

## The Commands of Christ

### Sermon # 9

#### *“Love Your Enemies”*

#### **Matthew 5:43-48**

The ninth command in our series “The Commands of Christ” is a very difficult one indeed. This command is found in Matt. 5:44, where we are told that you are to “love your enemies and bless (imperative command) those who curse you.”

If we have learned anything in the days since the terrorist attack of Sept 11, 2000 it is that it is easy to hate. It is not hard to hate the people responsible for the deaths of all those innocent people in the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. What is hard is to love them. How can we “love” Ossama Bin Ladin? How can we “love” a murderer or a thief who has permanently altered your family? How can you “love” a person who has swindled you out of your money or your possessions?

“A story ... about a professor of psychology illustrates how difficult it is to love others. Although he had no children of his own, whenever he saw a neighbor scolding a child for some wrongdoing, he would say, “You should love your boy, not punish him.” One hot summer afternoon the professor was doing some repair work on a concrete driveway leading to his garage. Tired out after several hours of work, he laid down the towel, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and started toward the house. Just then out of the corner of his eye he saw a mischievous little boy putting his foot into the fresh cement. He rushed over, grabbed him, and was about to spank him severely when a neighbor leaned from a window and said, “Watch it, Professor! Don’t you remember? You must ‘love’ the child!” At this, he yelled back furiously, “I do love him in the abstract but not in the concrete!”

[Frank Walker. “Jesus You Gotta Be Kidding” Sermon on Matt. 5:43-48  
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But factually it is always easier to talk about loving everyone, as opposed to actually doing it.

“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.”

How the Truth Was Perverted. The religious teachers of the day had taken the word of God and attempted to make it more palpable. The teaching of the Old Testament was clear, Deut. 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

This teaching is clear enough. The problem was that over time it had become twisted. The religious leaders had distorted the truth in order to make it possible to keep this command. Notice in verse forty-three, what Jesus said they were now teaching, "You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

Seriously, I am not kidding, that is really what they were teaching. They did not completely abandon God's word they just tried to make it more workable. Satan's perversion of God's word almost always is built on a partial truth. (Satan's deception of Eve).

As we look at their teaching and compare it with God's word we see that they left something out, they added something, and they redefined the term, neighbor.

First of the all, perversion by omission, they left something out, God's original said, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." They left out the "as yourself" part. This was a very difficult thing for the proud Pharisees, how could they love anyone as much as they loved themselves, no one else was as good as they were. And since it was inconceivable that they should care for anyone as much as they cared for themselves, they simply changed the standard.

Secondly, perversion by addition, they added something, you will notice that they perverted the truth about love by adding the phrase, "... and hate your enemy." Now that obviously goes against everything in the heart of God as revealed by the word of God.

Finally, the religious leadership had narrowed the meaning of "neighbor" to include only those people they preferred and approved of – and that amounted to people just like themselves. They narrowed the term "neighbor" to apply only to Jews, they were in effect advocating open and deliberate racism on the grounds of national origin. But it went further than that, they limited the term "neighbor" not just to Jews, but people like themselves, not the common ordinary riffraff of the streets.

In five ascending statements in verses 44 and 45, Jesus introduces his new standard, *"You have heard .... (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;*

#### 1. Love Your Enemies. (v. 44)

But who are our enemies? Our enemies, of

course often are just ordinary people who are mean, impatient, judgmental, self-righteous and spiteful – or sometimes just happen to disagree with us. Sadly, there are people who don't like me, as hard as that is for me to understand. There are people who have decided to be my enemy. These people would hurt me or even ruin me if they could. That is just a sad fact of life. But Jesus teaches me that I am to control my response to my enemies. *I cannot help that I have enemies, but I can refuse to be their enemy.*

*"In 1567 King Philip II of Spain appointed the Duke of Alba as governor of the lower part of Spain. ...He was a bitter enemy of the ... Protestant Reformation. His rule was called "The Reign of Terror" and his council called "The Bloody Council," because it ordered the slaughter of so many Protestants.*

*One man who was sentenced to die for his biblical faith managed to escape in the dead of winter. He was being chased by a lone soldier, and he came to a lake that was covered with a thin, cracked sheet of ice. He managed to get across, but as soon as he reached the other side he heard the soldier screaming. The man had fallen through the ice and was going to drown. So at the risk of being captured, tortured, and killed – or maybe even drowned – the man went back across the lake and saved his enemy. He did it because of His love for Christ. He knew that he had no other choice if he was going to be faithful to his Lord."* [Elon Foster. *New Cylopedia of Prose Illustrations. Second Series.* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1877) p. 296. - as quoted by John Mac Arthur. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 1-7* (Moody Bible Institute, 1985), p. 346.]

We miss the point of these verses entirely if we fail to note that the standard of love that is being set is one that only God is capable of. The fact that this is a divine standard and not a human one is clear in that the word (*agape*) occurs in this passage.

The "love" of which Jesus spoke is a particular kind of love. The Greek language has four distinct words for love and the word that is used here is (*agape*). This is often called the "God-kind" of love, because it is the word used to translate, John 3:16, which says, *"for God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him should have eternal life."* The type of love that we are to have for our enemy is not the same type that we have for our spouse or our children, but it is to be the same type of love that God has for us. We do not deserve God's love and our enemies do not deserve our love.

Before leaving the subject of love let me just say that there can be a distinction drawn between loving someone and liking someone. To like someone is to have a certain emotional attraction to that person, and while it is not possible to find ourselves emotionally drawn to everyone it is possible to love everyone. That is, *"I don't have to like you, to love you."* We may not ever get to the point that we want to share my deepest feeling with everyone, I can desire God's best for their lives.

At this point a person may be saying, *"Well, if that is the standard, I may as well admit it right now and quit, because I can't do it."* If that is what you think then congratulations you have got the point.

Love Your Enemies and...

## 2. *Pray For Those Who Persecute You.*

(v.44c) *"... pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."*

Our natural human reaction is, *"Yea, sure I will pray for them, pray that they get run over by a truck!"* That is not what the Lord meant.

One of the reasons that we are to pray for our enemies is that it is the most powerful weapon we have to change them and their attitude toward us. It is also impossible to pray for someone without have a change of attitude toward the person for whom we are praying.

*Pray For Those Who Persecute You and*

## 3. *Prove Who's Children You Are* (v. 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."*

Often we see children and we say "they are the spitting image of their mom/dad." They look so much like their parents that there can be no doubt who they belong to. In the text (v. 45) says that *"that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."* The verb translated here as "may be" is (aorist tense) and indicates a once for all time established fact.

But beware, loving as God does not make us sons of the Father, but gives evidence that we already are His children. Anyone can hate. Anyone can be bitter. Anyone can lash out and attack. But as sons ...children of the king... we are to show a different kind of reaction. It is what set us apart. It shows whose family you are a member of... and it makes people notice, and maybe even desire to know more about this Jesus.

*Manifest Your Sonship and...*

## 4. *Exceed the Expectations of the World*

(vv. 46-47)

*"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?"*

If the scribes and the Pharisees were certain of any one thing it was that they were better than most anyone else. But Jesus cuts through their masks of hypocrisy and shows them their type of self-centered love is nothing more than is common in the life of any unbeliever,

even tax collectors and Gentiles. Wow, what a slam. This was a real insult to the religious leaders who thought that they were undeniably superior to almost everyone.

Even unbelievers are capable of love. They love their children, they love their wives/husbands they love their families. But all such human love is on some level corrupted by self-interest.

The quintessential question Jesus asks in verse forty-seven is, “... *what do you do more than others?*” *It is not enough to just equal what unbelievers are doing in the area of love, it is essential that outstrip them.*

*Exceed the Expectations of the World and...*

#### *5. Be Like Your Heavenly Father (v. 48)*

“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

When Jesus uses the word “perfect” here it is not in the sense of being without flaw or blemish. This is not teaching that we can ascend to a level of sin-less perfection in this life. The word translated “*perfect*” here is (*teleios*) basically means to reach an intended end or a completion and is often translated “mature.”

The apostle Paul says in his first letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor 2:6) “*However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*” Later in the same letter (14:20) he goes on to say, “*Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.*”

In his letter to the church at Ephesus (4:13) he is even more adamant, “*till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*”

*We Are Called Then To....*

1. Love Your Enemies
2. Pray for those Who Persecute You
3. Prove Whose Children You Are
4. Exceed the Expectations of the World

Be Like Your Heavenly Father