

The invisibility of God is a great problem.

It was already a problem to God's people in Old Testament days. Their pagan neighbours would taunt them, saying, "Where is your God?" Their gods were visible and tangible, but Israel's God was neither.



Today in our scientific culture young people are taught not to believe in anything which is not open to empirical investigation. How then has God solved the problem of His own invisibility?

The first answer is of course "in Christ." Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son has made him known." "That's wonderful," people say, "but it was 2,000 years ago. Is there no way by which the invisible God makes Himself visible today?" There is.

We return to 1 John 4:12: "No one has ever seen God." It is precisely the same introductory statement. But instead of continuing with reference to the Son of God, it continues: "If we love one another, God dwells in us." In other words, the invisible God, who once made Himself visible in Christ, now makes Himself visible in Christians, if we love one another.

It is a breathtaking claim. The local church cannot evangelise, proclaiming the gospel of love, if it is not itself a community of love.

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Notes and Questions



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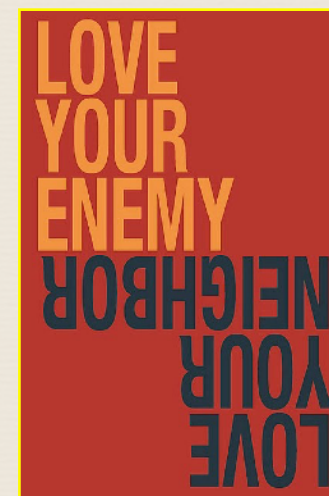
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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount #8

Active Love

Matthew 5:43-48



LOVE IN A TIME OF
COVID_19

22 March 2020

22 MARCH 2020
MATTHEW 5:43-48

The Ten Commandments monument is pictured in the State Judicial Building in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.



1. INTRODUCTION.

Today the whole world is reeling as countries seal their borders, businesses collapse amid massive financial uncertainties, individuals isolate themselves and hospitals anticipate waves of new patients.

Today we come to the apex of Jesus Sermon on the Mount at a time of 'unprecedented' challenge. His words to us today may never seem more suited to our situation.

However, whatever his words mean to us, we must remember Jesus' words expressed his mission as the Lord's anointed Messiah. They determined the path marked out for him.

2. THE HUMAN HEART

When it comes to the law of God, the human heart takes evasive action. Jeremiah's bleak diagnosis is 'the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked' (17:9) 'who can know it?'

The Law of the Lord says *no other god*, we erect idols, the law says *remember*, we forget, the law says *honour* we abuse, the law says *love your neighbour* we ask, who is may neighbour?

Jesus brings this home to us by a series of contrasts. "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you..." (Matthew 5 verses 21, 27, 31, 33, 38 and now 43). Each time Jesus exposes the seemingly plausible, but deeply misleading explanations of the religious leaders.

When it comes to human relationships the law puts love front and centre. The scribes and Pharisees picked up the law 'Love your neighbour' (Leviticus 19:18). The clear instruction is duty to fellow Israelites, to family and 'neighbour'.

So they assumed love for neighbour was permission to 'hate your enemy'. Their thought was: *Israel was 'God's chosen', the Gentiles were not!*

For any who wanted to maintain racial distinction this seemed reasonable enough to confirm their prejudice. But it ignores the verses which mention attitude to the sojourner! See verses 10 and 33, 34 of the same chapter!

There are two complex situations which might be used to muddy the law's clarity. One was the wars of Israel. The second is the imprecatory psalms. Thoughtful study will clarify any concern on both counts. See eg., John Stott, *The Sermon on the Mount* p.116ff.

Without taking time now we can comment briefly that (i) Israel's OT wars were viewed judicially as a judgment on the evils practised by Canaanite tribes. (ii) The imprecatory psalms call for judgment, but on God's enemies, not mine.

The whole Torah (12:49, 23:4,5, Deuteronomy 22:1-4) bears witness that the same law applied to stranger as to native born Jew. The reality was: *Israel was 'God's chosen' to ensure blessing for the Gentiles!*

3. FAKING LOVE TOGETHER

The sophistry with which the scribes and Pharisees evaded such clear passages of the Torah was not unique to them. We each have blind spots, and within us an ability to deceive ourselves. One blind spot is our loose thinking about 'love'.

In contemporary society we use the word *love* in a way very different from the the Bible. For us, love is feeling, typically induced by superficial stimuli; like

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coffee, Macdonald's, sport or my family. For us love readily becomes a particular feeling.

There are four different Greek words to describe love. Three are used in the Bible. The one not used is *eros*, signifying *sexual desire* or *lust*. It is this word that is most often connected with love in the contemporary mind.

Such loose thinking about something so central to our lives and their meaning does not serve us well.

The Bible is primarily about love as self-sacrificial service. In this COVID-19 crisis we get a sense of the reality and depth of service in our community. Sometimes it is dismaying, sometimes heartening. Let us be among those who go the extra mile.

4. JESUS REVALUES LOVE

We are used to loving those who love us. But Jesus takes us further... *love your enemies*.

Jesus is not merely revealing the truth about the love shortfall in human society. Where revenge and racism were common responses, Jesus demonstrated this kind of love; praying for those who tormented, crucified and killed him.

He is opening up to us all a new way of being human. A way marked out by his own DNA as the Christ. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son.

5. GOING WITH JESUS

At some moments in life we are more aware of our choices. Today we have the choice of turning inward or going with Jesus.

What this will mean for us is his theme in the rest of his sermon.