Matt. 5:46, 47).

He is the publican. He was the lowest possible example of what a person should be in our Lord's day. He had become a traitor to the people of Israel in his greed for money. He would be good to those who were good to him, maybe, but those who hated him, he hated in return, and would do his utmost to hurt them.

This led the Lord to:

VI. HIS CONCLUDING EXHORTATION (Matt. 5:48).

There are two possibilities: Either to be like our heavenly Father, or to be like an unregenerate publican. Which will it be?

For the true child of God, there is really no choice. We want to be like our heavenly Father.

The Lord said something like this;

You (emphatic) shall be perfect,
just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

"Perfect" is used here in two ways. When we speak of God as being "perfect," we, of course, mean absolute perfection. He is the Ideal. There is no Standard or Example greater than He. If you and I are like He is (as we some day will be), there will be no greater position to which we can attain. Our heavenly Father is the Highest and the Best. Our goal is to be like He is.

But we have to face the fact that we are not perfect. We are headed in that direction, but we are not there yet. However, in this one respect, we can do no better than what God does, nor can we improve upon what He tells us to do. It may seem like the ridiculous thing to do at times. It certainly will be humbling, and many will interpret it as weakness instead of meekness. Nevertheless, the will of God is clear in this matter.

Concl: So the conclusion we have to reach is this: Yes, God does love all men. He may be angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. 7:11), but He has no pleasure in their death. There certainly is a place for the preaching of judgment. We see that in both the OT and the NT. But we need to remember that Paul said that it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance.

There is no doubt that God has a special, distinguishing love for His elect. Paul said that "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Even Jeremiah in the OT said that the Lord had appeared to him with a message for "the remnant of Israel." It was this (see Jer. 31:3):

Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love:
therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

The Apostle John said of our Lord that

. . . having loved his own which were in the world,
he loved them unto the end (John 13:1b).

God has a special love for His elect. It is an eternal and unchanging love. He loves us the same even when our love for

Him may grow cold. He loves us with a love that will not let us go.

He does not love the non-elect in the same way, but I really believe that it is wrong for us to give people the idea that God does not love the wicked, and that He will be glad to see all of them in hell.

Long ago the Lord said to Ezekiel (33;11),
Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God,
I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;
but that the wicked turn from his way and live:
turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways;
for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

We never know how the Spirit of God will work. We know that all of the elect will be eventually be saved, and no one but the elect. But what was the Lord Jesus doing as He taught the multitudes, and performed miracles for them, and showed such patience toward them, finally dying for sinners on the Cross, if He were not seeking to show all men that He is a good and merciful and loving God. It is true that "whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved." And so we should hold out that hope to all men, knowing that, if they come, it is all to the praise of a God who is love, not hate.