

The Greatness of the Love of God

Matthew 5:43-48 – Jesus’ exhortation to “love your enemies,” and the equating of this love with the perfect love of God.

Introduction

1. In our Bible reading, Jesus equates very clearly the love of our enemies with the perfect Love of God. In a modern world where the love of enemies I almost dead and buried, many may see this as hopelessly naïve and weak.
2. Behind Jesus’ exhortation there is, however, a tremendous secret and strength that, if put into effect in our lives today, could once and for all liberate the world fro the hatred of enemies. The power is so profound that, indeed, it could free our human race from the enemy of us all, Satan himself, and render him powerless.

What is the secret that makes God’s Love so remarkable?

Unconditional Love

1. To state the answer first: Because God’s Love isn’t given or taken away according to the actions of the object of that Love; it is not controlled by the external object, but is eternally given according to God’s Heart.
2. In all of history, there is no graphic example of the statement just made than Jesus’ powerful action o the cross. Luke 23:33-34 – “And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”
3. Had Jesus been a person easily affected by the acceptance or rejection of the public, his last hours on the cross would have been an anthem of hate for hate. (Of course, Jesus was without sin, he was the messiah, and it is hard for us to even consider such a thing. But we shouldn’t make the mistake of easily passing Jesus’ statement of forgiveness off as something we expect from the messiah, something preprogrammed.”
4. Loving one’s enemies, forgiving them, was never intended to be exclusive to our Lord only. If we miss this point we risk the error of justifying our inability to forgive those who are our enemies by saying “I’m not Jesus” or “what did you expect from a sinner?”

5. We are challenged by Stephen. In the book of Acts, chapter 8, as Stephen is stoned to death by those who violently opposed his defense of Christ, his last words before dying were: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Again, with the early Christians in Rome, we see this remarkable ability to love beyond the hatred and perversion of the Roman arena.
6. There is an excellent example of love beyond hate in the book by David Wilkerson, “The Cross and the Switchblade.” Gang leader Nicki is threatening to kill him with a knife, but Wilkerson tells him that even if he is cut into many pieces each piece will say to his slayer, “I love you.” The gang leader is completely disarmed, and is converted.

Indeed, the logic behind God’s love is diametrically opposite to the fickle, popularized “love” we find in society today.

Love never withdrawn

1. To illustrate the difference between the Love of God and the love of this world, I’d like to tell you about a young minister. This gifted teacher has moved many audiences expounding on the Love of God, yet there has been a cruel irony in this man’s life... He grew up with a parent who constantly would remind him, “If you do that I won’t love you any more,” or “Do this and I will love you.” As he matured, this young person understood love to be something like wages for services rendered – as something that could be turned off or on according to his actions and “cooperation.” The suffering has been long and deep as the result of those unconsidered statements by a parent (surely the parent didn’t fully realize the impact on her son). Only now is this young clergyman recovering from the wounds of growing up thinking of God’s Love as wages for doing the “right thing,” easily withdrawn in the case of mistakes or failure
2. Our modern society is saturated at all levels with the self-centered pragmatism of easily given, easily withdrawn “non”-love. This love has nothing to do with the self-sacrificial love of Christ; it is largely godless form of love bent on self satisfaction... And the teachers of this love advise us to quickly withdraw if you find your investment isn’t paying off. (In fact, if our society spent as much energy, time, and money on COMMITTING as it does on WITHDRAWING we would have Heaven among us very soon.)
3. If our churches are also eroded by this kind of ethic, it is hard to look into the future with any hope.

Before concluding, it is important to bring out one more crucial issue.

4. In our world, there is a presence that compounds and feeds off every failure by Christianity to mobilize the God-centered, others-centered Love mandate given by Jesus in Mathew 5:43-48 (and again so powerfully on the cross). That presence is God-denying Communism. This atheistic “religion” has managed to convince an ever increasing segment of humankind that the Christian ethic of love for hate is weak and to be despised. If I have been hated, then I must hate – until my enemy is destroyed.

The good communist also sees Christian social responsibility as a sham, incapable of bringing the change needed.

IMPORTANT as an introduction to the conclusion: We do well to remember that it was, in part, the failure of Christianity to mobilize the love mandate of Jesus and to take social responsibility that helped deliver this bitter ideology from Karl Marx. (If it seems right, read Marx’s poem of hatred to God on the last page.)

Conclusion

What remains, then, for our churches to do in response to both our Western moral breakdown and the threat of Communism?

1. The first thing is to deeply reflect on whether we have taken seriously the love-mandate of Christ, and the issue of fully committed social responsibility. Are our efforts sufficient?
2. To practice love and responsibility for our brother and sisters in other denominations, let alone the world?
3. To refuse absolutely to let the ebb or flow of our love (God’s love) be determined by the response or reaction of those we serve. (This is to really join our Lord in bearing the cross.)
4. To realize, in our response to the needs of our world, that it isn’t so much a matter of this world coming to our church, but rather our church going out to this world.

Let these things be our testimony to God, to the living spirit of Christ among us, and to the return of the Prince of Peace.

The poem of Karl Marx, written in 1937.

Invocation of One in Despair

So God has snatched from me my all
In the Curse and rack of destiny.
All his worlds are gone beyond recall!
Nothing but revenge is left to me!

On myself revenge I'll proudly wreak,
On that being, that enthroned Lord,
Make my strength a patchwork of what's weak
Leave my better self without reward!

I shall build my throne high overhead,
Cold, tremendous shall it's summit be.
For its bulwark – superstitious dread,
For is marshall – blackest agony.

Who looks on it with a healthy eye,
Shall turn back, struck deathly pale and dumb;
Clutched by blind and chill mortality,
May his happiness prepare its tomb.

And the Almighty's lightning shall rebound
From that massive iron giant.
If he brings my walls and towers down,
Eternity shall raise them up, defiant.