

Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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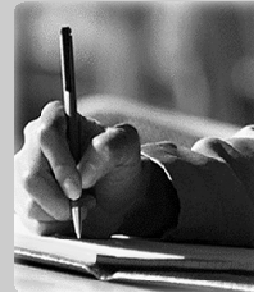


HG115: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season
KINDNESS: Love's Conduct

Matthew 5: 43-48 & Ephesians 2:1-10

Home Group Study Notes

22 November 2015 - Revd Paul Gambling



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

This is the last Home Group study before Christmas - share what you can, or will, do to encourage your non-church family and friends to remember that: 'Jesus is the reason for the season!'



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Discuss among your selves the theme; ‘Kindness – loves conduct’. Keep at the front of your sharing the question; what is ‘kindness’...how do you understand kindness? Share examples and experiences when you have witnessed what you believe defines kindness, when it has been extended to you, when you have extended it to others.

2: Now discuss it’s opposite ‘Unkindness’ in the same way.

3: Why do you think Jesus said: **“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”** (read Matthew 5:45 for a clue) Then discuss why you think Jesus said this? What does Jesus mean by ‘son’, ‘daughter’, ‘child’ of God?

IF THIS IS THE WAY TO SHOW WHAT GOD IS REALLY LIKE, AND IF THIS IS THE PATTERN THAT JESUS FOLLOWED EXACTLY.

Matthew is inviting us to draw the conclusion: that in Jesus we see Emmanuel - God-with-us. The Sermon on the Mount isn’t just about how to behave. The Sermon on the Mount is about discovering the living God in the loving, and dying, Jesus, and learning to reflect that love ourselves into the world that needs it so badly.

Do any of us remember a lady named Gee Walker? She was mother to Anthony Walker. He was axed to death in a racially motivated attack. The power of her words transmitted to us through our TV’S and radios are well worth remembering this morning.

Gee Walker forgave her son’s killers and extended Kindness; Love’s conduct, with these words: *‘At the point of death, Jesus said: “I forgive them, they don't know what they do.” I’ve got to forgive them – I still forgive them. My family and I still stand by what we believe – forgiveness.’*

She forgave her son’s killers and yes, her heart was still broken. What made this so intensely moving was the fact that her forgiveness was drawn agonisingly out of her, without making her loss easier. She could not have been who she was if she did not recognise that forgiveness was laid upon her; her life and her dead son’s would have been nonsense if she did not forgive. It was mercy without a hint of trivialisation or excuse for wrongdoing. Gee Walkers WORDS were no brief fling of sentimental goodwill. People like Gee Walker have known in their flesh and nerves just what the difference is that Jesus makes; it is not comfort or easy answers, it is the sheer fact that our lives can demonstrate that miraculous love is possible.

The starting place for us in demonstrating the way of Jesus, might seem insultingly small, and yet we are all too frequently, quite incapable of doing even that much.

What is it? We must learn to live together....there’s a noveltyeven with those we have not chosen....in love and kindness. We cannot stand in judgement over our enemies, withholding from them the love, that is God’s gift to them, just as it is to us.... We might much rather charge around, wielding judgment in God’s name.

But Christian disciples work at living together in Christ Jesus....then the world will have something to see that is not simply a mirror image of the earthbound reactions of those searching for identity and purpose in a disintegrating world they cannot make sense of, do not feel they belong to and have no voice in. The only Jesus they may encounter will be manifested and demonstrated through our lives together.

“I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”

This is our mission. Amen.

Is there something about our love that cannot be explained in natural terms? Is there something special and unique about our love that is not present in the life of the person who has not encountered Jesus? These are important questions.

Do you stop being kind and gracious to others because you know that they dislike you? (Question to self). Listen again to what St Paul says to the Ephesians: **“ as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Satan), the spirit who is at work in those who are disobedient.”**

Before we met Jesus, when we followed the wisdom and ways of a world who had chosen to alienate themselves from God’s love, we were most likely kind to those who were kind to us.....

Jesus says in 5:48: **“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

This verse summarises everything that has been said thus far in the Sermon on the Mount (5:3–47).

It seems Jesus says, the goal of the Christian is perfection. Someone has observed, “The Christian life has not been tried and found difficult; it has been tried and found impossible.”

Impossible? Well, yes, at one level. But again Jesus’ teaching isn’t just good advice, it’s GOOD NEWS! Jesus did it all himself, and opened up a way of being human so that all who follow him can discover it.

When they mocked him, he didn’t respond. When they challenged him, he told quizzical, sometimes humorous, stories that forced them to think differently. When they struck him, he took the pain.

When they put the worst bit of Roman equipment on his back – the heavy cross-piece on which he would be killed – he carried it out of the city to the place of his own execution. When they nailed him to the cross, he prayed for them.

The Sermon on the Mount isn’t just about US. If it was, we might admire it as a fine bit of idealism, but we’d then return to our normal lives.

**ITS ABOUT JESUS HIMSELF
THIS WAS THE BLUEPRINT FOR HIS OWN LIFE
HE ASKS NOTHING OF HIS FOLLOWERS THAT HE HASN’T FACED HIMSELF.**

Listen again to St Paul writing to the Ephesians in ch 2 **But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ.....**

And, within his own life, we can already sense a theme that will grow larger and larger until we can’t miss it.

4: What did Jesus say was the most important commandment? Why do you think Jesus believed they were the most important? Why does it matter so much?

5: What do you consider to be the most powerful and important characteristics of being a Christian?

6: If you consider ‘kindness’ to be of primary importance to your life as a Christian, consider the following and discuss together:

1. How can you as part of a Christian community (church) have an impact within? (You might want to consider relationships, words, actions, deeds etc)
2. As a church but beyond in the he wider community.
3. Your own personal life at home, workplace etc.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



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Home Group Sermon Notes

22 November 2015 - Revd Paul Gambling

"I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

Theme today is 'Kindness: Love's Conduct.' We live in a society of raw power: the one with the strongest fists or the most guns, or the greatest wealth wins. Our ethics are, "Do unto others first, before they do unto you." "If they do anything bad to you at all, finish them off before they can do anything worse." Or "Don't get mad, get even."

In 5:43 Jesus says, "**You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR and hate your enemy.'**"

The phrase, "You shall love your neighbour" is a quote from Lev 19:18. The word "neighbour" conveys the idea of one who is near. The neighbour could be a fellow believer or an adversary. The phrase "hate your enemy" is not a direct quote from any Old Testament passage; it was an inference from various texts (Deut 23:3-6; 25:17-19; Ps 139:21).

The crowd that was listening to Jesus' sermon – because this passage before us today is a part of Jesus Sermon on the Mount – must have said, "Okay, I will love my next-door neighbour, but those blasphemous Samaritans and unclean Gentiles ... "

However, in 5:44, Jesus once again goes above and beyond the Law by declaring: "**But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**"

How do these words sound to you this morning set against a background of a disintegrating world?

Here, love is not simply praised, it is commanded. It has been said, "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine." However, Jesus does not say that you need to *like* your enemy or like what they do. Rather, you are called to love them.

Biblical *agape* love requires that we are concerned about the welfare of even our enemies. This means that we will do things that will benefit and not harm them. How do we know if we really love our enemy? Do we pray for them?

We can be confident that we love our enemy when we pray for them. Why should we love our enemies? Jesus gives the purpose in loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us in 5:45:

"so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

You may be saying, "Wait a second, I thought I already was a child of God?" If you have believed in Christ as your Saviour, you are child of God.

The focus of this verse is not on attaining a relationship with God, but rather on being a person who shares the characteristics of God. That is the meaning of the original words translated to 'children' or 'son of.' For example, in our culture we might say:

"Like father, like son."

"He's a chip off the old block."

"She's the spitting' image of her mother."

When we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, we are manifesting a part of God's nature who is so gracious that He gives good things even to those who rebel against Him.

Listen to what St Paul says in his letter to the Ephesian believers in chapter 2: 3-5: **"Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."**

Jesus says that His Father sends sunshine and rain to fall on believers and blasphemers. God deals with enemies and friends alike. When you deal with both enemies and friends with their highest good in mind, part of God's character is manifested in us.

In 5:46–47, Jesus poses two pairs of rhetorical questions that get to the heart of the matter. He says: **"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet [bless] only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"**

Jesus declares that friendship with one's friends is nothing exceptional. Everyone does that...even tax collectors. In Jesus' day, the tax collectors would collect taxes for the Roman government and then add a surcharge, which they kept. Since tax collectors worked for Rome, they were viewed as traitors to their own people and were not well liked. Tax collectors were some of the most despised people in Jewish society, yet even they had love for those who loved them. Jesus' point is, this is true of everyone. So how is your love going to surpass that of the tax collector, or the person we might regard as despicable?