

Matthew 5:43-48

- Love your enemies: a command that will change the world -

Author: Evert Jan Hempenius

© 2016

www.christianstudylibrary.org

For any questions about this Scripture passage or the notes, please contact us through the Contact Us tab on the website.

Introduction

- ❖ “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45) is a world changing-command of Jesus. Let all political and religious leaders and ordinary people take this to heart.
 - When you love your enemy, you don’t treat him as an enemy any longer, but as your neighbour, your fellow human being.
 - This command has inspired many people. To mention two: Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Both have made an impact on world history. Some quotes of well-known people are given below.
 - Although these words were spoken in a political context in which the Pharisees discriminated between us (brothers and sisters) and them (tax collectors and pagans, Samaritans, Greek and Romans), these words can be applied to any situation in which tensions might be felt.
 - Love your wife and pray for her;
 - Love your children and pray for them;
 - Love your boss and pray for him/her;
 - Love your colleagues and pray for them.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount a brief summary of the background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:13-17):
 - Before Jesus was baptised by John, he said: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfil all righteousness.**”
 - And: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”
 - The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfilment of all righteousness**. <> “For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law...” (Mt. 5:20).
- ❖ The preaching of Jesus:
 - Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
 - “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt. 4:17).
 - Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
 - “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt. 3:1–2).
 - And later on, when Jesus sent out his twelve disciples:
 - “As you go, preach this message: ‘**The kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt. 10:7).
 - These two aspects, repentance and the kingdom, are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ:
 - Jesus taught not only the Law and the Prophets, but he lived according to them. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his way of life and by living so he set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” When Jesus was arrested, he didn’t strike back.
- ❖ The future of the Kingdom:

- After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount, the mount of the sermon: **“All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (...) and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**” (Mt. 28:18-20).
 - This authority is reflected in expressions such as: **“But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Mt. 5:22).
 - And in: “Not everyone who says to me, **‘Lord, Lord,’** will enter the kingdom of heaven, but...” (Mt. 7:20).

Form and structure

- ❖ The Sermon on the Mount consists of five main parts:
 - 1. General calling to repentance and the promise of the kingdom: Matthew 5:3-10, characterized by: “Blessed are...”
 - 2. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and all who want to learn from him: “Blessed are **you...**” The main theme is **“the prophets”** (Mt. 5:11-16).
 - 3. The central part is an exposition of the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17-7:12):
 - “Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them” (Mt. 5:17)...
 - The Lord’s Prayer is found at the very centre of the sermon!
 - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the **Law and the Prophets**” (Mt. 7:12).
 - 4. After his exposition of the Law and the Prophets, he returns to the theme of the Prophets and warns against **“the false prophets”** (Mt. 7:13-23). This contrasts with the second part of the sermon.
 - 5. He concludes his sermon again with a general call to choose: **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine...”**(Mt. 7:24-27).

- ❖ Let us turn to the structure of Matthew 5:44-48:

<i>Introduction</i>	“You have heard that it was said:
<i>General rule according to the teaching of the Pharisees</i>	‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’
<i>General rule of Jesus</i>	But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.
<i>Reason (1)</i>	He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
<i>Reason (2)</i>	If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?
<i>Concluding command</i>	Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- ❖ The parallelism of verse 45 is a chiasm¹:

He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good,
and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

- A chiasm consists of two parallel lines, in which the word order is reversed.
- This chiasm stresses the point that God does not discriminate between the “evil” and “the good”, the “righteous” and “the unrighteous”, a discrimination which was often made by the ordinary people and by the Pharisees. A clear example is found in Luke 15:1-2. By starting with the “evil” and ending with the “unrighteous” Jesus focuses our attention upon the “unrighteous”
- In the end, God will pass his judgment on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt. 25:31-46).

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

- ❖ It is important to realise that Jesus preached his sermon around 30 AD in Galilee.
 - To Jews living in a country

¹ (n.d.). Retrieved December 5, 2015, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiasmus>

- that was part of the Roman Empire; the Romans were the enemies (Mt. 5:43);
- that had contact with the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman culture; this culture was prominent in a city like Tiberias (Lake of Tiberias = Sea of Galilee) and the Decapolis, nowadays Jordan.
- To Jews
 - who frequented the synagogues and were used to listening to the teachings of the Pharisees and scribes, their spiritual leaders at that time;
 - who were expecting the promised One (according to Dt. 18:15-18; Mal. 4:4-5; Mt. 11:3);
 - who were longing for the restoration of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:12), the main theme of the teaching of Jesus.
- ❖ This background is needed to understand some passages of the sermon, especially those that speak of persecution (Mt. 5:10-12), pagans (Mt. 6:7, 32) and hypocrites.
 - The selection of topics found in the Sermon on the Mount reflects some debated issues among first century Jews such as divorce (Mt. 5:31-32; Mt. 19:3-9). Jesus doesn't cover all aspects of the Law, for instance, the fourth commandment (Sabbath Day) is not found here, although it was hotly debated between the Pharisees and Jesus (Mt. 12:1-8). Neither does he refer to the greatest commandment (Mt. 22:37-40).
 - He especially confronts the teaching of the Pharisees and Scribes. Some of the topics found in the sermon are also found in Matthew 23, where he condemns the teachers of the law for their hypocritical stance.
 - Jesus doesn't give a new set of rules or applications but teaches a different mindset. This mindset is governed by (see application):
 - the blessings of the Kingdom (Mt. 5:3-10);
 - the Lord's prayer (Mt. 6:9-13), the central part of the sermon.

Exposition

Verse 43

- ❖ **“You have heard that it was said,...”**
 - **“You have heard.”** This is the sixth example in which Jesus teaches the Law and the Prophets. You are the disciples, the people standing on the slope of the mount listening to Jesus. Jesus refers to the teaching of the Scribes and the Pharisees, which they (= you) had heard in their synagogues. He does not refer to the teaching of the Old Testament, nor is he quoting the Old Testament.

- **“that it was said.”** The Scribes and Pharisees read, explained and applied the words of God, which he had given to the people of Israel through his servant Moses. “That is was said” refers to the authority of Moses (and God), which doesn’t mean that these words were exactly taken from the Old Testament.

❖ **“Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.”** This teaching consists of two parts “love your neighbour” (1) and “hate your enemy” (2). It looks like a summary and short explication of Leviticus 19:17-18:

- **“Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in his guilt.
Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.”**

- These two rules referred to conduct towards the brother and neighbour, the fellow Israelite. In these verses, the enemy is not mentioned. But, in the immediate context, we read: “ **‘When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him.** The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, **for you were aliens in Egypt.** I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:33–34).

- What to think about Psalm 139:19-22?

- If only you would slay the wicked, O God!
Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!
They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,
and abhor those who rise up against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.

- This is not a command to hate our enemies and the enemies of God.
- Psalm 139 is a personal prayer by someone who experiences great anguish and fear. The Psalmist is finally asking for:
Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

- There are other instances to mention. David was persecuted by Saul, but he **didn’t hate** him. The slave-girl didn’t hate Naaman, but she loved him and advised him to visit the prophet (2 Ki. 5.1-19) for a cure.

Verse 44-47

- ❖ **“But I tell you.”** This is in contrast with the teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus is not contradicting or supplementing Moses, he is fulfilling Moses (Mt. 5:17-20), which means that his teachings are in accordance with Moses, the Law and the Prophets.
- ❖ **“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**
 - **ἀγαπάω** (love) = 1. to have a warm regard for and interest in another, cherish, have affection for, love.²
 - This love is not an emotion or feeling but based on your wish for the well-being of others, even your enemies.
 - The prayer for the persecutors and enemies is made possible by the promises of God:
 - “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
 - “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Mt. 5:10–12).
 - They can kill the body, but not your soul. They can’t take away your treasure in heaven, the kingdom of God. “Do not be afraid,” says Jesus in Matthew 10:26-31.
 - The apostle Paul elaborates on this in Romans 12:14-21:
 - “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.³
(...)
Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.
On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”⁴

² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p.5).

³ See also 1 Corinthians 4:12-13

⁴ See also Proverbs 25:21-22

- Paul concludes:
“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”⁵
- ❖ **“That you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”** To become like Jesus, **“my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”** (Mt. 3:17). Our Father in heaven will be pleased with us when we do not discriminate among people when we love our enemies and pray for them. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (5:1-2): **“Be imitators of God**, therefore, as dearly loved children **and live a life of love**, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
- ❖ **“He causes his sun ...”** See for the chiasm FORM and STRUCTURE. The examples Jesus uses are taken from nature. Look at the sun. Look at the rain. The sun shines upon everybody, the evil and the good at the same time. His rain falls upon the righteous and the unrighteous. His sun and rain do not discriminate between people.
 - These examples are so easy to understand, and at the same time so hard to put into practice. Nature is an important source of examples for Jesus. Look at the birds of the air (Mt. 6:26). See the lilies grow (Mt. 6:28). Watch the grass of the field (Mt. 6:30). What is the value of a sparrow (Mt. 10:30)? In all these cases God, the Father, Creator of heaven and earth is taking care. He will take care for his children!
- ❖ **“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?”** Jesus mentioned receiving a reward a few times in the sermon:
 - The first instance is found in Matthew 5:12: **“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven**, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
 - In Matthew 6:1-18 he mentions receiving a reward with regard to giving to the needy (6:1-4), prayer (6:5-6) and fasting (6:16-18).
 - Though one might not expect it, even tax collectors love and are friendly to one another. Pagans also greet and are friendly to one another. The Pharisees do the same. They love one another and are friendly to each other.
 - Don’t think that you are better than or different from the tax collectors or the pagans when you greet only your brothers and sisters.

Verse 48

- ❖ **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** These words are the conclusion of Matthew 5:43-47.
 - **τέλειος** (perfect) = **1. pert. to meeting the highest standard; b. of persons who are fully up to standard in a certain respect and not satisfied with half-way measures perfect,**

⁵ See also Luke 6:27-28, 34-35; 1 Peter 3:9

complete, expert. 4. pert. to being fully developed in a moral sense: a. of humans perfect, fully developed; b. of God perfect.⁶

- **τέλειος** is a translation of the Hebrew *"tamim"*: **4. sound, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity:** of God's way (Ps. 18:31 = 2 S 22:31); of God's work (Dt. 32:4); of God's law (Ps. 19:8); elsewhere of man. He is a man of *integrity*.⁷

- ❖ It means: do not discriminate among people, and indeed this is the highest standard for human conduct. Examples from the Old Testament:
 - "Noah was a righteous man, blameless (= **τέλειος**) among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gn. 6:9).
 - Deuteronomy 18:13: "You must be blameless (= **τέλειος**) before the LORD your God."
- ❖ The perfection here is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 7:12).
 - This is echoed by Peter in his letter: But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15–16; Lv. 19:22).

Application

- ❖ **Important.** There is a difference between the personal conduct of the disciples and the responsibility of a (secular) government. The government is an authority established by God. It is **an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer**, and a protector against enemies and persecutors (Rom. 13.1-7).⁸
 - There is a significant difference between the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets were given to the people of Israel and confined to its boundaries. Israel was a nation amidst the nations. In the New Testament era, the law is given to the disciples who are not living within the boundaries of one nation but live among the nations.
- ❖ Only true love transforms people. But how? Listen to the examples Jesus has given. The sun and the rain do not discriminate between people, Roman, Greek or Jew; Christian, Muslim or Hindu; European, Arab or Jew.
 - Bonhoeffer wrote: "This is the supreme command." "Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God."⁹

⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 995-996).

⁷ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 1071).

⁸ The apostle Paul is referring to the Roman Government, which was what we would call a non-Christian or secular government.

⁹ Bonhoeffer, D. (1959, p. 134).

- This teaching of Jesus is so profound. It transforms worldviews. And what is more important, it transforms our vision of God, the Father, Creator of heaven and earth. It renews our vision of ourselves, children of our Father in heaven.
- ❖ To put this into practice, it is helpful to look at the acts of mercy (Mt. 25:31-46).
- ❖ The following connections between the beatitudes and **love your enemies ...** can be noted (examples):

Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-10):	
7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”	Jesus gave an example in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37).
9 “Blessed are the peacemakers,”	Revenge and hatred don’t bring forth peace.
10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”	

- ❖ The following connections between the Lord’s prayer and the **pray for those...** can be noted (examples):

The Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:9-13):	pray for those who persecute you
9 “Our Father in heaven,”	He is the Lord, Creator, Father of all (Eph. 3:14)
“hallowed be your name,”	Let the persecutors acknowledge your holy name. A striking example is the conversion of Paul (Ac. 9:1-5).
10 “your kingdom come, your will be done”	Peace will fill this earth and justice will be done.
11 “Give us today our daily bread.”	This prayer is not confined to my personal needs, nor the needs of the brothers and sisters, but extends to the enemy and the persecutor. Look at the sun and at the rain.
12 “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”	Stephen prayed: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Ac. 7:60). This is probably the most important part. Jesus doesn’t teach to pray for revenge, but for forgiveness.

13 **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”**

The temptation might be to take revenge, to hate the enemy. Deliverance means that the persecution will stop.

Quotes¹⁰

- ❖ “The Bible tells us to love our neighbours, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people” (G.K. Chesterton).
- ❖ “It is easy enough to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business” (Mahatma Gandhi).
- ❖ “Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, "Love your enemies." It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies” (from "Loving Your Enemies", Martin Luther King).
- ❖ “Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work. 'The kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared' (Luther)” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*).

Bibliography

Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bonhoeffer, D. (1959). *The cost of discipleship*. London: SCM Press.

¹⁰ Quotes About Enemies. (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2015, from <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/enemies>

Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hagner, D. (1993). *Word biblical commentary: Matthew 1-13*. Dallas: Word Books.

Hendriksen, W. (1973). *New Testament commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.

Stott, J. (1992). *The message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian counter-culture*. (2nd ed.). Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.