

# Do You Love Your Enemies Enough to Hate Them?

Jonathan Parnell / August 13, 2014

Jesus said to love our enemies.

That is what *he* said, as Matthew recounts his words from the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I say to you, *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*”

(Matthew 5:43–44, emphasis added)

And when Jesus said “love,” we should be clear that he didn’t mean hollow good will, or some bland benevolence, or a flakey niceness that hopes our enemies stop being so cruel. Jesus never talks about love that way. A category for love like that — the anything-goes, pat-on-the-head, can’t-we-all-just-get-along kind of love — is a phenomenon peculiar to our own day. When Jesus says to love our enemies, he means that we love them with a lay-your-life-down type of love — the type that comes from the heart and desires the other’s good, and sacrifices for it, when no one else but God is watching.

And it’s the type of love that includes hate.

## **The Hate of Love**

In fact, if the love is real, it must include hate. We’ve seen or experienced something like this before, though it might be more complex than we first thought. Love that rightfully includes hate needs to navigate between the two ditches of unhelpful generality and selfishness in disguise.

In other words, to only say that we must “love the sinner but hate their sin” oversimplifies things, glossing over the inseparable connection at work in the evildoer and his evil. At the same time, to only hate the sin because of how it affects us is actually superficial virtue, not love. But real love, and therefore rightful hate, sails beyond these docks to drop anchor an extra mile down.

On one hand, righteous hatred is expected because evil acts are morally repugnant and offensive to God (Psalm 97:10). Evil belittles God’s holiness and evidences that his name is not hallowed. We hate evil because it is wrong. But on the other hand, if this hatred is part of loving our enemies, we must hate the evil of our enemies because of what the evil means for *them*.

## **With Them in View**

Expounding Jesus’s love command, John Piper writes that we cannot claim to truly love someone while being indifferent toward what destroys them. If we love our enemies, then we must hate the evil of our enemies that makes them so. That evil — the evil for which they are culpable and liable for eternal punishment — is therefore

at odds with love's interest in their eternal good. "We do not hate God's judgment. That is just and wise. But we do hate the evil that leads a person to oppose God and incur his judgment" (*What Jesus Demands from the World*, 224).

To be sure, our enemies aren't mere victims of evil's tyrannical force, and we don't parse individuals away from their actions. ISIS does evil and *is* evil — and our love for them means we hate both. We hate that they are blinded by darkness, that they are trapped by Satan's schemes, that they are following the course of this world and ignorant of it all (Ephesians 2:2; 4:18).

But that hate, if we are obeying Jesus, means that we hate them not only because of their disgusting injustice, but for what that injustice means for their souls. Piper explains, "There is a kind of hate for the sinner (viewed as morally corrupt and hostile to God) that may coexist with pity and even a desire for his salvation" (222).

Love for our enemies means, fundamentally, that we hate our enemies for wholeheartedly joining in the evil that will ultimately cause their damnation (John 5:29). That is the kind of hate — the kind of love — that might look on them and say, in the spirit of our Savior, *Father, forgive them for being so oblivious to what they're doing. Open their eyes.*