

Loving Enemies

Matthew 5:43-48
Halifax: 28 March 2004

Introduction:

I want to begin this morning's sermon with a question for you:

- "How do you treat people who have turned against you?"
- I don't care who it is—
 - someone that you just met...
 - a colleague at work...
 - your own mother or father...
 - another Christian...
- The question is,
 - "How do you treat the one who is against you?"
 - And I might add to this another...
 - "How **should** you treat the person who is against you?"

This is the sixth and final issue that Jesus addresses in this particular section of the Sermon on the Mount.

- You will remember that in this section,
 - Jesus is correcting the distortions of God's law that were popular in His day...
 - Distortions that were both taught and practised by the scribes and Pharisees.

They had so distorted God's law that many of them did not think they needed a Saviour to save them from their sins.

- Though they pretended to be very rigid about keeping God's Law,
 - the truth was that they had filed it down in so many places that it could no longer cut to their hearts to expose their sin.
 - As a result, they were not at all like the description Jesus gives in the Beatitudes of the people who are blessed in His kingdom.
 - They were not poor in spirit (seeing their spiritual bankruptcy and need)
 - They were not mourning about their sin.
 - They were not meek
 - They were not hungering and thirsting for righteousness.
 - They were not merciful or pure in heart.
 - They were not peacemakers, nor were they persecuted for righteousness.

I. If there was one place where they showed themselves to be completely contrary to the spirit and life of the beatitudes,

- it was in the matter of how they dealt with their enemies!

- Not only was their practice wrong, but they actually taught that:

- “You shall love your neighbour and **hate** your enemy.”

A. How did they ever come up with such an interpretation?

1. They came up with it because they were highly motivated to come up with it.

- I don't have to tell you that it is a very hard thing to love your enemy!

a. It certainly does not come naturally!

- If someone turns against you, the natural thing to do is to turn against him!

- Loving your enemy is **not** something the flesh wants to do!

- The flesh wants to oppose them.

b. And so when God's law said to love your neighbour as yourself,

- They did not want to include their enemies as their neighbours.

- That is why they came up with this doctrine:

- “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.”

TRANS> This is what people who are trying to pretend to keep God's law always do.

- They don't want to admit that they are not keeping it, so they change it.

2. But how did they go about manipulating the scriptures to come up with the doctrine that we should hate our neighbour?

a. You can be sure that they took some of the passages that we moderns have a hard time explaining...

- You can't casually dismiss them until you deal with these passages...

- You know the ones I mean...

1) Those passages that commanded Israel to deal harshly with certain nations:

a) In Deut 7:1-2, Moses commanded:

- "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than

you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.

- Notice that last phrase:
 - “Show no mercy to them!”

b) In Deut 23:6, they were commanded concerning the Ammonites and the Moabites.

- Deut. 23:6: "You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.

c) I am sure those who taught the doctrine that we are to hate our enemies would have been quick to point out how Saul was punished and the kingdom taken away from him **because...**

- He showed mercy on the Amalakitites.
- When Samuel confronted Saul about this, he said...
 - 1 Sam 15:17: “When you *were* little in your own eyes, *were* you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD?”
 - Then Samuel concluded:
 - v. 23: For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king.

2) In addition to these passages, there are those in which David expresses his hatred of enemies as a virtue:

- There is Psalm 139:21-22 where David said:
 - Ps 139:21-22: Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.
- Or like Psalm 69:22-24 where he said:
 - Ps 69:22-24: Let their table become a snare before them, And their well-being a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; And make their loins shake continually. Pour out Your indignation upon them, And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.

b. As moderns our tendency is to try to dismiss these passages or say that this is just the way it was in the Old Testament.

1) But the scripture cannot be broken.

- Jesus did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfil.
 - The problem is not with these passages,
 - but with the way the Pharisees understood them.
 - and with the way we dismiss them!
- 2) What is being promoted in these passages is **not** personal animosity and vindictiveness...
- a) It is rather a desire to see Christ's glorious kingdom established...
- And His kingdom will not be fully established in all its glory until Satan's kingdom is completely destroyed.
 - God has pronounced that He will judge Satan and all who are in alliance with Him.
- b) God appointed Israel to be His instrument to carry out judgement upon certain nations...
- They were to do this only as God's instruments of vengeance.
 - The reason we have a hard time with this as moderns is because we have a hard time accepting the fact that it is God's prerogative to judge.
- 3) But God's commandment about personal enemies was altogether different.
- Exodus 23:4-5: "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 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.
 - Prov 25:21-22: If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For *so* you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the LORD will reward you.
- 4) We are called, therefore, to hate those who oppose God's kingdom and to desire to see them destroyed
- Yet to love them because they are our own flesh and blood.
 - As we saw last week, judges are appointed are God's ministers to carry out God's vengeance by punishing evil,
 - they are to render an eye of eye and a tooth for a tooth—
 - Yet, personally, we are not to take vengeance.
- c. David was unique because he had a heart that loved his enemies, yet sought the destruction of God's enemies!
- 1) Do you remember how he dealt with his rebellious son Absalom?

- Because Absalom opposed God's kingdom, David prayed concerning him:
 - Ps 3:7 Arise, O LORD; Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.
 - Yet, you will remember how bitterly he wept when Absalom was killed, even though Absalom was trying to kill him.
 - He loved his enemy, yet for the sake of God's kingdom, he hated him.
- 2) He was the same way with Saul.
 - Remember how Saul was trying to kill David...
 - Yet, in Psalm 35:11-14, David says:
 - Fierce witnesses rise up; They ask me *things* that I do not know. They reward me evil for good, *To* the sorrow of my soul. 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. I paced about as though *he were* my friend *or* brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns *for his* mother.
 - And when Saul died, David wept bitterly for him.
- 3) Here was a heart after God!
 - A heart with a zeal for God's house that could not bear to see his kingdom opposed or His holy name defied...
 - Yet, a heart with love for his fellow human beings that wept for them in their destruction.

TRANS> Jesus is correcting His generation for having a different heart than David.

- Because they found it so hard to love those who were against them,
 - They had altered God's law to give them the liberty to hate them.
 - As a result, they were teaching people to hate their enemies!
- B. Be careful that you are not sucked into the wrong beliefs of the people who are around you.
 1. If something less than God's standard is held up by your church,
 - It will be very hard for you to keep looking at God's standard.
 - a. I have seen Christians who believe they ought to keep the Sabbath holy go to a church where that is not expected of anyone...

- It is not long because those Christians become lax about that—not because they change their mind about what scripture says, but because they conform to what the people around them are doing.
- b. There are hundreds of illustrations of this...
- If a man who sees his duty to teach the word of God to his family moves to a church where that is not upheld...
 - It will be very easy for him to abandon that duty also.
- c. This does not mean the church is to be nit-picky about things...
- Our personal applications will vary...
 - But when the principle is not upheld, the temptation will be to abandon it.

TRANS> Now I have shown you that the Scribes and Pharisees had rejected God's commandment to love their enemies...

- As a result, the people had gone to sleep when it came to this duty.
 - Nobody was holding them to it or expecting it of them.
2. But am I not justified in saying that the duty to love your enemies is not expected of Christians today either?
- a. It's not that we are like the Pharisees who say that Christians are to hate their enemies.
- It would be hard to find anyone that says **that** today!
 - But God's requirement to love your enemies is set-aside in a more subtle way.
 - In our society, you are expected to **say** you love your enemies...
 - and to say it out loud...
 - But you are not expected take any concrete action to demonstrate that love.
- b. This is the way of our whole society!
- 1) If you talk about love you have done your duty,
- you don't have to **do** anything else—just talk about it.
 - A loving person in our eyes is **not** someone who personally takes action to help other people,
 - It's just a person who talks sweetly.
 - It is merely sentimental!

- 2) Let's face it.
 - We live in a society where a woman can kill her unborn child and claim she loves it too much to bring into a world where it is not wanted!
 - No one would even dare to say something like in many societies—such a thing would not even come to their mind!
 - This is the kind of society we live in.
 - A couple will get a divorce and say,
 - “We still love each other, it's just that our marriage wasn't working out.”
 - A person will say,
 - “I love God, it's just that I don't have time to go to church.”
- 3) So you see that we have our own way of setting aside God's standard...
 - The Pharisee's redefined neighbour to exclude one's enemy...
 - We have redefined love to exclude action.

TRANS> You must learn to listen to the Lord!

II. Jesus insists that you are to love your enemies!

- v. 44: “But I say to you, love your enemies...”
- A. The **I** is emphatic... “But **I** say to you...”
1. As in all these passages, Jesus is placing Himself in opposition to what everybody in the community thought!
 - “You have heard it said, but **I** say to you...”
 - a. You must learn how to hear **Him** and how to uphold what **He** says...
 - When you hear the world's standard, you must say:
 - “You have heard it said, but the Lord says...”
 - b. Your Lord has spoken and His word must stand...
 - “You have heard it said, but **I** say to you...”
 2. Now consider who this “I” is that is commanding you to love your enemies!
 - a. It is God-the-Son Himself.

- He speaks with all authority from Heaven!
- All human voices must become very small next to His!
 - It doesn't matter how hard it may be to truly love your enemy...
 - You can't use your weakness as an excuse for disobedience.
 - God has spoken and that settles it.
 - There are no excuses, no alterations.

TRANS> But consider that He is not only God,

b. He is also the ultimate Peacemaker...

- 1) The One who says "Love your enemies" is the One who demonstrated love himself...
 - He is the One who left the glories of Heaven to come to earth and die on the cross for us when we were His enemies!
 - We were against Him and He came and made the ultimate sacrifice for us.
- 2) Do not minimise what He did!
 - a) There is a temptation to do that so we can excuse our own failure to love...
 - There is a tendency to say, "Yes, but He was God..."
 - Or to pretend that we were looking for a way back to God on our own and so were not really enemies.
 - Those are just ways of trying to minimise what He did so you can excuse yourself when you don't love your enemies.
 - b) Instead you should think more highly of what He did!
 - Consider that His suffering was not easier on account of His being the Son of God, but all the more difficult!
 - Nothing was worse to the Son of God than to offend the Father, yet He became sin for us when He went to the cross.
 - Consider likewise that His reason for offense with us, His enemies, was not less, but all the greater...
 - because He knows fully what we owe to Him as creatures.

TRANS> **This** is the One who commands you to love your enemies!

B. As He elaborates on this command, I want you to notice how He describes your enemies.

1. He is not talking merely about someone who doesn't like you very much...
 - He is talking about someone who is actively opposing you and seeking to harm you.
 - a. First, He refers to them as "those who curse you!"
 - Here is some one who is telling you what a bad person you are...
 - Someone who is reviling you.
 - He is spreading news about your evil ways to everyone.
 - I should mention that some of the translators omit a couple of the clauses in this verse because they are not found in some manuscripts...
 - but they are in the majority and therefore ought to be included.
 - b. Second, Jesus refers to your enemies as "those who hate you..."
 - By this He means the enemy is someone who is against you and wants to see you harmed.
 - c. Third, He refers to them as "those who spitefully use you and persecute you."
 - To spitefully use someone can also mean to accuse falsely before a court... to try to get you in trouble with the law...
 - To persecute means to pursue something or someone earnestly—and in this case, it is to pursue you to bring you harm.

TRANS> Jesus is talking about a person who not only wants to harm you, but who is taking active steps to do so...

- It is someone who is coming after you!
2. So you see by His description of the enemy that Jesus is talking about an enemy in the most extreme sense!
 - a. It ought to go without saying that any lesser enemy is also to be loved...
 - If the worst enemy is to be loved and esteemed your neighbour,
 - how much more the one who is not a full blown enemy
 - or the one you simply do not have much regard for or are not very fond of!
 - b. If you are to love enemies like Jesus is describing,
 - how much more are you to love your friends and family!

TRANS> But now it is very important for us to listen to how we are to go about loving them.

- Jesus is not talking about mere sentiment...

C. He tells you in verse 44 how you are to love your enemies in practical and tangible ways.

1. First, He says you are to bless them that curse you.

a. The way the word “**bless**” is used here;

- it probably has to do with how you speak to them and about them.
- You are to bless them and not to curse them as they are doing to you.

b. James talks about how inappropriate it is for blessing and cursing to proceed out of the same mouth...

- He says that with our tongues,
 - James 3:9: “We bless our God and Father,” and “we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.”
 - He tell us that it ought not to be this way.

c. When we bless God, we give thanks to his name and we speak highly of Him to others...

- This is what we ought to do to our enemies.

1) Have your parents wronged you?

- There is still much you can thank them for!

2) Is someone at work speaking evil of you?

- Surely there is something you can find to commend them—both to their face and behind their back.

3) I am very fond of the example of Fransis Scheaffer in this regard...

- He had some other ministers who opposed him for some of his teachings,
- but he continued to esteem them highly for their work in the ministry and to commend them to others and to their faces.
 - He would speak of the good they were doing in God’s kingdom and bless them accordingly.

2. Second, Jesus says you are to **do good** to those who hate you.

a. The word **good** here refers to deeds that are beautiful and fine.

- 1) In Romans 12, Paul talks about doing what is good in the sight of all men—what everyone would recognise as a fine deed.
 - 2) He goes on to say,
 - “If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.”
- b. I have counseled people before to love their enemies as Jesus says,
- And they have responded, “O yes, I do love them”
- 1) And then when I counsel them to list out some ways to do good to them...
 - They say, “Oh, I could never do that... after what he has done to me...”
 - 2) I am very glad that for Jesus,
 - loving enemies includes doing good to them.
 - What good would it have done if He had remained in heaven, talking about how much He loved us...
 - If he had never come to redeem us?
 - 3) Real love is active in finding ways to meet an enemy’s needs!
- c. Phillip Schaff gives a wonderful example from the early church of doing good for enemies...
- This was typical of what was going on all the time!
 - “During the persecution under Gallus (252), when the pestilence raged in Carthage, and the heathens threw out their dead and sick upon the streets, ran away from them for fear of the contagion, and cursed the Christians as the supposed authors of the plague, Cyprian assembled his congregation, and exhorted them to love their enemies; whereupon all went to work; the rich with their money, the poor with their hands, and rested not, till the dead were buried, the sick cared for, and the city saved from desolation.”
 - That is what Jesus means by doing good to those who hate you!
3. Third, Jesus says you are “to pray for those who persecute you.”
- a. His own example comes to mind, praying for His enemies while on the cross...
 - “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
 - The example of Stephen also comes to mind who, while he was being stoned, prayed:
 - “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”

- b. This ought to be your general disposition toward your enemies.
 - 1) Prov 17:5 is a very convicting verse. It says:
 - “He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.”
 - You learn a lot about your attitude toward your enemies when trouble comes to them in some way.
 - Do you rejoice or do you weep?
 - 2) Remember what King David did for His enemies:
 - Psalm 35:12-14: They reward me evil for good, *To* the sorrow of my soul. 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. I paced about as though *he were* my friend *or* brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns *for his* mother.

TRANS> Loving enemies is a very hard thing for us to do.

- It does not come naturally to us, but...

III. Jesus gives you two things to motivate you to love your enemies!

A. The first is that you may be sons to your Father in Heaven.

- Matthew 5:45: "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.

1. Jesus is not saying that you become a child of God by loving your enemies...

a. The Bible is clear that you become a child of God when God adopts you by His grace when you believe on Jesus Christ.

- You don't become His child by imitating Him...
- But you imitate Him because you are His child...
 - and in this way you show yourself to be His true child.

b. Jesus is talking about the wonderful marvellous privilege you have as God's child to become a person who is recognised as His child by living beautifully!

1) A couple of generations ago, people were often known by their families.

- The Jones were known for their wealth...
 - So when a son of the Jones family spent a lot of money, people would say, “Oh, he's a Jones” and everybody understood.
- The Smiths were known for their kindness...

- So when the young Smith girl helped one of her neighbours in need, people said, “She’s a true Smith.”
 - The Harrisons were known for their dishonesty.
 - So when their son cheated someone, everyone said, “Its no wonder—he’s a true Harrison.”
- 2) This illustration loses its force a little with us because of the break down of the family—
- Today we tend to classify people by their peers rather than their family.
 - It is very often the case that the son has little recognised resemblance to his family...
 - The son may not have the spirit of his father...
- 3) But with God the Father, we are definitely given His Spirit as soon as we are adopted...
- The Spirit of adoption is given to us and He gives us a new heart and a new spirit.
 - The Father brings us into His house and begins to teach us His ways...
 - By His grace, we take on more and more of His likeness.
 - We are renewed in His image!
2. Christian, is there anything more lovely than the love of our heavenly Father for His enemies?
- a. Jesus illustrates this love with the way He makes His sun to rise and sends the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.
- It is a love like we have been talking about—a love that provides for His enemy’s needs.
 - And we should understand further that God does this because of His decree to save the world through Jesus Christ!
 - He might have destroyed us altogether long ago,
 - but instead He preserves us from generation to generation,
 - not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
 - And of course, the greatest expression of His love for His enemies is in sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins.
 - He preserves His enemies so that He might carry out His plan to save them.

- b. This love is for enemies who have nothing in themselves to commend them to Him.
 - If God were to react to us and to what we are, He would destroy us all because of our sin.
 - But His love is a free expression of His loving heart—it is not tied to anything good in us.
 - It is a very beautiful thing.
 - There is nothing to compare with it.
- c. And you show yourselves to be His sons and daughters by your love.
 - You show it especially by your love for your enemies!
 - Heaven will be a place where we will imitate this love—
 - and it will be a love that is so strong that it would love our enemies if we had any...
 - However, in heaven, there will be no more enemies.
- d. This is all the more reason to demonstrate this love now—
 - The day will come when you will no longer have the opportunity to show love to your enemies.
 - But as long as you live in this present age,
 - you have the privilege to show for the excellent glory of your God...
 - to imitate the love He has demonstrated for you, even while you were still His enemy.

TRANS> What motivation is given to us to love our enemies...

- Show yourself to be God's sons and daughters!
- The second motivation that Jesus gives is just the opposite...

B. The second motivation to love your enemies is that you might **not** be like unbelievers!

1. God has saved you from what you were by nature...

- He has given you a new heart and a new life!
- We are going to look at this tonight in our Catechism study....

a. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul says:

- 1 Cor 6:9-11: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor

revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

- You are something altogether different than what you were by the grace of God.
 - And it is not just that you no longer do these things...
 - There is a positive change as well.

b. Positively, we are told in Galatians 5 that the fruit of the Spirit is love...

- You are not what you were because God has changed you.
- You have been delivered from death and hate.

2. Yet, you need hear the question of the Lord here:

a. He asks you, "What do you more than others?"

- He takes the people with the worst reputation of all as His example... tax collectors.
- They were considered traitors because they worked for the Roman government and collected taxes from God's people.
- They were indeed a wretched lot who were always cheating the people—they were extortioners.

b. Yet, Jesus asks His covenant people...

- How are you any different from them?

1) The tax collectors certainly loved those that helped them rise to their positions...

- And they were courteous to those on whom they depended.
- Jesus is showing that if we think ourselves to be God's people...
 - We had better not be content with living on that level!
 - What do you do more than others?

2) Matthew Henry says:

- This is a question we must all ask ourselves as Christians. As Christians, we *know* more than others; we *talk* more of the things of God than others; we *profess*, and have *promised*, more than others; God has done more for us, and therefore justly expects more from us than from others; the glory of God is more concerned in us than in others; but *what do we more than others?* Wherein do we live above the rate of the children of this world? *Are we not carnal*, and do we not walk as men, below the character of Christians? In this especially we must do more than others, that while everyone will render good for

good, we must render good for evil; and this will speak a nobler principle, and is consonant to a higher rule, than the most of men act by.

3) What do you more than others?

- This is a very searching question our Lord asks us.
- You are called be different from what you were.

Conclusion:

Brothers and sisters,

- Jesus concludes this section of His sermon by stating God's standard for human beings...
 - "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

That is the standard to which He calls you and for which He saved you!

- This leaves a lot of room for us to be poor in spirit, to mourn for our sins, to hunger for righteousness...
- You are wrong if you suppose you can attain this standard in this life...
 - But you are also wrong if you think that you are to be no different or that this is not something you ought to strive to attain.
 - Hear what Paul says:
 - Philippians 3:12-15: Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.