



Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48

Subject: Part 30. Love Your Enemies - Part 1

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 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, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

This whole sermon on the mount really draws a contrast between the best of men and God’s standards. At their very best - the most legalistic, ritualistic, religious people on the earth - the Pharisees - couldn’t match God’s standards. For example; they thought it was enough not to kill, but Jesus told them that they shouldn’t even harbour anger. As you are aware, Jesus was primarily teaching His disciples and they would have imbibed the traditional religious view of the day. Their religious teachers would have lacked all of what Jesus taught, for example, humility, mourning over sin, meekness, yearning for true righteousness, mercy, peace, purity of heart, and a peace-making spirit (see verses 3 to 9). But Jesus on the mountain that day directed them to God's word, teaching them God’s standards. This would have shown them how far they had departed from the ways of God, due to the fact that man had manipulated the law and all of God’s teachings to suit themselves. *Does this sound familiar of what is happening today?* But God wants His people to be different and as Jesus directed their attention to the Biblical view that day, in so doing, Jesus also points us in the same direction.

Now as we come to Chapter 5 verses 43 to 48, he contrasts their love with the kind of love that should characterize the subjects of His Kingdom. By doing so, He’s telling the religious that they’re not in His in Kingdom. They don’t qualify.

But we who are called by His name, are called on to be unique, beloved. Just like Christ. Nowhere is the distinction between the life of man and the Kingdom of God made more clear or unclear than in the life of a believer.

We could compare these verses to Matthew 22 verse 37, when the Lawyer asked Jesus what was the greatest command - *Jesus said unto him, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

In other words, you can keep all the law and all the prophets, one by one, or you can just love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself, and that will cover the law. It is also indicated in Romans 13:8 - *“Owe no-one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”*

We of course are not justified by the law, but the law brings us to Christ. Christ came to fulfil the law and in Matthew 5 when our Lord begins to speak about loving, he is touching on that which sums up the whole law. These verses are more than that just keeping the law, they contrast false righteousness with the true righteousness of God. To be a true disciple of Jesus, one must not just be convinced or convicted by this sermon, but one must apply it. It is not up for personal interpretation, for the Pharisees and Scribes already did that, but it is to be believed, accepted and lived out. Christ’s teaching is timeless, and classless, and it is for all of Jesus’ disciples, for all times.

These verses do indeed address love. The people who are in Christ’s kingdom have a love that goes beyond the love that we find naturally in this world, because we don’t just love our neighbours and hate our enemies, but we love our enemies. And we will see in verse 46 why this is different to the world’s standard but for now I just want to look at what does the word enemy actually mean, so we can put everything into biblical context.

The word “enemy” comes from the Latin “inimicus”, simply meaning “not a friend”. A friend is a person who we have a strong liking for and we trust in. Of course, not everyone who is not a friend is automatically an enemy. Enemies are opponents – not opponents for play, as in sports or games, but in opposition with us in matters of deep concern. They can rub us up the wrong way, and every interaction with them can be a real struggle.

In verse 43, Jesus first addresses the tradition of the Jews by saying -

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

This is now the sixth time that Jesus has addressed the traditional teachings with *‘You have heard that it was said’* and here He points out that their supposed commitment to loving their neighbor was inadequate. When you look at what they taught ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’, I would say that it is a pretty open-ended statement. All you’d have to do is first figure out who your neighbour is and then you can hate everybody else and be okay. It would also make sure that you could be comfortable with loving people just like you, and have the right to hate those who were not like you, disagreed with you, didn’t give you what you wanted, or didn’t belong to your class, background, or group.

But is this what God taught? Let’s look at Leviticus 19:18 and as we read the verse note for yourself the difference: *“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.”*

This command of loving your neighbour is repeated a number of times in the New Testament - *Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14 and James 2:8*. God’s standard for human relationships has always been anchored in love for one another; a love that shows itself in sympathetic concern and actual care. A great example of this is found in Luke 10:25-37 with the parable of the “The good Samaritan”.

In the Book of Deuteronomy 22:1-4, we find that the Lord taught that this “love of neighbour” was to be demonstrated in practical terms. It even extended to lost live-stock that was to be returned to its owner. And if the owner was unknown it was to be cared for until the owner was discovered. If a fellow countryman’s animal fell down or was injured they were to be helped also, which was used by Jesus as an example of loving your neighbour regardless of the day in Luke 14:5 (*c.f. Matthew 12:11&12*). *But was this demonstration of practical love also to be shown to their enemies?* Let’s turn to Exodus 23:4-5 to find out - *“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.”*

God was not speaking about an enemy soldier on the battlefield, but an individual - be it fellow countryman, foreigners, or anyone who is in some way or other antagonistic. God has never had a double standard of righteousness and some think that because they have divided God by making a difference between the old and new testament. But this is wrong. Turn to Psalm 119:96, and it clearly says, ***“I have seen the consummation of all perfection, But Your commandment is exceedingly broad”.***

In other words, the Israelites' neighbour was anyone in need that they might come across, *was that not so in the parable of the good Samaritan?* It may have sounded new, but in fact it wasn't. In the oldest book of the Bible Job says in chapter 31:29-30. ***“If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, Or lifted myself up when evil found him ³⁰ (Indeed I have not allowed my mouth to sin By asking for a curse on his soul);”***

We can't say that Job was fulfilling the law for it had not yet existed. What we can say, and do say, is that he was fulfilling personal righteousness that corresponds to God's standard. He did not rejoice when harm came to his enemies nor did he refuse to help them, let's turn to Job 31:31-32 ***“If the men of my tent have not said, ‘Who is there that has not been satisfied with his meat?’ ³² (But no sojourner had to lodge in the street, For I have opened my doors to the ^[a]traveller);***

Long before the law was given this man of God was personally living out God's standard of righteousness which included being merciful, kind, and showing loving care for others. No wonder God said of him ***“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. KJV.***

Even in the Old Testament, God's direction for the godly is not about seeking revenge or doing wrong against those who either oppose us or who are different to us, or who even persecute us. For instance, David displayed this godly character in the Psalms. Take for instances Psalm 7:4&5 from the Amplified Bible,

“If I have paid back with evil him who was at peace with me or without cause have robbed him who was my enemy, ⁵ Let the enemy pursue my life and take it; yes, let him trample my life to the ground and lay my honour in the dust. Selah [pause, and calmly think of that]!

David knew it was wrong to do evil against someone who wronged him just as it was wrong to evil against a friend. In another Psalm, Psalm 35:12-15, we read the following:

“They reward me evil for good, To the sorrow of my soul. ¹³ But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart. ¹⁴ I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother. ¹⁵ But in my adversity they rejoiced And gathered together; Attackers gathered against me, And I did not know it; They tore at me and did not cease;”

Despite his enemies seeking to do David evil, he nonetheless prayed for them as though they were his friends. These were not mere words of David trying to put a song together but he lived this truth out in his life, as we know. A great example of this is found in 1 Samuel 24:3-7, at this time Saul was out doing his best to capture David and kill him, which we all can agree, well fits the category of enemy. David had every reason, and in that chapter, even had the opportunity to repay him like for like, and kill him. But he did not do that, because he feared the Lord more. On another occasion when Saul’s relative Shimei threw rocks at David, and while it was in his power to deal with this man he did not, neither did he allow others to touch him. His devotion to a higher law prevented him from doing so.

Hard as it may seem God’s standard for His people was to treat even their enemies like friends and family even in the Old Testament. *Examples: Proverbs 17:5; 24:29; 25:21, and it was a fact that Jonah failed to realise.*

Going back to verse 43 - Yes it was thought to love your neighbour, like the law said, but the rabbinical tradition added in ‘*and hate your enemy*’. This is why Jesus needed to point out this perversion of the word of God. As I’ve already mentioned, your enemy could be anyone who was different in any way. The Old Testament had been perverted both by what was omitted and by what was added. In this verse we have both an omission and an addition which we will briefly look at.

Firstly - the omission. The verse in Leviticus 19:18 when talking about loving your neighbours (who was any person) ends with the words, “*as yourself*”. But by the days in which Jesus lived on the earth - the key part of the teaching was omitted. *How could this happen? Well,*

these religious people were meticulous when it came to persevering and interpreting the law, however, they manipulated it to suit their lifestyles and ideas over the years. They were the modern millies of their time, getting with the programme which suited their culture, and probably what the influential liked to hear. They were not ignorant; they knew well what the Law said. This is clearly seen for instance, in Mark 12:32-33. Another example is found in Luke 10:26-27 when Jesus spoke to a *“certain”* lawyer about the law of God. Jesus replied as follows;

“He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” 27 So he answered and said, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbour as yourself.’”

This reply comprised of Exodus 20:1-2 and Leviticus 19:18.

Surely this proves that the Law was fully known, but only partly taught, and practiced. God’s law was frequently contradicted by rabbinic tradition, just like other Scriptures, that seemed too demanding. Loving your neighbour had been reduced to a humanly acceptable level. Satan’s perversions of God’s revelation almost always touches on the truth at some point. We all know that a lie, which is mostly true, is the most dangerous, and its deception is more believable and acceptable. The rabbis and scribes had kept a part of God’s truth about love. As already indicated, *You shall love your neighbour as yourself* is a clear teaching of the Old Testament.

Why did they omit it? Most of the scribes and Pharisees loved themselves. They loved to be honoured, praised, and respected (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16), and believed they deserved it. The Pharisee who thanked God that he was *“not like other people”* (Luke 18:11) was typical of most Pharisees. He was also typical of most people throughout history. For the natural man and unfortunately for some Christians, self-love is real, active, and quite noticeable. Most people spend their lives doing and seeking things that are primarily in their own interest and their own safety, comfort, income, pleasure, health, personal interests, and so on.

Along with that significant omission, tradition had narrowed the meaning of neighbour to include only those people they preferred and approved of - which amounted basically to their own kind. Such obviously profane people as tax-gatherers and ordinary sinners were despised as outcasts and as not being worthy even to be considered Jews. But even that

restriction of neighbours was not narrow enough. The scribes and Pharisees also despised and looked down on the common people (like they were the great unwashed). They dismissed those who believed in Jesus by saying, ***“No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? But this multitude which does not know the Law is accursed”*** (John 7:48-49). Ironically, the proud and arrogant religious leaders who knew but perverted the law, disdained as ***“accursed”*** the common people who they felt did not know it. They conveniently ignored Exodus 12:49, ***“There shall be one law for the native and one law for the stranger who sojourns among you.”*** There are not different laws for different people. If you are to love, you are to love, and it is as broad as the commandment of God is broad. It wasn't only the Pharisees who were like this, this attitude would have been found amongst the ordinary Jews, they may just have looked down on different types of people.

Now let's move on to the next point - the addition. Rabbinic tradition also perverted the Old Testament teaching about love by adding something to it: ***hate your enemy***. Their addition was even more perverse than their omission, but it was the logical extension of their all-consuming self-interest. It goes without saying that Gentiles were not considered neighbours. A saying of the Pharisees has been discovered, and it reads, ***“If a Jew sees a Gentile fallen into the sea, let him by no means lift him out, for it is written, ‘Thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbour,’ but this man is not thy neighbour.”***

It is little wonder that the Romans charged Jews with hatred of the human race. A drum that was to be beaten by the Roman church and the Nazi's and every other antisemitic.

Why the addition? One excuse the Jews often made to justify hatred of Gentiles was based on God's command for their forefathers to drive out the Canaanites, Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites, and other pagan peoples as they conquered and possessed the Promised Land under Joshua (Joshua 3:10. Exodus 33:2. Deuteronomy 7:1;). Those peoples were considered a cancer that had to be cut out in order to save God's people from utter moral and spiritual corruption. ***“The wars of Israel,”*** writes Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ***“were the only ‘holy wars’ in history, for they were the wars of God against the world of idols. It is not this enmity which Jesus condemns, for then He would have condemned the whole history of God's dealing with His people. On the contrary, He affirms the Old Covenant”*** (The Cost of Discipleship, trans. R. H. Fuller.)

Israel's harsh dealing with those people was entirely as the instrument of God's judgment. God's people were never to return evil for evil, cruelty for cruelty, hatred for hatred. The idea that Gentiles, even wicked ones, were to be personally despised and hated originated from the heretical Jews' own pride and self-righteousness, not from God's Word. Rabbinic tradition no doubt also tried to justify hatred of enemies on the basis of the psalms. For example David's Psalm 69:22-24,

“May their table before them become a snare; and when they are in peace, may it become a trap. May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, and make their loins shake continually. Pour out Thine indignation on them, and may Thy burning anger overtake them”.

Such words did not represent David's personal vendetta but his concern for God's holiness and justice to be executed on those who despised the Lord's glorious name and persecuted the Lord's people. The basis for David's oaths is found in verse 9 of that same psalm: *“For zeal for Thy house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me.”*

David was angered because of what was done against God. When Jesus cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem, *“His disciples remembered”* David's words, *“that it was written, ‘Zeal for Thy house will consume me’”* (John 2:17). David and Jesus shared the same righteous indignation. The apostle John experienced similar tension of feelings when he *“took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it.” “It was in my mouth sweet as honey,”* he said, *“and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter”* (Revelation 10:10). He was glad because he knew the Lord would be absolutely victorious over His enemies; but he was sad because of the millions who would be destroyed because they would not turn to God. It is one thing to defend the honour and glory of God by seeking the defeat of His detracting enemies, but quite another to hate people personally as our own enemies.

Our attitude towards even the worst pagans or heretics is to love them and pray that they will turn to God and be saved. But we also pray that, if they do not turn to Him, God will judge them and remove them in order to prepare the way for His Son Jesus Christ as the rightful ruler of this world. We are to share God's own balance of love and justice. God

loved Adam, but He cursed him. God loved Cain, but He punished him. God loved Sodom and Gomorrah, but He destroyed them. God loved Israel, but He allowed her to be conquered and exiled, and He set her aside for a while. The scribes and Pharisees had no such balance. They had no love for justice, only for vengeance. And they had no love for their enemies, only for themselves. After David declared of God's enemies in Psalm 139:22-24 he wrote, *"I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies," he also prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way"*.

The scribes and Pharisees, by contrast, knew nothing either of righteous indignation or righteous love. Their only indignation was that of personal hatred, and their only love was that of self-esteem.

However, we as followers of Christ, are to be characterized by loving our enemies. That makes us different from the world. People in the world love their friends and their families. They can even be compassionate and sympathetic to people who don't have much. However, the world doesn't naturally love their enemies and those who do are often seen as either mad or genius. There is the famous quote of the president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, *"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."*

Nelson Mandela was right. You see if you hate your enemy, you've locked yourself into a prison of bitterness after committing the crime of murder, which Jesus addressed earlier on in this sermon.

John Stott, in relation to how Christian's should react to their enemies, said - *"To love them is ardently to desire that they will repent and believe and be saved."*

With all of that in mind we come to Jesus. Finally, we'll see the truth of Christ as He clears up all the misconceptions. He begins with the now familiar words, *'But I say unto you'*. As His disciple, are we listening? Are we in agreement? Are there changes needed in our thinking and behaviour? Before we can answer the question we need to know what Jesus says, but you will have to wait until next time. Amen.