

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: January 25, 2015
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“BUT I SAY: HATRED”
Matthew 5:43-48

? Who is your enemy?

A woman said to me, “I don’t have any enemies.”

Then, in the next breath, she described how she keeps a gun within reach for protection against home invasion.

? Who is your enemy?

Is it a *personal* adversary: the competitor at work, the bully at school, the abuser at home, that hateful individual you know all too well?

Is it an *impersonal* opponent: the oily politician, the brutish night stalker, the masked terrorist, that threatening figure you have never met?

? Who is your enemy?

You can identify them by the emotions which they, more than anyone else, provoke: alarm, fear, disdain, resentment, anger, bitterness.

You can identify them by the fantasies which they alone evoke: fantasies of destroying their reputation, ruining their career, bankrupting them, humiliating them, hurting them, killing them.

? Who is your enemy? I invite you to visualize them in your mind’s eye, and keep them in view this morning.

■ Please turn with me to Matthew 5:43: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”**

- Messiah is pointing back to Leviticus 19:18: **“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge...but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”**

Did you hear the part about **“hate your enemy”**? Me neither! We didn’t hear it, because it isn’t there. It isn’t anywhere to be found in the OT.

☑ {NIV Study Notes} However, the stricter Pharisees have **“added to this command what they [think] it [implies]: ‘Hate your enemy.’”** They argue that enemy hatred is not just permissible, it is necessary.

Their thought process goes like this: Anyone who hates me is my enemy; my enemies (presumably) hate God, too, so they are also God’s enemies; to love God is to hate his enemies; and, since my enemies are God’s enemies, I am obligated to hate them.

{Lev 24:19-20} In their view, enemy hatred is neither forbidden as a sin, nor allowed as a concession to our brokenness – it is mandated as an act of devotion! And so the *Lex Talionis* (the law of **“Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth”**) isn’t merely a merciful judicial code, much less self-indulgent revenge; it is a defense of divine honor!

Not all Pharisees subscribe to this analysis, but a growing number do. You can see why. Assuming that my enemies are God’s enemies and that it is good to hate them simplifies decision-making, eliminates self-doubt, and validates otherwise unjustifiable actions.

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

■ Matthew 5:44a: **“But I tell you, love your enemies.”** Act lovingly toward those who hate you.

Exemplify ἀγάπη [agápē] love in every interaction with people who are hostile.

☑ {Bonhoeffer, “Loving Our Enemies”} It is hard enough to come to grips with enemy love as an abstract principle. It gets harder the moment you realize Christ is talking about specific individuals who “[speak] **ill of me, who [vilify] me, who openly [wrong] me, who [plague] and [torture] me at every opportunity.**” That is who the Son of God has in mind when he declares **“love your enemies.”**

☑ {Pinchas Lapide} Let’s face it: many Christians are in the habit of trying **“to domesticate everything in [the Sermon on the Mount] that is shocking, demanding, and uncompromising,”** thereby “[rendering] **it harmless.**” I’ve done that myself.

We have contrived clever arguments to convince ourselves that **“love your enemies”** does not really mean **“love your enemies.”** Starting there we logically conclude that with some exceptions, we cannot – should not – must not – apply Mt 5:43-48 literally. It is too naïve, too grueling, too impractical, and far too dangerous.

★ There is an array of biblical and theological truths to refute this, but I am going with the best one: Jesus. Jesus perfectly embodies enemy love: his incarnation was an act of enemy love; his teachings emphasize enemy love; his relationships are case studies in enemy love.

★ {Ro 5:8} Above all, his crucifixion is the supreme manifestation of enemy love. **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

{Ro 8:7} Consider that sin is not just breaking the rules; it is antagonism against God, for **“the sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not [surrender]”** to him, **“nor can it do so.”** To say **“Christ died for us”** **“while we were still sinners”** is to say he **“died for us”** **“while we while we were still”** his enemies, while we desired to dethrone him, while we were actively opposed him, while we hated him.

■ **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies.”**

? Do we want to love our enemies? I hope so!

Before we go any further, a warning is in order: This is not about winning friends and influencing people. Enemy love can have that impact, and it sometimes does. *Sometimes!* More often the enemy does not change. They are still hostile after our interaction.

? Why, then, should we love our enemies?

✎ ■ 1st Reason) “Love your enemies,” (verse 45a) **“that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”**

To be children of God is to love our enemies. To love our enemies is to be children of God.

This is not works righteousness. We do not earn salvation by loving our enemies.

☑ This is spiritual genetics. As biological offspring we inherit all our genetic characteristics exclusively from our birth parents. To be their child is to have their DNA and RNA. To have their DNA and RNA is to be their child.

{Jn 1:13; Ro 8:29} Likewise, as spiritual offspring who are **“born of God”** we inherit all our spiritual genes from our **“Father in heaven.”** We are not his clones; yet we are being **“conformed to the image of his Son”** and, by extension, the Father.

Enemy love is an essential quality of I AM. It is not only what LORD YHWH does, it's who he is.

■ Verse 45b: **“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”**

☑ {Barclay} God is compassionate and generous to those who **“have broken his law and broken his heart.”** With unconquerable goodwill he pours out natural blessings even on his sworn enemies.

Are we his children? The evidence is in the way our words and actions resemble his. **“Love your enemies that you may be [his] children.”**

↗ ■ 2nd Reason) Verses 46-47: **“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 own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”**

Talk of rewards can make us feel squeamish. It evokes images of religious mercenaries who are in it not because of love, but to get the goods.

This is different. God's rewards are based not on performance, but on a particular relationship.

Beth and I give gifts to many children, but some are reserved for our daughters. We do not calculate how much love and blessing they have earned; their “rewards” are inherent to the relationship.

☑ {Weight of Glory} C.S. Lewis makes the same point, but better: **“There are different kinds of rewards.... Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for ... her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it.”**

Jesus does not name the rewards for enemy love. But isn't it enough to know that they come from God?

Why should we love our enemies? That we **“may be children of”** God and receive his full **“reward.”**

? The question is, how? How does conviction become reality? How do we love our enemies?

↗ ■ We love them by praying for them. Verse 45b: **“love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.”**

☑ {Barclay} We can stand on the side of our enemy and plead to the Lord on their behalf. It might take some time, but **“No [one] can pray for another...and still hate”** them. When we truly come into **“the presence of God”** and bring our enemy along with us in prayer, **“we cannot go on hating”** them. **“The**

surest way of killing bitterness is to pray for the [one] we are tempted to hate.”

✈ ■ We love our enemies by using good manners. In verse 47 Jesus instructs us to “**greet**” our enemies, to extend to them the same politeness we show our “**own people**,” our family and friends.

We are cordial to our enemy because the Father created them in his image, the Son gave his life for them, and the Holy Spirit is seeking to save them. Not only so, my courtesy enables me to see them not as a grotesque caricature, not as a one-dimensional cartoon, not as the personification of evil, but as a real human being.

✈ ■ We love our enemies by refusing to retaliate and by giving ourselves for them.

● We explored Matthew 5:38-42 last week. I won't rehash the message, but hear the word of the Lord:

“...do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other... as well. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go...two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

{Ro 12:17-21} The apostle Paul puts it like this: “**Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... Do not take revenge.... On the contrary, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink’**” (he is

quoting Proverbs 25:21). “**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**”

■ This brings us to Matthew 5:48: “**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**”

No Christ Follower will achieve sinless perfection this side of eternity. We cannot be perfect in our *being*.

Some Christ Followers are functionally complete. They are fulfilling their purpose. They are τελειοι [téleioi].

☑ {Barclay} Τελειος [téleios] (that's the noun) “**has nothing to do with... abstract, metaphysical perfection A thing is perfect if it [achieves] the [objective] for which [it] was created.**”

☑ {Barclay} The Creator's intent is that we love him and our neighbors, including our enemies. When his “**unwearied, forgiving, sacrificial benevolence**” is reproduced in us, we are τελειοι.

May we be perfect!

Matthew 5:43-48 is the word of the Lord.