



Mid-Week

**Bible Study and Prayer
Wednesdays 6:45pm – 8pm**



led by: Pastor Josh Franklin, Good Hope Baptist Church (www.goodhopechurch.org and www.joshfranklin.org)

Love Without Limits

(Your Enemies Should Experience the Love of God)

Matthew 5:43-48 (NKJV) [with explanatory notes]

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor [Jews considered only fellow Jews to be their neighbors.] and hate your enemy.' [this is not taught in OT; probably what Pharisees taught. Jesus was not quoting from the Law, but the way the people interpreted the Law] ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies [personal enemies – someone who has hurt us, and whom we have to forgive], bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, [Gk. – keep on loving, blessing, doing good and praying (long-term commitment)]

⁴⁵ that you may be [may "prove-to-be"] sons of your Father 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. [God gives "common grace" to believers and unbelievers]

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only [if you are nice only to your friends, probably Jews], what do you do more than others? [you are no better than other people] Do not even the tax collectors do so? [even those who don't know God are nice to their friends.]

⁴⁸ Therefore [Bringing this section of the Sermon on the Mount to a concluding statement] you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

[Amp version: "...be perfect [growing into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity], as your heavenly Father is perfect."]

[Wuest - Therefore, as for you, you shall be those who are complete in your character, even as your Father in heaven is complete in His being.]

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (Amplified Version):

- 4 Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily.
- 5 It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong].
- 6 It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail.
- 7 Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening].
- 8 Love never fails [never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end]

Romans 13:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Mark 12:29-31 (NKJV) ²⁹ Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Explanatory comments from R. T. Kendall [Sermon on the Mount, pg. 159ff]

Perhaps you are like some who, almost cynically, say: "I've never seen a miracle. I hear people talking about the deaf hearing, the blind seeing. I have never seen that." I answer: Right under your nose is the potential of a genuine miracle. It shows the possibility of the supernatural: It is when you love your enemy. To do this matches any miracle in the Bible. [159]

Most scholars say "hate your enemy" is only quoting a distortion of Old Testament understanding, since there is no such word as "hate your enemy." There does appear to be a certain amount to be said that "encouraged people to hate their enemies right out of the Law." [Lloyd-Jones] For example, when the children of Israel were anticipating the Promised Land, they were told: "Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy" (Deut. 7:2). This certainly suggests they were encouraged to hate their Canaanite enemies. King David must have felt justified in saying: "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" (Psalm 139:21-22). He no doubt felt he was being loyal to the legislation concerning Israel's enemies: They were to be destroyed. [160]

Love is more than a feeling. Love is a choice. It is an act of your will. It is often said that you cannot help the way you feel. This is true. But you don't go by your feelings – you do what you know is right, and you do it with all your heart. The question follows: Is love repression (denying what you feel)? Repression is never a good thing to do. Repression – living in denial – is involuntarily playing games with your mind and you don't know you are doing it. We repress when we find something so painful that without realizing it we push the pain down into our subconscious. BUT WHEN WE PUSH IT DOWN INTO THE CELLAR, IT GOES UP INTO THE ATTIC. It will come out as irritability, high blood pressure, sleeplessness or a stomach ulcer. [162]

Some people think they have totally forgiven people because they deny to themselves what really happened. Those who have been raped, been abused in childhood, witnessed a murder or been in a tragic accident will sometimes live in denial. They sincerely believe they have forgiven, when in fact they deny to themselves what happened. They say, "What they did to me could not have been that bad" – and they live as though nothing happened. That is not total forgiveness. It is truly total forgiveness WHEN YOU FULLY REALIZE, ACCEPT AND CALCULATE WHAT PEOPLE DID – AND THEN YOU FORGIVE THEM. That is what we are required to do. Not to live in denial but fully know what they did – and still let them off the hook. That is what Jesus means by love. [162]

CAUTION: Don't go to your enemy and say, **"I have had a wonderful victory. I have got completely over what you did to me and I have totally forgiven you."** Please don't ever, ever do that. Why? They will look at you with annoyance and say, "What are you talking about? What have I done to you?" Nine out of ten people you ever have to forgive don't believe they have done anything wrong to you... The only time you ever say, **"I forgive you,"** is when you know he or she wants to hear that from you more than anything in the world. Or, you can say, "I do forgive you," when people ask you to do this. Otherwise, your forgiveness must be in your heart without their ever knowing your pain. But God knows.

EXAMPLE: Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison. Mandela was imprisoned, even tortured in Cape Town, South Africa, yet he came out of prison with no bitterness. He dazzled the world. People couldn't figure him out. "Why aren't you bitter?" they asked. He gave two reasons: First, he realized that bitterness was only hurting himself. Second, Mandela said that "if black people were in power, they would do the same thing that the white people did to us." **He gave President Bill Clinton this advice: "If you hate, you give your enemy your heart and your mind. Don't give the enemy those two things." [163]**

"Be perfect"? This is a difficult verse to understand. Some think Jesus is saying, "You will therefore be perfect" – meaning that we would be perfect if we practiced all He has said in this chapter. However, Matthew 5:44 is probably a command – not a promise – that we should exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees by exhibiting the spirit and not the letter of the Law.

That we become perfect – that is, trophies of grace, unfeigned examples of the kind of godliness that He knows is attainable. In a word: that we will be mature, which is the meaning of teleios here.

This verse has given rise to several "perfectionists" movements over the centuries, one of which is the modern Holiness Movement. It arose out of John Wesley's teaching of "Christian perfection," although many who claimed to follow him took this concept beyond anything Wesley himself probably intended. I do know that not a few did teach "sinless perfection." Some said they actually lived without sinning and would make that claim with a straight face. I knew many of these people very well, indeed. I can safely tell you: Sincere though they were, they did not achieve what they claimed, not even my own dad, the godliest person I ever knew. [Kendall, 175]

James said, **"We all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man" (3:2).** James's implication is clear: No one is perfect. We all sin. And he, the half brother of Jesus, indicates in his epistle how familiar he was with the Sermon on the Mount... (See also 1 John 1:8) Perhaps Paul summed it up best: **"Aim for perfection" (2 Corinthians 13:11).**

CAN BELIEVERS BE "PERFECT"? Though the word perfect (*teleioi*) means "complete" or mature in its general sense, Jesus used it here in the moral sense of goodness or compassion. He was not speaking of absolute "sinlessness" (an impossibility in this life, 1 John 1:8), since even the "blessed" hunger for righteousness (Matt. 5:6). **Rather, He spoke of the Father's indiscriminate generosity (sending sunshine and rain on all) as a model of goodness for believers to emulate. Their love is to extend even to their enemies. In this way they show themselves children of the Father. Jesus here strongly encourages His disciples to imitate the Father by a perfection of love that is extended to one's enemies.** The motivation was not to become children, since they already were children of the Father. [The Greatest Life, Cheney]

In other words, followers of Jesus should do more than what is common among nonbelievers in the way they show love. It is this "more" that is the distinctive quality of the Christian's love. Dr. Lloyd-Jones expresses it like this: *We can emphasize that by putting it like this. The Christian is the man who is above, and goes beyond, the natural man at his very best and highest... There are many people in the world who are not Christian but who are very moral and highly ethical, men whose word is their bond, and who are scrupulous and honest, just and upright. You never find them doing a shady thing to anybody; but they are not Christian, and they say so. They do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and may have rejected the whole of the New Testament teaching with scorn. But they are absolutely straightforward, honest and true... Now the Christian, by definition here, is a man who is capable of doing something that the best natural man cannot do. He goes beyond and does more than that; he exceeds. He is separate from all others, and not only from the worst among others, but from the very best and highest among them.* The question we must each ask is, is there a "more" in my love? Is there

something about my love that cannot be explained in natural terms? Is there something special and unique about my love to others that is not present in the life of the unbeliever?

C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*: *The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less... The difference between a Christian and worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or "likings" and the Christian has only "charity." The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he "likes" them; the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.*

EXTRA MATERIAL:

FROM KENT HUGHES, "SERMON ON THE MOUNT" - In a 1958 issue of *Christian Century*, Dr. Normal Pittenger published "A Critique of C. S. Lewis." Among his criticisms was the accusation that Lewis did not care much for the Sermon on the Mount. In Lewis's "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," he responded:

As to "caring for" the Sermon on the Mount, if "caring for" here means "liking" or enjoying, I suppose no one "cares for" it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge hammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure.

As we would expect from Lewis, it was a perfect comeback. But it is also an accurate statement of how the Sermon on the Mount affects any serious, believing reader. **The Beatitudes, carefully examined, descend upon us with eight successively humiliating blows. Perhaps they even make us question the genuineness of our faith. Next come the stunning metaphors of salt and light. Who can say he has fulfilled such a dynamic witness? And if that is not enough, then comes the statement, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (v. 20), followed by six stringent illustrations of what our righteousness should be like, each of them incredibly demanding, each impossible in our own strength. Almost every line of the Sermon, taken to heart, will flatten us! It seems impossible!**

The classic preacher Alexander Whyte almost lost his arm when he was a little boy. He would have been taken to the hospital to have it amputated if it were not for a neighbor lady who said she would nurse him back to health, and she did. As the arm was healing, Whyte went through intense pain. But the woman would say, "I like the pain. I like the pain..." because that meant he had feeling in his arm and it was healing. As a result, when Whyte preached he often would say, "I like the pain. I like the pain." In a similar way we should like the pain of the Sermon on the Mount.

The standard love in Jesus' day was a limited love. "I will love only my neighbor [fellow Israelite], and I will hate everyone else. It is my duty." Perhaps the local Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce had this motto:

Believe as I believe, no more, no less;
That I am right, and no one else, confess;
Feel as I feel, think only as I think;
Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink;
Look as I look, do always as I do;
Then, and only then, will I fellowship with you.

—Source unknown