

Contempt vs. Love

How the Sermon on the Mount trades arrogance for humility and scorn for love

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.

MATTHEW 5:43-44

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Jesus says the real difference in His followers is the way they love. Contempt looks down on people; love sees the value in every person, even an enemy.
SCRIPTURE	Matthew 5:1-48 · 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 · Galatians 5:22-23 · Colossians 3:12-14
LENGTH	About 30 minutes, or three shorter sessions (Beatitudes, salt and light, six comparisons)
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles and a whiteboard divided into two columns: <i>Contempt</i> and <i>Love</i>

Start here: the eye roll

Ask the group to show you their best eye roll. Then ask: "What does an eye roll say without any words?" Usually it says, *You're stupid. You don't matter. I'm better than you.* That attitude has a name: **contempt**.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus describes what a truly successful, blessed person looks like. As you follow His teaching, you notice the real difference between His followers and everyone else isn't how religious they are. It's the way they love. And over and over, He contrasts contempt (arrogance and hate) with the humility and love He expects.

Contempt

Looking at someone as worthless, beneath you, or not worth your respect. Scorn. It also shows up as open disrespect for authority, law, and order.

Love

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4). It sees the value of each person and doesn't expect anything in return.

1 Eight qualities of a person without contempt

Read Matthew 5:1-12. These "Beatitudes" (from the Latin word for *blessed*) describe a person God calls happy. Notice how each one is the opposite of contempt:

Poor in spirit

Humble. Unselfish, considerate, gentle, and quiet. Knows they need God.

Those who mourn

Feels pain. Grieves over sin and the damage it does, in themselves and others.

The meek

Strength under control. Self-controlled and alert; responds instead of reacting.

Hunger for righteousness

Wants to be like Christ more than anything.

The merciful

Forgiving. Gives people what they don't deserve.

Pure in heart

Sincere and honest, with no hidden agenda.

Peacemakers

Reconciles people, pays debts, and fixes wrongs.

Persecuted for righteousness

Willing to be excluded, insulted, or rejected for doing what is good and right.

Paul paints the same portrait in other words: the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and the clothing of a believer: "tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering... But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12-14).

2 A commitment to be different: salt and light

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." **MATTHEW 5:13-14**

In Jesus' day, salt preserved food from rotting and gave it flavor. Light, of course, shows the way. People who live without contempt stand out. They slow the rot around them and help others see God. Jesus says the goal is that people "may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (5:16).

3 Six comparisons: contempt or love?

Jesus says He came not to destroy God's moral law but to fulfill it (5:17-20). Then He shows six areas where the religious leaders kept the outside rules while their hearts stayed full of contempt. Each time He says, "You have heard... but I say to you." Write each one on the board in both columns.

- **Life (5:21-26).** Contempt says, "As long as I don't murder anyone, I'm fine." Love deals with anger and insults, too. Calling someone "Raca" (an Aramaic word meaning something like "empty-head") was pure contempt. Love goes and makes things right, even before worship.
- **Purity (5:27-30).** Contempt treats people as objects to use. Love guards the eyes and heart and honors others as people made in God's image.
- **Marriage (5:31-32).** Contempt looks for an easy way out of commitments. Love keeps covenant.
- **Honesty (5:33-37).** Contempt plays word games to get out of promises. Love lets "Yes" mean yes and "No" mean no.
- **Forgiveness (5:38-42).** Contempt demands payback. Love turns the other cheek and goes the extra mile.
- **Kindness (5:43-48).** Contempt loves friends and hates enemies. Love prays for enemies and does good to people who hate you, just like our Father, who "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good" (5:45).

BACKGROUND FOR THE LEADER

The "go the extra mile" saying comes from Roman law, which let a soldier force a civilian to carry his gear for one mile. Jesus' listeners hated this. Imagine their shock when He said to carry it two. It's a perfect picture of trading resentment for love. Also be clear that "turn the other cheek" is about personal insults and revenge; it does not mean students must stay in abusive or dangerous situations.

The heart of it

Jesus ends the chapter with a sentence that can feel impossible: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (5:48). The word means complete or mature. We can't get there by trying harder. Only Jesus loved perfectly, and He lives in us by His Spirit. When we let Him, His love pushes out our contempt.

TALK IT OVER

1. Where do you see contempt most at school or online? Why do you think it's so common?
2. Which of the eight Beatitude qualities is hardest for you? Why?
3. Jesus said insulting someone is connected to murder. Why do you think He took contempt so seriously?
4. What would "going the extra mile" look like with a sibling, a teammate, or a classmate this week?
5. Who is one person you have looked down on? What would it look like to love them instead?

TAKE IT HOME

Read Matthew 5 every day this week. Each time you catch yourself rolling your eyes, making a cutting comment, or looking down on someone, stop and ask Jesus to help you see that person the way He does. Then do one kind thing for the person you find hardest to love.

The real difference is the way we love.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

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