



RCC Phoenix – 12.13.20 – Love... Your Enemies? (Ryan Mayes)

In our human minds it is counter intuitive to love our enemies. Our enemies are our enemies for a reason. They have either done something to us or our family to cause a rift and this rift can be great. Why should one show love to someone that wishes pain and suffering upon them? Because it is the commandment of Christ.

Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

But why must it be our responsibility to love those that hate us? We are busy loving those that love us back, why waste time loving someone that may never return that love. Once again, we must turn to the scripture.

Matthew 5:43 “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. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What good is it to only love those that love you? It would be the equivalent of God creating everyone to love him without free will. There is no challenge, no sacrifice, and no opportunity for us to grow as people and more importantly as Christians. The following five points are items we can keep in mind when we question, “Why love our enemies?”

1. Because we love a good _____ story.

Every year this country spends millions of dollars watching movies and TV shows where hated enemies have a change of heart and make the right choice just when it is needed. We cheer for these characters and feel a sense of satisfaction in their redemption, but they are nothing more than fiction. What this says is that we would rather spend our own hard-earned money watching others get an opportunity to change than give our own enemies an opportunity at redemption.

There is no greater real-life redemption story than that of the apostle Paul. At one point he was a man so evil toward Christians that the scripture says he was breathing threats of murder and stood nearby as he watched righteous men stoned. God forced Paul, then Saul, to quite literally see the light and change his heart. Paul goes on to become one of our finest examples of what a Christian should be and he gives us this beautiful scripture.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Our grace towards our enemies is not in vain. Every moment we spend forgiving, praying, asking for God's grace on their behalf is worth it and provides new opportunities for redemption.

2. Because there is a _____ behind their _____

One of the most renowned psychologists of modern times, B.F. Skinner, proposed that people are far more influenced by the reinforcements they receive in their lives than the genetics they are born with. Positive reinforcement leads to positive behavior and negative reinforcements create undesirable behaviors. There is empirical evidence to prove this theory and it should pause us to think if there is more behind our enemy's actions than we think.

Consider for a moment that the boss that is lashing out at you may be suffering through deep anxiety and depression, or that lady that cut you off in traffic may have just found out that her husband is divorcing her. Maybe that neighbor that so inconveniently blocked your driveway may have just received the news that he has cancer. Or maybe that church member that has been gossiping about you is deflecting the embarrassment from all the gossip that has been said about her. Does it make their actions toward you right? No. but it can help you better understand where they are coming from.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them., 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

In the words of B.F. Skinner himself, "*What is love except another name for the use of positive reinforcement? Or vice versa.*"

3. Because _____ may be _____ enemy

We often have the tendency to think that we are on the side of right in all our disagreements. Our enemies are our enemies because we are right, and they are failing to see that rightness. An old English Bishop named JC Rylie once said, "Beware of self-righteousness in every shape and form, some people get as much harm from their virtues as others do from their sins." Do we ever stop to consider if we are the ones needing praying for in our bitter

disagreements with our enemies? We make a righteous judgement in our disputes and instantly judge those that oppose us as wrong and condemn them, but the scripture says...

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned"

We must take the time to examine every dispute and understand our portion in it. Have we done all we need to do to pardon those that we dispute? Are we condemning when we ourselves should be the ones condemned? We must approach every disagreement with our enemies with righteous examination.

Sometimes our enemies do come through any fault of our own and are there to persecute and test us. The following is a quote that helps us understand this persecution.

"Now, I'm aware of the fact that some people will not like you, not because of something you have done to them, but they just won't like you. I'm quite aware of that. Some people aren't going to like the way you walk; some people aren't going to like the way you talk. Some people aren't going to like you because you can do your job better than they can do theirs. Some people aren't going to like you because other people like you, and because you're popular, and because you're well-liked, they aren't going to like you. Some people aren't going to like you because your hair is a little shorter than theirs or your hair is a little longer than theirs. Some people aren't going to like you because your skin is a little brighter than theirs; and others aren't going to like you because your skin is a little darker than theirs. So that some people aren't going to like you. They're going to dislike you, not because of something that you've done to them, but because of various jealous reactions and other reactions that are so prevalent in human nature." -MLK

Matthew 5:44 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.

4. Because God brings _____

Roman 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Throughout the scripture God has made it clear that he will bring his wrath on those that stand in the way of the righteous and that wrath is severe. Perhaps there is no better example than ...

2 Kings 2: 23-24: "From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking up the path, some small boys came out of the city and harassed him, chanting, 'Go up, baldy! Go up, baldy!' He turned around, looked at them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two female bears came out of the woods and mauled 42 of the children."

The message in this scripture is not “don’t make fun of people,” it’s don’t stand in the way of a righteous person trying to serve their God or suffer the wrath of the lord. Those that persecute us are in a dangerous position of feeling that wrath and spending an eternity without God. This is not something we should wish for enemies, but we should pray mercy it never happens. If we could get a glimpse at our enemies suffering the torment of the devil we would eventually beg for their mercy. It’s a pain beyond anything we could ever imagine. It is not something we should delight in.

Romans 12:20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Justice must be served but we can’t wish pain upon others, but instead pray for mercy in their judgement just as we must pray for mercy in ours.

5. Because it's not all about _____

When we love our enemies, we give them opportunity for redemption. When we try to understand their story, we start to see them less as an enemy and more as human. When we realize our responsibility in the dispute, we gain greater understanding of our responsibilities in forgiveness. When we pray for mercy for our enemies, God shows mercy to us, and when we do all of these things we lift up another human being to God to work in his kingdom, to serve as a witness, and to become a possible ally in our walk with God. Loving our enemy is about serving our God, and it is all for God no matter what.

Why should we love our enemies? Because Jesus hung there upon our cross and died for us as we stood there and reviled him without mercy, and his response....” forgive them they know not what they do.” When we were his enemies his response was only ever love. We must always remember to love as the lord loved us, even our enemies.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.