

## 9. *Anti-Discrimination*

Be sons of your Father who is in heaven: He makes  
His sun rise on the evil and on the good.

Matthew 5:43-48

### *Equal rights*

Some words or phrases are very loaded in a particular time or period. In our day and age that certainly applies to the terms “discrimination” and “equal rights.” Labeling something as “discriminatory” amounts to a devastating condemnation, and nothing appears to be loftier than equal opportunity. Every difference and every quality has been made subservient to it. The differences between the races in talents, history and culture have to be left completely outside of any consideration when dealing with peoples and tribes. Whenever someone does not want to see marriage made the equivalent of all kinds of “life-styles,” he will quickly be shouted down as an enemy of equal rights. Who in the world wants to be an advocate of unequal rights?

The way in which the expressions “discrimination” and “equal rights” are employed today is rooted in the doctrine of human rights. All human beings have the same rights and for that reason they ought to receive the same treatment too. At the same time from the standpoint of human rights this also means *identical* treatment.

Christianity, not based on any doctrine of human rights, is now being judged more and more negatively. On the basis of God’s creation-order Christians differentiate the place and task of man and woman. For many they have thereby become the heretics of the 20th Century. Christians also make a distinction between marriage as an institution established by God and a homosexual relationship which violates God’s creation-order and commandment. Because of that many people consider Christians to be the archvillains of the modern era: they discriminate!

In an attempt to save Christianity some take shelter in a distinction between the Christians with their disputable Bible interpretations and the Lord Jesus who in reality outlawed all discrimination. Wasn’t He just as much a teacher for prostitutes

and tax collectors as for the Pharisees? And didn't He abolish all forms of prejudice when He told about His heavenly Father who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good? Is it possible to plug the Sermon on the Mount into the modern plea for complete toleration and the right of self-determination for every person?

### *Love and hate*

Jesus begins His instruction in verse 43 with a reference to something spoken to the forefathers: "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." That sounds harsh and at any rate it looks like discrimination: treat your neighbor and your enemy unequally! Many Bible interpreters have a hard time imagining that God could have ever said anything like that to the people of Israel. Correspondingly, the first section is ascribed to God: "Love your neighbor," while the second section is dismissed as an incorrect Jewish tradition: "Hate your enemy." Over and against this Jewish perversion of the golden rule Jesus is supposed to reveal God's true intentions again. It's hard to get around the fact, however, that Jesus was always quoting the Words of God in the previous sections when He talked about the things spoken to the forefathers. Should that be any different all of a sudden? Did not the Old Testament really teach love towards fellow Israelites and foreigners, but at the same time hate towards the enemies of God as well?

This double-edged commandment cannot be separated from the fact that God's people in the Old Testament constituted a nation with their own territory and their own king. Anyone with borders on this planet has to watch over them too. Invading enemies cannot be greeted as brothers. There will be war. Not out of a desire for conquest, but rather to protect God's land and God's people. Loving of one's people has as its flip-side hating all those who would wipe it from the face of the earth. Loving Israel means hating Haman!

### *Love versus hate*

Jesus' appearance marks a turning point in history for God's people. He hands Israel a new order of the day: "But I tell you: love your enemies." A new sound because a new era is dawning. Not a time in which prejudices can be eliminated. The enemies of the church remain active. They shall "curse, hate,

attack and persecute” the believers. That is terrible and it calls forth revenge, antipathy, counteraction and revolt. In the centuries before Jesus’ coming in Israel this would have been sufficient grounds for God’s people to call everyone to the flag and to give their persecutors their just rewards under the leadership of a Samson or a David. The new response Jesus is teaching Israel is quite striking: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you.” Now the attitude of love, very active love, replaces the hatred of enemies. A wondrous counterattack.

Another era is clearly dawning. A time in which national territory will no longer have to be guarded and a time in which the church will no longer be gathered inside earthly boundaries. A time in which Jesus prepares His church for the kingdom of heaven of which the earthly Israel was a shadow. The struggle has already been decided: the enemy is powerless and on the run. Since Jesus’ coming the gates of hell are no longer capable of overcoming His church. Now we have the room to love our enemies. We don’t need to react negatively. We can show our faith in Jesus’ victory through unconcerned love for our persecutors. Who wouldn’t pray for losers who are going to perish? Who wouldn’t be concerned for people who ought to be very worried. Christ’s triumph frees His church to pray for its persecutors. Loving Christ, you no longer have to hate Herod!

### *Love without boundaries*

By placing His people in the open, Jesus calls upon His subjects to mirror God’s love in their lives without limits. “That you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (verse 45). God gives His sun and His rain indiscriminately to all men. He causes His sun to rise unceasingly in Japan, over Siberia, Russia, Europe and all the way to the shores of the Americas. Regardless of the races which live there and regardless of the ideology they might hold: the sun rises. God is the One who allows the sun to rise! Not as a deadly heat. At precisely the right time He mixes drought and rain according to the circumstances and needs of every region. In this way the earth becomes fruitful and offers food and drink for man and animal. It’s man’s fault that not everyone enjoys this. God opens His hand without any restraint. He has done this through the

centuries. Paul points this out to the pagans in Lystra. Even though they served idols in the preceding centuries, God did not leave himself without testimony: “He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and drops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17).

Christians are allowed to imitate this love. Not because all human beings are equal or because all people have the same rights. Jesus emphatically speaks about good and bad people, the righteous and the unrighteous. There is a difference. The one deserves help, the other does not. The basis for God’s love lies in His patience and not in human rights. He does not employ His majesty to shut wicked people out of sunlight and food. He surrounds them with His care too because He still wants to lead them to repentance. The whole of world history represents a period of gracious sparing through limitless patience. One day that will all come to an end, at the last judgment. Now, however, is the time for repentance, and God’s love invites everyone to do that. God’s children must imitate that image. Even when they are persecuted. God Himself is cursed and hated by many: nevertheless, he allows His enemies to walk the streets in the sunlight. In this way Christians are allowed to do good to those who hate them. So that the world will catch a glimpse of the image of the Father through the response of their love. Since God allows His sun to shine over Red Square, we may pray for the atheistic rulers in the Kremlin.

#### *Equal love for unequal men*

Love among men is always limited. For that reason Jesus says: “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (verses 46-47). The Israelites who kept the law cut themselves off from tax collectors and they in turn had their own circle of friends too. People draw borders around themselves: anyone falling outside their territory is dropped. Today it is no different. Whoever is unwilling to bow before a modern vision of equality, can forget about being treated equally. He will be actively discriminated against and unequally treated. By continuing to speak about good and evil, Christians will be

unwelcome. Discriminating does not stop with those who employ the word “discrimination” as a defamation.

Jesus, however, teaches us how to treat all men without any discrimination. Not an equal opportunity which stands in awe of their human rights, but equal opportunity which passes God’s love on to all, the good and the bad. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (verse 48). The Bible forbids us to make any distinction between man and woman, or black and white, when it comes to manifesting love and doing good works.

True love adjust itself to the needs of others. Love never hurts anyone’s feelings. Love does not send a neighbor away with freedoms he is incapable of handling. Love asks what is appropriate and what will help, and what is useful and edifying. God gives sun and rain using other criteria in the tropical lands than in North America. He changes the climate between the coast and the interior. At first glance inequality in treatment seems to abound. But if this inequality arises out of love and good care, and if it is the correct treatment, every land breathes again and every region can come to full bloom. Treating everyone exactly the same way is not very difficult: in point of fact we dismiss everyone with impersonal treatment. Treating everyone the correct way on account of love is very difficult: nevertheless, we then pull everyone towards us with non-discriminating love. This is the only kind of “equal rights” with a future, because it reflects the love of God.