

Junior High Bible Discussion Group
Doulos: ??

Open House: Living Out Our Christian Values With People We Just Don't Like

Scripture: Matthew 5: 43-48 (Henry's paraphrase below)

You've heard it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But here's what I say: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He makes the sun rise and shine on evil and good people, and makes rain fall on the righteous and unrighteous. If you love those who love you, so what? Don't the tax collectors do the same? What's so special if you hang out with only the ones you like? Don't the pagans do that too? Therefore, be perfect, because your heavenly Father is perfect.

Suggested Journal Time (at the beginning of the BDG):

Answer the following:

1. Who are some of the people you like at school? List names if possible, and why you like them. We won't read your entries, so feel free to write the guy or girl you have a crush on.
2. Who are some of the people you just don't like at school? Note: Excluding teachers and principal(s). I know many of you don't like "Bey", whoever he is. Why don't you like them? (Are they freakishly annoying? Do they talk funny? Do they ask silly questions? Etc.)

Suggested Outline:

1. Journal Time (at beginning of BDG)
2. Scripture Reading
3. Points to emphasize:
 - a. According to the world, who is your neighbor and who is your enemy?
 - b. According to Jesus, who is your neighbor? Who is your enemy?
 - c. Grace: What is grace?

What I'm trying to get across is not only the fact that our neighbor is technically everybody. People of the time (and in our time too) generally thought that the enemies are people who are "against us" and they must be eliminated at all costs (i.e. the Romans, in Jesus' time). What Jesus is going for is the idea of "loving the sinner, hating the sin". This ties into the second question. In Yancey's *What's So Amazing About Grace*, he recounts a time when he saw two groups (one identifying themselves as Christian, the other homosexual) meeting in front of the White House. The Christian group chanted derogatory slogans while the homosexual group was singing "Jesus Loves Me..." This idea of loving our neighbors is something that even Christians can find very difficult to swallow. We live in a culture that prizes strength, not weakness; and the idea of grace and Christian love seems to imply weakness.

4. Interesting tangents (or maybe not):

- a. “Love your neighbor and hate your enemies” Loving your enemies is a command found in Leviticus 19:18. Hating your enemies is nowhere found in the Law as an explicit command. What do the Pharisees think are the enemies? Who might Jesus be implying are our enemies?

The Pharisees (and most of the Jews) see the Romans and their allies, including the tax collectors, as enemies. In practice, they generally label them as “sinners” and “pagans” and don’t usually have any dealings with them. The fact that Jesus went to eat at Zacchaeus’ (tax collector) house, and had Matthew (tax collector) as one of his disciples already makes Jesus not a very likeable figure. Furthermore, Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion.

Of course, our Enemy is always Satan and his evil minions, and we are called to hate all that is sinful. However, we are not called to hate people, as sinful as they may be. This creates interesting questions for Christians. Are we, for example, to hate Adolf Hitler and Hideki Tojo (who massacred hundreds of thousands of Chinese in WWII)? Are we called to hate Osama bin Laden? Is the Allied attack on Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan biblical (I didn’t ask if it is *justifiable*, but if it is *biblical*). This leads to a parallel question below.

- b. In a few weeks, we’ll be talking about living out our Christian values in the world. As part of it, we’ll be talking about how we view war, poverty, etc. But let’s think a little: what are the implications of loving our enemies? If Jesus were President on September 11, 2001, what might he have done?

All in all, in our discussion of this, I hope you see how difficult a question this is. Loving our enemies and people we don’t like is NOT EASY. There are people who just “not cool”, weird, mean, or just rub you the wrong way. Jesus calls us to look out for their well-being above our own! If you run into problems with this, ask your parents or your older siblings, or people in YG who are older than you are. Of course, ask God to give you the heart to love these people.