

## OUR FATHER'S PERFECT LOVE

Matthew 5:43-48

### I. INTRODUCTION—WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES?

Who are enemies

Countries

But these alliances change—some former enemies are allies—and vice versa

Socio—political

Political parties—and political-economic-social ideals

Class struggles

Racial and ethnic biases

Religious

Other non-Christian or anti-Christian groups

Internal denominational strife

### II. THE TEXT

**KJV**—**43** *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

**NIV**—**43** *You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

**NASB**—**43** *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 and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

**The Message**—*You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. “In a*

word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.

### Parallel Text: Luke 6

**31** Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. **32** If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. **35** 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 Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**NOTE: Luke inserts Golden Rule in his version—which comes later in Matthew.**

## III. BACKGROUND

### A. OLD STANDARD—LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

**Lev 19:17-18**—You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

### B. OLD STANDARD—HATE YOUR ENEMIES

1. Some OT texts identified specific enemies of Israel
  - a. These could be construed to Jesus' reference—but this stretches the point

**Dt 23:3-6**—No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. “Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you. “You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days.

**Dt 25:17-19**—Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. “Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.

2. Or maybe—general OT references to enemies of God—as in the Psalms

**Ps 139:19-22**— *O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, And Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies.*

3. Or maybe—to love less than others—a comparative term

a. For example—Jesus’ hyperbole:

**Lk 14:26**— *“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*

b. For example—OT reference to ‘less loved’ wives

**Gen 29:30-31**— *And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.*

**Dt 21:15-17**—*If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

### C. THE ‘ENEMIES’ OF JESUS’ DAY

1. Political polarization

- ‘Jews’—Aramaic speaking, conservative Jews
- ‘Greeks’—Diaspora, Hellenized Jews
- Herodians—radical followers and supporters of the Romans
- Zealots—radical opponents of Romans—with ‘Sicarii’ assassins among them

2. Religious parties

- Pharisees
- Sadducees
- Essenes
- Samaritans

3. Ethnic-cultural animosity

- Jew—vs—Samaritan
- Judean—vs—Galilean

## III. EXPLANATION

### A. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

## 1. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- a. OT encourage helping one's enemies!

**Ex 23:4-5**—*If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.*

**Pr 25:21-22**—*If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.*

## 2. WHAT OTHER ANCIENT TRADITIONS SAID—LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

- a. **Babylonian Counsels of Wisdom**

“Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer ... smile on your adversary. If your ill-wisher is [so] nurture him’.

- Probably pragmatic advise—to avoid entangling lawsuits

- b. **Egyptian Instruction of Amenemopet**

“So steer that we may be able to bring the wicked man across.... Fill his belly with bread of thine, so that he may be sated and may be ashamed.”

- In order to reform evil-doers in society

- c. **Greek philosophy—Epictetus—said of Cynic philosophy**

While he [the Cynic] is being flogged he must love the men who flog him, as though he were father and brother of them all’

- d. **Roman—advice from Cicero**

“The most suitable means to win and maintain power is love, the most unsuitable is fear.... For fear is a terrible guardian for lasting certainty; but upon love one can firmly rely, even forever.”

- Practical advice for rulers—to gain and maintain power

## 3. CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

- a. Christian motives

1. God's fairness and love

- a. God is fair to everyone—merciful to all—and wants them to have equal chance

**Ps 145:9**—*The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

- b. God is love—and loves all persons
  - c. God wants everyone to be saved
- 2. Fulfilment of two previous passages—related to being God’s children
  - a. Seventh beatitude
    - Mt 5:9**—“blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”
  - b. Being ‘light’ in the world’
    - Mt 5:16**—let them see your good deeds—so they will glorify your Father!
- 3. The Fatherhood of God
  - a. God is our Father
  - b. We are His children—who should want what He wants
    - 1. We are His other children and should want what He wants
    - 2. All humans are our kindred—in the broader family of God’s creation
    - 3. So, we should love them as He loves them—see them through His eyes
    - 4. We should want to see them brought into the kingdom—and redeemed
- 4. Jesus’ message
  - a. Radical nature
    - 1. Other views (above) applied to enemies *within* one’s culture—only insider enemies
    - 2. Jesus placed no boundaries on this love—love even enemies who are outsiders
  - b. Expansion of His ‘new commandment’
    - 1. Later He commanded His disciples to ‘love one another’
    - 2. This was to demark and brand them as a distinct community—known for their love
    - 3. But—already here—Jesus had commanded them to go beyond that—love everyone
    - 4. This is perfect love—like the Father loves!
- b. Love became a mark of the Early Church
  - 1. For one another

**Tertullian noted that the pagans were amazed: “See how they love one another.”**

2. But also for others in the community
- c. The transforming power of love
  1. Working to love another person we don't already love is counterintuitive
  2. This is especially true—when we actually hate the person
  3. But this effort begins to change our heart—and our attitude about the ‘enemy’
  4. It also has the power of changing the other person's heart
  5. Love begs reciprocity!

## **B. PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU**

1. Obvious reference back to last beatitude—**Mt 5:10**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake,  
for there is the kingdom of heaven.**

2. Contrasting the two paradigms—‘love enemies’—and—‘pray for persecutors’
  - a. The “Love enemies” paradigm
    1. Love is the opposite of hate—what we do to enemies
    2. This is a logical command—love to counteract hate
    3. Love is also something you can actually do to someone else—to change the heart
    4. Jesus' command to love them—does not eliminate the need to pray for them, though
  - b. The “pray for enemies” paradigm
    1. What is the opposite of persecution?—It is not prayer!
    2. The opposite of persecution—might be kindness—or even love.
    3. Jesus already commanded this: love your enemies—and your persecutors *are* enemies!
    4. Now Jesus goes a step further—not only love them—but pray for them.
    5. Even if love will not affect them—the supernatural power of prayer can do this!
    6. Here Jesus is talking about *real* persecution
      - a. Not just petty problems with personal ‘enemies’

- b. But ‘persecution for righteousness’
  - c. The roots of this type of persecution are embedded in evil intentions
  - d. Usually—only God’s supernatural power can break through this evil
  - e. So—we *must* invoke the power of God through prayer
3. The power of prayer—over persecution
- a. Prayer can help Christians
    - 1. Gives them strength to withstand persecution
    - 2. Helps them develop loving attitude towards persecutor—that can touch the persecutor
  - b. Prayer can affect the persecutor
    - 1. God can change heart of the persecutor
    - 2. This can even lead to salvation of persecutor—and fulfilment of God’s redemptive plan
  - c. Prayer can stop persecution
    - 1. God responds to His children under oppression—and can directly stop it
    - 2. God transforms someone—who can make a real difference and contribution to the kingdom

**Example: Saul—the persecutor—Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2**

[The church was continuous in prayer]

**Saul’s conversion—Acts 9:3-30**

*Acts 9:31—So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.*

### **C. CONTEXT OF LUKE’S PASSAGE—GIVES US THE THEME**

- 1. Luke begins this section with the ‘Golden Rule’
- 2. This continues the theme of ‘reciprocity’ and ‘good over evil’ from the last section
- 3. But the last section focused more on the need for human ‘generosity’
- 4. Luke points out—here—this last section focuses more on ‘mercy’

**Be merciful just as your Father is merciful**

- 5. So the theme of this section is:
  - Perfect Love

- God’s perfect love is always merciful
- We are love as God does—mercifully
- Perfection is not legalistic adherence to the law
- Perfection is loving everyone with God’s merciful love

#### D. MPORTANCE OF LAST VERSE

*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

##### 1. LAST VERSE SETS THE WHOLE CONTEXT

###### a. For previous themes

1. For “*righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees*”—**5:20**
2. Jesus has given a fuller and **perfect** interpretation of the law
3. Six themes:
  - Reconciliation
  - Faithfulness
  - Respect
  - Truth/honesty
  - Generosity—overcoming evil with good
  - Perfect love

###### b. For future themes

1. The previous themes dealt with attitudes about righteousness—in relation to the Law
2. The next three themes—**Chapter 6**—deal with three righteous acts
3. How to be perfectly righteous—more so than scribes and Pharisees regarding
  - Almsgiving
  - Prayer
  - Fasting