

# **“Bless Those Who Curse You”**

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Internet Sources)

## Introduction:

### A. Matt. 5:43-48

1. The only realistic hope our enemies may have is in our reflection of the love of God for our enemies
2. The only hope we have for properly reflecting the love of God through our lives is to be fully re-created in Christ, because loving one's enemies is not natural for the unredeemed human

### B. Understanding the text

1. “This may be one of the most important verses in the New Testament; the ideas expressed in this verse are considered the Christian distinction and innovation. Love thy enemies is what separates Christianity from all earlier religions” (Ulrich Luz)
2. There are a number of historical precedents: the Babylonian Counsels of Wisdom, the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope. In Greek and Roman philosophy, it was addressed by writers such as Cicero, Seneca, and the Cynics.
3. Old Testament - Lev. 19:18; Deut. 23:6; Prov. 25:21-22
4. But before Jesus, all others advocated loving enemies when it is to one's own advantage
5. The meaning of the word love is more restricted in Greek than in English. Greek has four different words translated as love: love for a family member, storge; sexual love, eros; and deep affection, philia, are not used in this verse. Jesus uses agapao, which translates as ongoing benevolence.
6. Enemies is a broad term that applies to all manner of foes and adversaries. In this context, persecutors are specifically mentioned.

### C. Difficult text

1. Even some of the best Bible students have some trouble understanding what Jesus requires in this passage. We are in a world where people tend to live only for themselves.
2. Having to love and forgive our enemies seems counter to our own sense of fairness and reason.
3. According to the tradition of the Pharisees, one could hate one's enemies. The Jews were intent on practicing this tradition. They disdained the Samaritans to the north. They despised the Gentiles around them. Roman historians charged the Jews with the hatred of the whole human race.
4. Luke 6:27-28; Ex. 23:5; Acts 7:60; Eph. 4:32

### D. What it means to love our enemies in four questions:

1. Who are our enemies?
2. What is loving our enemies?
3. How and when do we love our enemies?
4. Why should we love our enemies?

## **I. WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES?**

### **A. Who they are not:**

1. People who have a different opinion than we hold.
2. People who are of a different ethnicity.
3. People from other countries.
4. People who are different, quirky, or eccentric in some way.
5. The Christian ought never presume anyone to be his enemy.

### **B. Those who by their choices and behaviors make themselves our enemies.**

1. Foreign aggressor nations we are fighting.
2. Those who hold immoral philosophical and promote evil political policies
3. People who despise Christ and oppose Christianity.

### **C. A better distinction is made with the question, "Who is God's enemy?"**

1. Those who are willfully carnal minded - Rom. 8:7
2. Those who purposefully practice friendship with the world - James 4:4.
3. Those who rebel and rail against God - Heb. 10:29
4. While there may be those who become our enemies by their choices and behaviors, we do not desire them to be our enemies.
5. In loving our enemies, we love those who by their choices and behaviors make themselves our enemies.

## **II. WHAT IS LOVING OUR ENEMIES?**

### **A. What it is not:**

1. It doesn't mean that we have strong feelings of affection for them.
2. It doesn't mean that we agree with them or approve their behavior.
3. It doesn't mean that we capitulate to everything they want of us.

### **B. It is in imitation of the character of God - Matt. 5:45, 48; Rom. 5:8-10**

1. God is love, even for His enemies - 1John 4:8, 16; John 3:16

### **C. It is what defines a Christian**

1. It's significant that many other world religions seek to destroy enemies.
2. Christians always seek the wellbeing of their enemies.
  - a. They desire to save their souls.
  - b. Matt. 10:28, 16:26
3. Abraham Lincoln said: "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" Christians seek to destroy their enemies by making them brothers.

## **III. HOW AND WHEN DO WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES?**

### **A. How can I love someone who hates me and is trying to destroy me?**

1. By blessing, doing good, and praying for them - Matt. 5:44
2. By refusing to return evil or violence for their treatment of you; by going the extra mile for them - Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:19
  - a. "What if they don't appreciate it, or they take further advantage?"
  - b. That's on them; you have satisfied the Lord and transformed yourself into His image.
3. By attending to his needs - Rom. 12:20
4. By overcoming evil with good; teaching them the gospel - Rom. 12:21

- a. David's attitude toward Saul while Saul was trying to kill David
  - b. Ananias and Barnabas toward Saul of Tarsus
  - c. Early Christians toward the Roman soldiers; Jesus Himself
- B. When do we love our enemies?
- 1. Any opportunity we have to show love to them.
  - 2. When we don't want to love them.

#### **IV. WHY SHOULD WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES?**

- A. God loves them - John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-10
- B. They need the gospel - Rom. 1:16; John 14:6; Acts 16:25-28
- C. To be more like God - Matt. 5:45
  - 1. It may be that no one else truly loves them.
  - 2. Sometimes they have become our enemies simply because they don't know how to be our friends.
- D. Every soul is worth loving. God knows this.

#### Conclusion:

“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 Faith in Community)