

Love Your Enemies

Dan W. Gelok

Matthew 5:43-47

In August 1983, Russell Stendal, 27 years old, was taken hostage into the jungle of Columbia, South America, by a band of Marxist guerrilla soldiers called the FARC. For nearly 5 months he learned what it really means to love one's enemies. He wrote a letter home, saying, "I am in danger only of losing my life; they are in danger of losing their souls." Through kindness, Russell befriended his guards. One day the commander told him, "We can't kill you face to face; we like you. So we will have to kill you in your sleep." God enabled Russell to forgive, but for the next 10 days and nights he couldn't sleep. A submachine gun was repeatedly thrust in his face under his mosquito net, but the guards couldn't bring themselves to pull the trigger. On January 3, 1984, Russell was released. When he said goodbye, tears filled the eyes of some of his captors.

The story of his kidnapping is told by him in the book he wrote titled "Rescue the Captors". His reason for the title is because he realized that his captors were more prisoners than he was. There was a chance he would be released, but most of his kidnapers were young boys who had been taken from their families, given a weapon and taught to kill. They are threatened with death to themselves and/or their families should they try to escape. Not to mention their spiritual captivity.

I. SIXTH OF SIX TRADITIONS CORRECTED - *Review*

The First Five - Matthew 5: 21 - 42

First - Murder - Hatred

Second - Adultery - Lust

Third - Divorce - Covenant Abandonment

Fourth - Vows - Deceitful Word Play

Fifth - Eye For Eye - Revenge

Sixth - Love & Hate - Pride & Prejudice

Matthew 5: 43 - 48 - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Here Jesus says, you think you love and what you love is everybody in your little group that agrees with you. And then you have license to hate everybody else. You're not even willing to love the ones you love the way you love yourself, which leaves room for yourself indulgent pride. That's the Jewish tradition.

THE ROOT QUESTION IS THIS: who is my neighbor and what should my relationship be with them?

Now as we've studied the texts through Matthew 5 from verse 21 on, there are three major thrusts:

II. Three Points Of View:

Scribes and Pharisees

Old Testament

Jesus

A. The Viewpoint Of The Scribes And Pharisees On Neighbors, Brothers, Strangers, & Aliens

It starts out good, "thou shalt love thy neighbor." That sounds good but remember, any system that wants to become a substitute for the truth must contain a portion of the truth. That's the deceit; the subtlety.

Ephesians 4: 14 - We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming

1 Thessalonians 5: 19 - 22 - Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

Because whenever there is an encroachment upon the truth by Satan, he invariably wants to maintain something of that truth to provide a common ground to lead people into the perversion.

It starts out well, "thou shalt love thy neighbor." But there are two problems. They left out something and they added something. They left out "thou shalt love thy neighbor **as thy self**" and they added "**and hate thine enemy**." They left out "as thy self" because of pride and they added "hate thine enemy" because of prejudice.

N.B. - NOT all of the Scribes and Pharisees were mistaken about this! Consider the one Scribe who Jesus said, "

Mark 12: 32 - 34 - The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; ³³AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, **AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF**, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

They didn't feel they wanted to love anybody as themselves. And they wanted the right to be justified in their victory a la hatred toward everybody who wasn't a part of their little group. So conveniently, they dropped something and conveniently they added something and thus they came up with a perversion of God's standard. And that's precisely what Jesus attacks.

And what Jesus is saying to these Pharisees and scribes and those who agreed with the system is that your system no matter how intellectually convinced you are, your system is inadequate to redeem you. You are not God's people. You have not met the standard. You are sinners. And the consequently, He offers Himself as the Savior knowing full well that no one comes to a Savior that he does not know he needs.

And so really, it's a message about sin.

B. The Old Testament Viewpoint On Neighbors Brothers, Strangers, & Aliens

What did the Old Testament teach?

Did the Old Testament say anywhere hate your enemy? **No.**

Did it say love your neighbor? **Yes.**

So what is the teaching of the Old Testament?

Old Testament Scriptures On Neighbors / Enemies / Brothers / Strangers / Aliens

Deuteronomy 22: 1 - 4 - You shall not see **your countryman's ox or his sheep** straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. If **your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him**, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. Thus you shall do with his **donkey**, and you shall do the same with his **garment**, and you shall do likewise with anything lost **by your countryman**, which he has lost and you have found. You are **not allowed to neglect them**. You shall not see **your countryman's donkey or his ox fallen down** on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up.

QUESTION: Who is the person that we are to help? _____

Brother, someone you know, OR someone you DON'T know!

Exodus 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.

QUESTION: Who is the person that we are to help? _____

Enemy with lost animal or suffering overburdened animal!

The syllogism of this simply says that brother has to include what? Enemy. That's the point.

Somebody who hates you and his animal falls down, the normal reaction is serves you right buddy. Hope your animal dies. And you've got to put the whole load on your wife. You know that retaliatory spirit. He says, no you go and help, even if it's your enemy.

The standard never changes. The term brother is big enough to include whoever happens to have a need. You see the point? That's where we determine the meaning of neighbor. Neighbor is as big as need. That's all. And when the Bible says "love your neighbor," it simply widens up the whole thing as Psalm tells us the commandment of God is very broad to encompass anybody who has a need no matter how they feel about you. That's the issue.

Job 31: 29 - 30 - Have I rejoiced at the **extinction of my enemy**, or **exulted when evil befell him**?
No, **I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse.**

QUESTION: How did this righteous man view cursing his enemy OR rejoicing in his calamity?

SIN

Psalm 7: 3 - 5 - O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is injustice in my hands, if I have **rewarded evil to my friend**, or have **plundered him who without cause was my adversary**, let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it; and let him trample my life down to the ground and lay my glory in the dust.

QUESTION: What sort of behavior did David think was worthy of God's judgment?

If I was unkind to a friend OR taken advantage of an enemy; being evil to one who was evil to me.

Psalm 35: 11 - 14 - Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me of things that I do not know. **They repay me evil for good**, to the bereavement of my soul. **But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom. I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.**

QUESTION: How did David respond to his enemies? What is appropriate behavior / attitude?

If I was unkind to a friend OR taken advantage of an enemy; being evil to one who was evil to me.

David says of his enemies, "They rewarded me evil for good for the spoiling of my soul." In other words, it just...it hurt me on the inside. They gave me back evil for good, my enemies did. "But as for me," now look, here's a righteous man, "when they were sick my clothing was sackcloth." Now what did sackcloth speak of? Well, it's spoke of remorse and sorrow and mourning didn't it? When a Jew put on sackcloth and ashes, he was in mourning. He says when I was good to them, they were cruel to me, but when evil fell upon them, I mourned over them. My heart broke over them.

This is the Spirit of Jesus who hangs on the cross and looks at those who spit on Him and says, "Father," what, "forgive them they know not what they do." This is the heart of Stephen who lays beneath the bloody stones that are crushing the life out of his body and cries out to God, "lay not this sin to their charge." This is the magnanimous unbelievable inhuman, supernatural forgiveness that comes here from the heart of David who has been given evil for good, and yet when his enemies suffer his clothing is sackcloth. And he says, "I humble my soul with fasting and my prayer return into mine own bosom."

In other words, David says I fasted and I mourned and I prayed for my enemies when they fell into calamity. Verse 14, "I behave myself as though he had been my friend or brother." Notice that? And here David brings together in our thoughts Deuteronomy 22 and Exodus 23 and he says "my enemy is my brother. My enemy is to be my friend at least in that sense. I bowed down heavily as one who mourneth for his mother."

Now I'll tell you something people, when a man can weep over his enemy like he weeps over his mother in calamity, he has learned a dimension of love that is far beyond the human level. And that's the teaching of the Old Testament. "In my adversity, verse 15, "they rejoice and they gather themselves together. They had a party and they tore at me and they cease not, they gnashed upon with their teeth, but that was never my heart towards them."

Proverbs 17: 5 - He who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; he who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.

QUESTION: According to Solomon, what happens to those who are entertained by poverty or trouble?

You'll not be unpunished, even if that person is an enemy.

Proverbs 24: 29 - Say not, "I will do so to him as he hath done to me."

QUESTION: God's command against retaliation violates what principle?

The golden rule.

Proverbs 25: 21 - If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink

QUESTION: How are we to treat an enemy who has a need?

Fill the need. (CAPTAIN RICHARD PHILLIPS US merchant mariner and author, who served as captain of the MV Maersk Alabama)

Genesis 13: 1 - So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. 2 Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. 3 He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. 5 Now **Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.** Now the Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land. 8 So Abram said to Lot, "**Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you?** Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left." 10 **Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere**—this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. 11 So **Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward.** Thus they separated from each other. 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. 13 Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord. 14 The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. 16 I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. 17 Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." 18 Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

QUESTION: What was the relationship between Lot and Abram like and how did Abram respond?

He responded with generosity and kindness to a relative who had become an adversary.

1 Samuel 24: 1 - Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. 3 **He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself.** Now **David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.** 4 The men of David said to him, "**Behold, this is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'**" Then **David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.** 5 It came about afterward that **David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the**

edge of Saul's robe. 6 So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed." 7 David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way. 8 Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. 9 David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'? 10 Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but my eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.'" 11 Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. 12 May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? 15 The Lord therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand." 16 When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. 18 You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the Lord delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the Lord therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. 20 Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. 21 So now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." 22 David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

QUESTION: Did David have a right to take Saul's life and what kept him from following the counsel of his men?

He could have, but displayed mercy by God's restraining grace.

2 Samuel 16: 5 - 13 - When King David (fleeing his son Absalom) came to Bahurim, behold, there came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose name was **Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came.** 6 **He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left.** 7 Thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! 8 The Lord has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!" 9 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head." 10 But the king said, "What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the Lord has told him, 'Curse David,' then who shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" 11 Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him." 12 Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day." 13 So David and his men went on the way; and **Shimei went along on the hillside parallel with him and as he went he cursed and cast stones and threw dust at him.**

CONCLUSION: The teaching of the Old Testament, and the example of many of the patriarchs was that men are commanded by God to be kind even to those who stood as adversaries, enemies, strangers, aliens,

Deuteronomy 10: 12 - 21 - Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen.

An Amazing Story



In the year 1567, King Phillip, II of Spain sent the Duke of Alva, the Duke of Alva was notorious for his bitter hatred of everybody who embraced reformed Christianity. It was the time of the reformation and people were turning from Catholicism to biblical Christianity and believing in Christ in a proper and they hated those people.

In fact, the time of the of the Duke of Alva was known as the Reign of Terror in Spain, and the council of Alva was call the blood council, because they slaughtered so many people who embraced the reformed faith.

Under the maliciousness of the Duke of Alva, Dirk Willems was martyred for his faith.

Dirk was caught, tried and convicted as an Anabaptist in those later years of harsh Spanish rule under this bloody tyrant in the Netherlands. He escaped from a residential palace turned into a prison by letting himself out of a window with a rope made of knotted rags, dropping onto the ice that covered the castle moat.

Seeing him escape, a palace guard pursued him as he fled. Dirk crossed the thin ice of a pond, the "Hondegat," safely. His own weight had been reduced by short prison rations, but the heavier pursuer broke through.

Hearing the guard's cries for help, Dirk turned back and rescued him. The less-than-grateful guard then seized Dirk and led him back to captivity. This time the authorities threw him into a more secure prison, a small, heavily barred room at the top of a very tall church tower, above the bell, where he was probably locked into the wooden leg stocks that remain in place today. Soon he was led out to be burned to death.

Some inhabitants of present-day Asperen, none of them Mennonite, regard Dirk as a folk hero. A Christian, so compassionate that he risked recapture in order to save the life of his drowning pursuer, stimulates respect and memory. Recently Asperen, a village in the Dutch province of Gelderland, named a street in Dirk's honor.

No one was near to help the soldier but Dirk. But the soldier was his enemy. What would you do? The historian tells us that Dirk went back picking his way over the crackling ice, rescued his enemy, and brought him to safety. That's the heart of the matter isn't? That's the spirit of Jesus. The spirit of Stephen, of Abram, of David. How about you?

C. The Viewpoint Of Jesus On Neighbors Brothers, Strangers, & Aliens

Jesus speaks with authority here. He is the Lord of the law. He is the Son of God.

Jesus by using the emphatic pronoun (before the verb) is intensifying the fact that He speaks authoritatively. "I say unto you." Setting Himself up as one who can speak over against their system no matter who their teachers have been. No matter how long a list of renowned and well meaning and well known and astute Rabbis there have been. "I say unto you." And so He is the Lord of the law.

A Pharisee (an expert in the law) shows his evasion of the issue by trying to squirm out of God's standard and have a LESSER standard which COULD not save!

Luke 10: 25 - 29 - And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." 29 But **wishing to justify himself**, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan. A priest came along and he saw the man and he said that man is not in my group. And he went to the other side of the road. Who wants to touch him? He's not my neighbor. It's one of the rebel Jewish people who's probably not even belonging to my religious party.

He was followed a little later by a Levite, one who was of the great heritage of the Levitical priests as well and when he was at the place he came and looked on him and passed by on the other side. He said, he's not in my group either.

Off they went, but a certain Samaritan, a race of Jewish people who inner-married with the pagans who infiltrated the northern Kingdom. They became half-breeds and the most despicable thing to a pure bred Jew was for somebody to defile the uniqueness of being a Jew by inner-marrying with a pagan.

Jew wouldn't even enter a Gentile house because they believed that the Gentiles aborted their babies in those houses and they were desecrated places. eat with a Gentile utensil. eat food cooked by a Gentile. They wouldn't even go into a Gentile house. When they came back to their own country, they would shake the dust off their garments because they didn't want Gentile dust dragged into their land.

And when they went from the south to north, they would go across the Jordan and up the east side and cross over at the top so that they wouldn't have to go through Samaria.

Here came a Samaritan, an enemy who would look at that bleeding Jew and say "Boy, good for him. It's about time some of them got their due the way they've treated us!"

All around Jesus were walls and fences. He came for the very purpose of bursting those barriers so that love - pure, warm, divine, infinite love - would be able to flow straight down from the heart of God. Hence from His own marvelous heart, into the hearts of men, His love overleaped all the boundaries of race and nationality and party and age and sex. When He said, 'I tell you love your enemies,' He must have startled His audience, for He was saying something that probably never before had been said so succinctly, positively, and forcefully.

New Testament Commentary On Matthew - William Hendrickson

III. APPLICATION - LIVING OUT JESUS VIEW OF NEIGHBORS BROTHERS, STRANGERS, & ALIENS

Matthew 5: 43 - 48 - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

A. Love Them

native tribe in Polynesia who had around their huts special articles hanging all around the roof of the hut. A visitor said, "What are they?" They said, "They are reminders." Reminders of what? "Reminders of injury. When anybody injures us or anybody does something against us, we hang a token of that injury there so that we will remember every time we have been wronged and none is ever removed until full vengeance is gained."

That's the human way, that's not God's way. That's the way the Pharisees lived. Around their legalistic hut hung all of the articles or symbols of their vengeance.

Be ready to do them all the real kindness that you can, and glad of an opportunity to do it, in their bodies, estates, names, families; and especially to do good to their souls.

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, Of the Gospel According To St. Matthew - Matthew Henry



I have several times read the story of George Wishart, who was a martyr in the early years for his faith in Christ. He was to die because he loved Jesus and wouldn't deny Him. He was taken to the place of execution, and the executioner prepared to take his life. But he had known of his life and testimony, and he was so burdened with the guilt of his role as executioner that he hesitated in reluctance in taking his life. The biographer says at the point where he hesitated, Wishart looked up and saw the hesitation. So he stood up, put his arms around him, embraced his executioner, planted a kiss on his cheek, and said, "Sir, may that be a token that I forgive you." That's loving your enemies.

It (love) indeed sees all the hatefulness and the wickedness of the enemy, feels his stabs and his blows, may even have something to do toward warding them off. But all this simply feels the loving heart with the one desire and aim, to free it's enemy from his hate, to rescue him from his sin, and thus to save his soul. Mere affection is often blind, but even then it thinks that it sees something attractive in the one toward whom it goes. The higher love may see nothing attractive in the one so loved. His inner motive is simply to bestow true blessing on the one loved and to do him the highest good.

I cannot love a low, mean criminal who robs me and threatens my life, at least in the sense of liking him. I cannot like a false, lying, slanderous fellow, who perhaps has vilified me again and again. But I can, by the grace of Jesus Christ, love them all, see what is wrong with them, desire and work to do them only good, and most of all, to free them from their vicious ways.

The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel 1-14 - R. C. H. Lenski

B. Pray For Them

The Jews had done a foul deed; they accused Him of being a blasphemer. They screamed for His blood, and they too had mocked Him, casting things in His face. He hung on the cross, and at His feet was a vicious, frantic, frenzied, hateful, despising mob, thirsty for His blood, the result of years of bitterness and hatred against One who was only an agent of love.

How does He react to that? What is His attitude toward them? [Luke 23:34](#) says that Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And they parted His garment and cast lots. In the midst of His magnanimous prayer of forgiveness, they were still busy gambling for His clothing. The point that I want you to see is that Jesus could love them so much that He could beseech the Father on behalf of their forgiveness. That's not a human love; that just isn't true of mankind.

You say, "Jesus was God. We can't do that, it's beyond us. We can't love enemies to that degree." I think we can. There is another biblical illustration in Acts 7. There was a man by the name of Stephen, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, a man who was numbered among the first chosen in the church in Jerusalem as a godly man to be placed over some important ministry. Stephen was the best of the very best in the early church, a man who knew God and the Old Testament and the new covenant even in Jesus Christ.

Stephen stood up, in Acts 7, and preached an indicting, powerful message not unlike Peter's message on Pentecost. He laid bare the sinfulness of Israel, and when he was finished, the people were so frantic and overwrought and so cut to the heart, says Luke as he writes, that they literally screamed with their voices and clapped their hands over their ears so that they wouldn't hear anything from this man. They picked him up and threw him over a precipice, and began to pummel his body with stones.

The Bible says, in the midst of this, that he pulled himself into a kneeling position - imagine that. The Jewish method of stoning was to find about a ten-foot drop and drop the man down. Then the first accuser

would take the largest stone and try to crush his head with it. The second accuser would follow, and finally the mob would stone him until they crushed the life out of his body.

Stephen was lying at the foot of this, receiving the stones, and he managed to pull himself into a kneeling position to do what? To pray a prayer. What was his prayer? Simply this: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. Be merciful, don't make them pay for this; be gracious to them." That's loving your enemies.

Prayer is the forerunner of mercy.

C.H. Spurgeon



In *Christianity Today*, Robert Coles told an amazing story of a girl who had learned to pray for those who were hostile to her. Coles was in New Orleans in 1960 when a federal judge ruled that the city schools must be integrated. A 6-year-old girl, Ruby Bridges, was the only Black child to attend the William T. Frantz School. Every day for weeks as she entered and left the building, a mob would be standing outside to scream at her and threaten her. They shook their fists, shouted obscenities, and threatened to kill her. One day her teacher saw her lips moving as she walked through the crowd, flanked by burly federal marshals.

When the teacher told Coles about it, he asked Ruby if she was talking to the people. "I wasn't talking to them," she replied. "I was just saying a prayer for them"

Coles asked her, "Why do you do that?"

"Because they need praying for," came her reply.

"In *THE GRACE OF GIVING*, Stephen Olford tells of a Baptist pastor during the American Revolution, Peter Miller, who lived in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, and enjoyed the friendship of George Washington. In Ephrata also lived Michael Wittman, an evil-minded sort who did all he could to oppose and humiliate the pastor.

One day Michael Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to die. Peter Miller traveled seventy miles on foot to Philadelphia to plead for the life of the traitor.

"No, Peter," General Washington said. "I cannot grant you the life of your friend."

"My friend!" exclaimed the old preacher. "He's the bitterest enemy I have."

“What?” cried Washington. “You’ve walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in different light. I’ll grant your pardon.” And he did.

Peter Miller took Michael Wittman back home to Ephrata—no longer an enemy but a friend.” (Lynn Jost, bible.org)

C. The Motive - Reflection

1. To Reflect The Image Of Our Heavenly Father

2. Reflecting On Our Heavenly Father

a. He Causes The Sun To Rise On The Evil And The Good

b. He Sends Rain On The Righteous And The Unrighteous

D. The Motive - Difference!

Corrie Ten Boom was a blest survivor of a Nazi concentration camp. When released from Ravensbruck, the Good and Gracious Lord led her into a world-wide Christian ministry of speaking and book writing.

The following is taken from Chapter 7 of Corrie's well known book, “Tramp for the Lord.” It's a tremendous demonstration of loving and forgiving enemies:

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him – a balding, heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947, and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander’s mind, I like to think that that’s where forgiven sins were thrown. “When we confess our sins,” I said, “God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. And even though I cannot find a Scripture for it, I believe God then places a sign out there that says, ‘NO FISHING ALLOWED.’”

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And that’s when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister’s frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin, Betsie, how thin you were!

The place was Ravensbruck, and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard – one of the most cruel guards.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: “A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course – how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard there." No, he did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well, Fraulein." Again, the hand came out, "Will you forgive me?"

And I stood there – I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven – and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place – could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there – hand held out – but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it – I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

I knew it not only as a commandment of God but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion – I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands.

And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother! I cried. "With all my heart." For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. But even so, I realized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in **Romans 5: 5** - Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who was given to us

SOURCES:

- **An Exposition, With Practical Observations, Of the Gospel According To St. Matthew** - Matthew Henry
- **Harmony Of The Gospels** - John Calvin
- **New Testament Commentary On Matthew** - William Hendrickson
- **Sermon On The Mount** - Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- **The Message Of The Sermon On the Mount** - John R. W. Stott
- **Tramp For The Lord** - Corrie Ten Boom
- **Loving God, Loving People – Part 9, Loving Your Enemies** - Kevin A. Pierpont
<http://kevinpierpont.com/loving-god-loving-people-part-9-loving-your-enemies-matthew-543-48/>
- **The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel 1-14** - R. C. H. Lenski