

International Conversation Cafe

New Testament: Jesus Teaches Us to Love Our Enemies, Matthew 5

Jesus Christ is the most loving person who ever lived. He loved his friends and celebrated with them at their weddings. He spent time with his followers and taught them to love their neighbors. To those who were considered unclean because of disease and deformity, he embraced and healed.

Jesus also taught his followers to love their enemies. Perhaps this is the most difficult command Jesus gave.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Matthew 5

What attitudes are Christians supposed to have about their enemies and why?

What are followers of Jesus supposed to do for their enemies?

What makes it difficult to obey his command?

Jesus showed love to his enemies, the Pharisees. But the Pharisees hated him because they were jealous of his following and did not believe he came from God. As a result, they often criticized and challenged him in public. The culture at that time was direct and confrontational.

How did Jesus respond? Sometimes, he challenged them and pointed out their prideful behavior.

²³ “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretenders! You give God a tenth of your spices, like mint, dill and cumin. But you have not practiced the more important things of the law, like fairness, mercy and faithfulness.

²⁵ “How terrible for you, teachers of the law and Pharisees! You pretenders! You clean the outside of the cup and dish. But on the inside you are full of greed. You only want to satisfy yourselves. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish. Then the outside will also be clean. Matthew 23

Describe Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees in verse 23.

How would you describe Jesus’ tone toward the Pharisees?

To love someone does not mean that you always “like” him or her. It does mean that you are committed to the truth and to their good. How does Jesus love in this confrontation?

Some cultures are very direct in giving criticism. Describe how people in your country talk to others when they want to point out a fault. Because Jesus was compassionate, it would follow that Jesus pointed out their errors in hopes they would repent.

*Have you ever had anyone confront you about a behavior that was wrong?
How did their correction make you feel?
Could they have confronted you in a better way than they did?
Did they have good advice? Did you follow it?*

Jesus was terribly mistreated by the Pharisees yet Jesus never sought revenge on them. On the contrary, he asked God to forgive them.

33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Luke 22

While loving your enemy does not make you a Christian, loving your enemy is how Jesus instructed his followers to live. Paul elaborates on what it means to love your enemy in Romans 12.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

*Give some examples of how people repay others for hurting them.
What thought does Paul mention that would keep a person from seeking revenge?
How do you think evil can be overcome by good? What are some examples?
Given the difficulty of this command, how can a person truly love his enemy?*

