

THE REAL MEANING OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

MATHEW 05:43–48

Introduction

No subject is more important than the subject of human relationships. God is creating a family of believers who are to live together eternally. Therefore, He wants that family to live together as a family, loving each other and loving their neighbours as they should. God's family must never allow hate to enter their hearts. God's family is to treat no person as an enemy. Every person is to be loved as a true neighbour.

- I. The law: love your neighbour; hate your enemy (v. 43).
- II. The real meaning (v. 44).
- III. The incentive (vv. 45-47).
- IV. The charge: be perfect — trust God for the power to live righteously (v. 48).

I. *Mathew 05:43 Interpreting the Law*

The law said, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Israel made two fatal mistakes in interpreting this law.

1. They said “neighbour” meant only the people of their own community, religion and nation. They did not include anyone else. In fact, they shut out and cut off everyone else (See *Samaritans*, Jn. 4:5; Mk. 7:25; Lk. 7:4-5)
2. They inferred they were to *hate their enemies*. God said, “Love your neighbour”; therefore, they reasoned and added, “Hate your enemy.” Human reason actually leads a person to think that he should oppose and hate his enemy. But such is just *deduced or inferred* from depraved human reason. It is the natural reason of man at work. It is not God, and it is not what God knows to be the best for the world: love, joy, peace.... (Gal. 5:22-23).

Thought 1. Many fall into the same mistake as Israel: They interpret “neighbours” to be only their friends and those who live close by. They never think of enemies nor of the world as a whole as their neighbours.

JOHN 04:05 SAMARIA, SAMARITANS

Samaria was the central part of Palestine. Palestine was a small country, stretching only 120 miles north to south. The country was divided into three sections:

=> Judea, the southern section

=> Galilee, the northern section

=> Samaria, the central section, lying right between the two

There was bitter hatred between the Jews and Samaritans. Two things in particular caused this hatred.

1. The Samaritans were mongrel or half Jews, a mixed breed by birth. Centuries before (about 720 B.C.), the King of Assyria had captured the ten tribes of Israel and deported a large number of the people, scattering them all throughout the Media empire (see 2 Kng. 17:6-41). He then took people from all over the Assyrian empire to transplant them into Samaria to repopulate the land. The result was only natural. Intermarriage took place and the people became a mixed breed, a breed including...

- the transplanted people
- the weak of the land who had been left behind
- the outcast and irreligious who had intermarried with the original Samaritans

The fact of a mixed breed, of course, infuriated the strict Jews who held to a pure race.

2. The Samaritans were mongrel or half Jews, a mixed breed by religion. The transplanted heathen, of course, brought their gods with them. Eventually the God of Israel won out, but the Samaritan religion never became pure Judaism. Three things happened to cause this.
- a. When Ezra led the Jews back from exile in Babylon, the first thing the Jews did was to start rebuilding their temple. The Samaritans offered to help them, but the Jews rejected their help, declaring that the Samaritans — through intermarriage and worship of false gods — had lost their purity and forfeited their right to worship the only true God. This severe denunciation embittered the Samaritans against the Jews in Jerusalem.
 - b. The Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim to stand in competition with the Jewish temple at Jerusalem.
 - c. The Samaritans twisted both the Scripture and history to favour their own people and nation.

=> They twisted Scripture in that they accepted only five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. (Just imagine! They missed all the richness and depth of the Psalms and prophets.)

=> They twisted history in that they claimed three great events took place on Mt. Gerizim that set it apart as a place of worship. They claimed it was the place where Abraham offered Isaac, where Melchizedek met Abraham, and where Moses built his first altar after leading Israel out from Egyptian bondage. □

II. *Mathew 05:44 Unconditional Love*

The real meaning of the law “to love” involves two very practical acts (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

1. Love your enemies. Believers are to love all men, even enemies. They are to respect and honour all men (1 Pet. 2:17). Every human being has something that is commendable, even if it is nothing but the fact that he is a fellow human being with a soul to be reached for God. Two facts are to be considered:
 - a. Loving our enemies is against human nature. The behaviour of human nature is to react, strike back, hate, and wish hurt. At best human nature treats an enemy with a cold shoulder and keeps him at a distance. The root of human reaction against enemies is self and bitterness. (Self-preservation is not evil of itself. See *Love*, Mt. 5:44. The section on agape love points out that love is not complacent acceptance of wickedness and license.)
 - b. There is one thing a believer can have for his enemy: mercy or compassion. If he does not have compassion for those who hate him, he has gained nothing of the spirit of Christ (Lk. 6:36).

Thought 1. Believers are often criticized for coming so far short of this command.

Thought 2. Note two facts. First, all are not to be loved equally (See *Love*, Mt. 5:44). Second, love is not license; it is not complacent in dealing with wickedness.

2. Pray for those who persecute you. Three things in particular need to be prayed about: (a) for God to forgive the persecutor (Lk. 23:34; Acts 7:60), (b) for peace between one’s self and the persecutor, and (c) for the persecutor’s salvation or correction. Prayer for the persecutor will greatly benefit the believer. It will keep the believer from becoming bitter, hostile, or reactionary.

Mat 5:44 *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

Luke 23:34 *Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

Acts 7:60 *Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

MATHEW 05:44 LOVE

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Mathew 05:44

When Christ said “Love your enemies,” He could have used any one of four words. The Greek language is very descriptive and detailed in its expressions. Its words are precise and full of meaning. In speaking of love, the Greek language describes

exactly what it meant. It separates the various types of love, and uses four different words for love. Thus, it is always important to know which word is used in the New Testament and what that word means.

1. There is “*eros*” love. This is love that arises from passion, infatuation, and sexual attraction. It is the love (passion) of a man for a woman. The word is never used in the New Testament.
2. There is “*storge*” love. This is love that arises from affection, a natural born affection, the affection of family love. It is the love and natural affection between parent and child.
3. There is “*phileo*” love. This is love that arises from affection also, but from a different kind. It is a deep, intense and warm affection. It is an affection that fills a person’s heart with warmth, tenderness, preciousness, and a deep consciousness of really loving and really being loved. It is the love of precious affection and feelings toward those who are very near and very dear to one’s heart.
4. There is “*agape*” love. This is the love that wishes well. It is a love that demonstrates kindness, benevolence and esteem. It is the love of the mind, reason and choice. It is a sacrificial love, that is, a love that cares, gives and works for another person’s good — no matter how the person may respond or treat one.

The word Christ uses in saying “Love your enemies” is agape: the love that must be willed. The Christian must use his mind and reason, deliberately choosing to love his enemy.

Note four significant facts:

1. The Christian’s love for his enemy is different from the love he holds for his family. It would be impossible to love an enemy with affection. Christ knew this.
2. The Christian sacrifices himself, bears all in order to work for his enemy’s good. Whether Christian minister or layman, the Christian chooses deliberately to love a world of antagonistic men for their own good (their salvation and hope of eternity).
3. The Christian’s love (agape love) is not complacent acceptance of open wickedness and license. It is not sitting back and allowing a person to do as he pleases. It is not allowing selfishness and deception and a wallowing around in license. Agape love is putting a stop to sin and license as much as possible. It is restraint, control, discipline, and even punishment when it protects the offender from himself and protects those whom he hurts. Very simply pictured, it is like a parent controlling a child for his own good and for the good of those who love him.
4. Agape love is God’s love. A Christian can have agape love only as he allows God to love through him (Jn. 21:15-17). The believer deliberately wills to love as God loves, and God empowers him to do so (Rom. 5:5).

Mat 5:44 “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Rom 12:20 On the contrary; “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Exo 23:4 “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him.”

Prov 24:17 Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice.

Prov 25:21-22 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

Mat 22:39 “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

1 Th 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right.

1 John 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. □

III. **Mathew 05:45–47 Love**

The incentive to love everyone as a true neighbour is threefold.

1. Love makes a person a child of God. Love is unmistakable proof that a person truly loves and truly knows God. A believer cannot hate another person — not a true believer. If a person says he loves God and hates some person, whether former friend or foe, he needs to search his heart. He lacks the genuineness demanded by God (1 Jn. 4:19-21; 1 Jn. 3:23; Jn. 13:33-34).

Gal 4:4-6 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

1 John 3:10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

2. Love makes a person like God. God loves His enemies. He causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on His enemies as well as on those who love Him. The Christian is to be just like God: he is to love his enemies. In loving his enemies, the Christian becomes more and more like God. He becomes godly.

Gen 1:27 *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

Mat 5:48 *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

1 Tim 4:7 *Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.*

1 Tim 6:11 *But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.*

Titus 2:12 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*

1 Pet 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

Thought 1. Man was created "in His own image, in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). Man's very purpose for being is to glorify God and to be like God (Mt. 5:48).

Thought 2. No man can look at God's nature and learn hatred. God's sunshine and rain bless all. There is no indication of favouritism in the sunshine and the rain. Therefore, the learning of reaction and hatred does not come from without man, but from within man (Mt. 15:18-20; Mk. 7:21; see Mt. 12:34-35; Lk. 6:45).

3. Love makes a person distinctive from other men. A believer must do more than others. He must go beyond what others do. Everyone loves his friends, so doing more and going beyond means that the believer will love his enemies. Everyone is friendly to those who salute him; therefore, doing more and going beyond means that the believer salutes his enemies.

Thought 1. Motives have to be watched. Too many are nice and kind out of self-interest. They hope to gain something (a vote, money, inheritance, support) from those to whom they are friendly. The believer is to be different and distinctive. His motive must be to reach out to the unfriendly, even the enemies of Christ.

Thought 2. If people loved and cared only for those who loved them, think how divided the world would be. Someone has to reach out to bring all together. All must be reached: the bitter, the cold-hearted, the withdrawn, the angry, the murderer, the attacker, the thief, the enemy, the curser, the hater, the spiteful, the persecutor.

Thought 3. It is the task of the believer to do more and go beyond. The believer is to reach all, for he knows the true love of God.

Thought 4. God has done more and gone beyond by sending His Son into the world (Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:11-18). The believer knows this; therefore, it is his calling to do more and go beyond (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Mat 5:42 *Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Rom 12:13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

IV. Mathew 05:48 Stages of Perfection (*teleios*)

The charge is "Be perfect." The idea is perfection of purpose. It has to do with an end, an aim, a goal, a purpose. It means fit, mature, fully grown at a particular stage of growth. For example, a fully grown child is a perfect child; he has reached his childhood and achieved the purpose of childhood. It does not mean perfection of character, that is, being without sin. It is fitness, maturity for task and purpose. It is full development, maturity of godliness. (Eph. 4:12-16; Phil. 3:12-16; 1 Jn. 1:8-10.)

The Bible reveals three stages of perfection.

1. Saving perfection. Christ's death has guaranteed forever the perfection or redemption of those set apart for God.

Heb 10:14 Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

2. Progressive or maturing perfection. God reveals anything that is contrary to His purpose, and the believer is expected to clean it up (Phil. 3:13-15, esp. 15). The believer's "perfecting holiness" (2 Cor. 7:1) is "now trying to attain [more and more perfection]" (Gal. 3:3). The believer is "straining toward what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13). As a member of the church, the believer is experiencing the "building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12; Col. 4:12; Heb. 13:21; Jas. 1:4; 1 Jn. 4:17-18).

Eph 4:11-12 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

3. Redemptive or resurrected perfection. The believer's purpose and aim is to "attain to the resurrection from the dead...[to be] perfect" (Phil. 3:11-12).

Phil 3:10-12 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

The Lord's point is this: the mature believer will do good and show kindness to all men, both good and bad men. He is *mature* in heart when he shows love to his

enemies as well as to his friends. God Himself is the believer's example in this. Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment: to love as *Christ loved*. (Jn. 13:33-35). We must keep in mind the following:

- a. This is not the old commandment, "Love your neighbour as yourself." It is not a human, neighbourly love that is being commanded. This *new commandment* was given to *disciples only*. It is the spiritual love that is to exist between believers as brothers and sisters and as servants of God who minister together.
- b. The love being commanded is the love of Jesus Himself which is the love of God Himself, the love that can be shed abroad in our hearts only by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is not the normal physical love among human neighbours which is being commanded by God. It is a spiritual love that is wrought only by the Spirit of God.

Note: the distinctiveness of this love is that it is the love of Jesus Himself that dwells in the heart of the believer. Only the Spirit of God can put the love of Jesus there within the heart of the believer. The Holy Spirit can create within the believer the love of Jesus Himself, the very same love which Jesus had while here on earth. The love of Jesus is ...

- the love of *spiritual being*: the love that causes one to hunger after union with God and God's people.
- the love of *spiritual life*: the love that shares the same life with all believers, both abundant and eternal life.
- the love of *spiritual union*: the love that binds and ties believers together in life and purpose.
- the love of *spiritual attachment or fellowship*: the love that shares needs and blessings and joys and sorrows and gifts together.

The Holy Spirit can create within the believer a love that can melt and mould his heart to the hearts of other believers. But note: it is a commandment; therefore, it is conditional. The Holy Spirit *can* create such a love, but believers *have to receive it*. When the love of Jesus dwells in the heart of a believer, several things happen. The believer has a love that *causes* him...

- to bind his life to the lives of other believers
- to tie his life to the same purpose as other believers
- to surrender his will and to be of the same mind as other believers
- to understand and feel with other believers
- to forgive other believers — always
- to sacrifice himself for other believers — always
- to seek the welfare of other believers before his own

- to deny self completely

The new commandment is the mark of a true disciple. The distinguishing mark of a true believer is not the normal human love of neighbours, not even the love of brothers and sisters or of husband and wife. It is the spiritual and supernatural love of Jesus Himself that dwells within the life of the believer. By this love shall all men know that a person is a *true* disciple of the Lord.

John 15:12 *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

1 John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

1 John 4:7-8 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Thought 1. God is love, perfect love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). He loves all; therefore, He wants a world of love from creatures who will freely choose to love. He challenges everyone to be like Himself: to love all, even his enemies.

Thought 2. Think about the challenge! The true Christian...

...has his enemies, yet he is to love them.

...has his cursers, yet he is to bless them.

...has his haters, yet he is to do good to them.

...has his spitters, yet he is to pray for them.

...has his persecutors, yet he is to pray for them.

If a person will work to mature in this challenge, he will be marching ever forward to be like his “Father who is in heaven” (Phil. 3:12-16).

Thought 3. No man will ever gain perfection, particularly in the area of human relationships. Just consider how short each person comes in relating to spouse, children, friends, fellow workers, and enemies. Yet he is to “press on...forget the past...strain toward...press on. He is to walk as he has learned to walk — more and more like Christ (Phil. 3:12-16; 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Mat 5:48 *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

2 Cor 13:11 *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

2 Tim 3:16-17 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly*

equipped for every good work.

Col 1:28 *We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*

Heb 6:1 *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.*

Heb 13:21 *Equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

James 1:4 *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything..*

1 Pet 5:10 *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ■*