

Matthew 5:43-48  
 Sermon on the Mount  
 MT1019

July 25, 2010 am  
 Kingdom Ethics

## “LOVING YOUR ENEMIES”

**INTRODUCTION:** In 1987, singer and songwriter **Billy Joel**, made an historic trip to Russia...

1. He was one of the first American rock stars to perform in the Soviet Union since the Berlin Wall went up in August of 1961...
  - a. Two cities in the Soviet Union; six performances...
  - b. Three in Moscow and three in Leningrad
  - c. Joel took his full touring band, his wife, **Christie Brinkley**, and their daughter, **Alexa Ray Joel**, (age two), with him.
  - d. A Russian circus clown named **Viktor** attended all six concerts.
  - e. After one of the Leningrad concerts, Viktor asked to meet Joel and his family.
  - f. The result of that meeting resulted in the writing of one of Joel’s greatest songs: *Leningrad*.
  - g. All this took place in 1987, two years before the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War.
2. In the song, *Leningrad*, Billy Joel contrasts his life, his boyhood in Levittown, NY, and his American worldview to that of Viktor, the Russian clown, five years his senior...

*Viktor was born in the spring of '44  
 And never saw his father anymore  
 A child of sacrifice, a child of war  
 Another son who never had a father after Leningrad*

*Went off to school and learned to serve the state  
 Followed the rules and drank his vodka straight  
 The only way to live was drown the hate  
 A Russian life was very sad  
 And such was life in Leningrad*

*I was born in '49  
 A cold war kid in McCarthy time  
 Stop 'em at the 38th Parallel  
 Blast those yellow reds to hell  
 And cold war kids were hard to kill  
 Under their desk in an air raid drill  
 Haven't they heard we won the war  
 What do they keep on fighting for?*

*Viktor was sent to some Red Army town*

*Served out his time, became a circus clown  
The greatest happiness he'd ever found  
Was making Russian children glad  
And children lived in Leningrad*

*But children lived in Levittown  
And hid in the shelters underground  
Until the Soviets turned their ships around  
And tore the Cuban missiles down  
And in that bright October sun  
We knew our childhood days were done  
And I watched my friends go off to war  
What do they keep on fighting for?*

*And so my child, when I came to this place  
To meet him eye to eye and face to face  
He made my daughter laugh, then we embraced  
We never knew what friends we had  
Until we came to Leningrad*

3. Billy Joel later said that, although the tour cost him nearly \$1 million of his own money, the goodwill and cross-cultural experience, and the lesson for his daughter, Alexa, were well worth it.
4. Joel came to realize that the people he had grown up, both fearing and hating, in the end had a human face and human experience as he himself had.
5. Dealing properly with our enemies remains one of the most common and most uncomfortable experiences that all men and women share.
6. Jesus addresses that very issue in **Matthew 5:43-48**, in His *Sermon on the Mount*...
  - a. (Matthew 5:43-48)
  - b. A very *practical* issue for the Jewish people and those in Christ's audience that day.
7. *Judea* was a Roman province, and the Romans ruled the Jews with an iron fist and a heavy boot.
  - a. *Heavy taxes on Judea*
  - b. *Harsh treatment of Jews*
  - c. *Haughty disregard for Judaism*
  - d. Jews hated Romans and the feeling was reciprocal.
8. As Jesus sets forth the selected samplings of His new **Kingdom ethics**, He moves (in my opinion) from the challenging, to the difficult, to the nearly impossible:
  - a. **Challenging:** *dealing with anger and with lust* (attitudes of the heart)
  - b. **Difficult:** *faithfulness in marriage and integrity is all you say and do* (actions that shape life)
  - c. **Nearly impossible:** *resisting the urge to defend ones' rights and loving ones' enemies* (two things contrary to the root of human nature)

- d. The **climax** of the Kingdom's dramatic demands is extreme: *"See people as God does."*

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)*

9. Let's examine what God says and what Billy Joel tried to experience...

## I. THE RABBI'S FALSE TEACHING ABOUT ENEMIES (5:43)

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (Matthew 5:43)*

### A. What Moses actually wrote

1. *You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 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. (Leviticus 19:17-18)*
2. **Please notice** the words Moses uses in these two verses: *"your brother...your neighbor...the sons of your own people..."*
3. Moses said: "You shall love, be reasonable with, never hate in your heart, or bear a grudge against a fellow Jew." This **is** what Moses wrote. Charity begins at home.
4. Moses said **nothing** about "strangers," foreigners, Gentiles or people like the Romans...or did he?
5. One of the easiest ways to distort Scripture is to lift verses out of their *context* in order to divorce them from things you don't want to face. (*favorite tactic*)
6. **Read farther** into the text of Leviticus 19...
  - a. *"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34)*
  - b. *There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you. (Exodus 12:49)*  
  
*You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. (Exodus 22:21-24)*

*You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)*

- c. *You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. (Deuteronomy 24:17-18)*

7. So...Moses actually said two things: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself...and you shall love the alien among you as you love yourself."* (both in Leviticus 19)

## B. What the Rabbis taught

1. *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* (Matthew 5:43)

- a. Love your neighbor (Jews)  
b. Hate your enemies (Gentiles)

2. How did this rabbinical tradition arrive at the opposite of what Moses wrote? *A very common and popular misinterpretation of Scripture...*

- a. **Law of opposites:** The law commands the opposite of what it states  
b. Hence: to *love neighbor* must also imply to *hate aliens* (enemies)  
c. **A common but destructive tendency among men**

3. **Illustrations:** We do this ourselves in many areas of our theology, practice and ethics...

- a. **Justification:** If a person is not justified by works, then good works are not essential to the Christian life. Correction: read the whole text...

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

- b. **Baptism:** Since people are commanded to repent and believe in order to be baptized, then we ought not to baptize those who can't repent and believe. (children) read the whole text...

*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41)*

- c. **Gospel:** The Gospel is all about salvation and not about doctrine, law and social righteousness. (social Gospel?) Read the whole text...

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1 Tim. 2:1-5)*

4. These Rabbis said, “*Since Moses said ‘Love your neighbor’ then the obvious truth is we should hate our non-neighbors – our enemies.*”
  - a. They should have read all of Leviticus 19...
  - b. *You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 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. (Leviticus 19:17-18)*  
  
*When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34)*
  - c. **In fact...they had done so! They just didn’t like the last part of the chapter.**
  - d. They *deliberately* perverted Moses’ law!
  - e. “Love *only* your neighbors but not your enemies.”
5. **John R. W. Stott:** *The Message of The Sermon on the Mount (p. 115)*

*We have already seen how blatant a perversion of the law is the instruction, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’ because of what it omits from the commandment and adds to it. It deliberately narrows both the standard of love (leaving out the crucial words ‘as yourself’, which pitch the standard very high) and its objects (qualifying the category of ‘neighbour’ by specifically excluding enemies from it and adding the command to hate them instead). I call the perversion ‘blatant’ because it is totally lacking in justification and yet the rabbis would have defended it as a legitimate interpretation. It was easy enough to twist it to their own convenience. ‘My neighbour’, they argued, ‘is one of my own people, a fellow Jew, my own kith and kin, who belongs to my race and my religion. The law says nothing about strangers or enemies. So, since the command is to love only my neighbor, it must be taken as a permission, even an injunction, to hate my enemy. For he is not my neighbor that I should love him.’ The reasoning is rational enough to convince those who wanted to be convinced, and to confirm them in their own racial prejudice.*

6. They also appealed to the **Imprecatory Psalms** that David wrote as King of Israel...

*The Lord tests the righteous,  
but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. (Psalm 11:5)*

*Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?*

*I hate them with complete hatred;  
I count them my enemies. (Psalm 139:21-22)*

7. But Jesus will have none of this Scripture-twisting...

## II. CHRIST'S TRUE TEACHING ABOUT ENEMIES (5:44-48)

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:44-48)*

### A. Three things to reconsider

1. Jesus raises **three issues** that must be reconsidered and three concepts that must be *redefined*...

2. **First:** *Who is my neighbor?*

a. The Jews wrestled with this question a great deal because of Moses' teaching.

b. *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 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." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."*

*But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 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. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 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. 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.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)*

a. According to Jesus, a "neighbor" is anyone near to us who is in need: our fellow man.

- b. In this parable of the *Good Samaritan*, Jesus uses the Samaritan and the Jews as a picture of two “neighbors” in the human race.
- c. Classic enemies who live side by side – hence, they are “neighbors”
- d. **For us**, our “neighbors” would include: our fellow church members, our next door neighbors in our neighborhood, the people of Matthews, a Muslim in our circle of life, a member of a race historically at odds with us, that person of the opposite political party who works in our office, a person who’s dying of AIDS, hostile to the church, but living across the street.
- e. “*Neighbor*” is **not** the one who is like us, or who likes us, or whom we like. The neighbor is the one whom God places in your life so that you can do good to them – whether you like them or not!

### 3. **Second:** *Who is my enemy?*

- a. We cannot spiritualize away the reality of enemies in life.
- b. Jesus *assumes* enemies are (1) real, (2) unavoidable, and (3) genuinely hateful of us.
- c. We cannot say, “*We have no real enemies; they are really God’s enemies.*” This is romantically naïve.
- d. We must *face reality* with God’s truth and God’s grace:
  - i. **Muslims** historically hate Jesus and persecute Christians; not all Muslims but perhaps most of them.
  - ii. **Communists** are atheists who despise both our capitalistic way of life and any religion.
  - iii. **Jews** will never be favorable to Christianity and will suppress the Gospel when they are able.
  - iv. **Atheists** often seek for the silencing or the elimination of Christianity in the culture.
- e. **Please:** *You may disagree with my four examples, but the point I’m trying to make is this: It is naïve to think that only God has enemies. So do God’s people. Let’s not pretend!*
- f. St. Paul clearly acknowledges our enemies:
 

*As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. (Romans 11:28)*

*For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. (Phil. 3:18)*

*...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)*
- g. **If you stand for Christ, the Gospel, scriptural religion, freedom, Biblical capitalism or moral order, you will have enemies – people who hate you and what you stand for, and who will oppose you or even persecute you.**

- h. *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)*

- i. Incidentally: *The Imprecatory Psalms are written from two perspectives*
- i. *The reality of evil and evil men (enemies)*
  - ii. *David's perspective as king of Israel*
- j. David writes as the *Federal Head* of Old Testament Israel –
- iii. To oppose David (king) is to oppose God's people and God's Kingdom.
  - iv. Likewise, to oppose Jesus (King) is to oppose the Church and God's Kingdom.
- k. David's call for God to destroy his enemies, whom he hates because they hate God, is a call to destroy those who hate Jesus, hurt the church, and oppose God.
- l. **Dan Doriani** helps us put this in perspective to our daily lives (*The Sermon on the Mount; p. 100*)

*This is how we must understand the Psalms and prophecies that approve of God's judgment. Believers hate violence and wickedness. Some people give themselves over to such sins, so they are properly called “the violent” or “the wicked.” The Bible never commands us to hate individual enemies, but there is a place for righteous wrath toward God's settled enemies. On judgment day, we will rejoice at their downfall, for their end is inseparable from the victory of God and His saints. Thus, when we view the wicked as a class, from an eternal perspective, our love for them ceases. In daily life, however, we have no right to adopt the eternal perspective. We cannot classify people. The man standing before us may be wicked, but we do not know whether he will repent or not.*

4. **Third:** *Who are the sons of God?*

- a. *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. (Matthew 5:44-45)*
- b. The “son (child) of God” is not the member of a believing group: a Jew or a Christian
- c. Rather, the child of God is one who loves both neighbor and enemy as God does.
- d. **Leon Morris:** *Matthew: Pillar NTC; p. 131.*

*We will see that to be God's children means to love. Love and membership in God's family go together. Sons here are members of the heavenly family. There is a sense in which those members are infinitely diverse and another sense in that they are all characterized by dependence on and likeness to the Father.*

- e. Those spiritually *born again* will grow to reflect this Christ-like love for their enemies as well as their neighbors.

5. **Key Point:** For the sons of God, the neighbor and the enemy may well be the same person:
  - a. A Muslim next door to your house
  - b. An antagonistic unbeliever who's a sister-in-law
  - c. A boss, who's a delight to work for but a horror when it comes to spiritual things
  - d. An unconverted spouse
  - e. The child who has rebelled and walked away from parents, church and Christ
  - f. Your gay brother who lives in a sub-culture hostile to you and Jesus
  - g. *Sometimes, as the movie stated, we may well be "sleeping with the enemy."*
6. How do we handle this? Jesus gives us **five steps** to loving our enemies and leading them to God's love in Christ...

#### B. Five Steps to Take

1. *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:44-48)*
2. **First:** *"Love your enemies..." (as God does)*
  - a. How? God has great compassion on His enemies – the unconverted and sinful.
  - b. *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 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. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:6-11)*
  - c. Key truth/phrase: *"...while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son..." (5:10)*
  - d. Our love for enemies seeks one overarching goal: that they be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.
  - e. i.e., we work to share the Gospel with them so that they may be saved...as we once were!
  - f. *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:1-4)*

*As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. (Romans 11:28-32)*

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)*

- g. Once reconciled to God and conquered by Jesus, they will no longer be enemies but fellow children of God.

3. **Second:** “...and pray for those who persecute you...”

- a. Obviously, then, our first step to seeing our enemies converted into Sons of God is to pray for them...their salvation and blessing.
- b. *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Tim. 2:1-6)*

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)*

*Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)*

- c. Our tendency is to forget how many people prayed for our souls – perhaps for years – that we might be saved. How could we do less?
- d. **Example:** *In my own life, when I was an unconverted and wayward son, many people prayed for me: My mother (for years), Wiley, Pat and little Bradley Patterson; my dentist, Jim Reardon; his Bible Study; a group of Christians at International Harvester Co.; a group of women at Central Church, a young asst. pastor named Blake White; and a young girl in Mississippi praying for a godly husband – Jane Gray Virden...and others!*
- e. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** *“Through the medium of prayer, we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God.” (Stott, p. 119)*
- f. **John Stott** correctly states...(Sermon on the Mount; p. 119)

*It is impossible to pray for someone without loving him, and impossible to go on praying for him without discovery that our love for him grows and matures. We must not, therefore, wait before praying for an enemy until we feel some love for him in our heart. We must begin to pray for him before we are conscious of loving him, and we shall find our love break first into bud, then into blossom.*

4. **Third:** “...bless those who curse you...”

*But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (Luke 6:27-28)*

- a. Jesus says this not in Matthew, but in Luke...
- b. To “bless” them: to speak kindly to them and to ask God to be good to them
- c. Out of God’s blessings and grace may come a softened heart and an open mind to the Gospel.
- d. Blessing alleviates fear, the primary motive which makes enemies distrust and hate one another.
- e. **Illustration:** The Cold War came to an end when *Ronald Reagan* and *Mikhail Gorbachev* decided to stop “cursing” one another, began talking to one another, and decided to work for mutual blessing and no longer conquest.

f. **Jack F. Matlock, Jr.:** *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*; p. 319

*Face-to-face meetings between the Soviet and American leaders and their policy makers were essential to move the U.S. – Soviet dialogue in a constructive direction. Under these conditions, the overwhelming suspicion characteristic of the Cold War was gradually replaced by trust-not blind trust, but trust supported and reinforced by proof that promises were kept.*

- g. Reagan and Gorbachev decided to end the curse of nuclear threat and bless one another with peace!

5. **Fourth:** “...do good to those who hate you...”

- a. *But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (Luke 6:27-28)*

*...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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (Matthew 5:45-46)*

- b. Good deeds build bridges between old enemies.
- c. Even the unconverted often returns good with good.
- d. Someone has to start the process of grace in action!

6. **Fifth:** “...greet your enemies...”

- a. *And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Matthew 5:47)*

- b. “Greet” means to open up dialog, showing respect, acknowledging another’s presence, and recognizing your enemies’ worth as a person.
  - c. The refusal to greet someone is a deliberate act of contempt...back to Matthew 5:21 ff.
  - d. “Greetings!” is a distinctly Christian practice that we see in all Paul’s letters to the churches and his dealings with those who persecuted him.
  - e. **Observation:** *People in Mississippi greet others more than they do in North Carolina, Ohio, or New York. Why? Because the Old Southern and Christian virtue of respect still means something in the deep south. It’s a Christian virtue.*
7. Jesus says: *“Here’s the new paradigm for dealing with your enemies: a compassionate concern for their souls, prayer for their salvation, blessing them in earnest, doing good to them as you are able, and greeting them with respect and grace. These things pave the way for the Gospel to turn your enemies into the children of God and brothers in Christ.*

**CONCLUSION:** Can we do this? No, not on our own...

1. Look at the last verse in this paragraph:

- a. *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* (Matthew 5:48)
- b. *teleios:* complete, mature, of full age, manly, perfect
- c. Jesus is **not** asking for perfect love for your enemies, this is not possible for us...
- d. He is asking for *mature* love for all men: a product of the Spirit and His grace in us.
- e. **God’s grace at work in us to grow in love and to act with Christ’s perspective on relationships.**
- f. **Sinclair B. Ferguson:** *The Sermon on the Mount; p. 103.*

*Can we really love those who have been hostile to us? Not as long as we live by the principles of the kingdoms of this world, which at best encourage us to ignore our enemies, and at worst to retaliate against them. Only the Kingdom of God can provide sufficiently strong motives to help us love our enemies.*

2. Jesus lays it on the line: *You and I, as Christians who are forgiven, loved and filled with grace, should be different and live differently than all other men. We are to love and live on a higher plane – the Kingdom of God.*

- a. *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* (Matthew 5:46-48)
- b. Hatred, revenge, cursing and animosity are the infantile patterns of sinful, lost humanity.
- c. The mature way of the saint is to love your enemies with an eternal perspective in mind.
- d. **Grow in Christ, Be like the Father, Walk in the Spirit.**

3. **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:** *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*; p. 320.

*I end, then, with this searching question. It is the most profound question a man can ever face in this life and world. Is there anything special about you? I am not asking whether you are living a good, moral, upright life. I am not asking whether you say your prayers, or whether you go to church regularly. I am asking none of these things. If God is your Father, somewhere or another, in some form or other, the family likeness will be there, the traces of your Parentage, will inevitably appear. What is there special about you? God grant that as we examine ourselves we may discover something of the uniqueness and the separateness that not only divides us from others, but which proclaims that we are children of our Father which is in heaven.*

4. **Allow me to close by telling you a true story:** *A story about a boy named Jeffrey Allen and myself. (Childhood rebuff. Years of resentment. Ohio State University in 1970. An extended hand and the words: "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?")*