

Confusing Signals

“Love your enemies”

Matthew 5:44

Our Lord made various statements that run contrary to the ideas of the world. It must be understood that our Lord always spoke the truth, so if some things He said sound odd to our way of thinking, we are the ones who are in the wrong and not Jesus.

Our text today is one of the statements of Jesus that I refer to. Most people do not “love” their enemies. In fact, many people hate their enemies and wish evil upon them. Clearly, such an attitude is contrary to the verse for today.

We are told some very important things to consider when dealing with our enemies. Leviticus 19:17-18 (NIV) “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Our obligations toward our enemies has several aspects to it. First if someone offends us we are to rebuke the person (Luke 17:3). We have a

responsibility toward the offender to bring to their attention the issue that separates us. If we do not rebuke the offending person, we share in their sin as Leviticus 19:17-18 makes clear.

Apparently, at times, people who offend need our help in recognizing their sin. So at times our obligation toward our enemy is to help them see that they are in the wrong. What they do with the rebuke is their business.

However, the Bible puts restraints on the offended person. When it says to “love your enemies” it is not speaking about your emotions primarily. What the statement refers to is our actions toward the offending person, not our “feelings”. In Scripture, love is usually understood as a verb, or is used in context with action toward an enemy.

Matthew 5:43-44 reads “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 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...” (NIV)

In these verses we are told quite clearly that to love your enemy is to bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. So love is an activity and not just an emotion. Loving your enemy in this manner will certainly confuse many of them. They expect you to seek harm to them or to speak evil of them.

Loving your enemy in this manner keeps the door of reconciliation open. However, hatred or not having a forgiving spirit will close and lock the door, preventing reconciliation. Such an attitude is sin on the part of the offended person.

Find real lasting peace in life by forgiving whenever you can, loving your enemy when you can't, and always knocking on the unrepentant door through prayer and attitude when words “fail”.