

## Uncommon Grace

Matthew 5:43–48<sup>i</sup>

### You Have Heard That it was Said.

As we come to the end of this section in the Sermon on the Mount, I want to remind you one last time that nothing Jesus said in Matthew 5 should be taken in any sense that diminishes or relaxes the law of God, especially if the relaxation is meant to release us from the sense that this law applies universally. Again, we saw this back in verses 17 and 18, where Jesus said:

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them,

which would be straightforward enough all on its own, but He continued:

<sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Matthew 5:17–18 ESV

Even so, our understanding of murder, adultery, divorce, oath-taking, and revenge—all of these things—must be shaped not only by the letter of the law, but by the Spirit, who brings us beyond mere words which can be so easily manipulated, and right to the heart of the matter.

He shows us, for example, that God is not merely concerned with whether or not we physically murder our neighbor. He certainly is concerned with that, but He is also concerned with the attitude of our hearts toward our neighbor. So, in verses 21 – 24, we learned that not only are we to abstain from murdering our neighbor, but we are also to abstain from harboring murderous thoughts toward him, and this final section, verses 43 – 48, pulls everything together and takes it one step further.

So, once again, Jesus began by saying,

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said... Matthew 5:43 ESV

referring His listeners not to the Law per se, but to the various twisted interpretations of the law that had arisen over the years to distort the law itself, and to manipulate the people into a kind of obedience that actually fell short of true obedience. As He said in Matthew 15:

<sup>8</sup> “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me...” Matthew 15:8–9 ESV

But here, there’s not merely a distortion or a misinterpretation, there’s an actual addition to the law.

<sup>3</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor...’

which was absolutely true. The law required this, but the traditions included and additional statement. They said,

‘You shall love your neighbor **and hate your enemy.**’ Matthew 5:43 ESV

Now, the first part, “love your neighbor” is clearly in the Law, in fact, Jesus went so far as to say that this is the second greatest commandment in all the law. We read this just last week in Leviticus 19, verses 17 and 18.

<sup>17</sup> **“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.”** Leviticus 19:17 ESV

(equating, we might note, the concepts of brother and neighbor without distinguishing a separate category for enemies). The passage went on:

<sup>18</sup> **You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.** Leviticus 19:18 ESV

So, the law required that we not hate our brothers and sisters, but rather love them even as ourselves, and the reason given, as throughout Leviticus 19, “I am the Lord,” and that’s really all we need to know. But over the centuries the commandment had been limited by narrowing its focus to “your brother,” and “the sons of your own people”, so that, by extension, it could be said, “You shall love your neighbor **and** hate your enemy,” something that was not even implied in the law.

### **What Jesus Said.**

This is what Jesus was addressing when He said:

<sup>43</sup> **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”** <sup>44</sup> **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** Matthew 5:43–44 ESV

So, once again, Jesus refused to reduce the commandment to its narrowest application, instead, expanding its boundaries beyond the obvious and outward to include even those whom we inclined by nature to despise. Later, He would illustrate this in the parable of “the good Samaritan”, but that’s another sermon for another day.

Of course, there’s a textual variant here too, and the majority text actually reads:

<sup>44</sup> **But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...** Matthew 5:44 NKJV

Of this, Martin Lloyd Jones wrote,

**...as the same teaching is certainly to be found elsewhere, I think is best for us to take the teaching as given in the Authorized Version.<sup>ii</sup>**

and I too think we can easily incorporate these ideas, “bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you...” into our understanding of what Jesus meant when He commanded us to love our enemies, and this, whichever text we might follow, is the heart of His command. So, this is what we, as followers of Jesus, are to do.

<sup>44</sup> ...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, Matthew 5:44 NKJV

It's not easy, but if you think about it for even a minute, it's really pretty simple and straightforward, requiring little exposition or explanation.

### Common Grace.

It's also very important, given the reason that Jesus gave. We are to bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us, all this,

<sup>45</sup> so that [we] may be sons of [our] 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. Matthew 5:45 ESV

which, as far as I'm concerned is the whole definition of what is sometimes called common grace. Now I know, whole books have been written (and denominations divided) on this subject, so that may seem an overly simplistic statement, but I don't think so. I think a lot of what passes for common grace in theological thought should really be understood as simply the providence of God, which is

His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving, and governing all His creatures; ordering them, and all their actions, **to His own glory.**<sup>iii</sup>

See, what some know as common grace would have a narrower field than the providence of God which extends to all His creatures and all *their* (all *our*) actions<sup>iv</sup>. So, can an atheist discover a cure for some disease that in the end is a benefit to all humanity? Of course, but this is the *providence* of God, not His so-called common grace, and I suppose that all that passes for common grace could be understood in the same way. For,

<sup>28</sup> ...**all things** work together for good, for those who are called according to [God's] purpose. Romans 8:28 ESV

But when the rain falls on the fields of a God-fearing farmer who has cried out for it in prayer, it often falls on the field of the blasphemer next door as well, and when the sun rose this morning, its light was dispersed on both the evil and the good.

And we are to be like this. If we bless those who bless us, we ought also to bless those who curse us. If we do good to those who do good to us, we ought also to do good to those who hate us. Above all, if we pray for those who treat us well, we ought to pray (perhaps more so) for those who spitefully use and even persecute us. Remember,

<sup>12</sup> "...whatever you wish that others would do to you..." Matthew 7:12 ESV

(not whatever they have done)

...do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12 ESV

### Uncommon Grace

Of course, for God, making His sun rise on the evil and the good, and His rain fall on the just and the unjust, is simply *common* grace (if we can use that term in the narrow sense), but for us, it will require *uncommon* grace because this is not the way that people normally act. This does not come naturally to fallen man.

Naturally, we are inclined to bless those who bless us, to do good to those who do good to us, to pray for those we care about, and to love those who love us back. Naturally, we are inclined to do good to those do good to us, to do unto others as they have done.

But what if some have done wrong? What if some have mistreated and abused us? Well, the same principle holds in reverse. Naturally, we are inclined to do unto others *as they have done* unto us.

You know this land is full of people doing wicked things to each other.

So says Nicholas Earp, the father of Wyatt Earp in the 1994 film of the same name. He goes on...

You know I'm a man that believes in the law...But there are plenty of men who don't care about the law. Men who'll take part in all kinds of viciousness, and don't care who gets hurt...When you find yourself in a fight with such viciousness, hit first if you can, and when you do hit, hit to kill.<sup>v</sup>

And I know, it's Hollywood. Even so. But in contrast, Jesus said,

<sup>44</sup> ...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven... Matthew 5:44–45 ESV

And why?

<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Matthew 5:46–47 ESV

There is no credit, there is nothing to be gained in the love that comes naturally to all, even tax collectors and sinners. We are called to something higher; something better. We are called to

<sup>1</sup> ...be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us... Ephesians 5:1–2 ESV

and to do this in all situations and circumstances. We will not always reach this lofty goal, but this must be our aim, for Jesus concludes this first section of His Sermon, saying,

<sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48 ESV

**Be Perfect!**

Now, there are two ways of taking this and I would not argue that either one is wrong. The first is to understand this statement as the equivalent of Leviticus 19, verse 2, where God said,

<sup>2</sup> “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” Leviticus 19:2 ESV

and since that was also spoken in context with loving our neighbor, I don’t think we can fault those who want to approach it this way. I have taken it like that myself at times. But in Ephesians, chapter 4, the same word is used when Paul said that Jesus gave the church leaders to build up the body of Christ,

<sup>13</sup> ...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to **mature manhood**, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Ephesians 4:12–13 ESV

And there it is: mature, full grown, complete. I believe this is what Jesus was urging on His disciples here at the end of Matthew 5 as well, not that we would be perfect as in sinless, but that we would be complete and mature, wholly integrated in the way that we interact with others, whether they are family, friends, or enemies. It should not matter. God Himself is our example here, He who loved us even while we were still in our sin, and demonstrated that love

<sup>8</sup> ...in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 ESV

That should be enough, but more still, Jesus Christ commands this, and Jesus Christ is Lord, so either way you want to take it, hear the word of the Lord one more time.

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> 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.

<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

<sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43–48 ESV

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i All Scripture citations unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).  
ii D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Volume One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 299.  
iii The Larger Catechism, Question 18, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1985), 137 (emphasis mine).  
iv Cf. The Shorter Catechism, Question 11, *Westminster Confession*, 289.  
v HeisenbergC10H15N. 2017. “Wyatt Earp - Earps Always Know.” YouTube. November 28, 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvNgzn28a\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvNgzn28a_M).