

RELATED SCRIPTURES

STUDY FOR SERMON FROM 1.15.23

Leviticus 19:18 | 1 John 3:16-18 | Romans 12:14-21

SUMMARY

As he did numerous times throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clarifies the law where the religious leaders of the day misused it. This intent is why Jesus begins by saying, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” Reading this might prompt the question, “Where did people hear this?” This saying contained a piece of the law but also an erroneous addition. The Old Testament law instructed Israel, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). However, the religious leaders took liberties with the word “neighbor” to mean they were only required to love their fellow Jew; this was their neighbor. Furthermore, if they were only required to love their neighbor, they were free to *hate* anyone else, especially their enemies. To this notion, Jesus responds with sweeping authority, “But I tell you . . .” At first pass, it feels beyond radical: love your enemy? Pray for your enemy? In these verses, Jesus is saying that fundamentally, we forego our rights for our neighbor’s sake, including our enemies. In other words, as Jesus sees it, your neighbor is *everyone* to the exclusion of no one. In these statements, Jesus teaches that personal self-sacrifice displaces personal retaliation—always. This mindset prescribed to all followers of Jesus is cast in the pattern of Christ himself as he went the way of the cross—not just for a vaguely defined neighbor—but for his enemies, too. This pattern is how Jesus concludes this section of the sermon by pointing his followers to the high bar of holiness found in God alone. “Be perfect . . .” not to the level of religious tradition, but “as your heavenly Father is perfect.” One could summarize such a statement as “Follow Jesus, not man.”

GROUP QUESTIONS

From the sermon or your direct reading of Matthew 5:43-48, share something that surprises, encourages, or troubles you.

The call to love your enemies might make some feel like Jesus is calling us to be proverbial doormats allowing everyone to walk all over us. How is what Jesus commands advocating for strength, not weakness?

Who do you consider to be your “enemies”? How often do you pray for those you believe to be your enemy? What does praying for your enemies accomplish in you?

If there’s one thing Jesus would want you to walk away believing and receiving as a result of this portion of Scripture, what is that thing?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

As you pray, be sure to include today’s themes in what you bring before God.