

Matthew 5:44

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Analysis

Jesus commands the radical ethic: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you' (Greek: ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, 'love your enemies'). The verb ἀγαπᾶτε is not emotional affection but volitional commitment to another's good. Four progressive actions are commanded: love (internal disposition), bless (speak well of), do good (act beneficially), pray (intercede for). This overturns natural justice and exceeds Old Testament lex talionis (eye for eye). Such love is supernatural, impossible without divine transformation.

Historical Context

In Roman-occupied Palestine with Zealot revolutionaries advocating violent resistance, Jesus' command was scandalously countercultural. Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 19:18 ('love your neighbor') debated who qualified as neighbor - often excluding Gentiles and enemies. Qumran community rule explicitly commanded hating 'sons of darkness.' Jesus demolishes these boundaries, commanding universal love that mirrors God's indiscriminate grace (5:45). This teaching later shaped Christian pacifism and enemy-love traditions.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does loving enemies differ from approving their actions or enabling evil?
2. What practical steps can we take to move from natural hostility toward supernatural love for enemies?
3. How does praying for persecutors transform both them and us?

Interlinear Text

ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ἀγαπάτε τῶν ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν
I But say unto you Love them which enemies your
G1473 G1161 G3004 G5213 G25 G3588 G2190 G5216

εὐλογεῖτε τῶν καταρωμένους ὑμᾶς, καλῶς ποιεῖτε
bless them which them that curse you good do
G2127 G3588 G2672 G5209 G2573 G4160

τῶν μισοῦντας ὑμᾶς, καὶ προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ
them which to them that hate you and pray for
G3588 G3404 G5209 G2532 G4336 G5228

τῶν ἐπηρεαζόντων ὑμᾶς, καὶ διωκόντων ὑμᾶς,
them which despitefully use you and persecute you
G3588 G1908 G5209 G2532 G1377 G5209

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:14 (Blessing): Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

1 Peter 3:9 (Blessing): Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Luke 23:34 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

1 Peter 2:23 (Parallel theme): Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Acts 7:60 (Parallel theme): And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

2 Kings 6:22 (Parallel theme): And he answered, Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

Psalms 7:4 (Parallel theme): If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; (yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy:)