

Love Your Enemies, Part 1

Matthew 5:43-44

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We come this morning to a passage of Scripture in Matthew Chapter 5 that deserves our greatest attention, deepest commitment, for perhaps no other passage in all of the New Testament sums up the heart and attitude of a Christian as well as this one. It expresses what I think is the most single, powerful testimony that a Christian can have in the simple statement of Jesus in verse 44, "Love your enemies." As we embark upon this passage from verse 43 to 48 this morning in our continuing study of Matthew, we come to a tremendously important part of Scripture.

I think that if there is one statement made by Jesus that in the eyes of the world sums up what Christianity ought to be like, it's probably, "Love your enemies." I know Will Durant was asked what he thought of the Christian ethic, and he summed the Christian ethic up with the words "Well, basically it's love your enemies." He said, "Without question Jesus set the highest ethic ever set in the history of man, but too bad nobody ever lived up to it. This is the supreme facet of life. If love is the greatest thing, the loving your enemies is the greatest thing that love can do. And so the summum bonum in a sense of all of our kingdom living, should be found in this concept of loving our enemies.

And I want you to really think with me. We have to lay some groundwork this morning so you'll understand. And then two weeks from this morning, we're going to resolve this thing, wondrously, as we hear how Jesus speaks, starting with the Old Testament, and moving to the fullness of the New Testament concept of loving your enemies. But we have to begin today with a little background and some foundation. And I want you to get this, because it's absolutely essentially that you understand.

In all of the Sermon on the Mount, I think there are two statements that more than any others...and they're very obscure at first...sum up the ethics, the standards, the requirements of the one who claims to be a member of the kingdom of heaven. They're very simple statements. The first one I want to point your attention to is in verse 47 of Chapter 5. It says this in the middle of the verse, "what do ye more than others?" Now there is a tremendous summary statement of what Christ is asking in this whole sermon. What does your system have more than any other human system? What makes you different?

And then in Chapter 6, verse 8, another simple statement. "Be not ye therefore like unto them." There's a second statement. Two statements that sum up the whole sermon. "What do you more than others," and "don't be like them." What Jesus is saying in both of these simple statements is this. "My standards are not like other standards. What I require is not what other people do. My standard is a higher standard." And that's what He's saying. In fact, He's indicting the whole pharisaical religious Judaistic system as being substandard.

When the best is said of your system, what makes it better than any other? What do you do different

than anybody else? What sets you apart? If you are a part of my Kingdom, you would not be doing like them. People in my Kingdom have a higher standard than even yours and theirs by the way was the highest religious standard of the day, but it wasn't high enough. God requires for His Kingdom a different standard, unique, separate, holy. In Chapter 5, verse 20, He pointed directly to their system and said this, "I say unto you that unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter the Kingdom of heaven."

"My standard is high," He is saying. "My standard is higher than the highest human standard, which is the standard of the scribes and the Pharisees." They struggled with all kinds of laws, all kinds of religious ceremonies and rituals. They were the most religious people of their time. And yet God says, "You're no different than anybody else. My standard is that you do not act like them, that you do more than even the best that men can do." The highest human ethic falls woefully short of God's standard. Now this isn't anything new in the New Testament. God has always called His people to a higher standard.

This is how God put it to the people of Israel soon after He had rescued them from their Egyptian slavery and made them this covenant people. He said this. Listen. "I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you dwelt. And you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I'm bringing you." In other words, my standard is not the one you came from and it's not the one you're going to. "You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall do my ordinances and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God."

Now notice He brackets the statement by "I am the Lord your God, I am the Lord your God," beginning and ending with that statement. And because I am the Lord your God, you don't act like anybody else acts. You don't live according to any standard, not the one you came from and not the one you're going to. Because He was their covenant God and because they were His special people, they were to be different from anybody else. They were to follow His commandments and not take their lead from the standards of the people around them.

And that's hard, it's hard for them, it's hard in Jesus' time, and it's tough on us today to try to live according to a standard other than the standard that engulfs us and traps us in the world around us. It is difficult. But that's what God asks for. Sadly throughout the centuries that followed, Israel kept forgetting their uniqueness. They kept forgetting that theirs was another standard and they kept falling into sin.

They were in Balaam's words "a people dwelling alone and not reckoning itself among the nations." That sounds good. "They dwelled in isolation, not mingling," say Balaam. But the truth is, in practice, they became assimilated to and everything around them. So that scripture this, interesting statement, "they mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did."

Sad commentary, and that commentary could be labeled on the church just as well. They mingled with the heathen and learned to do as they did. From the very beginning, God has always called the people to uniqueness. He has always called the people to another standard, to a higher level. And God's people for some reason are always pulled down. In fact, it came to be that in Israel they desired to have a king and their statement is this, "We will have a king over us that we may be like the nations."

They wanted to be like the rest of the world. They even went so far as to say, "let us be like the nations and worship gods of wood and stone." So God kept sending them prophets, and the prophets kept reminding them about their uniqueness. Prophets like Jeremiah who said, "People learn not the ways of the nations." Prophets like Ezekiel who said "Do not defile yourselves with the gods of Egypt." And prophet after prophet after prophet came, singularly and in duos and trios and so forth they came, continuously pleading with God's people to be sure they maintained their unique standards. To fall below was to dishonor God.

It's no different in Jesus' time and today. God wants His people to be different. He wants His people to be unique. And the standard that Jesus presents here regarding loving your enemies is not the mood of the mob. That kind of a statement to the average pagan today sounds like lunacy, doesn't make any sense. It is not an earthly standard. It is not the morality of the age. It is unique. It is a far greater ethic. In fact, if you want to know the truth, it's a far greater ethic than either you or I could ever keep on our own. It's way beyond us to love our enemies.

But Kingdom character...now mark this. Kingdom character is to be absolutely distinct, absolutely unique. And the key to it is that you can't live that way unless you are infused with divine power. And so Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, "Your system is substandard. And until you come to me for power you will never be able to live by my standards."

This whole sermon really draws a contrast between the best of men and God's standards. And even the very best there were, the most legalistic, ritualistic, religious people on the earth, the Pharisees, couldn't qualify. For example, they thought it was enough not to kill. Jesus says, "I don't even think you should hate. In fact, it's a command that you not be angry with your brother."

They thought it was enough not to commit adultery. And He says, "You shouldn't even think about committing adultery." They thought it was alright when they got a divorce if they took care of all the legal paperwork. Jesus said, "You shouldn't even be getting those unbiblical divorces." They thought it was enough that they kept certain vows. Jesus said, "You shouldn't even need to make vows because your word is so true and so pure." They thought it was enough that they gave back an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He says, "You shouldn't be retaliating at all."

In Chapter 6 they said, "Here's the way we pray." Jesus says, "It's inadequate. When you pray you're to do it this way." And Jesus said, "Here's the way you give, and that's the wrong way to give. I want you to give this way." And Jesus said, "You are concerned with material things. I want you to seek the Kingdom of God." You see all the way through He's leveling a contrast. And now as we come to Chapter 5 verses 43 to 48, he contrasts their love with the kind of love that should characterize the subjects of His Kingdom. And what He's doing is telling them that they're not in His Kingdom. They don't qualify.

We are called on to be unique, beloved. That's the thrust of this whole sermon. That's really what He's saying. And that's what I was trying to say earlier in the service this morning that God is calling us out of the system to be a separated people with convictions and commitments and standards that we live by that are not the world's standards. Nowhere is the distinction between the life of man and the Kingdom of God made more clear or unclear than in the life of a believer. That's where it all comes down. And so Jesus is confronting Israel here because Israel, as religious as Israel was, was walking in the flesh. He attacks their humanistic religious tradition by saying it falls woefully short of God's standard.

Now, let's look what He says about this subject of love in verse 43. It's such an important one. "Ye have heard that it hath been said thou shalt love their neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you that ye may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye. Do not even the tax collectors do same? And ye greet your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the heathen so? Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

He says to them as He has said in the five previous comparisons beginning in Chapter 5, verse 21, "Your law says this; mine says this." Your law says love your neighbor, hate your enemy. I say, love your enemy." You're substandard He's saying. Your ethics are too low. First as I said, He had exposed their perversion of the divine statute, "Thou shalt not kill." Then He had attacked also their unwarranted whittling down of the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Then He attacked their desecration of marriage.

Then He had spoken against their wicked tampering with the injunction not to take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Then He had shown how they corrupted the judicial law of an eye for eye. And now He attacks them on the basis of the highest and best of things, love, and says your supposed commitment to love your neighbor is inadequate. And I have to say that I feel this is the supreme statement here because it's a statement on love and love is the greatest thing, and loving your enemies is the greatest thing that love can do. He really comes to the ...to the peak, the summum bonum, as He speaks of love.

To compare with what we just read, Matthew Chapter 22, a lawyer came to Jesus and asked Him what was the greatest commandment, and in verse 37 Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." In other words, you can keep all the law and all the prophets, one by one, or you can just love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself and that'll cover it all.

That is the sum of it all. It is also indicated in Romans 13 by the apostle Paul who says, "Owe no man anything –" Romans 13:8 – "but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to its neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

Paul says love fills up the whole law. Jesus says love fills up the whole law. And so in Matthew 5 when our Lord begins to speak about loving, he is touching on that which sums up the whole law. Here is really, people...and we'll see this in the next few weeks as we cover this...here is a devastating deathblow at the Pharisees. In fact, it is so direct that it must have curdled their blood when He said to them, "You can be compared with heathens," in verse 47, which is exactly what He says.

Your love is no better than anybody else. You don't have anything on publicans and sinners, tax collectors and pagans. The point is this; the people in my Kingdom have a love that is beyond the best of loves the world can ever know. We don't just love our neighbors and hate our enemies, we love the our enemies. And in so saying, He indicts them, because they don't love their enemies, and shows them their need for a Savior. Now in each of these contrasts and there are six of them in Matthew 5, we have marked out three major points: the teaching of the Old Testament, the tradition of the Jews, and the truth from Christ. And those are the same three points in all six.

Let's look, first of all, at the tradition of the Jews, the tradition of the Jews. And that is referred to in verse 43. Look at it. "Ye have heard that it hath been said – " Now that little introductory phrase is a reference we have seen now for the sixth time that refers to Jewish tradition. It is not a statement related to the Old Testament. It means your tradition has been passed down saying this.

This is your system. This is what you have developed and you have been taught. This is the rabbinical current religious teaching. And what is it? Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. Now that's what they were taught. Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That's pretty open-ended wouldn't you say? The first thing you do is figure out who your neighbor is and then you can hate everybody else and be okay.

You can just hate up a storm depending on how you define your neighbor, right? If you define your neighbor as your wife and three best friends, you can hate the whole world. So it all depends on your definition of neighbor. And that's exactly what Christ gets into, not only here, but elsewhere as we shall see in our coming studies. Look first of all at the first part, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor." Now that sounds so pious. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor." Oh it sounds so good. You would say, "Where did they get that?" Well, that's in the Old Testament, sure it is. Leviticus Chapter 19. They got that right out of the Old Testament.

You know, whenever they wanted to make up a rule, they made sure that they intersected somewhere with the Old Testament. Like the clock that doesn't run, they're right twice a day. Every once in a while they're going to hit the truth. And they always could find some kind of a basis for truth somewhere. And so here they are in Leviticus 19:18 which says, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people. But thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self." That's Leviticus 19:18. "Love thy neighbor as thy self." That's where they got that.

But did you notice something? They left something out. You have heard it said "Thou shalt love thy neighbor – " what did they leave out? – "as thy self." That's a convenient omission isn't it? In their state of unbelievable pride, they were so puffed up that that kind of a phrase at the end of a sentence would only confuse their desires. And so rather than be trapped in a thing where they would have to treat others equal to themselves, they dropped it. Now granted the one who came to Jesus in Mark 12 adds "as thy self," and the lawyer in Luke 10 adds "as thy self," but it may have been that they wanted to make sure they were accurate because of who they were speaking with.

Apparently the norm was "thou shalt love thy neighbor." They didn't want to love anybody like they loved themselves. That would be crowding them. They were too proud to love anyone equally. Have you ever thought about what that means, to love someone as you love yourself? If you were just to love someone and it didn't say as yourself, you could just sort of love them at a distance. You could treat them a little less than you treat yourself. Whatever you do for yourself, you do half for them or a third or a tenth. I mean if you just could drop that little phrase it would be so convenient. If it just said

love your neighbor, period.

But the Lord has a way of driving things right into the heart of our being. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Oh come on. Equal to...you say how do we love ourselves? Listen, you love yourself. You do. I mean, whose teeth did you brush this morning? Whose hair did you comb? Whose wardrobe hangs in your closet? Whose savings account is in your bank? You are concerned about yourself. You love yourself. To love means to serve the needs. You serve your own needs, let's face it. You have an unfeigned, unhypocritical total love for yourself. There aren't some days when you fall out of love with yourself. You love yourself all the time. And your true; you're genuine about it, you really do. You're fervent about it.

You're habitual about it. It's a permanent love. Why, whenever you have an interest you want to fulfill it. Whenever you have a need, you want to meet it. Whenever you have a want, you want to supply it. Whenever you have a desire, you want to fulfill it. Whenever you have a hope, you want to realize it. Whenever you have an ambition, you want to see it come to fruition.

I mean, you are really working in your own behalf. It's the way life goes. You're very concerned about your own welfare, your own comfort, your own safety, your own interests, your own health, physical, spiritual, temporal, eternal things. We're very concerned about ourselves. We seek our own pleasure and we know of no limits to gaining what we want. Now that is exactly the way you're to love everybody else. Jesus said even your enemies.

In other words, you are to have that same totally consuming unfeigned, fervent, habitual, permanent love which brings into your heart their interest, their needs, their wants, their desires, their hopes, their ambitions, and prompts you to do everything you can to make sure that all their welfare, safety, comfort, and interest is met, and that whatever they need and whatever they want or whatever pleasure they have, you are anxious to fulfill on their behalf.

How do you measure up? The last time you had a choice between doing what you want or sacrificing yourself so somebody else could do it, which way did you go? Who do you really care about? The standard is very high people. Love your neighbor as yourself is very, very high, very high. Humanly speaking, it is impossible, because humanly speaking we are totally absorbed in ourselves. I mean just think of it.

Think of it from the standpoint of your income. I mean, probably at best you keep 90% of what you finally get after taxes and maybe give the Lord 10. When it comes to how much you spend on you as opposed to how much spend on the people on your block, I mean it's miniscule to even think of how much you might spend on them. As to how much you give to the needy and how much you use for yourself, those kind of comparisons are very remote because we don't even think like that. That's how far we are from these kind of principles. Loving your neighbor as yourself is a very, very, very heavy principle. And that's the way we're to love.

But you see they weren't interested in that and so they just dropped it. Love your neighbor. And so they omitted something. But beyond that, they added something. What did they add? And what? "Hate your enemy." Now where did that come from? Did that come out of the Bible? No, nowhere does the Bible command us to hate our enemies. Where did they get that? I mean, what did they do, just make that up? That's right.

It was the logical extension of their perverted thinking. You see what they did was, they said, “All right, we are to love our neighbor. Now we’ve got to figure out who is our neighbor,” right? So they said, “Our neighbors are the Jews, not the Gentiles.” That’s what the Pharisees believed. Only the Jews qualified and among the Jews only certain Jews, right? Certain Jews didn’t qualify as neighbors.

For example look at Matthew 9:10. “And Jesus passed forth from there, – ” verse 9 – “He saw a man named Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector.” All right, then verse 10, He’s...Jesus meeting with a tax collector. “It came to pass as Jesus sat eating in the house, behold many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.” And you have two categories of people.

Tax collectors...and we’ll see more about them in our future study. They were the renegade trader, rebel, extortionist Jews that were despised by the people because they had sold out to Rome for money. And then there were the sinners. They are the public sinners, the displaying sinners, the prostitutes and the criminals. And the Pharisees saw it and they said “What, why eat your master with tax collectors and sinners?”

So they said their neighbors are the Jews, but only the Jews who aren’t tax collectors or sinners. So we eliminate all of them. They aren’t our neighbors. In fact, they found a woman taken in adultery one time and they picked up stones to stone her. So it was a very defined neighbor. That wasn’t all. Look at John Chapter 7, verse 49. In John 7:49, they went even further.

And the Pharisees are kind of giving away themselves here. And in verse 49, they say, “But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.” And what they mean there is this rabble mob here. They’re talking about a crowd. This rabble mob of uneducated, not knowledgeable people with no commitment to Pharisean tradition, this riff raff that doesn’t know the law are cursed.

So they have eliminated the tax collectors and they have eliminated the sinners and they eliminated the rabble mob that weren’t committed to the law they were. You know who their neighbors were? The people in their group that’s who. And if you were in their group you could...you would be loved. But outside their group you were an enemy whether you were the rabble mob or a tax collector or a public sinner.

If you weren’t one of them, you know, it was us for, no more, bar the door. Commitment to ourselves and nobody else. They fed their evil proud hearts by concluding that anyone not a neighbor was to be hated. In other words, they said, “The Bible says love your neighbor. Therefore, if someone who is not your neighbor is not to be loved and the opposite of love is hate, so love your neighbor means hate your enemy.”

That’s what’s known in legal arguments as a non sequitur argument; it does not necessarily follow. But that’s the way they reasoned, because they had a perversion in their hearts to begin with. Their prejudice found a way. By the way, they didn’t read far enough in Leviticus 19 either. If they’d have read verse 34, they would have read this, “The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you and you shall love him as yourself.” If they’d have read a little farther, they would have known that even a non-Jew a stranger, whatever he was, was to be loved as they love themselves.

How they conveniently ignored Exodus 12:49, “There shall be one law for the native and one law for the stranger who sojourns among you.” There aren’t different laws for different people. If you are to love, you are to love, and it is as broad as the commandment of God is broad. It wasn’t only the Pharisees who were like this.

We know of the three groups in Jesus’ time, the three sects of Judaism; Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Essenes were the hippy cult. They were the ones who went out of town and they set up a community on the edge of the Dead Sea, which is now known as Qumran. It’s the place where we have found the Dead Sea Scrolls. And they lived apart from society. They lived out in the wilderness in a primitive life and copied copies of Scripture and lived in a very austere anti-social way.

And the Essenes have among their writings these statements that show they had the same attitude as the Pharisees. Quote, “Love all that God has chosen and hate all that He has rejected. Love all the sons of light, each according to his lot in God’s community and hate all the sons of darkness, each according to his guilt in God’s vengeance.” And then this, “The Levites curse all the sons of Belial.” And to them the sons of Belial were the non-Essenes. So they cursed everybody who wasn’t in their group, just like the Pharisees. Their love was a prejudiced, narrow, ugly thing that just gave them license to hate everybody.

If you don’t think they hated, just watch them interact with Jesus Christ. They were so filled with hatred. One of the evasive maxims of the Pharisees that we’ve discovered in archaeology is this statement. Listen. “If a Jew – ” this is what they taught – “If a Jew sees a Gentile fallen into the sea, let him by no means lift him out, for it is written, thou shalt not rise up against the blood of thy neighbor, but this man is not thy neighbor.”

In other words, if you see a Gentile drowning, stand there and enjoy it. Don’t save him; he’s not your neighbor. With such an outlook, it is little wonder that the Romans charged the Jews with hatred of the human race. Now, frankly, there’s some reason to see why they were able to twist Leviticus 19 to fit their own prejudices. No place in the Old Testament does it ever say to hate your enemy. But there are some things in the Old Testament that at first might be a little hard to understand.

So let’s move from our first point, the tradition of the Jews to the teaching of the Old Testament. Where did they ever get these ideas? And we’re going to see a lot of this. We’ll see some of it today and some of the teaching in the Old Testament in our next study. And, finally, we’ll see the truth of Christ as He clears up all the misconceptions. But let me just give you the tension that created their sort of opening for them to do this. They wanted a way to hate. They wanted to justify it in their religious system so it wouldn’t encroach on their self-righteousness. So they had to invent some way to hate. And no doubt they found a couple of good excuses.

One would be the Old Testament promises to exterminate the Canaanites. You’ll remember that when God brought Israel into the land of promise, the land was filled at that time with the Canaanites who were vial, retched people. In fact, archaeology has shown us that there has not been a race of people found that were worse than the Canaanites. They were a despicable thing.

They were a cancer on human society of the worst kind; Human sacrifice, blood letting, massacres of babies; you name it, the Canaanites did it. Horrible orgiastic kind of things. And so the Canaanites

were to be wiped out. And when Israel came into the land they were told regarding the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Midianites, to wipe them out. They are not to be treated with kindness. Deuteronomy 23, verses 3 through 8, that whole section there, says that all of these people, Midianites, Ammonites, Moabites are to be treated with no kindness, but they are to be done away with.

Now later on, we read that also the Amalekites were to have the same fate. In fact, God says wipe not only them off the face of the earth, but the memory of them as well, so they won't even be remembered. So here was God saying to these people, "You go in there and you clean those people out of that land." And certainly the Pharisees would have looked on this and said, "You see God says, 'Boy, you know you've got to hate your enemies. Go get them.' " And some people have been confused by this. They say how could God be the same God who said love your enemies and the God who wanted to wipe out all these nations? And that's a kind of a confusing thing at first.

But there was another thing that probably added fuel to their fire too and that's what is known as the imprecatory Psalms. Those are the Psalms in which David praised judgment on his enemies. And people have often said well how can...how can the Bible say love your enemies and then David's praying, "Oh God judge my enemies; oh God punish my enemies; catch them in a trap, catch them in snare," you know, and so forth and so on. "Judge them Lord, do away with them." How can he be praying that if he's supposed to be loving his enemies? And so no doubt they had taken some of these imprecatory Psalms and used them as a basis.

I'll give you an illustration. Turn in your Bible, and I want you look there with me to Psalms 69 because I think it will help you to understand this. In Psalms 69, David here is praying one of these imprecatory Psalms. He's calling judgment down upon these evil people. And notice in Psalms 69, verse 22, it gets pretty heavy. It's really pretty stirring maledictions that he gives.

He says regarding these enemies, "Let their table become a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened that they see not and make their loins continually to shake, pour out thine indignation upon them and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate and let none dwell in their tents, for they persecute him whom thou hast smitten and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written with the righteous."

Now that's pretty heavy stuff. I mean, that's giving both barrels, God, and don't spare anything. Now, did this become a justification for the hatred of the Pharisees? Very possibly, along with the destruction of the Canaanites. They would say well, see this is the way it is to be boy, the enemies we are to hate. And they use it as a justification for their own personal hatred and vendettas. But if they did that, and it's likely they did, then they missed the point of both the word to destroy the Canaanites and the Psalms. Because they have nothing to do with personal relationships. Just like our last study on an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, there are certain things that are judicial laws that do not apply in terms of personal relationships.

And they had again confused that. They had taken the judicial code of an eye for an eye and they dragged it down and made it a way of living on a day-to-day basis. And the same thing is true here. They had taken the judicial act of a holy God in preserving a righteous seed, and they had dragged it down to be a justification for their personal hatreds. Let me show you what I mean by that. In the first place the Canaanites were a vial people. So nauseating and corrupt were their abominations that the

Bible says the land vomited them out. They were a vile, retched people.

When someone goes to the doctor with cancer and the doctor cuts the cancer out, we don't say the doctor is a cruel, unloving, uncaring, unsympathetic, without compassion person. We thank him for cutting cancer out. And when God said get rid of the Canaanites, that was not an act of evil. That was an act of goodness to take out of human society a retched, filthy, vile, people that would do nothing but pollute it. And that is a judicial act on God's part.

That does not give license to an individual Jew to despise an individual Canaanite or to hate him because of something he has done. What God does in His judicial act, does not change the fact that the same God who judged the Canaanites, loved every one of them with the same love He loves you. Just as I love my child, when I punish my child, the punishment comes because of the evil. It does not deny the love. So there is a judicial element.

If Israel had followed their customs, Leviticus 18 says, she would have shared their fate and God wanted to preserve a righteous seed. Why? To bring out a righteous Messiah to redeem the world. And so the preservation of Israel was a great concern with God's heart so that you would have a witness in the world, and He was cutting a cancer out of human society.

We have enough sense even today, at least a few places in the world, to set apart individuals in our society who do nothing but bring cancer on our society, who kill and maim and steal. We set them aside. And God was doing no more than that in a collective way and setting aside those evil people for the good of society. "The wars of Israel" wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer "were the only holy wars in history, for they were the wars of God against the world of idols." It is not just enmity which Jesus condemns, for then He would have condemned the whole history of God's dealing with His people. On the contrary, He affirms the old covenant. There was a place for a holy war then.

Well, what about the imprecatory Psalms? What about David calling down all this judgment on his enemies? Listen. You missed the point in Psalms 69 if you don't read verse 9, because that explains verses 22 to 28. What does Psalms 69:9 say? "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Stop right there for a minute. David, why are you so upset? David, why are you so concerned? David, why are you praying judgment on these people? Because of what they have done not to me, but Your house.

You see? It is not personal. David, believe me, had the greatest enemy in his life be his only son...or his son, Absalom. And David prayed that God would judge his son and God would judge his enemy, and yet he cried from the deepest part of his heart. "Oh Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son." The fact that he prayed for judgment to glorify God and preserve his people didn't mean he didn't love his son. And those are things you have to hold in tension.

We love the lost, and yet we pray that God would be vindicated and their sin would be stopped do we not? We love the lost with all our hearts and our hearts ache for those without Christ. And yet we pray that Jesus would come and set His Kingdom up and put their unrighteous people aside. We have the same reaction of dear John the apostle as he saw the vision in Revelation 10. And he said "When the scroll went into my mouth and I saw what was going to happen, it was both sweet and bitter. " It is sweet to see Christ reigning again, it is bitter to see what happens to the lost. Why? Because he had the tension of loving God with all his heart and loving people too.

And that's the way it was with David. It was zeal for God's house that ate him up. And the reproaches of those who reproached you are fallen on me. He says, I'm not defending myself; it's you I'm defending. It's one thing to defend the glory of God and the honor of God; it's something else to hate people personally. And you have to understand those two in balance. The judgments and curses are always judicial, not personal. What is to be my attitude toward anybody, even my worst enemy? My attitude is to be one of forgiving love, while at the same time I pray, "Oh God, do not let your enemies continue to dishonor Your name, but take the glory that is due to you."

My great attitude toward an enemy is to love them and to pray God would save him. And if God doesn't save him, that God would judge him so that he can bring Christ to be the rightful ruler of this world and set righteousness in its proper place again. God punished Adam, but He loved him. God loved Cain, but He punished him. God loved the whole world, but He drowned them.

God loved Sodom and Gomorra, but He burned them to ashes. God loved the nation of Israel, but He set them aside for a time. God loved His only begotten Son, but He let Him bear sin and die. And God loves the world today, but He promises that it's going to go up in a flame some day. God loves you, but you'll spend an eternity in Hell if you don't know His Son.

Well, you see the scribes and the Pharisees never made any distinction in this tension. They took judgment passages and because of their evil, perversive, prejudiced hearts, they allowed them to become justification for them to hate people. That was the wrong thing altogether. I think I can sum up my thoughts this morning by having you look at Psalms 139, Psalms 139. And this is just the introduction really. Psalms 139, verse 19. Now listen, most interesting scripture.

Psalms 139:19, David, again, is saying "Surely thou will slay the wicked, Oh God." In other words, he's saying God, it can't always be this way. It wasn't meant to be this way. "Depart from me therefore you bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly." You see, that's the right attitude. It's not me I'm defending God, it's You. "And thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them Oh Lord that hate thee. And am not I grieve with those who rise up against thee? I hate them – " watch this– "with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies." Stop right there.

Now wait a minute, David you're hating. Yes, he says, but I'm hating them with what kind of hatred? Perfect hatred. Let me ask you a question. Is it right to be angry? Is it right to be angry? No. Is there such a thing as righteous indignation? Yes. Is it right for me to be angry when somebody offends me? No. Is it right for me to be righteously indignant when somebody dishonors God? Yes. Would it have been right for Jesus to say you can't talk to me that way and punch somebody? No. But when Jesus came to defend the holiness and the honor of God with a whip, it was right. There's a difference between anger and holy wrath. And you want to know something? There's a difference between personal hatred and perfect hatred.

That's what David's talking about. Lord, he says, I hate them oh Lord, not the hate me, it isn't me. I don't care for me. Me, as far as I'm concerned, I'll forgive them and I'll love them, but for your sake, I hate what they do to Your honorable name. I am grieved with them who arise up against thee and so I hate them with perfect hatred.

And then he says this, And Lord, I know this is perfect hatred. I know it isn't personal. Verse 23, "And

you search me Oh God, and You know my heart and You know my thoughts, and you see if there be any wicked way in me.” You check out my heart, Lord, and you’ll see that my hatred is a perfect hatred, it isn’t personal. It’s not a vendetta. It’s not a wrath for someone who’s an enemy, who’s opposed me. I love that.

You see, David is saying Lord I hate him with a perfect hatred. You examine my heart and see if it isn’t so. See if it isn’t the right kind of thing. What are we saying, beloved? Perfect hate is not personal. As we walk through this world, I’ll tell you something. What puts us a cut above everybody, what puts us above everything, is the capacity to personally love our enemies.

Yes, we pray for God’s glory to be vindicated. Yes, we pray for an end of the unrighteous who curse His name. Yes, we allow God to come in fire and flaming vengeance. Yes, we know the same Jesus who said, “Love your enemies” to the Pharisees also said to the Pharisees, “You are woeful, Matthew 23, and I pronounce on you doom.” Yes, we know that judicially there will become a judgment. Judicially God will act in punishment, but that’s for God to do. And in defense of God, we’ll uphold His holy name.

But in our personal relationships, we are to be characterized by loving our enemies. That’ll make us different than everybody in the world. People in the world love their friends. They do a pretty good job at that. They love their families, not bad at that either. And they’re even compassionate and sympathetic to people who don’t have much. But people in the world don’t love their enemies. Believe me they don’t love their enemies.

People in the world may not kill, but they get angry. People in the world may not commit adultery, not all of them, but they do it in their hearts. People in the world may do all legal things in their divorces, but they shouldn’t have divorces anyway. People in the world sometimes keep their word, but they don’t always keep their word. People in the world retaliate, some of them on a very equal basis, but they don’t forgive and forget. And people in the world love, but they don’t love like this. And Jesus is saying I don’t want you to be like that.

Go back to verse 47 again. What did He say? “And what do you more than others?” What makes you different? You’re not going to be different if you just sprinkle a little Christian activity on your human life. You’re not going to be different if just a little bit of commitment goes over to Christ. What makes you different than anybody else? If you belong to my Kingdom for one thing, it is that you love your enemies. A pretty high standard. “To love them.” said John Stott “is ardently to desire that they will repent and believe and be saved.” If you love them enough they just might respond to the Christ who lives in you, made visible through that love. Let’s pray.

Who am I Lord to speak this message when the standard is even beyond me or anybody? But I speak as your spokesman, and I speak to my own heart. Teach me to love not those that are easy to love, not the lovely and the loveable, but the unloved and the enemies. Teach me to love the people who hate me. Teach me to love the people who curse me. Teach me to love the people who would silence me, who would harm me, who would harm my family and those I love most dearly. And, oh God, teach me to hate the sin, to hate the unrighteousness that sweeps over the world, to hate to see Jesus dishonored. Give me a perfect hatred that calls for a righteous day, a righteous Kingdom, with a righteous king to make things right.

May I understand the difference between that great longing for God's glory and a personal love for those who offend Him most. May we love people Father, people who don't love us and so may they say of us, "They must be Christians for no one else can love that like." May Grace Church be known as a place where people love with a love that is unearthly, supernatural. May we not retaliate. May we not give back what is due, but may we give back forgiveness and love. And so, as Your Son said, "be the sons of our Father who is in heaven." May we love like You love, like Jesus loved, even those who hate us most.

Father, we can't do it on our own. There's no way. Thank you for the promise of Romans 5:5 that the love of Christ has been shed abroad in our hearts. You have given us a new capacity to go with a new command, to go with a new life. As new creatures called to a new kind of love, may we tap that capacity that's there by the presence of the Spirit of God. Give us magnanimous, big, forgiving, loving hearts that there might be a validation of our testimony and Jesus lifted up. And, truly, some of Your enemies turned into friends in response to such love. For Your glory we pray. Amen.

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