

Love Is Kind (2)

Scripture Reading — Matthew 5:4

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..." — Matthew 5:44

The Jewish scribes, who were responsible for interpreting God's law for the people, worked with a very narrow definition of neighbor. They defined neighbor as "a person close to you in terms of family, friendship, religion, ethnicity, or nation." People were to be kind to their neighbors. But they were to hate their enemies—others who did not have their best interests at heart.

Jesus commands his followers, however, to take on a radically different attitude toward enemies. In spite of our understandably negative feelings for them, we are to love them by being kind to them and praying for their well-being. Paul echoed this command, saying, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink" (Romans 12:20; see Proverbs 25:21).

But what can we gain from striving to love our enemies? Let me suggest three things. First, this is confirmation that we "participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), for God is kind to his enemies. Second, God may work through our kindness to move an enemy to repentance. Third, by being kind to our enemies, we purify our spirit of hatred and its effects: depression, irritability, shouting, violence, wars, death.

It's not easy to be kind to our enemies, but we can make good progress toward being Christlike in this life through the Holy Spirit, who lives in us.

Prayer

Father, you were kind to me while I was still your enemy. Help me to be kind to my enemies so that they too may turn to Jesus Christ for eternal life. In his name, Amen.

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