

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,....

When I was going to Bible College, they taught us, *"Always start your sermon with a really powerful story, or an illustration of some kind – Something that's a hook that captures the attention of the listener...."*

You don't need a story today, do you? Hasn't Jesus already got your attention? Isn't that confronting enough???

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,....

Now, let's get one thing clear from the start – **God never said** "hate your enemy". God **did** say, "Love your neighbour".... But He **did not** say, "Hate your enemy" – That was something that man tacked on....

One of the very real dangers, is for us humans, to try to use **our own** logic, to take a command of God, and to dumb it down until it suits us. God said, "Love your neighbour". And, for most of us, that sounds do-able.... – but only if our neighbour is someone that we like. So, human logic, wanting to limit the command, extrapolated "Love your neighbour... Oh, the inverse of that must be true as well – hate your enemy." Yep – I can do that....

But Jesus said, "No. When God said "Love your neighbour, that doesn't mean you can hate your enemy.... – Love them too. And even **pray** for those who persecute you."

Why?

45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (this is what God is like) **He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

What Jesus is saying, is "Be like God." God is good to **all** people. God poured out His love – not just on the good people – but on all people.... – even on His enemies...

When World War I broke out, the War Ministry in London dispatched a coded message to one of the British outposts in an inaccessible area of Africa. The message read:

"War declared. Arrest all enemy aliens in your district."

The War Ministry later received this reply: "Have arrested ten Germans, six Belgians, four Frenchman, two Italians, three Austrians, and an American. Please advise immediately who we are at war with."

Who's the enemy?

- Who here, feels they are a child of God?ⁱⁱ
- Who here, believes they are loved by God?ⁱⁱⁱ
- Who here, knows that they are a friend of God?^{iv}

What about this one?

Who here feels they are an **enemy** of God? Does God even **have** enemies?...

James 4:⁴ **You adulterous people**, (and he's talking to a church at this stage – he's talking to Christians who'd been drawn into worldliness, and he says) **You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.** Wooh, that's strong language. Even Christians, when we are drawn into worldliness – when we choose to be a friend of the world, we become enemies of God. (Does that open your eyes, to how important it is for Christians – for a church – not to be drawn into worldliness?.....) We become enemies of God, but **thank** God we don't have to stay enemies of God – the answer is “more grace”.

I used to have a jumper from the show “Home improvements” (Tim The Toolman) And it said, “The answer is ‘More power’. I don't care what the question is.”

Well, when it comes to getting right with God, the answer is always “More Grace”. It doesn't matter what the question is... I can't make myself right with God, but from God, the answer is “more grace”.

James 4 continues: ⁶ **But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** ⁷ **Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** ⁸ **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.** ⁹ **Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.** ¹⁰ **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

So for a Christian, we **can** become enemies of God **again**, when we become worldly... And if you feel you've become an enemy of God in that way, your part, is to humble yourself before God – stop being double-minded – you're either of God or of-the-world. Yield to God, and His grace is sufficient...

But “Who's the enemy?”

- Who are the enemies of God????^v

Which of these two statements is true?

- Those who are lost in sin and reject Jesus Christ, are enemies of God.
- God loves all people

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They're both true. Those who reject God, are enemies of God. All sinners are enemies of God.

- All liars are enemies of God.
- All adulterers are enemies of God.
- All gossips are enemies of God.
- All who are filled with pride, are enemies of God.
- All homosexuals are enemies of God
- All Muslims are enemies of God
- All terrorists, are enemies of God
- All who dishonour their parents, are enemies of God.
- All who covet their neighbours possessions, are enemies of God
- All rapists, and murderers, psychopaths, swindlers and paedophiles, are enemies of God

But which of these people, does God **not** love?

None of them – God loves every single one – even you. While you were still a sinner, God loved you. You were an enemy of God, but God **loves** His enemies...

Paul explains it in Romans 5:⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

You will never understand “loving your enemy” – you’ll never feel a reason to “love your enemy”, until you accept the fact, that, at one time, **you** were an enemy to God, and **while** you were still an enemy to God – it was at that time, that God loved you enough, to send His one and only Son, to die on the cross for you...

That is love. That's what it means to love like God loved...

And because God loves **us** like that, we should be like our Heavenly Father, and love those who hate us.

God's way, isn't just to love the people we like. God's way isn't just to love the people who like us... It's to love the people we don't like.

It's to love those who have got it in for us. It's to love those who lie to us and cheat us, and who delight in devising ways to harm us....

You see, as Christians, we are called, to a higher **level** of love. Somebody once said,

To repay evil for good is devil-like.

To repay evil for evil is man-like.

To repay good for evil is God-like.

It's a natural expression of the flesh, to love those who love you.
But to love those who hate you, - well, that's God-like.
And to love those who hate God – that's God-like too.

God loves all people – that's why Jesus died for them.
That doesn't mean that all people are going to get to heaven. If when you die, or if Jesus returns first, when He comes, if you are still an enemy of God, you will be subject to judgment and go to hell.

But the good news is, God loves all people.
The Good News, is that God doesn't want you to be His enemy. God wants you to be His friend. And that's why Jesus Christ, while we were enemies, showed His love for us, by dying on the cross.

Now, if God loves all people, how should we love them?
Liars, adulterers, gossips, those filled with pride, homosexuals, Muslims, terrorists, those who dishonour their parents, those who covet, rapists, murderers, psychopaths, swindlers, paedophiles..... How do we love these?

Some of these people will repulse you – make you feel sick to the pit of your stomach.

How much more do you think a holy God is sickened, when he sees the very acts in progress???......

God loves all people enough, to want to see them **saved** from their sin.

And that, is how we are to love.

The love of God doesn't say "By the way, that thing we used to call 'sin', well, we don't think it's sin any more."

The love of God doesn't say "God loves all people, therefore everyone's going to get to heaven."

Nor does the love of God say, "All the good people will be saved, and everybody else goes to hell."

The love of God is to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. And the Good News of Jesus Christ, is that "Even though you are an enemy, in Jesus Christ, as you turn away from your sins that you once used to delight in, you become a child and a friend of God."

Love is an action. To love all people, means that you will demonstrate that love to them, in tangible ways.

And one of those tangible ways, is to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them as well.

Questions???????

ⁱ 7163 Tan, P. L. 1996. *Encyclopaedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Bible Communications, Inc.: Garland, TX

Sentence: Love your enemies because God loved you when you were an enemy.

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48

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ii 1John 3:1

iii Romans 5:8

iv John 15:15

v Romans 5:¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.