

not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:58-60

No doubt Stephen's witness made a deep impression on the 'young man named Saul' and served to place Saul into the crucible of the Cross.

Andrew

The apostle Andrew preached the gospel far and wide. As an old man he came to the town of Patras in Greece. His evangelistic work in Patras was so successful that the proconsul Aegeas became enraged and ordered that Andrew be crucified. Picture the scene:

A cross had been set up on the sea shore. Andrew, however, protested that he was not worthy to die on the same kind of cross as his Lord, and had them fashion the wood into the shape of an X. Aegeas had ordered that Andrew be tied, not nailed, to the cross to prolong his sufferings.

For three days and two nights Andrew hung there exhorting the Christians and pleading with the unsaved to turn to the Lord. The crowd, which had swelled to more than two thousand, marvelled at the wise words of this gentle and pious white-haired man of God.

Finally...at around seventy-five years of age, Andrew passed into the presence of the Lord he had served so faithfully for almost forty years.

Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles, by Elva Schroeder, p.27.

A world awash with enmity

In our peaceful, Australian setting it may be hard to think of anyone who we could really call our enemy. No one wants to kill us, wound us, or ruin us. However, the ever-present 'works of the flesh' are 'enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions' (Galatians 5:20). Therefore sin lurks in 'friendly' places: the colleague who secretly envies us and plots our downfall, the neighbour who simmers with resentment towards us, the child who quietly wishes we would hurry up and die so they can have our money, the offended spouse who wants to pay us back. (Someone wrote a book on marriage entitled 'The Intimate Enemy')

Furthermore, the world is at enmity with God (James 4:4) and the people of God bear daily the brunt of that enmity. Jesus said that because of the gospel 'a person's enemies will be those of his own household' (Matthew 10:36). So responding to enmity with love will be the daily fare of the believer. It is good for us as Christians to know this four-fold command off by heart, and to set our hearts each morning to live it.

Rod James
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Five Commandments to Love

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Here are five commandments we find in the New Testament. These five commandments to love interrelate and instruct one another, and the believer will delight to meditate upon them and obey them.

1. **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** Deuteronomy 6:5
2. **You shall love your neighbour as yourself.**
3. **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.** John 13:34
4. **But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.** Luke 6:27-28
5. **Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** 1 John 3:18

STUDY FOUR

In this study we look at Jesus' command to 'Love your enemies'. In Luke 6 Jesus expresses this command in four ways.

**But I say to you who hear,
love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who abuse you.** Luke 6:27,28

Jesus loves his enemies

The wonderful thing about Jesus as our Lord is that he commands us nothing that he himself has not done to the uttermost, and is not even now doing full bore. Our Lord leads from the front!

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and

saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" Luke 23:33-37

Why loving enemies is important to the Christian

1. We were God's enemies

For the Christian, enemies are special people. The believer remembers that while he was the enemy of God, Christ, far from repaying him evil for evil, instead loved him so amazingly. The Christian can ever forget that it was 'while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son' (Romans 5:10). With this love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) we are washed over by a superlative grace which extends even to our enemies. Such was the case for John Wesley when his heart was 'strangely warmed' by the grace of Christ for him. He testified in his diary,

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me.

Paul instructs us:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all...Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:14-21

2. Loving our enemies is the high point of true love

The real test of love is not loving those who are easy to love. Such love may be authentic, but it is not love at full stretch. As good as it is there is nothing remarkable in loving your loved ones or loving those who repay your love.

"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. Luke 6:32-34

Love shows its true character and full capacity when it returns love for hate, blessing for reviling, good for ill-treatment and prayer for persecution. What stands out in human society as exceptional is when we love our enemies. So Jesus commands us,

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:35-36

3. The crucible of the cross

It is vital that we, as 'Christ-ones', understand clearly the nature of Christ's cross as God's moral crucible. A crucible is a heat resistant container used to melt hard metals, and the cross of Christ functions as a crucible in which the hardened human heart is softened and the conscience awakened.

It works like this—we, the human race, poured out our anger at God in the crucifixion of His Son. As he died he bore our sins and prayed for our forgiveness. The Cross reveals God's righteous love for us in the face of our depravity and enmity. It is a moral crucible designed to melt the hard heart that is set in its stubborn, angry self-justification. And for those whom God is calling it does just that. Charles Wesley experienced this crucible and wrote about it:

Died he for me, who caused his pain—
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!

The crucible of the cross is at work in our lives as we take up our cross (Luke 9:23) and love our enemies. We carry in our bodies the killing of Jesus, so that the love of Jesus may be revealed through us.

We...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Examples of Christians loving their enemies

Stephen

The true character of a Christian is seen when they are under pressure. When Stephen was under the pressure of being stoned by his countrymen the character of God shone through him wonderfully.

Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do