



Matthew 5:43-48
A New Economy of Righteousness:
Loving Enemies
December 4, 2011
Carl Johnson

During the Revolutionary War there lived in Pennsylvania a pastor by the name of Peter Miller. Although Miller was greatly loved by everyone in the community, there was one man who lived near the church who hated him and had earned an unenviable reputation for his abuse of the minister. This man was not only a hater of the church, but it also turned out that he was a traitor to his country, and was convicted of treason and sentenced to death.

The trial was conducted in Philadelphia, and no sooner did Miller hear of it than he set out on foot to visit General Washington and interceded for the man's life. But Washington told him, "I'm sorry that I cannot grant your request for your friend."

"Friend!" Miller cried. "Why, that man is the worst enemy I have in the world!"

"What?" the general exclaimed in surprise. "Have you walked sixty miles to save the life of an enemy? That, in my judgment, puts the matter in a different light. I will grant him a pardon for your sake."

The pardon was made out and signed by General Washington, and Miller proceeded at once on foot to a place fifteen miles distant where the execution was scheduled to take place that afternoon. He arrived just as the man was being carried to the scaffold, and when he saw Miller hurrying toward the place, remarked, "There is old Peter Miller. He has walked all the way from Ephrata to have his revenge gratified today by seeing me hung." But scarcely had he spoken the words when Miller pushed his way through to the condemned man and handed him the pardon that saved his life.

—*Bible School Journal*¹

Let's remember the context prior to our reading our text for the day:

- This is God in the flesh speaking authoritatively on matters of life and salvation.
- In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes the character and nature of those in the Kingdom of Heaven
- Using salt and light, Jesus describes the purpose of those in the Kingdom of Heaven
- In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus fulfills the law as God intended and becomes the only means by which one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven
- Now Jesus uses six examples to demonstrate God's intent in the law

ESV | [Mt 5:43](#) "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 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.

¹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Textual Idea: Limiting your love to only those you like reveals a shallow, selfish heart far from God and a life that is inconsistent with the character of God.

Those who have been transformed from the inside out by the gospel indiscriminately share God's unconditional love.

- 1) "Hating your enemy" is a misguided application of God's righteous **JUDGMENT** and a distortion of "loving your **NEIGHBOR**". Verse 43
 - a. ESV | [Le 19:18](#) You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.
 - b. Great commandment
 - c. But where does "Hate your enemies come from?"
 - i. ESV | [Dt 23:3](#) "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, [4](#) because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. [5](#) But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. [6](#) You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.
 - ii. They had taken passages of God's judgment on specific people and applied that in general to say that it was okay to hate those who did not worship God they way they did
 - d. In doing so they distorted the understanding of "neighbor"
 - i. ESV | [Lk 10:25](#) And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" [26](#) He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" [27](#) And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." [28](#) And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." [29](#) But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" [30](#) Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31](#) Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32](#) So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33](#) But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34](#) He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35](#) And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' [36](#) Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell

among the robbers?” [37](#) He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

- e. So Jesus undermines the concept of hating enemies in two ways, First, God alone is able to rightly judge and second, the definition of neighbor is very wide!
 - f. When World War I broke out, the War Ministry in London dispatched a coded message to one of the British outposts in the inaccessible areas of Africa. The message read: “War declared. Arrest all enemy aliens in your district.” The War Ministry received his prompt reply: “Have arrested ten Germans, six Belgians, four Frenchman, two Italians, three Austrians, and an American. Please advise immediately who we’re at war with.”²
- 2) Loving enemies indicates **BELONGING** to God and mirrors God’s **CHARACTER**. Verses 44-45
- a. That you may be sons of God –
 - i. People who so love and greet their enemies and pray for their persecutors thus prove themselves to be those, as in v. 9, who are growing in conformity to the likeness of their Heavenly Father (v. 45).³
 - ii. By this all men will know you are mine if you love one another.
 - b. This is how God loves!
 - i. ESV | [1 Jn 3:1](#) See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.
 - ii. ESV | [Ro 5:7](#) For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8](#) but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - c. He makes the sun rise and rain fall on good and evil ones
 - d. When you love those who would otherwise be considered enemies, it is then that you are loving like God the Father
 - e. Despicable Me – the youngest one loves Gru anyway, despite all of his antics.
- 3) Loving enemies demonstrates allegiance to another **KINGDOM** that contradicts the world. Verses 46-47
- a. If you love only those who love you, greet only your brothers
 - i. Idea here is that Jesus now draws a distinction between God’s love and how the world loves.
 - ii. Even the world loves like this right?
 - iii. Isn’t God’s love greater than this? Shouldn’t those who follow God love like this also?
 - iv. Genuine love is loving someone or something with no regard for what that person can do for you in return.

² Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

³ Blomberg, C. (2001). *Vol. 22: Matthew* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (115). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- b. This story was told of General Robert E. Lee: Hearing General Lee speak in the highest terms to President Davis about a certain officer, another officer, greatly astonished, said to him, “General, do you know that the man of whom you speak so highly to the President is one of your bitterest enemies, and misses no opportunity to malign you?” “Yes,” replied General Lee, “but the President asked my opinion of him; he did not ask for his opinion of me.”—*Sunshine Magazine*⁴
- 4) Followers of Christ are to pursue the perfection of God as the goal of their lives. Verse 48
 - a. The paragraph begun in v. 43 closes with a command that may equally summarize all six antitheses. “Perfect” here is better translated as “mature, whole,” i.e., loving without limits (probably reflecting an underlying Aramaic *tamim*). Jesus is not frustrating his hearers with an unachievable ideal but challenging them to grow in obedience to God’s will—to become more like him. J. Walvoord rightly observes, “While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable.” But such godliness cannot be comprehensively formulated in a set of rules; the ethics of the sermon are suggestive, not exhaustive.⁵

Conclusion: “I have seen Christians in communist prisons with 50 pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold, and praying with fervor for the communists. ... Afterward, the communists came to prison too. “Now the tortured and the torturers were in the same cell. And while the non-Christians beat them (torturers), Christians took their defense. I have seen Christians giving away their last slice of bread (we had at that time one slice a week) and the medicine which could save their lives to a sick communist torturer who was now a fellow-prisoner.”—Wurmbrand⁵

Have you comprehended God’s love toward you? As you comprehend His love toward you, will you love others that way?

⁴ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

⁵ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.