

Sermon Outline

GOOD CITIZENSHIP, I: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES (MATTHEW 5:43-48)

I. The Heart of Earthly Citizenship

- A. Christians are dual citizens: We are citizens of our earthly nation and citizens of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. We became citizens of Christ when we first repented and put our faith in Jesus.
- C. We are Christians first and Singaporeans second.
- D. Our thoughts on the vocation of citizenship and related issues have to be taken captive to Christ.
 - 2 Cor 10:5: “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”
- E. I want to take up a question that gets to the heart of our duty as citizens:
—Based on the Word of God, what is the most basic “glue,” the most basic duty, that binds Christians to our fellow citizens and residents of this nation state? What is the most fundamental point of unity that Christians share with our fellow citizens who may or may not be Christian—and who may, in fact, strongly oppose our Lord Jesus Christ?
- F. Scripture tells us what exactly this glue is in Matthew 5:43-48. It has to do with *love*.

II. The Law

- A. The context of Matthew 5 is the Sermon on the Mount.
- B. In this Sermon, the Lord Jesus takes his place as the new Prophet-Teacher of Israel and re-proclaims the Law of God to Israel.
- C. In the Law, we are looking into the very perfection of the holiness of God.
- D. Only when we understand the scope of the Law’s requirements can we truly appreciate *why* we desperately need a Savior. The Sermon on the Mount is meant to point us to Jesus Christ himself.
 - Gal 3:24: “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”

III. “Hate Your Enemy”

- A. Through this chapter, Jesus has been addressing false interpretations or misapplications of the Law. When we come to Matthew 5:43, Jesus is continuing in this vein. This time, the issue he takes up has to do with how one ought to treat one’s own enemies.
 - Mt 5:43: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”
- B. Jesus may be referencing a saying that had made its way into the language of pious Jews of his day.
 1. Israelites nursed feelings of resentment at the Roman rulers.

2. The rabbis looked at those passages that spoke about God judging their enemies, for instance, and they would have drawn the conclusion that they were therefore justified in hating their enemies.
- C. Jesus has basically unearthed a core assumption/mode of operation that is held by almost every human being: “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”

IV. Love Your Enemies (!)

- A. But Jesus disagrees!
1. When Jesus disagrees with a certain way of applying the Torah, he intends for his interpretation to be binding on all consciences.
 2. Jesus’ word at this point carries the same weight as the rest of the Law.
 3. In contrast to how we are told to treat our enemies, *this* is how God expects us to treat them:
 - Mt 5:44: “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
- B. Therein lies the fundamental duty of citizenship.
1. Since the Law of God is binding on all human beings, regardless of race, language, or religion, this Law is also binding on all Singaporeans. It is the ethical principle at the heart of all human society.
 2. When Jesus gives this Law, he is showing us our most basic duty to our fellow citizens: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”
 3. If we can love our enemies, we can also love...
 - those who may not share our beliefs/values, but who are not out to hurt us either.
 - our family members and friends who care for us.
 4. When Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” he is intensifying the demands of the second Great Commandment, which is to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt 5:36-40).
 5. If this Commandment is so basic to human life, it follows that how cohesive we will be as a society depends on the degree to which we abide by this *torah* of God.
- C. But just so we know how far Jesus is pressing the claims of the Law, listen to how Jesus defines who our enemies even are. They are those who “persecute” us.
- D. To “persecute” (Gk: *diokō*) = to harass, mistreat, or pursue.
- E. Jesus isn’t just talking about people who happen to disagree with us. He was talking about people who genuinely desire to damage us.
- F. Instead of hating them, Jesus tells us that God requires us to do at least two things for our enemies. But these two things are really the foundation of a lot of other things.

V. The Good Work of Love

- A. The first is *to love our enemies*. To love our enemies is the opposite of hating them. To love our enemies is to work for their wellbeing as opposed to their destruction.
- B. Loving our enemies is working for their wellbeing is because, according to our Lord Jesus, that is what God himself does. Jesus points to God as the model for our ethical conduct.

- Mt 5:45: “so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
- C. This is God’s Word to all people, again, regardless of race, language, or religion. That being the case, I humbly submit to us today that this Law is at the very center of what it means to be a citizen.
 1. Because this Law is at the heart of the great commandment, which governs all interpersonal conduct.
What is citizenship but membership in a community?
What is citizenship but being placed in relationship with other citizens that make up a country?
 2. When Jesus calls us to love our enemies, he is showing us the depths of the second great commandment.
 3. Jesus is essentially calling us to treat our enemies as our neighbors.
- D. There are more than enough opportunities to do that here in pluralistic Singapore.
 1. Singapore is a diverse society where people hold vastly contradictory beliefs, values, and practices.
 2. In such a society, we have people who not only disagree with followers of Jesus, but deeply dislike us as well. But if we only loved our neighbors and hated our enemies, are we any better than they are?
 - Mt 5:46-47: “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”
- E. In another passage that restates this doctrine, Romans 12:14-21, we learn that if we should bless our enemies and not return evil for evil.
 1. When we return evil for evil, we multiply violence (cf. Rom 12:17, 19, 21).
 2. In multiplying violence, we undermine the peace we need in order to live quiet, godly, and dignified lives (cf. 1 Tim 2:1-3).
 3. You cannot do injustice to your enemy and expect that justice will be done to you. You cannot fight evil with evil, because someday, it could come back to bite you.

VI. The Good Work of Prayer

- A. How do we go about loving our enemies? *We pray for them* (v 44).
- B. What are we to pray for? We pray that God would...
 - set his saving grace and his adopting love upon our enemies.
 - change their hearts and grant them repentance.
 - cause them to look to Jesus alone as their Savior so that his atoning death can eradicate their sins, his resurrection can justify them, and his ascension can set them free from the corrupting powers of the world.
- C. When we pray for our enemies, we are resisting evil with God’s appointed weapons. We are holding back the tide of evil by refusing to replicate the evil, entrusting judgment only to God.
- D. Praying for our enemies (i.e., seeking God’s mercy for them, seeking their union with Christ) is a good work God calls us to do for them.

VII. More Good Works

- A. What other forms can loving our enemies take? Based on God's own example in v 45, loving our enemies involves seeking their wellbeing. If God does such things for his enemies, shouldn't we be doing similar things as well?
- B. Herein lies the foundation principle for a godly, just, and humane vision of earthly citizenship.
1. In a godly and humane society, we do not return evil for evil.
 2. Justice also involves looking out for those who have sinned against us, ensuring that they are not punished excessively.
 3. Based on God's Law, which is rooted in God's character, even our enemies should be free to pursue sustenance, safety, life, and happiness.
- C. If God's Law is our guide, loving our enemies would also mean doing all these things that are required by the Law. These include:
- not unjustly depriving our enemies of their lives and livelihoods (Ex 20:13)
 - continuing to honor our enemies if they are above us in rank (Ex 20:12; cf. Rom 12:17)
 - protecting our enemies' reputations from false or exaggerated accusations (Ex 20:16)
 - protecting their properties from unlawful removal (Ex 20:17; 23:4-5)
 - doing no injustice to them in court (Lev 19:15)
 - not spreading falsehoods about them (Lev 19:16)
 - not bearing a grudge against them but reasoning frankly with them (Lev 19:17, 18)
 - (in the case of a pluralistic society like ours) allowing them the same freedom to practice their religion as we would want them to do for us (because Singapore is not a theocracy and we are called to do to others what we wish others would do for us—Lk 6:31)
- D. Those laws and principles must...
1. become our own personal core values.
 2. shape our own personal attitudes toward those who have hurt us.
 3. be allowed to shape what *we* expect our government to do to our enemies.
- E. If we want Singapore to be an excellent and exceptional society, we have to listen to God's Word—and start with ourselves.
1. Nurture communities where people are free to disagree with one another (even on important issues) without being harmed or maligned.
—Learn to disagree with others in a respectful way.
 2. Teach our young people that violence is an unacceptable way of dealing with disagreements or opposing those who are morally evil.

VIII. Perfection Is Required

- A. But there is much more at stake in this commandment than just Singapore's sustainability and greatness: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"—why?—"so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...." (v 45).

- B. Our very standing before God is conditional on our holy, zealous, joyful, consistent, moment-by-moment observance to this commandment.
- C. To top it off, Jesus says, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v 48).
- D. Sincerely loving our enemies is the mark of perfect holiness—and Jesus makes this perfection the condition by which we become sons of God. If we want to be sons of God, then we must be like God, the God who loves even his enemies.
- E. The problem is that we don’t do this commandment. Even if we do desire to do it, we don’t desire it with the fervency or do it with the consistency that amounts to the perfection that God requires. If God requires perfection and not just well-intentioned efforts, we are in deep trouble....

IX. Jesus Is Our Perfect Love

But there is good news. God has helped us to fulfill this Law not just by inspiring us to take little steps in keeping this commandment. God has helped us precisely by sending Someone to fulfill this law, together with its implications, and all his other laws—for us (Mt 5:17; 1 Cor 1:30)! This Substitute is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The Law-Giver is himself the true Law-Keeper. The perfect love that God requires of us is completely performed on our behalf by the Messiah Mediator, who is the Lord Jesus, God’s own Son.

- A. N.T. Wright explains it this way:
 - “Jesus did it all himself, and opened up the new way of being human so that all who follow him can discover it. When they mocked him, he didn’t respond. When they challenged him, he told quizzical, sometimes humorous, stories that forced them to think differently. When they struck him, he took the pain. When they put the worst bit of Roman equipment on his back—the heavy crosspiece on which he would be killed—carried it out of the city to the place of his own execution. When they nailed him to the cross, he prayed for him.
(*Matthew for Everyone Part One: Chapters 1-15*, 52-53)
- B. How else do you think we became Christians in the first place? If God didn’t love his enemies, there would be no Gospel.
- C. True: God’s love for those in his Son is far greater than his love for those not in his Son.
- D. But God still loves the wicked. He delights to do good even to those who hate him—and will never come to him! He longs for their repentance and finds no pleasure in their destruction (Ezek 18:32).
- E. As we hear the words of this Law and feel its crushing claims upon us, it is important to recognize that God is humbling us under his Law. He is shattering every ounce of confidence we have in our own righteousness, so that we have no other option but to look only to Jesus for the fulfilment of this Law in our lives and our salvation.
 - 1 Cor 1:30: “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,”