



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 11
Matthew 5:43-47 Topic 11

Study By
Lorin L Cranford
cranfordville.com

Greek NT

5.43 Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἔρρέθη, Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου καὶ μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου. 5.44 ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν καὶ προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς, 5.45 ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, ὅτι τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει ἐπὶ ποιηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους. 5.46 ἐὰν γὰρ ἀγαπήσητε τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας ὑμᾶς, τίνα μισθὸν ἔχετε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ τελῶναι τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν; 5.47 καὶ ἐὰν ἀσπάσησθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν μόνον, τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ ἐθνικοὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν;

Gute Nachricht Bibel

43 »Ihr wisst, dass es heißt: 'Liebe deinen Mitmenschen; hasse deinen Feind.' 44 Ich aber sage euch: Liebt eure Feinde und betet für alle, die euch verfolgen. 45 So erweist ihr euch als Kinder eures Vaters im Himmel. Denn er lässt seine Sonne scheinen auf böse Menschen wie auf gute, und er lässt es regnen auf alle, ob sie ihn ehren oder verachten. 46 Wie könnt ihr von Gott eine Belohnung erwarten, wenn ihr nur die liebt, die euch ebenfalls lieben? Das tun auch die Betrüger! 47 Was ist denn schon Besonderes daran, wenn ihr nur zu euresgleichen freundlich seid? Das tun auch die, die Gott nicht kennen!

NRSV

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 children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 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 and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

NLT

43 "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. 46 If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.

The Study of the Text:¹

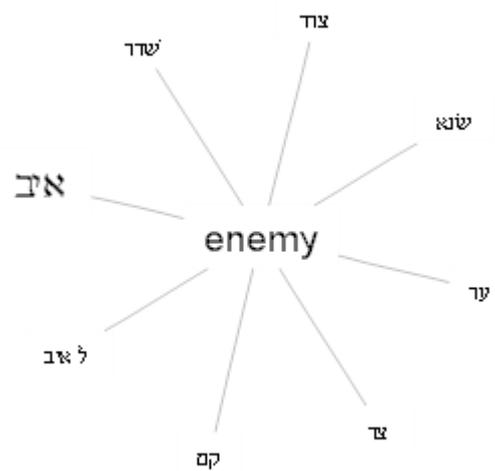
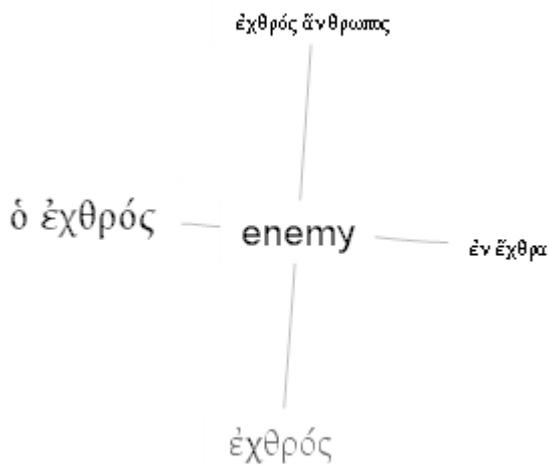
1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Seemingly with each passage Jesus' demands become more challenging. In this final premise / contrastive pericope Jesus demands a radical love of all people by His disciples. Each of the six passages in 5:21-47 has presented a demand upon believers to go beyond the Law of Moses in discipleship commitment in the Kingdom of Heaven. We need to hear carefully the words of Christ at this point.

Historical Context:

In the world of Jesus, every person had enemies. Friends and enemies were categories well understood by Jews in the first century. And the Romans had these categories pretty well laid out as well. The focus tended to be on formal identification of friendship. The culture of the ancient world at this point was very diverse. In the Greco-Roman world friendship played a significant role in one's career and political - social connections. Belonging to some officially recognized group was self-defining. In other words, the value and worth of the individual did not reside within the person himself, but instead was determined by the social status of the various organized groups he belonged to. Usually crucial to this was the developed network of friendship the person had been able to establish. A common phrase in first century Greek was 'friend of the emperor' (ὁ φίλος τοῦ καίσαρος). This was the most valued friendship in the first century world because

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.



To be an enemy⁷ means to react with hostility toward another person. The attitude of hatred fuels the hostility, and the most extreme expression of hostility is war. An enemy was the opposite of a friend, and most of the ancient world viewed individuals as being either in one or the other of these two categories. If you were not positively connected to another person, the expectation was in general that this person represented potential danger to you. The Israelite experience of enemies in the Old Testament primarily came from the surrounding ethnic groups and nations seeking to overrun the Israelites, or else destroy them. In the New Testament the enemy is almost always a personal enemy rather than a national enemy.⁸

Thus when Jesus speaks of loving one’s neighbor and of hating one’s enemies from the Old Testament, he is alluding to the internal ethnic defining of neighbor as Jewish friend, and to the external hostile nation as enemy. Put simply, the Jews were to love fellow Jews and treat everyone else as an enemy. This was His assessment of how these two concepts were understood in His day among the Jewish people. And to this He will respond with His astounding declaration to modify. Love also connects to enemy, not just to neighbor. And this rules out completely the second strophe of the Old Testament allusion about hating one’s enemies.

Literary Aspects:

This more lengthy pericope contains both the core elements, vv. 43-45, and expansion elements, vv. 46-47. Verse 48 has both a connection to this passage and a larger connection as the climatic summary of 5:17-47. Thus we will treat it separately in the next study.

Literary Form:

The standard premise / contrastive segments are found (vv. 43-45), along with expansion elements (vv. 46-47), intended to throw more understanding on to Jesus’ response to the Old Testament concepts. The twofold premise declaration (v. 43) contains both a direct quote from the Septuagint (LXX) and a summarizing statement reflecting contemporary first century Jewish understanding of selected Old Testament texts.

Jesus’ response (v. 44) contains a twofold declaration utilizing a word play off the premise statements. Love for neighbor is now shifted to love for enemies. And this love must take on the concrete action of

(cf. the extolling of friendship among the Essenes in Josephus *Jewish War* 2.119), but although the community achieves a high degree of communal life (the sharing of lodging, food, knowledge, talents, and work), the strict ranking seems to militate against true friendship.

5. Philo speaks about friendship with God. The patriarchs are examples, but all the righteous may be called God’s friends. Philo also finds a pair of human friends in Moses and Joshua, and he believes that human friendship is pleasing to God. God, the refuge of friendship, does not despise its rights (*Every Good Man Is Free* 44).

[Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: Theologisches Worterbuch Zum Neuen Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985), 1262]

⁷Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: “enemy: 1: one that is antagonistic to another; especially: one seeking to injure, overthrow, or confound an opponent.”

⁸While “enemy” in the OT refers usually to the national enemies of Israel (Josh. 24:11, etc.), it is also used to mean one’s personal enemies (Exod. 23:4; Judg. 16:23; I Sam. 18:29; Esth. 7:6; etc.), especially in the Psalter (Ps. 3:7 et passim). Similarly, while “enemy” in the NT refers most often to personal enemies (Matt. 13:25; Gal. 4:16; etc.), it also is used to mean a foreign people (Luke 1:71; 19:43; cf. 21:20). [J. A. Sanders, “Enemy,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach]

praying for them. Enemies (τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν) is further defined as persecutors (τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς) in the two strophes of Jesus' response.

The two expansion elements, vv. 46-47, set up potential application scenarios for Jesus' response. Through the use of the Greek third class conditional sentence structure, these are put forth as hypothetical possibilities. The protasis clause, the 'what if' segments in both sentences, focuses the scenarios on the Jewish premise loving of only those perceived as friends. The apodosis main clauses, the 'then clause,' in both sentences compare the exclusivistic loving to being no better than 'tax collectors' (οἱ τελῶναι and pagan Gentiles (οἱ ἔθνηκοι. Thus such love has no value before God, since both Jewish tax collectors and Gentiles have no concern to love God and obey Him. To be sure, Jesus is here playing off the popular images of these two groups of people in His day who were traditional objects of religious scorn and derision by supposedly religious Jews. The New Testament has numerous instances of exceptions where both tax collectors, e.g., Matthew, and Gentiles, e.g., Cornelius, did love God and sought to follow Him. But the exceptions don't weaken Jesus' argument here.

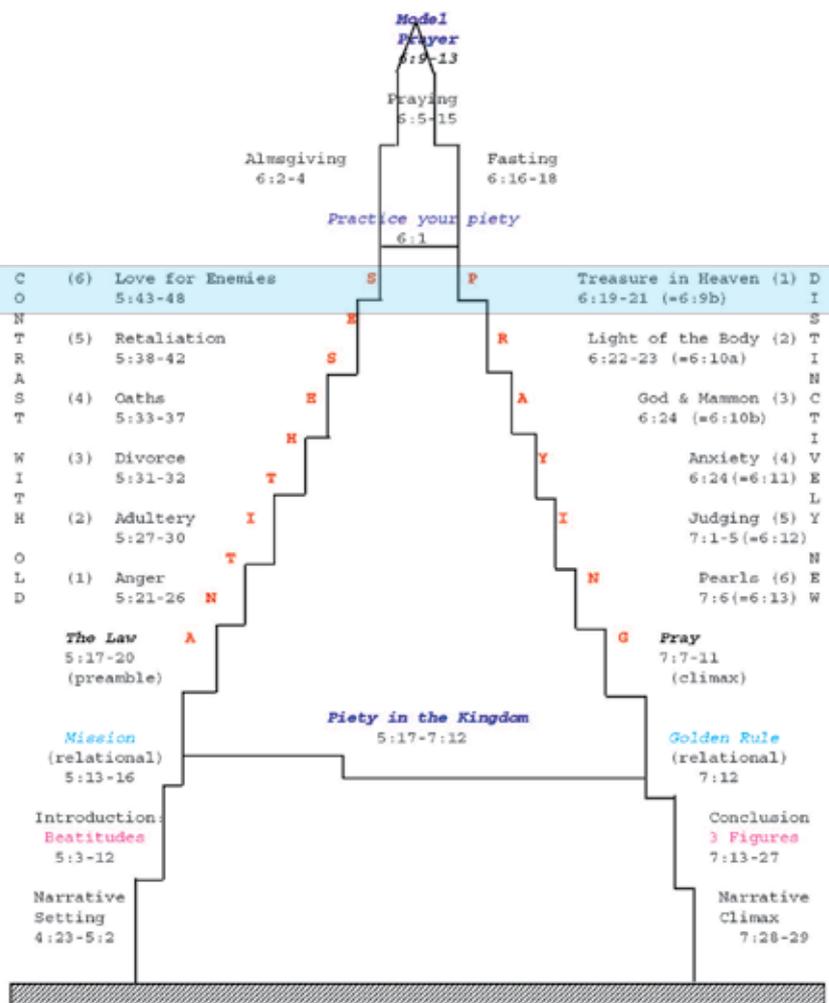
Literary Setting:

Mt. 5:43-47 stands as the final sixth segment of the series of premise/contrastive passages in vv. 21-48, as is charted in the above diagram. Additionally, it is the third pericope in the second set of threes structured in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' teaching.

Conceptually, it is closely linked to the preceding pericope on retaliation in vv. 38-42. This identification is especially noticeable in Luke's version of the Sermon where he collapses the two ideas into a single segment in Lk 6: 27-36.⁹ With the insistence on non-retaliation to one's enemies in vv. 38-42, Jesus shifts in vv. 43-47 to what we are to do and it is to love them, not strike back.

This theme of responding to opposition comes as a climax to the series of six passages in vv. 21-47. In this, it matches the climatic role of the eighth beatitude in 5:10-12 dealing with the identical theme of persecution.¹⁰

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

⁹Luke 6:27-36 (NRSV): 27 **“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29** If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. **32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34** If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. **35 But love your enemies, do good,** and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and **you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”**

¹⁰Matt. 5:10-12 (NRSV): “10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were

brothers, #s 60-61. Jesus casts these as four pointed rhetorical questions in order to heighten emphasis on the point being stressed. To His initial audience these questions were quite blunt and provocation because they challenged long established prejudices among the Jewish people.

Exegesis of the Text:

Clear understanding of the text depends on grasping the nature of the interaction of the premise / contrastive declarations, and then seeing how the expansion elements throw additional light on the nature of Jesus' response to the Old Testament concepts. With this clearly in view, one can then see the application possibilities of the text that naturally grow out of the scripture, and are not forced down on to the text artificially with false meaning.

Premise: "You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη, Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου καὶ μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου).

The introductory formula is exactly the same as in pericopes 2 (v. 27) and 5 (v. 38). Unlike the third pericope in the first set which continues the pattern of reduced formulas,¹² this one as the sixth segment retains the same wording as the fifth one. The reason for this variation of pattern is not clear.

The premise reference is twofold. In **the first instance**, "You shall love your neighbor" is clearly an abbreviated quote of Leviticus 19:18, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."¹³ This Old Testament principle is widely quoted throughout the New Testament.¹⁴ The Old Testament text sets this forth as apodeictic law, that is, a command without specified penalty for violation. The shortened citation of the text in Matthew helps facilitate a more exact parallel to the second declaration that follows.

The importance of this principle of loving one's neighbor is underscored by Jesus in Matt. 22:39 as the second foundation for the entire Law of Moses. Jesus has no argument with the principle; instead, he affirms it as having ongoing validity for disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In traditional Jewish interpretation the key issue was the definition of 'neighbor,' as Jesus' interaction with the Jewish lawyer in Luke 10:25-37 with the Parable of the Good Samaritan reflects. For the vast majority of Jewish people in Jesus' day, neighbor meant only fellow Jew. Conversely then, enemy meant non-Jew. The inner / outer boundary was solely determined by race. Jesus' parable of the Samaritan helping a Jewish victim of robbery radically redefined the concept of neighbor away from race to that of anyone needing help. Need, not distance or any ethnic considerations, defines who one's neighbor is.

But in quoting this Old Testament principle here, Jesus is then responding to traditional Jewish interpretation of the concept.

The second premise declaration, "You shall... hate your enemy", is not a quote of any Old Testament text as is true of the first one. Rather, it is a summation of several Old Testament texts as they had come to be understood in Jesus' day.¹⁵ With the definition of neighbor as Jew and of enemy as non-Jew, the Jewish people of Jesus' day found it quite easy to justify hating one's enemies since they mostly were the Romans who ruled their land. From the Essenes,¹⁶ Pharisees, and others came the message that God hated these foreigners, and that His people should also hate them. Such thinking provided grounds for various kinds of violent reactions to the Romans in the desire to drive them out of the Promised Land.

Contrastive: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on

¹²"You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones" (Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις,) in v. 21 and 33 [adds 'again' (Πάλιν) signaling the start of a second set]; "you have heard that it was said" (Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη,) in vv. 27, 33, and 38; "it was said" (Ἐρρέθη δέ) in v. 31.

¹³Also see Matthew 22:39, where this text is quote more completely: "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (NRSV).

¹⁴Cf. Mt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8.

¹⁵The latter, though not taught in the OT, is an inference that was commonly drawn, for example, from such passages as Pss 139:21-22; 26:5; or Deut 7:2; 30:7. On the basis of such passages, the Qumranites explicitly taught hatred of those regarded as enemies (1QS 1:4, 10-11; 9:21-26). Clearly, neither Jesus' listeners nor Matthew's readers would have been surprised by the added words, since the traditional interpretation had become regularly associated with the text. The "neighbor" meant fellow Jew; the "enemy" meant Gentile." [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 132]

¹⁶1QS 1.2-7. "To seek God with all the heart and all the soul, to do what is good and right before him according to the command which he gave through Moses and through all his servants the prophets, and to love all that he has chose and to hate all that he has rejected; to keep away from all evil and to hold fast to all good deeds; to practice truth and righteousness and justice on the earth; and to follow no more the way of the stubbornness of a guilty heart and of lustful eyes, to do every evil."

the righteous and on the unrighteous“ (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν καὶ προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς, ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, ὅτι τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους.).

Down through the centuries of Christian interpretation, the claim has often been made that this declaration of Jesus is exclusively Christian in its orientation. But such is not the case.¹⁷ Jesus, however, made no such claim to uniqueness. Whether He is the only one to advocate this principle or not is completely unimportant and irrelevant. It is the principle and how Jesus understood it that is crucial for believers to grasp and follow.

Unquestionably, Jesus' response is a play on the wording of the premise declarations. In the premise, love friends / hate enemies stood as in antithetical parallelism to one another. In Jesus' response, love now takes the second direct object 'enemies,' thus radically shifting the thrust. Disciples are to love their enemies, as well as their friends.¹⁸

Luke 6:27-28 reflects another rendering of these words of Jesus by Luke.

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

Other New Testament writers reflect this understanding of Jesus as well:

Rom. 12:14. “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

1 Pet. 3:13-16. “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting

¹⁷“The commandment to love one's enemy is one of the central Christian texts. Not only is it quoted frequently in early Christian papyrus¹⁴ — and that in almost all Christian areas¹⁵ — but also since the Apologists it is regarded as *the* Christian *proprium* and *novum*¹⁶ about which the Gentiles marvel.¹⁷ For the Christian missionary preaching,¹⁸ the Apologists, and the early Latin fathers, it was decisive in portraying Christianity as a religion of the deed; loving one's enemy was not only taught, it was also practiced.¹⁹ The central position of the love of one's enemy in the early church reflects the intention of the Sayings Source and especially of Matthew, who has given it a favored position in his last, conclusive antithesis. Thus he presents the love commandment as the middle of the Christians' “better” righteousness, which he summarizes in v. 48 with “perfect.”

When the church fathers claimed that Jesus' command to love one's enemy is a *novum*, they were only partly right. There are similar statements in many different places: in Judaism, in the Greek (esp. Stoic) area, in India, in Buddhism, in Taoism.²⁰ The most important biblical examples are Exod 23:4–5 (help for the enemy's ox or donkey); 1 Samuel 24 (David and Saul in the cave of En-gedi); Prov 24:17–18 (do not rejoice when your enemy falls); 25:21–22 (give your enemy bread to eat and water to drink). Early Jewish examples speak of individual concrete ways of behaving toward one's enemy, for example, of generosity toward people who think differently (*Ep. Arist.* 227) or of peaceableness and forgiveness toward enemies (*T. Gad* 6.3–7; cf. *T. Benj.* 4.2–3).²¹ The catchword of the “love” of enemies is missing. Jews themselves regard this difference²² as significant. The Jewish texts guard against extravagant statements and demand what is realistically possible.

There are also basic statements similar to those of Jesus in Greek philosophy, especially in the Platonic and Stoic traditions. The fundamental device is that of the unconditional love of human beings,²³ which includes being congenial to those who are not likable and to those who are evil or hostile. Basic here is that every person shares in the same divine origin so that the universal love of human beings is in harmony with nature. The wise man resides in himself and cannot be harmed by external hostility.²⁴ Hellenistic parallels can also speak in this context of imitating God.²⁵ Finally, for the Stoic, God's indiscriminate goodness is an expression of amazement over the harmony of the cosmos—a harmony that human beings do not make but that they experience as grace—a harmony in which they share through the love of all people. In an antithesis similar to the Matthean antithesis, Sophocles' Antigone says: “I cannot share in hatred but in love.”²⁶ [Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 1-7 : A Commentary*, Rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 283.]

¹⁸Modern non-Christian attitudes reflect the inability of nature man to grasp the significance of Jesus' words here. “Heinrich Heine states: “If the dear God really wants to make me happy, he will let me experience the joy of seeing six or seven of my enemies hang. With a heart filled with emotion I will forgive them every injury before they die.... Yes, one must forgive his enemies, but not before they are hanged.”⁸² For Friedrich Nietzsche loving enemies is weakness and dishonesty: “To be *unable* to avenge oneself is called to be *unwilling* to avenge oneself.... Also there's some talk of loving one's enemy — accompanied by much sweat.”⁸³ For Sigmund Freud the command to love enemies is a successful but happiness-negating attempt on the part of the cultural superego to transform one's aggressive needs into feelings of guilt and thus to combat them.⁸⁴ Measured by the standard of human nature the command to love one's enemies is part of “I believe, because it is absurd” (*credo quia absurdum*). In Christian history one can see how problematic it is. Loving one's neighbor, of which love of enemies is an extreme example, was always able to be realized only in manageable communities. The price one pays for it is heightened aggression toward the outside world. “When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence.”⁸⁵ [Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew 1-7 : A Commentary*, Rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 283.]

for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil."

Clearly the early disciples understand the impact of Jesus' command to love as something more concrete than merely a positive attitude toward one's enemies. With the second strophe of Jesus' response, "pray for those who persecute you," we see love moving into concrete action.

Who is the enemy disciples are to love? In the second line this person is defined as a persecutor of disciples. Clearly Jesus has shifted enemy away from the traditional national definition to a personal definition and to one actively opposing the gospel message. Peter's insight in 1 Peter 3:13-17 makes this even clearer in his understanding of loving one's enemies.

Love for enemies leads to concrete positive action in their behalf. Herein is the distinctly Christian viewpoint, and the critically important Christian principle.

Expansion 1: "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (ἐὰν γὰρ ἀγαπήσητε τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας ὑμᾶς, τίνα μισθὸν ἔχετε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ τελῶναι τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν;).

The essential point of the two illustrations is that nothing distinctively Christian or valuable before God is achieved by doing good for good. No religious commitment is needed for such. The people considered most pagan in the ancient world were completely capable of doing good for good. The presence and empowerment of God was quite unnecessary for such.

Jesus first addresses loving in parallel to the first strophe of His response. The tax collectors here were the Jewish individuals who contracted with the Roman authorities to collect taxes from the Jews in behalf of the Romans. As such they were considered traitors to Judaism and thus were despised greatly by the vast majority of Jews in Palestine. Thus Jesus' comparison of their exclusive loving of neighbors only had to have been highly insulting to them, and in particular to the religious leaders who may have been present on the occasion of the Sermon. The Jewish peasants who made up the majority of the crowd, on the other hand, who have largely welcomed these words, since they were often also the butt of the scorn of these religious leaders. Matthew's Jewish Christian readers would have seen these words of Jesus as confirmation of the distinctive path for disciples of Jesus to take in contrast to that of their non-Christian Jewish neighbors.

Expansion 2: "And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (καὶ ἐὰν ἀσπάσησθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν μόνον, τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ ἔθνηκοὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν;).

This second expansion element accomplishes two points. First, 'greeting' involved an action that included physical contact since ancient Jewish greetings were not only verbal but included a kiss on the cheek of the other person.¹⁹ The careful Jew would have been extremely cautious about whom he greeted because of the potential religious 'contamination' from physical contact with an unclean person. The idea of a Jew greeting a Gentile this way would have been unthinkable. Romans had little interest in greeting Jews in the customary manner because the Romans considered the Jews to be a filthy, stinking people since the Jews seldom took baths while the Romans bathed virtually every day.

Against this backdrop comparison to the Jews' tradition of greeting one another to that of a pagan Gentile had stinging tones. The Jewish practice of greeting had no more value before God than did that of the pagans! What a condemnation Jesus issued.

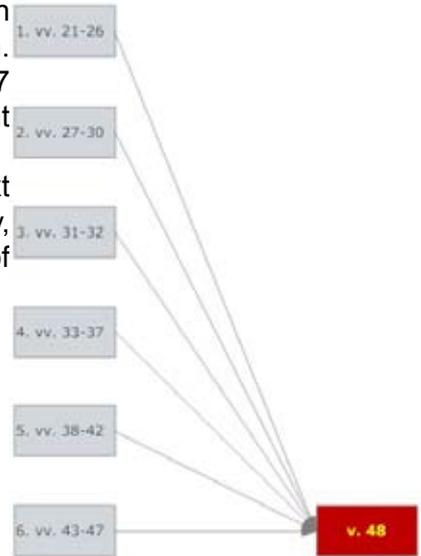
Role of verse 48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" ("Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν;).

The relationship of this final declaration to the preceding material is debated among biblical scholars. The inferential conjunction, 'there,' (οὖν) formally links the statement backwards as a implication and

¹⁹“The ethical problem is not that the greeting is done because one expects to be greeted in return, although the ancients regarded failure to return greetings as a terrible insult and threat.⁹⁶³ Rather, greeting only one's own people merely conforms to convention.⁹⁶⁴ It lacks the element of the “extraordinary”⁹⁶⁵ that would qualify it as ethically superior and that would conform to the greater righteousness of SM/Matt 5:20*.⁹⁶⁶ The failure to greet outsiders was in itself an expression of contempt. In the social life of antiquity, and especially in Judaism,⁹⁶⁷ the conventions of greeting played an important part, as they do today. The position here advocated by the SM⁹⁶⁸ is completely within Judaism and its ethics as summed up in *Abot* 4.20: “R. Mattithiah ben Harash said: Be first in greeting every man; and be a tail to lions and not a head to foxes.”⁹⁶⁹ [Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 294.]

/ or application of what was said previously. The fact of a connection is unquestionable. But less clear is the literary role of this connection. Does it just link back to vv. 43-47? Or, does it reach back to vv. 21-47 as a summarizing implication of all six pericopes? Most New Testament commentators are rightly convinced of the latter, more than the former.

For this reason, this statement will be treated separately in the next study where we will see how this works when so understood. Additionally, it will provide a review overlook at the past seven studies in this section of the Sermon.



2. What does the text mean to us today?

1) How much do you deliberately reach out to people you don't particularly like?

2) How do you define 'friend,' 'neighbor,' and 'enemy'? Do your definitions match those of Jesus in this text?

Friend:

Neighbor:

Enemy:

3) What concrete actions are possible in today's world to your personal 'enemies'?