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You Have Heard That It Was Said: Love Your Neighbor

Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-30, 32-36

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor” **DIG: Only the first part of the quote in Matthew 5:43 is from the TaNaKh. What does this show about the common use of Scripture at that time? In that context, what does the type of love Jesus calls for involve? How do the themes in Matthew 5:21-48 illustrate what Jesus meant by Matthew 5:19-20? What standard does the LORD expect from us? How can we attain it?**

REFLECT: Although these standards are not a new commandment that we must attain before ADONAI will accept us as His children, what do they suggest as the direction in which God wants us to grow after we have experienced salvation? Which of these inner qualities do you want to cultivate right now? How will your life be different as Ha’Shem helps you to put this quality into action?

In Christ’s sixth example of true righteousness, He contrasts ADONAI’s kind of love with that of the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers. Nowhere did their humanistic, self-centered system of religion differ more from **the LORD’s** divine standards than in the matter of **love**. Nowhere had **YHVH’s** standard been so corrupted as in the way the self-righteous Pharisees and Torah-teachers viewed themselves in relation to others. Nowhere was it more evident that they lacked the humility, mourning over their own sin, meekness, yearning for true righteousness, **mercy**, purity of heart, and peacemaking spirit that are to belong to **the children of God**.⁵³⁹

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (Matthew 5:43). Love your neighbor is clearly the essential summary of the Torah, even if the word **neighbor** was normally applied only to fellow Jews. Some passages did call for compassionate treatment of a personal *Jewish enemy* (**Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 24:17, 25:21**), as well as a welcoming attitude to friendly foreigners (**Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19**), but, the attitude

toward the *foreign* enemies is usually expressed by the judgment against neighboring peoples in **Deuteronomy 23:3-6** and illustrated by the book of **Joshua**, the violent nationalistic invective of **Psalm 137:7-9**. While in **Psalm 139:21-22** the writer commends himself for hating **God's** enemies, nowhere does the TaNaKh teach that you should **hate your enemy**. It's one thing to defend the honor and glory of **ADONAI** by seeking to defeat those who **hate Him**, but, quite another to **hate** people personally as our own enemies. Such a teaching came from the misinterpretations of those who teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines of **YHVH** (see **Isaiah 29:13**, cited by **Yeshua** in **Mattityahu 15:9**).

Jesus saw **neighbors** in unlikely places. When **an expert in the Torah** asked **Him** to define **the neighbor** we are to **love**, **the Lord** drew a big circle. **He** told the parable of a merciful Samaritan to show that a **neighbor** is the friend, stranger, or **enemy** who needs help (**to see link click [Gw](#) - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**).

We are to share **the Lord's** own balance of **love** and justice. **God loved** Adam, but **He** cursed him. **God loved** Cain, but **He** punished him. **God loved** Sodom and Gomorrah, but **He** destroyed them. **God loved** Isra'el, but **He** allowed her to be conquered and sent into exile and set her aside for a time. The Pharisees and Torah-teachers had no such balance. They had no **love** for justice, but only for vengeance. They had no **love** for their enemies – only for themselves.⁵⁴⁰ For **Jesus**, the **love** of **neighbor** was broadly inclusive, as seen below.



The paradoxical values of the kingdom of Heaven reach their climax in what is virtually an oxymoron because an **enemy** is by definition not **loved**. Nevertheless, **Yeshua** tells us: **Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you**, which makes no sense in a world characterized by conflict and self-interest (**Matthew 5:44a; Luke 6:27-28a**).⁵⁴¹ **Love** isn't easy. Not for you. Not for me. Not even for **Jesus**. Want proof? Listen to **His** frustration: **You unbelieving**

generation, how long must I stay with you? How long must I put up with you (Mark 9:19)?

How long must I put up with you? Long enough to be called crazy by **My** family and a liar by **My** neighbors. Long enough to be run out of town and **My** Temple . . .

How long? Until the rooster crows and the sweat stings and the mallet rings and a hillside of demons smirk at a dying **God**.

How long? Long enough for every sin to soak into **My** sinless soul that heaven will turn away in horror until **My** swollen lips pronounce the final transaction: **Paid in full**.

How long? Until it kills **Me**.⁵⁴²

For **the Lord**, however, emphasizing the need to **love your enemies** elevated the commandment to another level. This would apply to both Jews and Gentiles, even the ones you **hated**. Seems impossible doesn't it. Well, in our flesh it *is* impossible. That's the point. Such **love** requires a new heart and **Spirit** within us in order to let **the love of God** shine through to others. If we **pray for those who persecute** or mistreat us (**Mattityahu 5:44b; Luke 6:28a**), it will go a long way toward giving us a tender heart and a new perspective on our **enemies**. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor who suffered and was eventually killed in Nazi Germany, wrote this about **Jesus'** teaching here, "This is the supreme demand. Through the medium of **prayer** we go to our **enemy**, stand beside his side, and plead for him to **God**."

Then **Jesus** plays **His** strongest ethical card; to **love** those who do not **love you** is not as an example of proverbial wisdom, but is a reflection of the character of **ADONAI Himself**. This prepares the way for the final breath-taking summary in **Matthew 5:48. Pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:45a)**. To **love** our **enemies** and to **pray for** our persecutors demonstrates that we have been adopted into the family of **God**. The aorist tense of **may be** (Greek: *genesthe*) points to a once-and-for-all established fact. **ADONAI Himself** is **love**, and the greatest evidence that we are **children of the Father** is our **love**. **By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35)**. **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them (First John 4:16b)**. Loving as **God loves** does not make us **children of God**, but, gives testimony that we already are **His children**. When we reflect **God's** nature it proves that we currently possess



His nature and have been born again (see [Bw](#) - **What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith**).

Those who are **God's children** should show impartial **love** and care similar to what **God** shows. **He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45b)**. Those blessings are given without respect to merit or deserving. **ADONAI's** divine **love** and concern in some forms benefit everyone, even those who rebel against **Him** or deny **His** existence. **The eyes of all are looking to You; You give them their food at the right time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:15-16 CJB)**. There is no good thing – physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual, or of any other kind – that anyone possesses or experiences that does not come from **the hand of God**. If **the LORD** does that for everyone, **His children** should reflect that same generosity.⁵⁴³

At this point **Luke**, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us four examples about how the command to **love your enemies** should be carried out. First, **if someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also**. What is being referred to involves insult more than injury. **If someone takes your outer [coat], do not withhold your [shirt] from them (Luke 6:29** also see [DI](#) - **You Have Heard It Was Said: An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth**).

Second, **give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back (Luke 6:30)**. It is best to understand this as an overstatement for effect, for we do find an exception in **Second Thessalonians 3:6-13**. Nonetheless, the use of overstatement in this command serves to heighten its importance, and this issue will come up again in **Luke 6:34-35** below.

Third, when it comes right down to it, we are all equal before our **heavenly Father**. But, if there was one thing the Pharisees and Torah-teachers were certain of, it was that they were superior to everyone else. But, **Jesus** said: **If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even tax collectors (see [Cp](#) - **The Calling of Matthew**) and sinners love those who love them (Mattityahu 5:46; Luke 6:32)**. We have a higher calling in **Yeshua**. In fact, it is so high that it is ultimately beyond our ability. Our faith is not merely a religious philosophy or a system of morals to try to follow. In the final analysis, it is about allowing **the Messiah** and **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** to give us new life.

Fourth, **and if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that**

to you? Even Gentiles do that (Matthew 5:47; Luke 6:33). Jesus said that the **love** of the Pharisees and Torah-teachers was no better than those whom they despised above all. “Your righteousness,” **He** declared, “is no better than **the Gentiles!**” The only way we can be as **perfect** as **ADONAI** is to receive the righteousness of **Yeshua** through faith, which makes us **perfect** as we stand before **the Father**. So, the more we study **Messiah’s** interpretation of the Torah in the Sermon on the Mount, the more we should realize our desperate need for **God’s** help. Blessed be **Ha’Shem** who has provided the way of redemption through **His Son, Yeshua Ha’Meshiach.**⁵⁴⁴

And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full (Luke 6:34). The three previous commands are all present tense imperatives and emphasize the need for the believer to *continually* **love (Luke 6:32)**, **do good (Luke 6:33)**, and **lend (Luke 6:34)**. Just as **ADONAI** has been gracious to believers **while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8)**, so we are to give freely in return.

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great (Luke 6:35a). There is no idea of merit in this statement, for even after perfect obedience and service to **God**, believers will only be able to say: **We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty (Luke 17:10).** It is pure grace that causes **God** to reward **His** servants; but reward there will be, and this is not uncommon in the B’rit Chadashah (**Mattityahu 6:1-6, 18, 10:41-42; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:35, 12:33, 18:22; First Cor 3:14**). **And you will [show yourselves to] be children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked (Luke 6:35b).** **ADONAI is kind**, and **His** character is revealed by the fact that before salvation, the believer, while **ungrateful and wicked**, has been the recipient of **His** mercy.

Therefore, **be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36; Psalm 145:8-9).** The sum of all that **Yeshua** teaches in the Sermon on the Mount – in fact, the sum of all **He** teaches in the Bible – is embodied in those words. **The disciple’s** lifestyle is to be different from other people in that it doesn’t draw its inspiration from the norms of society but from the character of **God**. Keeping the Oral Law meant nothing (see **Ei - The Oral Law**). **Jesus** demanded a different approach, not living by external rules of conduct, but looking behind those laws to the mind of **Ha’Shem**. The wording of this summary



recalls the repeated formula of the Torah: **You are to be holy, for I, ADONAI your God, AM holy (Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26)**. The children of **God** are to reflect **His** character at all times, in all ages.⁵⁴⁵

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series of articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

Now it came to pass in one of my journeys that I lodged with a Friend who in former years did Preach, but now had Retired, and liveth in a goodly Little City wherein is a College, and where in former years he Preached. And he hath bought for himself a House, situated where two streets cross, and he liveth Happily and Quietly and Usefully. Even so may the Lord grant me Grace and Cash wherewith to live when I come to his time of life.

Now, the boys of the city pass his home on their way to School, and many of them turn the Corner there; and having learned from a certain teacher called Euclid, who theories no man disputeth because few Understand Them, that the Square of the Hypotenuse is equal to the Square upon the other two side, and having some doubt about it, they create an Hypotenuse across the Lawn of my friend, in order to find if it be not true that the Hypotenuse is shorter than the way around the Corner.

Now the Neighbors of my Friend spake unto him, saying: Those Infernal Boys will Ruin thy Lawn. Go to, Make a Stumbling Block in their Path, and make it of Barb Wire, that they entangle themselves therein and be pricked with the Goads, and cease to ruin thy Yard.

So my Friend built a Stumbling Block and placed it in their Path, but of Barb Wire builded he not. He built it of stone, and filled it in with earth, and he dug it, and dunged it, and therein he planted flowers.

And the boys thereafter kept to the walk, and they looked at the flowers and admired them, and they spake: Lo, the Good Man hath planted a Flower Bed in his Lawn; now Shall we Keep on the Walk lest we injure it; and to walk around it were more Bother than to Keep in the Great Highway.



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And the boys never suspected that it was for their sake he planted the Flowers, nor that the Flowers were planted to Beautify the Bunker.

Now, when I beheld this, I said to my soul: Behold, my Friend is not only a person of kind heart, but also a Man of Great Wisdom. How easily he might have wakened the resentment of the Youthful Soul, whereas he hath gladdened the heart of the neighborhood, saved his Lawn and kept the good will of the Boys.

Then I thought of the many Stumbling Blocks which good folk have erected in the Path of the Sinful, and how often they have become futile, for I have beheld Youth Vaulting happily over the Barbed Wire, and landing with Heels deep in the turf on the farther side.

And I said to my soul: Whenever it is necessary to erect a hurdle across the path of the wicked or the thoughtless, I will seek out a Flower and plant thereon. And the same shall be reckoned unto me for Righteousness as well as practical Good Sense.⁵⁴⁶