On 9/6/18, 26 year old accountant Botham Jean was shot by an off duty cop, who mistakenly entered his apartment rather than hers. Months later in court, his little brother Brandt Jean had the opportunity to speak to his brother’s murderer. He wished that she would go to God with her guilt, and he forgives her and says God will forgive her if she goes to Him. He said he wants the best for her, and that would be her giving her life to Christ, then he asks if he can leave the stand and hug her.

In 2015, a shooter killed 9 people in a church in Charleston. Just a couple days after losing mothers, and sisters, and sons, husbands, wives, they appeared in court for the murderer’s hearing and were given an opportunity to make a statement. First up was Nadine Collier, who lost her mother Ethel. With tear-filled eyes, she said, "I forgive you ... You took something really precious from me. I will never talk to her ever again, I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you and have mercy on your soul,"

In 2006 when a man stormed an Amish school house and killed 5 girls then himself. They forgave him, attended his funeral, and donated money to the killer’s widow and children. The world doesn’t know what to do with these instances. When the community of Christ, loves their enemy, we shine. We are salt and light. We are a city set on a hill. We are a contrast society, a counterculture. This morning we are in Matthew 5 (). This is our 8th sermon in Matt 5. It has been instructive and challenging. The SOTM is the Charter for the life of the NC community. My prayer is that God has been molding us into a contrast society by His Spirit through His Word. Let’s consider the words of the King together:

**I. What You Have Heard 43 –** In the previous verses, Jesus has quoted something from the OC Law. And love your neighbor does come from Lev 19:18. And over time, the Jewish people had begun to define their neighbor exclusively as their fellow Israelite. But even if you interpret the Law as saying only love your Jewish neighbor, that is quite different than hate your enemy, isn’t it? In fact, there is no verse in the OT that says hate your enemy. The Jewish people had come to that conclusion from verses that speak clearly about God’s judgment of the wicked, like the following: Psalm 5:5 says God hates all evildoers. Psalm 7:11 says God feels indignation every day. In Psalm 26:5: David says “I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. In Psalm 58 David begs God to break the teeth of his enemies. In Psalm 109, David asks that their days be few and their posterity cut off. Psalm 139:21-22 says, “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.” And then of course you have God commanding his people to clear out the Gentiles from the land and show them no mercy (Deut 7:1-6 20:16-18 23:3-6).

And beyond the Bible, there was a popular Jewish sect known as the Qumran community, and they had a rule that said they are “to love all the sons of light . . . and to hate all the sons of darkness.”[[1]](#footnote-1) So, while hating one’s enemy was not in the Bible, it had become Israelite folk wisdom because of these types of verses. Jesus is correcting a wrong conclusion here, a false inference. No, you are not to hate your enemy. On the contrary, you are to do the opposite.

**Jesus says we are to love our enemy – 44 –** King Jesus says, no, you are not to hate your enemy, but love them. This. Is. Revolutionary. This is one of Jesus’ most radical moral directives. Remember what the people were expecting in a Messiah? They were expecting a militaristic Messiah: one who would come in and destroy their enemies, wipe out Rome. You remember that time in Samaria, James and John are like, “Lord, do you want me to call fired down to consume them (Luke 9:54)? They thought the King of Israel would come and destroy the nations and elevate the Jewish people. For them, the Kingdom meant the destruction of enemies, but Jesus is a different kind of King and is forming a new way of being Israel.

Luke 17:20-21: “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you’.” This Messiah’s Kingdom is not coming like you think it is. It doesn’t come down all at once. It is slow and subtle. In John 18:36: “Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world’.” When the K invades the world, God doesn’t launch missiles but sends in the meek, the mourners, the merciful.[[2]](#footnote-2) We are not waging war according to the flesh. No enemy-hatred, but enemy-love.

Jesus is our model for enemy-love. He could have come in and destroyed his opposition. **26:51-53, 67-68.** Jesus doesn’t fight his enemies, but lays his life down for them. And as Jesus is on the cross, being executed by enemies, what does he say? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Jesus is our Savior and our example. Stephen followed him, as he was being stoned, what does he say? “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60).

Christians are to love their enemies. Now, our culture is very confused about what love is. Love is not merely being nice, love is not always being a doormat. Jesus has some very sharp rebukes all through the Gospels. Jesus storms through the temple and in Matt 23 he does some harsh name-calling: you hypocrites, you brood of vipers, when you convert someone to your ways you make this twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.According to Jesus, love is not simply being nice to people and allowing error to go unchallenged. Love is compatible with rebuke.[[3]](#footnote-3) And remember how the Bible defines love. 1 John 3:16. Love is giving of self for the good of another.

Act for the good of our enemies. Love is an action verb. Listen to C.S. Lewis: “The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste 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.” Work for their good. In Luke 6:27-28, Jesus says, “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.”

And we must confess that the Christian church has often failed here. Most famously the Crusades, the battle between Muslims and the Catholic Church over holy sites in the 11-1200’s. But listen, many if not most who killed in the name of Christ were not actually doing in the name of Christ but in the name of the state. This is why a state church is always a bad idea. You cannot coerce conversion. One has said that mixing the church and the state is like mixing manure and ice cream. The state is the manure. It is not affected much. The church is the ice cream and it is ruined.

How do we love our enemies? Well, praying for them is the best way to start. **44.** The wisdom of Jesus shines here. Whenever someone is troubling you, this is a great first step to loving them. Pray for them. Intercede for them. Plead the throne on their behalf. God will change your heart towards them. Try it. Think about a person you really have trouble with. Now point at them. No, maybe it is a boss or a family member or whoever. Pray for them.

Love your enemies and pray for them. This is consistently taught all over the NT. **Rom 12:14-21**. 1 Pet 2:20-23: “For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

And we are familiar with the parable of the good Samaritan. The Samaritans were the enemies of Israel and in the story Jesus has the Samaritan loving his enemy. Jesus broadens “neighbor” to any and all, including supposed enemies. The parable of the good Samaritan is creative commentary on Jesus’s command to love your enemy. I remember being deeply impacted by an act of enemy-love by some of our members: Gerald and Debra Frazier. You know, the Lord uses all kinds of means to bring us to faith and I can point to so many. And one of them was the Fraziers. I had to be like 16-17 . . .

Do you love your enemies? The first step is to identify them. Who is it that gets your blood boiling? Name them. Who is it? A family member? A church member? A boss or coworker. Or maybe a group of people: Muslims, Democrats, Republicans, homosexuals. Who is it? Begin to pray for them and work for their good. This is one of the characteristics that makes the church distinct, that makes us different. **23-24, 39-40.** We are different. We pursue reconciliation. We are peacemakers. **5:9.**

**Why – 45a –** Love your enemies, for in so doing, you show yourself to be sons of the Father. Like Father like sons. We love our enemies, not to become children of God, but because we are. Sons of *your* Father in heaven. He is your father so act like children. This is the proper outworking of what it looks like to be sons and daughters of God.

**Why else? 45b -** Jesus is not PC here, or in many places but he calls non-believers evil and unjust. Because they are. And so were we before Christ. Here Jesus reads the pages of creation and finds the love of God. God provides for all. This is what theologians call “common grace.” God shows special grace to his people but common grace is given to all. He makes *His* sun rise. And He sends rain, which was a divine blessing. Before irrigation and electric water pumps.

**46-47 –** Jesus reasons, if you only loved your friends, you are no different than pagans. They do that. Even tax-collectors love those who love them. Remember that tax collectors were considered the scum of the earth. Even gentiles greet their friends. Side note: be on the lookout for people you don’t know on Sundays. Even Italian mobsters look out for their own. Gang members love their Mommas. Once again, we see that we are to be distinct. Christians shouldn’t merely “do the same.” We are to be different, extraordinary. Our lives are not shaped by culture or societal norms but the character of God and that clearly shows forth as we love those who don’t love us.

**Conclusion 48 –** Here we have a climactic statement, a summary declaration, a conclusion to chapter 5. I think the therefore is not just a concluding statement for these last verses but for all of chapter 5. And the statement is be perfect. Perfection? Surely he is not serious. What could he mean? We can’t be perfect. The key is in what the word means. The word is *teleios*. It is sometimes translated mature (1 Cor 2:6, 14:20), blameless (Deut 18:13 LXX), entire, complete. The idea is not without sin, but fully mature, whole-heartedly complete, having a unified heart for God. William Barclay says this word *teleios* describes something perfectly suited to the end for which it was created.[[4]](#footnote-4) *Teleios* is a virtue related word, something we aspire to and grow into.

Listen to Phil 3:12-15: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect (*teleioō*), but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature (*teleios*) think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.” The Apostle Paul says I know I am not perfect but I look forward not back, pressing on and everyone who agrees is perfect. Christian perfection is in part realizing we’ll never arrive at perfection in this life.

It is another way of saying what he said in **5:20.** The greater R is perfection. And remember what the greater R is. It is not just being squeaky clean on the outside but having a true heart for God. It is the law-on-your-heart R, the hearts of flesh R, NC R. It is having a whole new person, not just new external actions. The idea is wholeness or singleness of devotion.[[5]](#footnote-5) The word means whole-hearted dedication to God. An all of life orientation toward God. Being unified in heart and action. As one NT scholar says, “To say that disciples must be *teleios* as God is *teleios* is to say that they must be whole or virtuous – singular in who they are – not one thing on the outside but another on the inside.”[[6]](#footnote-6) This is the difference between disciples and hypocrites. **6:1-2, 5, 16, 23:1-7, 24-27**. Flip over to **19:16-22**

You must be perfect/whole/completely unified *as* your Father in heaven is perfect. This wording and phrase is very similar to what we find in the Law. Lev 19:1-2 says “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” Our character is to be defined by the character of God. And we have seen that in ch. 5: God is perfect: he does not murder but forgives, he is faithful to his marriage covenant with his people, he is honest and keeps is covenant promises, he forgives and gives even to those who dishonor him and he loves his enemies.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Abilene is filled with people who have some external trappings of religion, but do not have a heart for God. They are not whole-hearted, they are what Jesus calls hypocrites. Where are you today? Read back through Matt 5 and see if you fit how Jesus paints a disciple. Examine yourself. Repent of sin. Turn to the Lord. If you want to talk through any of this, our elders and staff would love to.

Be perfect as your Father is perfect. We don’t live up to this calling, or the calling of much of this chapter. This is a challenging call and goes against the grain of the air we breathe. This high call throws us back to the Beatitudes **5:2-4.** We often fail to keep these commands. We often fail to love our enemies. But we can praise God that he loved his enemies. Rom 5:8-11: “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.”

1. France, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. NTW, Bird, 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. France, 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Boice, *Matthew,* 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pennington, *SOTM and Human Flourishing,* 69-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Pennington, *SOTM and Human Flourishing,* 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)