

TIME4CHANGE Reconciliation

Talk-2

Matthew 5:43-48

Is it really possible for us to love our enemies? Humanly speaking? No, but Scripturally speaking, yes, because we're commanded to do it, even though it seems difficult.

Part of the characteristic of being a Christian is that we are called children of God. And we are called children of God, especially when we exhibit love to the unlovable. According to Rev Dr Martin Luther King, *"love is the only force capable of changing our enemy into our friends."*

What does Jesus mean by loving our enemy? The Ancient Greek language gives more options than English. It has four different words for the word 'love'. For you Greek scholars, there is a word called 'Storge', which means a kind of family affection. That kind of love a parent has for a child, a child has for a parent.

Then there is 'Eros' - from which we get the word erotic - that talks about passionate love; passionate love people have for one another. It was a word that was used in Greek, and then it became associated with lust.

The third word is 'Philia'. It's a word that describes real love, real affection. It describes a man or woman's closest, dearest, truest friend. It's a warm and affectionate kind of love, the kind of highest love we can have for human beings.

Finally, there's 'Agape' love. And this is an unbreakable, unshakable kind of love. It's loving people, no matter what they do, no matter what they say, no matter how they treat us, no matter if they insult us, injure us, or grieve us. We won't allow any bitterness against them in our hearts. We will regard them with that unbreakable, unshakable love, which seeks nothing but that person's highest good.

Jesus, didn't ask us to love our enemies with the same kind of love that we have for our nearest and dearest. We are to love our enemy in a way that isn't just with our hearts, but it's also with our heads, with our minds. When we love our enemies, we have to decide to do it. It is something we choose to do. And, in doing so, we get a victory over hate. Jesus can give us the strength to do it.

How do you love people when they call you all manner of names or when you are disproportionately stopped by the police just because of the colour of your skin? Or when racist graffiti is sprayed on your front or a footballer of color hears monkey chants every time they get the ball?

'*Agape*' love has the power to enable us to love those we don't like, and those people who might not like us. But it's only when Jesus comes into our heart and conquers that anger and conquers that bitterness that we have this kind of '*Agape*' love to all people. Lord, help me keep this commandment.

It's an almost impossible thing to do by ourselves. But, with Jesus, we can do all things. We can move from hating people to loving people. When we're tempted by hate, we can move from bitterness to love.

Jesus says it's part of our spiritual development; it's part of our spiritual growth. You know, when we grow up, sometimes you grow up to be like your parent or carer. Sometimes that's good. Sometimes that's bad. But if we're going to grow up to be like our heavenly Father, then we must show some of His characteristics about us. Somehow, He still loves us. Even when we get it wrong. The Scriptures tell us that, while we were still sinners, this is how we know he loves us, because He died for us. Jesus says, we must have this '*Agape*' love inside our hearts because we are like our heavenly Father. And if *He* has the ability to forgive us, if *He* has the ability to love us, despite us breaking his heart, then we've got to exhibit that kind of love as well.

This passage finishes by saying, you must be perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect. Does that sound like an impossible commandment? None of us can say we are perfect! But when we look at this word 'perfect', the original Ancient Greek word is used in a very special way. And it has very little to do with the way the English language uses 'perfect'. The Greek word for 'perfection' is functional. It does something that achieves a purpose. It does something that it is planned to do, designed to do, made to do. The word for 'perfect' can be translated as meaning 'a means to an end', a purpose, an aim, a goal. Therefore, a thing is perfect when it achieves what it was planned and designed to do. Something is perfect when it does what it was created and sent into the world to do. Humanity was created to be like God; the characteristic of God is love. And that is our highest goal, to love every person similarly made in the image of God. If that's God's characteristic, it needs to be ours as well. The person who cares most for people is the most perfect person. We enter into that perfection when we learn to forgive as God

forgives. And when we learn to love, as God loves, that's why love is perfect and the most excellent way.

Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr said, "Truly speaking, loving your enemy is very, very difficult, almost impossible, but we can do it. So I have decided to stick to love. He says, I am concerned about a better world, and I am concerned about justice. I'm concerned about brotherhood and sisterhood. I am concerned about truth. And when one is concerned about that, he can never advocate violence. And I say to you, I've also decided to stick with love, for it's love, ultimately, that is the answer. The only answer to mankind's problem. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go."

I know it isn't popular to talk about it, said, Martin Luther King, but I'm going to talk about it; not the emotional part that people talk about, but I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. For I've seen too much hate. And I say to myself, that hate is too great a burden to bear. So I have decided to love. And if you are seeking the highest goal, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we're not even moving in the wrong direction when we do it because John was right, God *is* love. And he has that as the key to unlock the door to the ultimate reality.

So, I say to you today, my friends, you may be able to speak with the tongues of men and angels. You may have the eloquence and the articulate speech. But if you have not love, it means nothing. Yes, you may have the gift of prophecy. You may have the gift of scientific prediction and understand the behaviour of molecules. You may break into the storehouses of nature and bring forth many new insights. Yes, you may ascend to the heights of academic achievement so that you have all knowledge, and you may boast of your great institutions of learning and the boundless extent of your degrees. But if you have not love, all of these mean absolutely nothing. You may give your goods to feed the poor. You may bestow great gifts to charities, and you may tower high in philanthropy, but if you have not *love*, your charity means nothing. You might even give your body to be burned, and die a death of a martyr. And your blood may be spilt as a symbol of your honour for generations as yet unborn, and thousands may praise you as they look through history's greatest heroes. *But* if you have not love, your blood was spilt in vain.

What I'm trying to get you to see this morning is that man may be self-centred in his self-denial, and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. His generosity may feed his ego, and his piety may feed his pride. So, without *love* this gift becomes egotism and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride. So, I choose love. What do you choose today? How do you choose to live?

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