

"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. (Matthew 5:42-48, NAS95).

This morning we come the sixth of Jesus "but I say unto you" teachings.

In this final statement he is again making clear that Jesus is pointing His kingdom people to a higher standard than legalism and the determination of right and wrong in questions of conduct or conscience by analyzing cases that illustrate general ethical rules. We finished our study last week by saying this is not about what is right or wrong it is about the way of the cross. It is about "but I say unto you." It is about living the norms of the Christian life and having the result of people knowing that Christ's true disciples are different than others in this world.

It is about the church being what Christ says she should be. We don't exist as Christians in a vacuum, we are a body. The church needs to be seen living like this, not just you or me as individuals but Christ's church.

What Jesus says next will be astounding and these verses are building to an unheard of concept- Love your enemies.

So if we are filled with anger and rage and want revenge, if we cannot humble ourselves in any way when we are taken advantage of by others who have authority over us, if we do not have an attitude of charity and helping others when we can then how are we going to be able to love our enemies?

So here we are at a text that challenges us to the extreme.

You have heard of extreme makeovers – facially, bodily, and with houses. Americans are obsessed with them. But Jesus brings an extreme makeover to our entire life and our purpose for life and our way of living.

In this sermon Jesus has been building layer upon layer of commands for his New Covenant people and teaching that the attitude of the heart is the heart of the New Covenant because that is what salvation and being made a child of God, who is a

kingdom dweller under the Lordship of Christ, is all about. It is an accomplished work by the grace of God that has changed the hearts of a people, His church, His bride whom He has called unto himself for His purpose, for His own pleasure and for His own glory. This is all accomplished to the praise of His glorious grace.

Of all the things Jesus has taught in this sermon, this is the most radical, the most extreme, the most unique and it can only be done when He has removed the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh where His New Covenant Law is written. He begins this part of his sermon by quoting from the Old Testament, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and then he adds what else they have heard but which is not in the Holy Scriptures –and hate your enemy.

He first quotes from Lev. 19:18 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD. This was an explicit command as part of the Law and the Prophets.

Sincerely and heartily, as a man loves himself, doing all the good to him as a man does to himself, or would have done to himself, and hindering all the mischief done to him that he would have himself preserved from is what it means. It was a saying of Rabbi Akiba, an ancient Rabbi that this is "the great universal in the law" and it does indeed cover the whole of the second tablet of the Law that was given to Moses on Sinai, and it is the summary of it, and is pretty much the same our Lord says of it, that it is the second and great commandment, and like unto the first, on which two all the law and the prophets hang, Mt 22:37-40;

And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40, NAS95).

and also the Apostle Paul makes all the laws of the second tablet to be understood in this same statement in Rom.13:9,10

9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

Loving your neighbor was a known command by the Jews of Jesus day. It even went a little further than that.

Le 19:34 'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.

The command are very explicit and easily defines who the neighbor is.

Isn't interesting that by Jesus day at a time after this sermon which is recorded in Lk.10:29ff, He was asked, "and who is my neighbor" because of the ethnic and religious pride that had developed in the hearts of stone of unredeemed Israel. Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, just the kind of person by ethnicity that Jews hated.

So, they have heard it said that they should love their neighbor. But where did and hate your enemies come from?

Here is the reasoning, if we are to love only our neighbors then it is logical that we are to hate our enemies. If on the one hand one thing is true, then the other must be true. Compare it to this. If I go to school then I will learn something. If I don't go to school I won't learn anything. And this is absolutely absurd.

But in Jesus day there were isolated monastic communities that actually taught to hate the outsider. And this is real world dogma among many extremist groups all over the globe today. An Afghani brother is on trial for his life just because he is a Christian. American neo-Nazis and skinheads want our country eliminated of Jews, blacks, Arabs and anyone else they can hate because they see them as enemies not neighbors.

Jesus is describing a particular enemy here. It reflects back to the Beatitudes:

Mt:5:10-12 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We are to love them and pray for them **so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven** according to our text.

The phrase may be is important. I quote from John Gill, the Puritan Baptist

“Not that any became the children of God, by doing things in imitation of him: for as in nature no man becomes the son of another by imitating him, or by doing the things he does but either by birth, or by adoption; so in grace no man becomes a child of God by the works he does, as a follower of God, but by adopting grace; and which is discovered in regeneration. Christ's meaning is, that they might appear, and be known to be the children of God, by doing those things in which they resemble their heavenly Father; and which are agreeable to his nature and conduct; as the tree is known by its fruit, and the cause by its effect: for where adoption and regenerating grace take place, the fruit of good works is brought forth to the glory of God.”

We are to pray for them because sheds His goodness, not salvation, on all of His creation, even our enemies –“for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

He provides for all as it pleases Him to do for His own good pleasure. If He was willing to send His Son to save some from this wicked world then we are to reflect the character of the Father as well. To be persecuted is to be like the prophets Mt 5:12, but to bless and pray for our enemies is to be like our Father.

And furthermore we have the example of our Christ, our Savior, the Father's son who reflected His Father's character at Calvary when He cried out, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Why is this so important? Jesus says it is so easy to love those who love us. It takes little effort and it has no reward as far as the kingdom of God is concerned. Even the tax collectors, who after Rome, were the most hated people in Palestine.

The tax system allowed these Jews to cheat and steal and they became ceremonially unclean with their contacts with Romans and overlords and Gentiles.

Yet, they had people who liked them and loved them and those whom they loved.

Jesus is making it very clear that there is nothing that makes His people different or exemplary in any way if we act no differently than a tax collector.

If we only greet our brothers with kind words or warm greetings even pagans do that among themselves. The standards of the kingdom of God are higher than the standards of the societies in which we live.

“Prayer for your enemies is one of the deepest forms of love, because it means that you have to really want that something good happen to them. You might do nice things for your enemy without any genuine desire that things go well with them. But prayer for them is in the presence of God who knows your heart, and prayer is interceding with God on their behalf. It may be for their conversion. It may be for their repentance. It may be that they would be awakened to the enmity in their hearts. It may be that they will be stopped in their downwards spiral of sin, even if it takes disease or calamity to do it. But the prayer Jesus has in mind here is always for their good.” Pastor John Piper

There was a well known Southern Presbyterian minister, John Lafayette Girardeau. He was a prisoner of war during the War Between the States. When He came back to South Carolina to take up his ministry again after the war, he preached a passionate sermon on this passage...on loving your neighbor. His youngest son heard that sermon and asked his dad questions all the way home, and continued to ask him annoying questions around the dinner table. He kept asking him specifics about how that sermon might apply to his own experience: "Dad, does this mean that I have to love the bully who beats me up at school?" "Yes, son." "Dad, does this mean that we have to love people who have taken advantage of our family?" "Yes, son." "Dad, does this mean we have to love Yankees?" "Be quiet, son, and eat your dinner." It's hard for all of us to love as God calls us to love.

Yes it may be hard but by the grace of God it is not impossible. For with God all things are possible.

Two men lived near each other. The river divided their farms. One day when the corn in the beautiful river bottoms was in roasting-ear stage, the cows of one neighbor got out of the pasture and crossed the river into the earing field of corn. They slashed and ruined perhaps a half acre. The man who owned the damaged corn rounded up the cattle and put them in his barn. He made the neighbor pay for every ear of corn that they had destroyed and then made him pay a good price for the cattle before he would return them to him.

In the fall of that year the hogs of the man whose corn had been eaten got out and crossed the river into the potato patch of the neighbor. They played havoc with it. This neighbor saw the hogs damage his potato patch, and got the hogs back across the

river to the barn where they belonged. The owner saw them coming, got his gun, and hid himself with the avowal that if his neighbor harmed the hogs, he would shoot him. When he saw that he had no intentions of harming the hogs, he was surprised. He came out from his hiding, and said: "You have something I do not have. What is it?" The neighbor replied, "I am a Christian." That night the unregenerate man and his wife went across the river and visited the neighbor. They were both converted before they left the home. On the next Lord's Day they both joined the local church.

How well do we represent the Father in these matters. As I said earlier if we are filled with anger and rage and want revenge, if we cannot humble ourselves in any way when we are taken advantage of by others who have authority over us, if we do not have an attitude of charity and helping others when we can then how are we going to be able to love our enemies and be the Christians that we are called to be. It is not a matter of saying I can't do it. That contradicts God's word. It is a matter of saying I refuse to do it and that is rebellion and disobedience and may prove eternally fatal, if God's law is not written on your heart.

So let's go back and look at the command to love our enemies in its context—both the nearby context and the bigger context of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:43-44 is the last of six statements in the Sermon on the Mount that begin, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you." The series of six statements begins in Mt. 5:21. Just before this series, in Mt.5:20 Jesus says,

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Then come the six statements:

"You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you."

We have taken this to mean that Jesus is explaining in these six statements what the righteousness looks like that he requires, new quality of righteousness that goes beyond what the scribes and Pharisees understood and required.

Verse 21: "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court."

Verse 27: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery' 28 but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Verse 31: "And it was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery."

Verse 33: "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool."

Verse 38: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil."

Verse 43: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies."

So what Jesus is doing here in these six commandments is showing his disciples how some of the scribes and Pharisees applied the Old Testament teachings, and then, over against that, what he was calling them to do—something radically different, or something deeper because it is all a matter of the heart..

So when verse 20 says, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven," he was saying, "There is a way of life—there is an authentic, deep, unhypocritical way of life—that you must live if you want to arrive in heaven." He is not saying: I have an impossible standard of righteousness that you can never meet, and so stop trying to meet it, and trust in my righteousness. That's not what he is saying. He is saying, "If you will come to me, and trust in me, and receive the power of the kingdom, and be cleansed on the inside by the forgiveness and love of God that I offer, and put your hope on all my promises, and let my ransoming death cover all you failures and imperfections, then you WILL be able to live this way (not perfectly, but powerfully), and your life will be the light of the world and the salt of the earth that proves you are the children of God.

Jesus ends this part of His sermon with the words, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What is this perfection? Is it an absolute?

It is the greek word teleios. It means coming to an end, mature, being complete.

As Jesus has full authority to say “but I say unto you and make these demands upon his people He has the authority to tell us to be perfect like our heavenly Father.

He has fulfilled all of the Law and the Prophets. His authority comes from the Father.

He has addressed the fallacies, misunderstandings and misapplications of numerous teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees and tells those who will be His that He demands a different kind of living.

God is not a hypocrite. If we are His children we cannot be hypocrites. God is transparent in all He does as He reveals Himself to us. We are to be the same to each other and the world. We are to be seen as growing in the completion that will be ours as we stand in glory with Jesus.

God is working to will and to do his good pleasure in us. And we are to work outwardly our salvation. This is not mere counsel, not just a precept, or that an absolute perfection in holiness is a thing in this life that is attainable. But it is our duty to labor for it, as Paul wrote which is an echo of Jesus words:

forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, Philip. 3:13,14.

Are you saying I cannot or I will not? Both are dangerous attitudes of heart if you profess to being a Christian. Neither is acceptable.

It is a matter of your heart.

Jesus says you can by His grace.

And next week we will see what Jesus says about religious hypocrisy.