

“WHEN LOVE IS TOUGH”

Matthew 5:43-48

Tonight’s message deals with this subject—*“When Love Is Tough.”* Turn in your Bible to Matthew 5:43-48. In this text, Jesus took the concept of love and stretched it to its fullest meaning. He unapologetically made demands upon all who would follow Him. Normal religious people would never buy into these demands and normal religious leaders would never make these demands.

Most people who read our text tonight believe the demands of Jesus are intentionally a little too severe—*like putting the clock ahead half an hour to make sure of not being late for a morning appointment.* Is that what you believe? Let’s dive into the Scripture and examine this love that is such a tough pill for us to swallow.

1. THE EXAMINATION OF LOVE

Matthew 5:43... *“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’”*

Jesus quoted from *Leviticus 19:18*—*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* But look at the way the religious leaders had compromised God’s Word.

A.) The Compromise of Man

They thought and taught that it was perfectly okay to hate your enemy. Why would they do this? These leaders fell into the trap of reducing God’s high standards to levels that were humanly acceptable. How did they do it? They left out the words *“as yourself”* and added the words *“and hate your enemy.”*

To them a “neighbor” was only those people they approved and preferred. Gentiles, tax gatherers, and sinners were on the outside looking in. They were “enemies.”

B.) The Command of the Master

Matthew 5:44... “But I say to you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**”

Jesus spoke with authority by placing His words on the same plane as Old Testament Scripture—“**Love your enemies.**” Can you imagine how this must have shocked those who were listening to Jesus? We are so prone to love only those who are like us—that’s the human kind of love. To be a follower of Jesus means that we must love anyone who has a need regardless if they are like us or not! Listen to His commandment...

John 13:34–35... “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35** “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Don’t miss this. Jesus has issued a command that you, as His disciple, are to love people. Now let’s dig even deeper into this concept of love.

2. THE EXPRESSION OF LOVE

A.) The Meaning of Love

Matthew 5:44... “But I say to you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**”

The Greek word here is “*agape*.” Jesus is not referring to the love you have for a friend. He is not talking about the kind of sexual love a husband and

wife share with each other. He is zeroing in on a supernatural kind of love—*an unconditional love.*

This kind of love defines who God is and it defines who the followers of Jesus Christ are. Take your Bible and look at **1 John 4:7-12**. Do you see how much emphasis God places upon love?

1 John 4:7–12... Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. **9** By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. **10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

B.) The Manner of Love

Love is an action verb (**1 Cor. 13**). Of course, words can express this God kind of love but it goes much deeper. God's kind of love expresses itself in action (**Romans 5:8**). Now don't miss what Jesus is saying here. He says that love expresses itself as you "**pray for those who persecute you.**"

Following Jesus Christ will guarantee that you will face some level of persecution. Now your persecutors or enemies may not be those who kill your family or steal you blind. They may be people who are mean spirited, hard-headed, spiteful, bitter, self-righteous, or full of pride. They may be members of your own family. You may work with them, play golf with them, and even go to church with them. What are you going to do in these situations? Pray for them! Love them!

Now prayer may not change them but it sure will change you! We have examined love and looked carefully at the expression of love. Now I want you to see...

3. THE EXCELLENCE OF LOVE

A.) The Merit of Love

Matthew 5:45a... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven....

God is love. Therefore, the greatest evidence of our sonship is our love.

1 John 4:16, 20... We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.... **20** If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Does your life reflect the nature of God? Are you actively loving people, even those whom many of your friends and relatives would call your enemies?

B.) The Measure of Love

Matthew 5:45b-47... "for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

God's love is indiscriminate. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are required to demonstrate a kind of love that goes beyond the normal human parameters of selective love. J. Oswald Sanders wrote...

The Master expects from His disciples such conduct as can be explained only in terms of the supernatural.

CONCLUSION:

Are you a disciple of Jesus? Have you repented of your sin and placed your faith in Him alone? Listen, He requires you to love all people—even your enemies. Don't argue with God. Don't say it is impossible. Listen to Paul's words...

Romans 5:1–5... Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. **3** And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; **4** and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; **5** and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Forget the common excuse—“*I’m only human.*” That won’t fly with God. Listen to Jesus’ final words in this chapter...

Matthew 5:48... “**Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**”

This word perfect means “*to reach an intended end.*” So, I ask you believers, are you ready to obey the Lord Jesus and love even your enemies who persecute you? Would you bow your head and ask the Lord to bless you with the ability to love like He does?

God’s standards for entering heaven are high. In fact, you have to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. That’s the message of the Sermon on the

Mount. Over and over Jesus stressed our need for perfect righteousness. Try as hard as you can, but you can never produce this kind of perfection. That's why God sent His Son to this earth 2000 years ago.

Jesus died on the cross and paid the ultimate penalty for your sins—for your falling short of His glory. Paul wrote...

2 Corinthians 5:21... He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

That's right, God offers you *the perfect righteousness of His Son*. You can only go to heaven on the righteousness of Jesus! That's the only way you can be perfect. Trust Christ today. He loves you.