

“Enemy Love” – Matthew 5:43-48

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Meet me in your Bibles at Matthew 5 (page 811 in the pew Bibles). We have been studying this section of the Sermon on the Mount known as the “Six Antitheses,” where Jesus has contrasted His teaching with the misapplications of the Old Testament rampant in that day. We have seen what Jesus has to say about anger, lust, divorce, honesty, and retaliation. Today we will sit under what He has to say about radical love in the sixth and final of these famous statements.

This has not been an easy section of the Sermon on the Mount for us to wrestle with. Many of you have joked that you’ve felt your toes get stepped all over. I hear you. I’m right there with you, church. I’m not preaching from some ivory tower. I need the teaching of Jesus as much as anyone in this place. It hurts me too. But sometimes pain is a good thing. When you have a limb that you suspect is dead or dying, the experience of pain is a *great* thing. It shows you have feeling and therefore the chance for healing.ⁱ

Keep that in mind today because the text we have before us is probably going to hurt a little as well. I have this weird relationship with the verses we’ll cover this morning. On the one hand, I absolutely love them because they articulate one of the most beautiful and compelling characteristics of Christianity. On the other hand, there is a part of me that doesn’t really like them at all because they are among the most difficult to imagine applying in my own life, hence the love-hate relationship.

In 1958, Dr. Normal Pittenger published an article in a widely circulated magazine called *Christian Century*. The article was titled, “A Critique of C. S. Lewis.” He had several criticisms, including the accusation that Lewis didn’t care for the Sermon on the Mount. Lewis later wrote perhaps the perfect comeback:

“As for ‘caring for’ the Sermon on the Mount, if ‘caring for’ here means ‘liking’ or enjoying, I suppose no one ‘cares for’ it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure.”ⁱⁱ

On that happy note...take a look at the text. We will pick things up where we left off last week. Start in verse 43...This is God’s Word...

“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 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 do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

Pray with me...

“Father, we confess that these instructions can, at times, feel so alien to our thought and practice. But we don’t believe that reality pleases You. Help us hear and heed the instruction of Jesus. Help His Lordship to drown out our hard hearts, which we have all too often bolstered and defended in the name of practicality. Help the glory of sonship to outshine the pragmatic appeals of our sin-inclined hearts in the moments ahead. Allow Your Holy Spirit to steer our minds toward truth, to fix our gaze on the example you have set, and to compel our lives to move in the direction of Jesus. These things we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Now then, the plan is for us to examine this text for a couple sermons. Today we will try to grasp the shock of it all. Then in the second sermon we will explore some of its sweeping implications for our lives.

We can approach this text in the same way we have the previous five blocks of teaching. We need to identify the Old Testament teaching He alludes to, then consider how that teaching was commonly misunderstood and misapplied, and then see the contrast that Jesus’ teaching creates. The contrast is not between Jesus and the Old Testament, but Jesus and the sinful conduct of many religious people who wrongly spun their behavior as obedience to God’s Word. They did this because they misunderstood the Scriptures. We do the same thing, so we may find ourselves identifying more with the religious people Jesus is critiquing than with Jesus Himself. That’s a problem. But it’s also a grace for God to help you see the truth.

So, then, let’s consider the teaching of the Old Testament...

NEIGHBOR LOVE

Look at verse 43—“*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’*” The first half of that is indeed taught in the Old Testament. “*You shall love your neighbor*” is a verbatim quotation Matthew draws from Leviticus 19:18 in the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is usually referred to as the Septuagint or the LXX for short. We find that principle at work in righteous throughout the Old Testament and the command is, not surprisingly, reiterated several times in the New Testament.ⁱⁱⁱ

In fact, this is a summary statement that captures all of the commands of God. Think of it this way, all of the commands we find in the Old Testament could be reduced to the instructions given in the Law of Moses. All of the Law of Moses could be reduced to the Ten Commandments. All of the Ten Commandments could be reduced to the Two Great Commandments that Jesus explained to the scribe in Mark 12:30-31—“*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...mind...and...strength. [And] love your neighbor as yourself.*” He says, “*There is no other commandment greater than these.*” That’s true because these two love commands summarize *every* command that God has given.

Interestingly, Paul boils things down even further when he told the Galatians, “*the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Galatians 5:14; cf. Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8). He’s not contradicting Jesus. He’s showing the connection between love of God and love of neighbor. They can’t rightly be separated. They were meant to go together. To love your neighbor as God intends presupposes loving God in the holistic way Jesus described. You can’t do the latter without the former. In that sense all of God’s Law can be boiled down to Leviticus 19:18, which Jesus quotes here in Matthew 5—“*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” So Jesus is getting us into the very heart of all God’s instruction.

But, notice in Matthew 5, Jesus says that the people have “heard” more than this. They have heard that they are to love their neighbor *and* hate their enemy. Jesus is doing something clever here. It’s as brilliant

as it is subtle. The way that verse is worded helps us understand how many religious people misread Leviticus 19:18. There were three mistakes they made.

First, they misread by omission. You see, the command in Leviticus told them to love your neighbor “as yourself.” That little phrase is intentionally missing in Jesus’ description of what they had “heard.” Why? Because it reflects something of what many religious people did with the command. It’s very subtle, but you need to see this. If you take “Love your neighbor as yourself” and you turn it into “love your neighbor,” you’ve shifted the focus from *how* God wants us to love to *whom* God wants us to love.^{iv}

When you’re prone to self-righteousness (which we are!), it’s very hard to think about loving someone in the manner and extent that you love yourself. But if the question shifts to whom you are to love, then it becomes a limitation game. You start limiting the scope of people you’re required to love. It’s an exercise in making things more manageable for you by excluding some people from the list. When that’s the game you’re playing, I can pretty much guarantee who’s not going to make your list—all those people who are hard to love.

This is really the essence of the second common error made when interpreting Leviticus 19:18. They misread by speculation. It’s quite common for a person to misread the command as love *only* your neighbor and don’t fret the rest.^v And if that’s what you think God meant, then your job is to figure out who makes the “neighbor list.” That’s the very question that prompted Jesus to tell the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:29ff). Remember that parable?

A man gets mugged and left for dead on the road in the middle of nowhere. A priest finds him on the road, but moves to the opposite side and passes by. (“Hey, that’s not very neighborly!”). A Jewish Levite does the exact same thing. But then a despise Samaritan, who the Jews loved to hate, sees the victim and has compassion. He binds his wounds, puts him on his animal, takes him to an inn and cares for him, and then gives money to the innkeeper to keep the care coming, along with a promise that he would pay the price of any help the battered man might need.

Then Jesus ends the parable with a question—“*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*” (Luke 10:36). The answer is obvious. The Samaritan! The guy who answers doesn’t even have the courage to acknowledge that it was a Samaritan who kept Leviticus 19:18 properly. He just says, “*the one who showed him mercy.*” To which Jesus replies, “*You go, and do likewise*” (10:37). I’m sure that Jewish leader loved hearing that. Go be like the Samaritan!

But do you see what Jesus is doing? He knows how prone we are to semantics. So what does He do? He defines “neighbor,” with this parable, as anyone you are in a position to offer help.^{vi} That pretty much forces you to scrap the “neighbor list,” unless, of course, you are prepared to put everyone on it. Jesus shows that the term “neighbor” in Leviticus 19:18 was meant to be inclusive, not exclusive.^{vii} And it’s because of this that we can see yet another mistake that many people make.

They misread by addition. Notice Jesus also points out the people heard that they were to “*hate their enemies.*”^{viii} That’s what they heard, but they didn’t hear it from the Bible. Nowhere in the Old Testament is *that* command given. That’s an addition that people just assumed. In fact, that really runs counter to the instruction and example we find in the Old Testament. But it sounds believable enough. “Satan’s perversions of God’s revelation almost always touch on the truth at some point,” writes John MacArthur. “A little truth makes deception more believable and acceptable.”^{ix}

In the same chapter the Israelites are told to “*love their neighbor as yourself,*” they are also told to show this same love to the foreigner “*as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:33-34). The same courtesies they extended to their own ilk, they were to extend toward enemies. For example, in Deuteronomy the Israelites are told to

return lost livestock to their countrymen and help out their animals when they fell down or were injured (Deuteronomy 22:1-4). In Exodus, the people are told to offer that same assistance to their enemies.

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.” (Exodus 23:4-6)

That’s just one example.^x Many of the heroes of Israel’s history provide us with examples of loving enemies. That heart can be heard in Job’s testimony (Job 31:29-30) or the actions of David toward his pursuer Saul (1 Samuel 24:3-7) or David’s kindness towards Saul’s relative, Shimei, who pelted him with rocks and continually shouted curses at him (2 Samuel 16:5-10). It can be seen in many of Israel’s proverbs, like *“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink”* (Proverbs 25:21; cf. 17:5; 24:29). More illustrations could be given, but you get the idea.^{xi}

That said, if you read the Old Testament selectively, it’s possible you could come upon some verses that could be (mis)used to justify hatred for enemies. The most famous examples are probably the Canaan conquest narratives (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:16-18; 30:7) and the so-called “imprecatory Psalms” (e.g., Psalm 139:21-22), where God’s people seem to long for or rejoice in the destruction of the wicked.^{xii} But I don’t think that excuse will do.

We could easily spend the rest of our time on this, but we don’t need to waste our precious time on that tangent. Suffice it to say, something larger is going on in the conquest of Canaan that involves God’s judgment on the Canaanites for their wickedness and involved Israel as God’s instrument of bringing that judgment upon the Canaan.^{xiii} We should also remember what the fates of Canaanites such as Rahab, who was spared and becomes a grandmother of Jesus, teach us. We also have to keep in mind some of the conversations we have had in the past two sermons, concerning non-retaliation in our personal lives vs. the pursuit of justice on behalf of others. We must recall the delegated authority that God has given to human judges and rulers who, in Paul’s language, do not “bear the sword in vain” (Romans 13:3). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, is dealing with our personal relationship and not with civil law or the judicial system. The imprecatory Psalms are also more nuanced than their critics give them credit. As Daniel Doriani observes,

“The Bible never commands us to hate individual enemies, but there is a place for righteous wrath toward God’s settled enemies. On judgment day, we will rejoice at their downfall, for their end is inseparable from the victory of God and his saints. Thus, when we view the wicked as a class, from an eternal perspective, our love for them ceases. In daily life, however, we have no right to adopt the eternal perspective. We cannot classify people. The man standing before us may be wicked, but we do not know whether he will repent or not.”^{xiv}

For this reason, and several others, Jesus’ instruction makes sense. Let’s consider it in greater detail.

ENEMY LOVE

In verse 44, Jesus contrasts His teaching with those who used God’s command to justify hatred toward enemies. *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”^{xv}* That’s a pretty radical thing for Jesus to say.^{xvi} Who would Jesus’ original audience consider an “enemy”? To some extent, that’s a personal question that could have elicited a variety of responses. But one all the Jews would have in common was Rome. The Romans were oppressing them and occupying what they considered to be their land.^{xvii} That’s the enemy by definition.

That's also not something that easy for us to relate to. So whom do we consider our enemies? The text gives us some help at answering that question. Notices that verse 44 puts in parallel "*enemies*" and "*those who persecute you,*" suggesting that they are probably to be considered one and the same. Who persecutes you? Who intentionally seeks to do you harm?^{xviii} For some it might be an ISIS terrorist. For the Democrat, it may be the Republican. Maybe the reverse. For the morally conservative, it may be the morally liberal. Maybe it's the person who wants your job or the CEO of the company trying to put yours out of business. Maybe it's that person at work that gets your blood boiling. Could it be a person across the pew you suspect gossips about you behind your back?

Jesus calls you to love those people. And if those people, then all people. Uncomfortable yet? The call to love your enemies means, as one writer put it, that the "question is never who to love—because we are to love everyone—but only how to love most helpfully."^{xix}

Furthermore, He calls us to pray for them. Here we must be careful. There is a difference in praying *about* someone (or, perhaps, *against* them) and praying *for* them. If we are not careful, we may end up praying like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11—"God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector..." That's not how Jesus wants us to pray for our enemies. Jesus is calling us to pray on their behalf, for their sake, for them in a positive sense.^{xx}

I often give this counsel to people struggling with anger and hatred toward another individual. Pray for that person. If we discipline ourselves to do this, then, in time, we may find our animosity towards the person dwindles. In its place, compassion will normally grow because our heart begins to be knit to God's own through prayer.^{xxi} This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this invitation to pray "the supreme demand." As he says, "Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God."^{xxii} When was the last time you prayed like that for someone who sought to do you harm?

What is the motivation for all this? Why should we take Jesus seriously and seek to love our enemies? Well, first of all, we should simply because He is our Lord. Is He truly? Then that should be enough to prompt our obedience. Nonetheless, He does give us some explanation here as to why we should love our enemies. He doesn't ground the teaching on the positive benefits it brings to those who obey it, though He could have. Surely there are spiritual, psychological, physical, relational, and kingdom benefits, to loving and forgiving our enemies (to say nothing of the great freedom it affords us).^{xxiii} But that's not where Jesus focuses us here. No, He grounds His teaching in...

THE FATHER'S LOVE

We should do this because God does! Jesus says, in verse 45, that the Father "*makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.*" He is describing what modern theologians refer to as "common grace." It's a gift that comes to people indiscriminately. The good and the bad get the rain and the sunshine.^{xxiv} That's grace. And those generous things that God does, for all people, are intended to communicate God's love and to produce the sort of thanksgiving that looks for a source to express that gratitude. God's common grace largely goes unnoticed.^{xxv} But Jesus wants us to notice here what it teaches us about God. He shows love to even His enemies. He gives breathe to even those who would use it to blaspheme His name. That's incredible. And that provides for us the example.

Perhaps the greatest expression of the Father's love for enemies is the fact that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die in the place of His enemies so that they could be forgiven of their hostility and be adopted as sons and daughters of God. That's love. No greater love could be cited! Jesus embodies the love of the Father. He "exemplifies the conduct He requires."^{xxvi} This why He healed the servant of the Roman centurion (one of Israel's enemies!) in Matthew 8. This is why we find people like Joanna, the

wife of Herod's household manager, following Him around (Luke 8:3). He befriended and dined with tax collectors and sinners. This is why He prays for the forgiveness of those who, at the same moment, were in act of killing Him (Luke 23:34). This is why Jesus endured death on a cross. This is why He died for you.

The Bible calls us "enemies" of God and yet Jesus laid His life down on the cross for us. We were God's enemies, but because of His love we can be forgiven of our hostility and every wrong we have ever committed and have a new life with God. That's amazing! Jesus came and died and rose from the dead to save sinners like us. We can each be saved from God's wrath and eternal condemnation by believing this "good news," acknowledging our sin and need for Jesus to save us, and turning from our sin and self to Jesus, trusting in Him alone for salvation. That's the faith that saves.

Listen, if you are sensing your need for that and you want to talk to someone about that, let me encourage you do something today. In the pew in front of you, you'll see a white card with the words "Response Card" at the top. Take a look at that, all of you. See if one of those options expresses what you are feeling, check the appropriate box, give us a way to contact you, and then in a few minutes when the offering plate is passed around drop that card in the plate. Let that be your offering to us today. If you do that, someone from our pastoral staff will follow up with you this week and privately work through any questions you might have and show you what the Bible has to say about the subject you indicate. That's a really easy thing to do that very well could set in motion some life changing results, so don't waste the opportunity. That may be a step that God is calling you to take today. So take that step. See what happens. Give God a chance to use that act in your life through that very simple step.

I hope you are sensing that God loves you. If you are, then Jesus wants you to let your knowledge of God's love fuel your love. He is your example. Jesus embodied the love we see in the Father. He loved His enemies. As Christians, our love must be defined by His love. It's derived from His love. It should put on display His love to the world in a way that draws attention to the Cross. It's a cruciform love. It's a love that involves sacrificial action, not merely emotion.

It's the love that we have seen in so many rich and compelling ways throughout Christian history. It's the love that led Stephen to pray at the moment of death for the forgiveness of his executioners (Acts 7:60). It's the same love that Paul so often expressed and called God's people to live out (e.g., Romans 12:14; 1 Corinthians 4:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). It's the love that Peter spoke of when he wrote, "*Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing*" (1 Peter 3:9). It was this love that led Polycarp, who was the disciple of the Apostle John and eventually executed for faith in Christ, to write to the Philippians: "Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings and powers and rulers, and for those who persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, in order that your fruit may be evident among all people, that you may be perfect in him."^{xxvii}

It's the love that led George Wishart, the Scottish Reformer and friend of John Knox, to show compassion on his executioner. Wishart noticed that his executioner was reluctant to carry out the sentence and set on fire one who had ministered to hundreds of people who were dying of the plague. Seeing the remorse on his executioner's face, he approached him, kissed him on the cheek, and said, "Sir, may that be a token that I forgive you."^{xxviii} There are so many other examples that could be given from history.

It's the love that let Corrie Ten Boom, a Holocaust survivor, to forgive and embrace one of the guards that held her captive. I'd like to read you her own account of that event as we close.

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavyset 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 liked 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."

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!

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, *fräulein!* 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. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in 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. *Fräulein!*"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. 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 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 tried and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Romans 5:5... ‘because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us.’^{i>>XXIX}

Isn’t that an amazing testimony? It’s incredible! That act of forgiving her enemy was an act of shocking love. Why do we find stories like this so compelling and moving? Because in them we see a glimpse, a shadow, of the love of God. Her story points to His story. Her forgiveness of her enemy was prompted by His forgiveness of her. It’s a love that stands out in this world. It’s counter-cultural. It’s compelling. It’s shocking. It’s attractive. It’s distinct. And that’s kind of Jesus’ point. We are to express a love that is distinct and shocking to the world around us, because that’s precisely the love we have experienced from God the Father! And when we do this something incredible happens...but we will save that for next time.

There are a couple additional paradigm-shifting things that Jesus says in this text, which we will cover in two weeks. Next week we have something special planned. But in couple weeks, we will pick up here and explore what Jesus says next in this text...

Let’s pray...

ⁱ An illustration given by the late Scottish preacher, Alexander Whyte. Recorded in Warren Wiersbe, *Walking with the Giants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), p. 93.

ⁱⁱ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, Walter Hooper, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 181, 182. Kent Hughes used this exchange to make the same point in *The Sermon on the Mount* (PTW; Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 139.

ⁱⁱⁱ E.g., Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

^{iv} John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 264; Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church* (NACSBT; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 158.

^v Daniel Doriani makes this point and shows that the Old Testament also confronts this misunderstanding. “‘Love your neighbor’ could be taken to mean, ‘Love *only* your neighbor and don’t bother with the rest.’ It is possible to interpret ‘Love your neighbor’ in a way that removes our obligation to those who live at a distance. But the same chapter of the law that commands us to love our neighbor also commands us to love the stranger ‘as yourself’ (Lev. 19:33-34).” Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 99. Cf. also the detailed analysis found in Quarles, 159-162.

^{vi} D. A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 56.

^{vii} Ibid., 55. Scot McKnight keenly observes, “many of us love our neighbors in such a way that it is at the same time a powerful damnation of others, and we do this damnation in a socially acceptable form of exclusion, denunciation, and libel.” Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount* (SGBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 148-149.

^{viii} “The grammar of the Greek expression ‘hate your enemy’ mimics that of the OT commands and suggests that some Jewish teachers viewed the inverse of the divine command as having the same authority as the divine command itself.” Quarles, 159. Cf. M. Smith, “Hate Your Enemy,” *HTR* 45 (1952): 71-73.

^{ix} John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7* (MNTC; Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 340.

^x John Stott observed that this command in Exodus 23:4-5 is virtually the same as the one regarding the treatment of the ox of your “brother” in Deuteronomy 22:1-4. John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 116. Remarking on this, Charles Quarles stated, “The similarity between the command shows that God intends for His people to show the same love to both friend and foe.” Quarles, 161.

^{xi} E.g., Genesis 45:1ff; 2 Kings 6:22; cf. 1QS 1.3-4; 9.16, 22-22.

^{xii} Other imprecatory Psalms include: Psalms 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54, 56, 58, 69, 79, 83, 109, 137, 139, and 143. Doriani also notes, “If a critic tries to dismiss this as second-rate Old Testament teaching, remember that Revelation says the same thing. When Babylon, the symbol of rebellion against God, falls by his judgment, the heavenly host shouts, ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever’ (rev. 19:3). She was ripe for judgment, for she slaughtered the prophets and the saints (18:24), corrupted the earth with her adultery (19:2), and boasted in her strength (18:7). Babylon would buy or sell anything to get rich, even the ‘bodies and souls of men’ (18:13). Her sins were piles up to heaven (18:5). Satan’s ally, she joined the war against the Lamb (17:14). She will never repent (17:12-16). Therefore, angels rejoice at Babylon’s fall, for it means the end of her oppression of mankind, the end of her rebellion against God. The settled enemies of God must fall and shall fall. When their rebellion is implacable and irreversible, they are ripe for God’s judgment, which is just and true (Rev. 16:5-7; 19:2). On judgment day, God’s patience ends. This is how we must understand the psalms and prophecies that approve of God’s judgment. Believers hate violence and wickedness... The Bible never commands us to hate individual enemies, but there is a place for righteous wrath toward God’s settled enemies. On judgment day, we will rejoice at their downfall, for their end is inseparable from the victory of God and his saints. Thus, when we view the wicked as a class, from an eternal perspective, our love for them ceases. In daily life, however, we have no right to adopt the eternal perspective. We cannot classify people. The man standing before us may be wicked, but we do not know whether he will repent or not. Remember the conversion of Paul. Once the archenemy of the church, he became its great apostle. Paul’s salvation demonstrates God’s ‘unlimited patience’ (1 Tim. 1:16). Therefore, we should be patient with sinners too.” Doriani, 99-100.

^{xiii} Bonhoeffer writes, “The wars of Israel were the only ‘holy wars’ in history, for they were the wars of God against the world of idols. It is not this enmity which Jesus condemns, for then he would have condemned the whole history of God’s dealings with his people.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: SCM Press, 1959), 147.

^{xiv} Doriani, 100. Similarly, John MacArthur states, “It is one thing to defend the honor and glory of God by seeking the defeat of His detracting enemies, but quite another to hate people personally as our enemies. Our attitude toward even the worst pagans or heretics is to love them and pray that they will turn to God and be saved. But we also pray that, if they do not turn to Him, God will judge them and remove them in order to prepare the way for His Son Jesus Christ as the rightful ruler of the world. We are to share God’s own balance of love and justice... The scribes and the Pharisees had not such balance. They had no love for justice, but only for vengeance. And they had no love for their enemies, but only for themselves.” MacArthur, 343.

^{xv} The “I” of the translation “I say to you” is emphatically written in Greek. The emphasis is not merely grammatical, but also theological. It’s also worth noting, “The command ‘love’ is a present imperative which, in this context, demands either a continuous or habitual action. Thus Jesus’ disciples are to keep on loving their enemies. They are to love them with an undying love that does not wane or grow cold in the face of their enemies’ abuses.” Quarles, 161.

^{xvi} “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.” Williams Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 313.

^{xvii} Bonhoeffer writes concerning Matthew’s audience (as opposed to Jesus’ original audience when the Sermon on the Mount was first preached), “The enemy was no mere abstraction for the disciples. They knew him only too well. They came across him every day. There were those who cursed them for undermining the faith and transgressing the law. There were those who hated them for leaving all they had for Jesus’ sake. There were those who insulted and derided them for their weakness and humility. There were those who persecuted them as prospective dangerous revolutionaries and sought to destroy them. Some of their enemies were numbered among the champions of popular religion, who resented the exclusive claims of Jesus. These last enjoyed considerable power and reputation. And then there was the enemy which would immediately occur to every Jew, the political enemy of Rome. Over and above all these, the disciples also had to contend with the hostility which invariably falls to the lot of those who refuse to follow the crowd, and which brought them daily mockery, derision and threats.” Bonhoeffer, 146-147.

^{xviii} I admire what Bonhoeffer says at this point: “In the New Testament our enemies are those who harbor hostility against us, not those against whom we cherish hostility, for Jesus refuses to reckon with such a possibility. The Christian must treat his enemy as a brother, and requite his hostility with love. His behavior must be determined not by the way others treat him, but by the treatment he himself receives from Jesus; it has only one source, and that is the will of Jesus. By our enemies Jesus means those who are quite intractable and utterly unresponsive to our love, who forgive us nothing when we forgive them

all, who requite our love with hatred and our service with derision, 'For the love that I had unto them, lo, they now take my contrary part: but I give myself unto prayer' (Psalm 109.4)." Ibid., 147-148.

^{xix} MacArthur, 346.

^{xx} This is the meaning of the Greek preposition used when followed by a genitive, as is the case here. See Knox Chamblin, *Matthew: Volume 1: Chapters 1-13* (MC; Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 380-381, 381n.115.

^{xxi} C. S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, "The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.... The difference between a Christian and worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or "likings" and the Christian has only "charity." The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he "likes" them; the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning." C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fontana, revised edition 1964), p. 114.

^{xxii} Bonhoeffer, 149. Cf. Psalm 109:13-14.

^{xxiii} For a helpful exploration of some of these benefits, I would recommend the first chapter of Lee Strobel's *God's Outrageous Claims* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

^{xxiv} It's worth remembering: "There is no good thing—physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual, or of any other sort—that *anyone* possesses or experiences that does not come from the hand of God. If God does that for everyone, His children should reflect that same generosity." MacArthur, 348-349.

^{xxv} "This indiscriminate divine love for both the good and the evil does have its limits. Later Jesus based His comments in Matt 24:29 on Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; and 3:15 to warn that the sun will not shine perpetually on the wicked. The sun will be darkened by God, and the moon will not give its light. God will pour His wrath out on the unrepentant wicked. One must carefully distinguish the common grace that God lavishes on all people now indiscriminately with the saving grace that only repentant followers of Jesus receive." Quarles, 165.

^{xxvi} Chamblin, 379.

^{xxvii} Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 12:3.

^{xxviii} From Jim Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. W. Grinton Berry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 252.

^{xxix} Corrie ten Boom, *Tramp of the Lord* (Christian Literature Crusade, 2008), 55-57.