

# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



November 27, 2016

## Loving Is Not Liking

The command to “love your enemies” seems hopelessly unrealistic—but not if we understand the distinction between “liking” and “loving” others.

*“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, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:43-45)*



No ethical system challenges humanity more than Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The demands that Jesus makes in this Sermon seem to contradict everything we think we know about human relations. Skeptics dismiss it as unrealistic, while believers struggle to understand and apply it.

The counterintuitive nature of the Sermon is nowhere more glaring than in the command to “love your enemies.” When others treat us with hate and contempt, it is only natural that we respond in kind. Yet Jesus insists that we not only *not hate* our enemy, but *love* him. How is this even possible?

To implement this principle in our lives, we first have to understand the terminology. By viewing “love” and “like”

as almost synonymous, we create a roadblock that prevents us from grasping what Jesus is saying. But the two concepts are quite different.

We “like” those things that bring us some kind of emotional pleasure or enjoyment. We *like* little puppies because they’re cute and playful; we *like* ice cream because it’s cold and sweet; and we *like* our friends because they are so much like us, with common interests, beliefs, experiences, and backgrounds. They probably even *look* like us. We like them because their presence in our lives validates our comfortable identity. None of that applies to our enemies, nor can it.

But to love someone in the Biblical sense involves none of those qualities. Biblical love can be defined as “active goodwill” toward others. It is a genuine desire for whatever is in the best interest of another, whether we like them or not, and is demonstrated in sincere acts of kindness and compassion. We don’t have to *like* someone to *love* them.

The greatest example of this kind of unselfish love is God Himself. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in

that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . *When we were enemies* we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:8, 10). God doesn’t just demand that we love our enemies; He models that behavior Himself, in a very practical manner.

The implications of this principle have a far-reaching effect on human relations. Start with marriage. Two people fall madly in love, get married, and take on the world together. But after a few years the fun wears off and the two people who once couldn’t bear to be apart now can’t stand each other. They don’t even *like* each other any more. They have become enemies, inflicting enormous pain on each other. Can their marriage be saved? Yes, but only if both parties are willing to do what Jesus said: *bless* instead of curse, *do good* instead of evil, and *pray fervently* for one another. They have to learn how to truly love each other, despite their differences.

Loving our enemies is not only possible, it is essential to human flourishing. We mustn’t allow our dislike of them keep us from doing them good.

– David King