

You have Heard... But I say to You... 6: Hate your Enemy

The final topic Jesus felt the need to bring to the attention of His disciples regarding the popular but flawed morality of His day is still a very popular maxim today. They were being taught they could limit the command to "*love your neighbor as yourself*" by selectively choosing neighbors. Thus divided people into two classes. They could therefore arbitrarily move someone from one category into another at their own whim. If a friend betrayed them or mistreated them, he could be moved into the class of an enemy and they were free to hate or despise him. Anything that caused animosity removed all responsibility to love or forgive. Jesus challenged them to broaden out their concept of a neighbor. A true disciple of Jesus does not partition people, show partiality or in any way selectively choose to bestow mercy, love, or compassion upon others.

"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, Mt 5:43-44

This was not the first time those in Israel had been warned about hating others. God had strictly forbidden it.

You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. Lev 19:17

All hatred was to be banished. It was not to be allowed to remain in the heart. When any neighbor did evil, they had the right to reprove them, but if they began to feel hatred or animosity they would bear guilt. Their word for hate was much broader than our own.

sane' 8130, "**to hate, set against.**" This verb appears in Ugaritic, Moabite, Aramaic, and Arabic. It appears in all periods of Hebrew and about 145 times in the *Bible*. *Sane'* **represents an emotion ranging from intense "hatred" to the much weaker "set against"** and is used of persons and things (including ideas, words, inanimate objects). **The strong sense of the word typifies the emotion of jealousy**; and therefore, *sane'* is the feeling Joseph's brothers experienced because their father preferred him Gen. 37:4; cf. v. 11. This "hatred" increased when Joseph reported his dreams Gen. 37:8. Obviously, the word covers emotion ranging from "bitter disdain" to outright "hatred," for in Gen. 37:18ff. the brothers plotted Joseph's death and achieved his removal. ... In a weaker sense, *sane'* signifies "being set against" something. Jethro advised Moses to select men who hated ["were set against"] covetousness to be secondary judges over Israel Exod. 18:21. A very frequent but special use of the verb means "to be unloved." (Vines Expository Dictionary)

God had warned Israel that they could not hold back favors to others in need even if they were an enemy. What Israel was being taught is that an enemy is someone who has themselves chosen to hate. For the devout servant of God an enemy was always outside of themselves and never within. An enemy was someone who wanted to work them harm, and never someone they wanted to harm. An enemy was someone who despised, disdained, or had an intense hatred toward them, but never someone they actively felt disdain or an intense hatred toward.

"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. Ex 23:4-5

This enemy worked them harm, but they were not to respond in kind. Although the natural inclination runs contrary to this, God had higher expectations of those who love Him. Never were negative feelings resulting from previous unpleasant experiences with others to influence our treatment toward them. They might be our enemy, but we are never their enemy. No matter what the situation, they were to take advantage of every opportunity to help. In the Proverbs the full extent of these commands are revealed. No devout servant of the Lord is to feel any joy or happiness over the misfortune that strikes an enemy.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; 18 Lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and He turn away His anger from him. Pr 24:17-18

Although no one but God would ever know this was violated, God lets it be known that it displeases Him when there is rejoicing over the fall of an enemy. It is never right to feel good about the misfortunes of another. No matter how richly they deserve it, God forbids taking pleasure at their fall. Even if the misfortune helped us, it is a sin to feel happy about it. Even Job recognized that rejoicing over the destruction of those who hated him would be a blight on his character. Those made in the image of God should love as their father loves.

"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); Job 31:29-30

This is an important point to ponder in business, politics, and even religion. Generally those we consider to be enemies today are those who have crossed our path and done us some harm or disagreed with what we believe to be right. There is a potential for creating an enemy in every business transaction or purchase. If things don't work out to our satisfaction and those responsible do not measure up to our expectations, anger and frustration can be created. We may enter the

business not even knowing them, but leave feeling like they are enemies. When we later learn that the person was fired or the business went under, do we sin by feeling joy?

Politics is another area that generates strong feelings. Those who disagree with such strongly held convictions can appear to be working against our interests and thus become some one we could easily despise. We see this today in the delight that is often taken when the wicked deeds of an opponent come into the light of day and they fall. What about those who disagree with us religiously? After a class, do we feel angry when people disagree with us? Do we feel good later when a terrible misfortune overtakes or destroys them?

The heart of the problem lies in the corrosive nature of hatred, jealousy, contempt and disdain. Such emotions destroy those things that are necessary to be helpful to others. When misfortune comes, God's people are given an opportunity to show the depth of their love. If they allow hatred to control them then the opportunity is lost. Who will go and help someone when they are happy that the misfortune befell them and don't want it to be alleviated. Such an attitude is so displeasing to the Lord that He will turn away His anger from this enemy who may truly deserve the vengeance God is meting out. A second proverb shows the other side. It reveals what God can do if we submit.

When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Prov 16:7

When someone serves the LORD with all His heart, God has the ability to bring his enemies into peace with him.

Who is my Neighbor?

This is the real crux of the matter. In a conversation with a lawyer seeking to make trial of him, Jesus was asked what things were necessary to inherit eternal life. The Lawyer thought that he needed to love God and his neighbor. Jesus agreed with him. If he would do these two things he would live. The lawyer was not yet comfortable with this answer and thus asked another question.

*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 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 neighbor as yourself.'" 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 **But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"** Lk. 10:25-29*

Jesus answered with the parable of the good Samaritan(Lk 10:30-35). Jesus selected a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan as the main characters. The first two ignored the plight of the stranger while the Samaritan saved him and took care of him. Jesus then asked the all important question:

So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Lk 10:36-37

Every human being who passes into our life becomes a neighbor. It doesn't matter what their culture, skin color, religion, or attitude toward us. God wants us to see every human being as our neighbor and thus "**love your neighbor as yourself**" is a universal command for all.

Hope for Reconciliation!

This is the real essence of Jesus teaching. A true disciple of Jesus never gives up hope that God might be able to turn an enemy into a friend. Isn't this a more excellent way than to hate them or hope for their destruction? This is exactly what Paul did in preaching to the Jews. They were his enemies, but he sought to make them friends by helping them obey the gospel. Never do we see Paul hoping for their destruction.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, Rom. 9:1-3

Later in Romans, Paul explains the amazing truth! Although Israel has become an enemy of the church because of the gospel, they are still beloved by God because of the promises and oaths to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because of these promises, God still wants to save them and bless them. He was even then using the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy hoping that it would lead more to salvation. The last thing God needed was a Christian who responded with hatred toward those He still wanted to be saved.

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. Rom 11:28-32

It is interesting that God allowed Paul to write this words. Paul himself was a terrible "enemy" of the

church in Jerusalem. Many likely struggled with considering Saul of Tarsus to be their neighbor. Even after his conversion, many still feared him. But Barnabas was Paul's neighbor.

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. Acts 9:26-28

God has never granted His children the right to be selective in their love and good-will. One of the marks of maturity in any servant of the Lord is the ability to set aside personal feelings and focus only on the needs of others. It is not the memory of past treatment that should influence the godly, but the needs of the moment. This is the focus Jesus sets:

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. Matt 5:45

God has always blessed those who are unworthy. How can we be any different? He blesses us when we are unworthy and He blesses all our loved ones as well when they are unworthy. This is a wonderful attribute of God that gives us such a wonderful sense of comfort and esteem. God has never allowed past behavior to influence His treatment of anyone until the day of judgment and wrath comes. Until that day, God looks to the hope of reconciliation. Love and good deeds are sometimes repaid with a change in relationship. This has always been God's desire:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance... 2 Pet 3:9

God has always been patient. He does not want even His enemies to perish. He patiently blesses them with sunshine, rain, and continued life, in hope that it will lead to their salvation. We are all to regard this wonderful attribute of the Lord in a favorable light. Even when those who are severely persecuting us and doing us harm are allowed to live year after year, we are to regard it not as slackness on God's part, but as his hope that it might lead them to salvation.

and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation — as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 2 Pet 3:15

This love is the heart of one of the most cherished passages in all the Bible:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. Jn 3:16

Will we imitate our Father?

How can we not want to imitate God in this? It may be difficult, and it may even run counter to our natural feelings, but we have to ask ourselves where did such feelings come from? We know how God feels and how God acts. If we are his true children then we will act exactly as he does. If we are not following him, then where did these feelings come from and who are we actually following?

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. Mt 5:46-48

The most worldly, ungodly, and corrupt of men love to the degree of their proverb. It is easy to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. It is the most natural thing in the world. But it is only natural because the tax gatherers and the Gentiles do it. God showed it is not natural at all. It stands opposed to His righteous character.

Jesus presented the stark contrast this decision demands. God's people must choose to follow His lead, or the lead of the corrupt and wicked tax-gatherers, and Gentiles who do not acknowledge or serve God. If we seek for the perfect holiness and sanctification of God, then we must act as He acts. He loves everyone and seeks to do good even to his enemies.

...while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, Rom 5:10

God has ordered and planned this life in hopes of leading us back to Him. All the good and pleasant things God does for the wicked are designed to bring about this reconciliation. If we seek to be true children of our Father in heaven then we must join Him in this work. We be His children if we hate those He loves and won't help those He wants to save.

Coals of Fire?

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; 22 For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you. Prov 25:21-22

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Rom 12:19-21

Often a Christian will make enemies simply by being a Christian.

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved. Mk 13:12-13

and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' Mt 10:36

This is an extremely uncomfortable and unpleasant situation to be in. We have no power to change this enemy and bring peace. God will not punish until life is over so what to do now? Vengeance and grudge bearing are out of the question because God has forbidden it. God bids us care for the needs of his enemies. If this enemy is hungry or thirsty, then the Christian is to buy up the chance to assist them. He must see this as a possible opportunity for reconciliation and even conversion.

This type of response to an enemy is so out of the ordinary that it will have a powerful impact. These are the coals of fire produced by a conscience that realizes it has been doing wrong. These are the coals that can change an enemy into a friend and a sinner into a saint. These are the coals of fire that remove an enemies smug justification for his hatred toward us. Jesus was likely speaking of this when he spoke to Saul.

And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Acts 26:14

So if a Christian has enemies they must be treated as all others. No disciple has the luxury of loving neighbors and hating enemies because most of those enemies are God's enemies and must be treated as God treats them.

Reflected Hatred!

The disciples of Jesus must imitate their Lord. Even Jesus realized that the hatred they felt toward him was not personal. They hated him because he showed them the light and testified of the evil in this world.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." John 3:19-21

The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. John 7:7

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. John 15:18-21

Jesus never allowed their hatred to create a response in Him that would justify it. He always loved, turned the other cheek, went the second mile, and did all within his power to be as harmless as a dove. So must we.

- 1 What two classes of people did Israel seek to divide those they know?
- 2 Did God forbid hatred even in the law of Moses?
- 3 What is the difference between their word for hatred and ours?
- 4 Was it ever right to rejoice when an enemy fell into hard times?
- 5 What did Job say about his feelings when an enemy fell?
- 6 Have we controlled our feelings toward those we differ with over matters, religion or politics?
- 7 Can God turn an enemy into a friend?
- 8 Who is our neighbor?
- 9 Paul had many enemies in Israel who hoped for his destruction how did he feel about them?
- 10 Does God allow us to be selective in our love to others?
- 11 If we are not imitating God's universal love, who does Jesus then say we are following?
- 12 What are the coals of fire we can often pour over our enemies head?
- 13 What was to goad Saul of Tarsus was kicking against?
- 14 Where does most of the hatred directed against Christians come from?