
“LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, HATE YOUR ENEMY”

George Battey | January 23, 2014

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who was the “neighbor” of the OT which Israel was suppose to love?
- 2) What is the common interpretation of “hate your enemy”?
- 3) What kind of enemy was Jesus referring to when He said, “Hate your enemy”?
- 4) What is an “imprecatory psalm”?
- 5) For a physical kingdom to survive, what **must** it do?
- 6) What is the basic meaning of the Greek word ἀγαπάω (love)?
- 7) A certain part of speech is used 15 times in 1 Cor 13 – what part of speech?
- 8) Jesus said we must be “perfect” like the Father in heaven. What is another (alternate) translation of “perfect”?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5:43-48

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, 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.”

POLICE VS. MILITARY

The last two sections of Mt 5 address two distinct items:

vv38-42 – police action

vv43-48 – military action

In this study, we will focus on military action and the need to return good for evil.

TEXT (1)

We begin now, as Jesus did, by looking first at the OT teaching.

Matthew 5:43

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

Jesus is here quoting a very familiar passage from the OT:

Leviticus 19:18

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.”

neighbor = “*children of thy people*”

The emphasis is, “**Love your fellow Israelite.**”

“HATE YOUR ENEMY”

This passage is perhaps the most confusing and difficult passage in this chapter. It can be clearly demonstrated that throughout Mt 5 Jesus has been contrasting what Moses said with His own NT teachings.

But in this last section we have a great problem because:

- You cannot read verbatim the command, “Hate thine enemy” and
- There are passages in the OT which seem to teach, “Love thine enemy.”

Exodus 23:4

4 “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.

Proverbs 25:21-22

21 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.

THE COMMON IDEA

To solve the problem of this text the majority of Bible students say that Jesus was referring to a Pharisaic tradition, rather than the OT itself.

So you will know that I am not exaggerating, I would like to give one of many quotations to illustrate the difficulty lying around this passage.

H. E. Robertson:

[Jesus] begins to do some contrastive teaching – but not a contrast of the Law and the Gospel. He was here contrasting some of the perversions, misapplications, and additions to the law of Moses with what the Law actually taught ...

v. 43 “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy”. This is purely a perversion of the Law. It did not say that. “Hate thine enemy” was only their addition. (“It Is Written of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage,” pp. 10-11)

The reason some brethren take this position is because they are desperately trying to avoid what Jesus taught concerning divorce and remarriage.

(They tell us that because Jesus was explaining the OT, none of these contrasts can apply today in the NT church.)

THE SOLUTION

Now ... here’s why I reject the idea that Jesus was merely correcting some perversions:

FIRST: Throughout this entire chapter when Jesus says, “*You have heard that it was said*” you can turn right over to the OT and read exactly what Jesus quotes.

SECOND: When Jesus says, “*But I say to you*” you cannot turn to the OT and read what He now teaches.

The solution to this difficult passage is twofold:

- Jesus is not quoting a specific OT passage, but rather is summarizing what the OT taught.
- The “enemy” is not just a personal enemy, but rather it is a **national enemy**.

HEATHEN NATIONS HATED

Israel counted these heathen nations as their enemies and God taught the people to “*hate*” them.

(I’m going to belabor this point because so many reject Mt 5 as NT doctrine because of this passage.)

Deuteronomy 7

1 “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,

2 “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.

16 “And you shall destroy all the peoples whom the LORD your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.

“have no pity upon them” – i.e. have no tenderness in your heart toward them. Do not love them.

Ex 34:12 – they were forbidden to make covenants with national enemies.

Dt 23:6 – they could not seek their peace, nor their prosperity forever.

Ezra 9:11-12 – they could not intermarry with the enemy, seek their peace, nor their wealth forever.

In contrast to this:

Dt 23:7 – Israel was specifically instructed not to hate the Edomites, or Egyptians.

Implying, of course, that some nations were to be hated.

Sometimes Israel ended up showing mercy to national enemies and they were rebuked for it.

2 Chron 19 – King Jehoshaphat was rebuked for loving the enemies of the Lord.

1 Sam 15 – King Saul was rebuked when he spared King Agag of the Amalekites.

1 Kings 20 – King Ahab was rebuked when he spared Ben Hadad the Syrian.

2 Kings 13 – King Joash was rebuked when he refused to smite the Syrians more than three times.

2 Kings 20 – King Hezekiah was rebuked when he showed kindness to the Babylonian ambassador.

Besides all of this, we have recorded some of the sacred songs of Israel where they sang of their hatred for enemy nations. These are called "*imprecatory psalms*" because they call down curses on the enemy:

Psalms 26:5

5 I have hated the assembly of evildoers,
And will not sit with the wicked.

Psalms 139:21-22

21 Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?
22 I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

This illustrates the spirit of "*hatred*" that burned in the hearts of faithful Israelites. (cf. Ps 109:6-14)

SUMMARY

More passages could be given, but this should suffice to show that the OT indeed taught:

- “Love thy neighbor” and
- “Hate your enemy”

Ex 23 and Prov 25 taught that Israel should be kind to *personal enemies* within the nation of Israel.

On the other hand, Israel was clearly taught to hate her national enemies.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

The important question is: **Why???** Why did God teach His people to hate and to war against the heathen nations surrounding them?

1) Israel would be tempted to serve other gods:

Exodus 23:32-33

32 “You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.

33 “They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

2) Israel was a physical as well as a spiritual kingdom on the earth:

Israel

⇒ Spiritual

⇒ Physical

- physical land
- physical boundaries
- physical laws
- physical punishments
- physical kings

Because the kingdom of Israel was partly physical (earthly) its existence was threatened by hostile enemy nations.

Israel had to learn war (which necessitated hatred) in order to maintain its existence.

TEXT (2)

Now let us return to the text and notice the implications of what Jesus is saying:

Matthew 5:44

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,

Jesus is trying to show these people on the mountain the nature of the “*kingdom of heaven*.”

If the “*kingdom of heaven*” were an earthly kingdom in any sense, God’s people would be fighting wars to maintain its existence.

NOTE: If they fought physical wars, they would of necessity have to hate their enemies.

SUMMARY

To maintain a physical kingdom men must engage in physical warfare:

John 18:36

36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

Physical warfare requires physical armor:

- a physical girdle
- a physical breastplate
- physical shoes
- a physical shield
- a physical helmet
- a physical sword

A physical kingdom requires physical war to maintain its existence. Physical war requires physical violence and physical hatred.

But to maintain a spiritual kingdom men must engage in spiritual warfare.

The problem with many churches (they're almost dead) is because they're not fighting.

ILL: (Corsicana) – busy evangelizing we were at peace. Slack off and fussing started.

Soldiers are trained to fight. If left in the barracks alone, long enough, they will fight each other and tear the barracks down.

Now ... since we're fighting a spiritual battle, we need spiritual armor:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

As citizens of this spiritual kingdom we do not hate, or attack anyone physically. Instead we hate and **attack** the spiritual enemy that works within men:

Ephesians 6:12

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Israel's hatred in the OT was a physical hatred toward physical enemies. But our hatred is a spiritual hatred toward spiritual enemies.

HOW TO LOVE ENEMIES

"Love your enemies" – How???

- (1) By blessing them
- (2) By doing good to them
- (3) By praying for them

When we read these words we feel a sense of hopelessness. How can we possibly love an enemy? Surely Jesus is commanding the impossible.

Notice that none of these things have to do with feelings. The basic meaning of Bible **"love"** (ἀγαπάω) is **"to do good to someone."**

1) Men are commanded to "love" God:

Matthew 22:37

37 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

This doesn't mean to have a *"good feeling"* about God but to *"do good"* toward Him – i.e. to *do* what He commanded:

John 14:31

31 “But that the world may know that **I love the Father**, and as the Father gave Me commandment, **so I do**. Arise, let us go from here.

Jesus showed His love to the Father by keeping His commandments.

2) God shows His love by action:

John 3:16

16 “For God so loved the world that **He gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

His love for the world is not a “*feeling*” – in fact, the world often grieves God, but in spite of His feelings, He does good toward the world.

3) Young women are to be taught to love their husbands (Tit 2:4).

Q: How can you teach someone to love?

A: By teaching them how to “*do good things*” towards their husbands.

4) Husbands are to love their wives (Eph 5:25).

Q: How can a husband obey this?

A: By “*doing good things*” to their wives.

NOTE: If a husband and wife would constantly “*do good*” towards the other, eventually some of the “*romantic*” feelings they desire would return.

SUMMATION

Jesus, then, is not commanding us to “*be fond of,*” or to “*have a warm affection*” for our enemies. He is commanding that we “*do good things*” to them.

Now, in 1 Cor 13 we have the greatest treatise on love. All 15 characteristics of love are given in the verb form.

If Bible “*love*” were a feeling (noun) there would have been 15 adjectives.

CIVIL GOVERNMENT

In view of what Jesus taught concerning the *nature of His new kingdom* and love for all men the natural conclusion is that a Christian cannot participate in law enforcement either locally, or nationally.

Christians are pilgrims and pilgrims don’t fight wars or enforce laws of the countries thru which they pass.

Q: If God does not want His people to fight in carnal wars and enforcing civil laws, did He intend wicked men to be punished?

A: Yes, but He ordained civil government to do that.

Romans 13:1-6

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do **you** want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and **you** will have praise from the same.

4 For **he is God’s minister** to **you** for good. But if **you** do evil, be afraid; for **he does not bear the sword in vain**; for **he is God’s minister**, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

5 Therefore **you** must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

6 For because of this **you** also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

The Holy Spirit was very careful in how He worded this. He worded it in such a way so as to make it impossible for a Christian to be involved in the process of taking revenge.

Notice the pronouns in this passage:

Civil Ruler	Christian
"He is a minister to you"	Not "You are a minister to yourself"
"He bears not the sword in vain"	Not "You bear not the sword in vain"
"He is an avenger"	Not "You are a avenger"
"They are God's ministers"	Not "You are God's ministers"

Civil Government	Church
Will administer civil laws and physical punishments.	Will administer spiritual laws to spiritual men.

Christians are specifically told:

- "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Rom 12:17)
- "Avenge not yourselves" (Rom 12:19)
- "Give place to wrath" (Rom 12:19)
- "Overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21)
- "Turn the other cheek" (Mt 5:39)

God will use unconverted men to punish criminals. Christians are specifically instructed not to be the administrators of this punishment.

TEXT (3)

Jesus now gives us a reason why we should love our enemies:

Matthew 5:45

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.

In this verse and the next verse Jesus gives two reasons why we should love our enemies:

- So we will be like God
- So we will not be like publicans and heathens

SUMMARY

In summary, Jesus is saying that we must follow God’s lead. So long as God is content to bless the wicked man ... then I must continue loving and blessing him also.

Someday God will stop shining His sun upon this enemy and then I will no longer have to bless him and pray for him. But for the time being I must love my enemy:

- Because God loves him and
- As long as God loves him

COMPARING OURSELVES

Now when Jesus asked, “*What do ye more than others,*” He did not intend to simply create a comparison. Jesus does not intend for us to sit around and feel satisfied just because we’ve done as much as others.

NOTE: The reason some do not grow is because they continually compare themselves to others.

2 Corinthians 10:12

12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Q: Why can't we compare ourselves with others?

A: Because it causes us to function on a lower level. This is an inferior standard by which to gage things by.

ILL: Man called operator each day at 11:59 AM to ask what time it was. Several years went by. It turned out that he blew the noon whistle and she set her watch by that whistle.

Jesus asked, *"What do you do more than others"* to expose a difference.

He wants us to see that God expects more out of us than of the world.

TEXT (4)

Next, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:46

46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

Here we are introduced for the first time in the NT to tax collectors.

"tax collectors" – a Jew who hired himself to the Roman government as a collector of the Roman tax.

The Roman tax was bad enough, but to collect the tax for Rome was doubly bad. The Jews looked at them like traitors. Only those with no reputation would accept the job.

Now Jesus is saying that if we *only* love those who love us, we are not exceeding the scribes and Pharisees (v20) and in fact, we are not even exceeding the tax collectors.

TEXT (5)

Jesus continues the thought:

Matthew 5:47

47 “And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”

Notice three things about this verse:

1) “If ye greet your BRETHREN only”

Jesus builds His case by presupposing that we will first love our brethren. BUT, if we don't love our own brethren, we cannot begin to love our enemies.

2) “What do you DO more than others?”

This is very impressive to me.

Jesus did not ask:

- “What **feel** ye more than others?”
- “What **believe** ye more than others?”
- “What **profess** ye more than others?”

Loving an enemy, once again, involves **doing** something for them.

1 John 3:18

18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but **in deed** and **in truth**.

3) “Do not even the tax collectors do so?”

“*Tax collectors*” here should have been translated “*Gentiles*” and all modern translations will translate it so.

If the first comparison was not strong enough for these Jews listening to Jesus, this one certainly is. The only thing worse than a publican is a Gentile.

TEXT (6)

Matthew 5:48

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

“perfect” (τέλειος) – “brought to completion; fully accomplished, fully developed ... complete, entire” (Greenfield)

Let me give you another verse that uses this word so you can see exactly what it means:

1 Corinthians 14:20

20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be **mature** (τέλειος).

Obviously Paul was not requiring us to be **flawless** in understanding, but rather to be **mature**.

This word does not mean “*sinless*,” but rather maturity.

Q: Is Jesus just giving us a general command to be mature, or is He commanding maturity in a specific area of our lives?

A: In this particular context, Jesus is calling for “*perfection*,” or “*maturity*” in how we *love* men. “*Complete*” in loving – not lopsided.

CONCLUSION

Why does Matthew emphasize the spiritual nature of the kingdom? Because so many are waiting for, looking for and expecting a physical kingdom:

- Jews
- Jehovah’s Witnesses
- World Wide Church of God
- Premillennialists

Everywhere we look and everyone we speak to is expecting and anticipating a physical kingdom.

All of these religious groups can see the importance of the “*kingdom of heaven*.” They know:

- the kingdom is **essential** for salvation.
- there is **only one** kingdom for all mankind.
- if you’re not in the kingdom, you cannot be saved.

They eagerly await the one kingdom which they believe is yet to come for they see its importance.

In anticipation of a physical kingdom, men are completely by-passing the church. They look with contempt upon the church. They believe:

- the church is unimportant.
- you can choose the “church of your choice”.
- you can be saved without being a member of any church.

The Scriptures are telling us:

- The church is the kingdom
- The kingdom is here
- And it's a spiritual kingdom
- It's the church of Christ.

Colossians 1:13

13 [God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into **the kingdom** of the Son of His love,

You too can be a citizen of this great kingdom by submitting to the laws of the King.