

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: Loving Those We'd Rather Not

Transcribed Message
March 25, 2018
Matthew 5:38-42

There's a popular saying that has often been applied to the teaching of Jesus that said He comforted in His teaching the afflicted and He often afflicted the comfortable. I suppose that is true of any of us as we bring God's truth to each other. There are times in which the Word of God specifically is a Word of comfort to us in our affliction, and then other times it seems to afflict us in our comfort. That may have been specifically true when Jesus said some particularly hard things which we know He had a tendency to do. We know that it's not just as we read the Bible today that those things are hard for us to hear and understand and put into practice, but we know that was true in the 1st century as well. When Jesus said some of those hard things we read in the Gospels, after hearing those things some of His followers decided that it was too difficult. They said these things are too hard for us to hear and they left in following the Lord.

It may have been after He said on one occasion you need to eat My flesh and drink My blood, which we know was a foreshadowing of His death and the introduction of the communion service that we celebrate. It may have been when He said you need to hate your father and your mother. Of course, He said that to be in comparison to how much more we're to love Him and how committed we are to be to Him. Our love for anything and everybody else is to diminish in the light of that. It may have been what He said to that young man you need to sell everything you have and give it to the poor. A word that was hard for that young man to hear because he was in love with his stuff, way more than he was in love with the Lord. Or it could have been when He said what you need to do is you need to love your enemies. This seemingly impossible command that Jesus gives to us takes us to the highest of ethics. The command to love even our enemies. We're of all people to be known by our love and nothing is more powerful than the people of God demonstrating their love for each other in that way.

We're going to finish this morning the fifth chapter. You didn't think we would ever get there, but here we are. We're already at the end of the fifth chapter this morning and, Lord willing, we'll carry on after Resurrection Easter Sunday. Actually Bonnie and I are going to go to a pastors' conference after that, so we'll be gone for a little bit, but we are looking forward to not only that conference but jumping into chapter 6 when we get back. This morning here's what we have. Simply stated, there is no one to whom the light and warmth of our love should not reach, not since Jesus said to us you are to love even your enemies. We're wrapping up the fifth chapter.

There are three words that you're going to provide to me that are going to be a summary of this fifth chapter in the Sermon on the Mount to this point. There they are. They're in front of you. The first one says this is a picture of His life. Who would that be? This is a picture. Who might that be? Jesus. That's right. The first answer is Jesus. We've said all along this is a snapshot, a portrait of the life of Christ. This is how He wants us to live as we follow after Him.

The second statement. This is where the focus of His work takes place. We talked a lot about this matter of righteousness and whether it is here. Which of those words are we looking for? Inside. Jesus's focus in the Sermon on the Mount is what's going on inside. Remember the Pharisees are spending all of their time focusing on the external focusing on what people see. Jesus says this is not about just what people see. It's about what's going on in the inside.

Our last word. This is the likelihood of success of doing these things inside of us and looking like Jesus. This is the likelihood of success apart from the Holy Spirit. Impossible. It's impossible to do this. It should be the same as it has been almost on a weekly basis. We read what Jesus says and we go that's impossible! I can't do that. Do you know what? I think that's exactly the response we're going to have as we'll see again this morning.

So this morning is love instead of hate. Let's begin almost as we have for the past five weeks by looking first of all at a distorted concept. As we come to this sixth time, Jesus says you have heard it said. This is the sixth and final time that Jesus says that as He takes us back to the Old Testament. Notice first of all what the Old Testament taught. I'm going to jump back quickly and read a couple of those passages

because it gives us a flavor of what Jesus is talking about. Exodus chapter 23 and verse 4 says: "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him." Clearly Old Testament law called for us to move towards somebody that we don't like, that is described as somebody that we hate, someone who is our enemy.

Leviticus chapter 19 and verses 17 and 18: "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." Proverbs 24 says that we are to move towards our enemy when our enemy is hungry. The writer of Proverbs says we're to feed him. When he's thirsty, we're to give him something to drink. Proverbs 24 says that when we see our enemy stumble, we're not to be glad. When we see him fall, we're not to rejoice. Clearly, when you look even in the Old Testament there were enough statements there for the people of Jesus's day to know full well what it was that God had said with regard to how it is that they're to view those that they normally would not want to be around or they would view as their enemy. We have an ethic established in the Old Testament and that ethic is be kind even to your enemy.

Remember David when Saul was trying to kill him? He would not move towards Saul in anger and he wouldn't try to seek revenge? Remember when he was running away from Absalom and Shimai was out there throwing stones at him, cursing him, calling him out by all kinds of names and David responded in kindness? That's a picture of the Old Testament ethics and how it is we relate to one that would be our enemy.

With that in mind, what are the Pharisees saying in light of that? Let's look at verse 43 of this fifth chapter. "You have heard that it was said." So we just talked about that. We know what the Old Testament said. You heard that it was said. You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That's what they were hearing. They were hearing you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. How in the world did they come up with that? In light of what we just read in just those few brief passages, how is it that the Pharisees of Jesus's day moved from the Old Testament ethic that says you shall love

your enemy as you love yourself and they come to this point where they say no, you just love your neighbor. If you love your neighbor that's good, because you can then hate your enemy.

Here's how they did it. First of all, they said yes, we understand that the Old Testament says to love your neighbor but they said that neighbor is to be understood as your fellow Israelite. The neighbor that you're to love is your fellow Jew. What they did is they made that circle of neighbor really small. It's your family. It's your friend or somebody that's living close by you. But in every case it must be someone who is of the Jewish tradition of the Jewish faith. We can love Gentiles if they come over and become a part of the Jewish faith. That's how they made that circle smaller and smaller and smaller until it was just people in their life who they were comfortable with, who they naturally loved. That's why when Jesus tells one of the more famous stories, the good Samaritan, He's extending this circle of who your neighbor is. He is really answering the question in the story of the good Samaritan of who is my neighbor? Jesus says your neighbor is anybody whose need you see, whose need you can meet. He tells them that it is even the Samaritan, which of course really blew their minds to hear it in that way. So first of all they did it that way.

Secondly, what they did is they dropped the statement as yourself. So as we read in that Leviticus passage – you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You read in verse 43 what Jesus said they were being taught. You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Nothing about love your neighbor as you love yourself. I believe what the Bible teaches is that self-love is the most natural, passionate love that we have. We love ourselves more than anything else. We love ourselves more than anybody else. They didn't put that as a part of that statement. They said love your neighbor and drop that part of it out.

The third thing that they did was they added to Scripture. They actually added the statement that you hate your enemy. Love your neighbor...sure. We understand that is somewhere in the Old Testament, but here is what we believe it means. Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. How do you come up with hate your enemy out of the Old Testament? Well, for one thing, you get a little creative. One of the first things that they said was there's no verse in the law that says love your enemy. That's true. There

isn't a verse that you could go to that says love your enemy. Since God didn't say love your enemies, therefore He must mean by that we're supposed to hate them. If God wanted us to love them, He would've told us to love them.

The second thing they did is they begin to rationalize and say when the children of Israel went into the land of Canaan land of the Gentiles, what did God tell them to do? God told them to wipe them out. God brought judgment on them. In their way of thinking, of course God intends for us to hate our enemy. All you have to do is read the Old Testament to see what God commissioned the Israelites to do with regard to the Gentile nations.

Then thirdly we of course have in the Psalms something called the imprecatory psalms. Imprecatory Psalms. You'll know it when you read one of them. Imprecatory Psalms are psalms in which the psalmist is calling down judgment on somebody and is calling for God to bring discipline and judgment. So they said look at the Psalms. Of course God wants us to hate our enemy. We love our friend. We love our family, but we're supposed to hate our enemy. So they twisted the Scripture. They added to the Scripture. They took away from the Scripture and this is what they came up with.

Now let's look at an observation before we go on. There is something that we need to understand when God says love your enemy. Every time we come across one of these harder sayings of Jesus, we've had to be observant of the context. We had to be observant of the whole counsel of Scripture. We do that again today. This observation needs to be made. The Biblical concept of love is not divorced from the concept of justice and truth. We don't need to divide love from justice. They're not incompatible. We don't divorce love from justice and truth. We don't look at these two things as being in necessary conflict with each other. We know that God is a God of love. We know that God is a God of justice. We read through the Bible and we see both of these things as an active part of the character of God. They work in harmony with each other. God brings those same principles over into our life. He says you need to have love and you need to have a form of justice within the home. Loving parents move towards their children to bring justice as that's needed. We acknowledged that principle is there and they're not in conflict. Within the church, we've talked about the fact that a loving body moves towards each other to help each other when we're caught, as Paul

says in Galatians, in some sin or we're stumbling in some way. There is a mixing of love and justice, isn't there? The state. Romans 13. Paul says the state does not bear the sword in vain so that there is a balance there between the love of God and the principles that flow from that, and the justice of God and the principles that flow from that. The point is when God commissioned the people of Israel to go into the land of Canaan that was, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, probably the last and only holy war. That was literally a war commissioned by God as a form of judgment on the people of Canaan.

When we think today what does it mean to love your enemy in our world today? How do we love our enemy as we think of our own country? How do these principles apply to the whole concept of war? Ethicists have wrestled with that question for centuries. One of the ways that we have concluded in dealing with, at least in my own personal conviction, is there can be such a thing as a just war. We're to love our enemy, but remember, we talked last week that we're to turn the other cheek as well. That doesn't mean we become a doormat. That doesn't mean we allow people to just run over us in every situation. Are there situations in which we let people run over us? Yes, there are. Those of personal insult but not of personal assault. The same principle applies here. When Japan attacked the United States at the beginning of World War II or when Hitler is running over Europe, I don't think that this principle that Jesus teaches here says to us all we're to do is to love our enemy and allow them to run over us. Allow them to do all the things that they want to do because after all we're living by the ethic that Jesus is telling us to love our enemy. Love is a principal. Justice is a principle. There is such a thing I believe as a just war in which we defend ourselves from the aggression of an enemy. So just as we think of that, we know that when Jesus comes back in Revelation 19, He's going to come back and He's going to make war on the nations. The ultimate lover, the alternate provider of grace and mercy is going to bring justice and judgment.

So let's look at what this looks like. This distinctive characteristic that Jesus talks about then in verses 43 and 44: "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." Let's start off by defining love. You know that there are a lot of

different words in the Greek language for the word love. I've listed them out there for you on your outline. The first one *eros* is not in the New Testament. It speaks of a sexual love, often a perversion of what God intended. There is *storge*. Family love. It's love within the family. It is used in that context to describe the relationships that families have with each other. *Phileo* is the strongest word of human love. This word of a relationship. We talk about Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love. If you want to truly be loved, just walk down the streets of Philadelphia and you will be embraced and be loved by everybody. We talk about people who are philanthropic. What is that? They're lovers of mankind. Philharmonic. What is that? Lovers of music. All of this speaks of this strong affection that people have in the relationships.

The word used here is the word *agape*. This unchanging love, this unconditional love that God calls us to. It is a giving love. It's the love that describes the love of God, most often to speak of Him moving towards us in redemption. It's the love of 1 Corinthians 13. This is the kind of love that Jesus says we are to direct to our enemies. When Jesus says this, it is a present active imperative which means the present tense is ongoing. You're always doing this. It's active, which means you are continuously involved in the present moment of loving that person. It's commanded. It's an imperative. That means it's directed to our will. God doesn't command us in terms of our emotion, but He commands us in terms of our will. It is in this way that God loves us. Remember... even while we were yet sinners, Paul says in Romans, Christ died for us. He goes on to say that when we were the enemies of God, God moved towards us. That's this picture. 1 John 4: In this is love, not that we loved God. Of course we didn't love God. We weren't attracted to God in any way. We were running from Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and gave His Son. So all of those describe that.

It reminds me of the guy who was in marriage counseling and the counselor is trying to convince him to love his wife. He says you are commanded by God to love your wife. Ephesians 5. Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church. You're commanded to love her. He said furthermore you're commanded to love her as your sister in Christ. Love one another. Jesus said it in the Upper Room. That's how people are going to know that we are brothers and sisters because the way we love each other.

You're supposed to love her as your neighbor. Love your neighbor even as you love yourself. Love her as your friend. A friend loves at all times. he said if you can't do any of those, then you're still commanded to love her as your enemy. There is no way around it. We are commanded by God to love those within our family but even those that we would rather not love. God calls to do that.

When you read that in verse 44 note again. When you look at that 44th verse: But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, you say what? Let me just look at your faces and I will interpret what you're saying back to me. What you're saying as you read this is this is impossible. The reality is we generally have a hard enough time loving those who are nice to us. Loving those in our small circle who we consider people who we want to love. Yet Jesus blows the doors off of that and said that's not enough. You're supposed to love people who you would naturally view as being your enemy. I think Jesus fully expects that we would respond that way and I think He would probably say to us that's exactly right. You can't do that. It is impossible. How can we do this apart from the Holy Spirit? We can't. this is an impossible assignment.

So let's look at it. The second thing I want you to see is this matter of divine capability. God gives us the capacity to do this that we can't normally do on our own. verse 45: "...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 then others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" so let's look at the extent to which Jesus calls us to apply this to our life. It is not a selective group here. This is nondiscriminatory love. This is love across the broadest and widest spectrum that we can imagine. Jesus even calls it out and names it. You are to love those who are good. And you are to love those who are evil. How does that work? How's that working for us? To love those who are good...to love those who are evil. It's one thing to love people who are good to us. It's another thing to love people who would do us evil. Those who are just and those who are unjust. How are you doing at loving people who are unjust to

you? How are you doing at loving people who are not treating you at all the way you think they should be treating you? That's what Jesus calls us to.

He said in verse 46 that the tax collectors can manage to love the good and they can manage to love the just. They love each other and that was saying something because remember the tax collectors in Jesus's day were the most despised group of all the groups of the 1st century. They were viewed as being traitors to the nation. They acted most often unethically. They were dishonest. Self-interest motivated everything about them and yet Jesus says right here to love your enemies.

Let's think about that for ourselves. Who is in that list for us? Fill in the blank for who is in that list for you today. If you're a Democrat, maybe it's the Republicans. If you're a Republican, maybe it's the Democrats. If you are conservative, it's the liberals. If you're a liberal, maybe it's the conservatives. If you're strong on the Second Amendment, it is the people who want to take away your guns. If you're big on the environment, it's those who are trashing the environment. Today you don't have to look very far to get yourself stirred up with a sense of not wanting to be very nice, not wanting to be very kind, certainly not wanting to love those who are different from us and who are thinking different from us. Just think of all the words and all the emotions that is spilling out in our country today as people take sides on all manner of issues and can hardly have a normal conversation. Into that, Jesus says we are not only to be loving each other, but we are to be loving people who would very likely fall into the category of your enemy. In verse 47, that's His whole point. Jesus says we're no better than anybody else if that's the best we can do – to love those who are good to us and those who treat us justly.

Verse 47 says you're going to be called upon to love more. If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? It's not enough for Christians to resemble the world. We're to far exceed the behavior of the world. We're to go beyond and surpass what the world is able to do. Our love is not to be explained in human terms. It's to be something that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Someone said we are not to be enemies of those who may be enemies to us. From their perspective, we are their enemies, but from our perspective, they are our neighbors. Look at the display of this.

What does this look? Jesus gives us a few very practical things that we can leave here today and say I can engage even my enemy in this way. Look at the verse 44 when Jesus says: "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 the unjust." Note first of all we're to pray. We're to pray for our enemies. Now you might say you're happy to pray for them. I'm going to pray for their demise. I'm going to pray for their destruction. I'm going to pray for everything bad to go on in their life. I will be happy to pray for them. I don't think that's exactly what Jesus has in mind. If we're going to pray for our enemies, what would we pray for them? We can certainly pray that they might come to faith in Christ. We can certainly pray that they may experience the new birth of the gospel. You think that's impossible. That's highly unlikely. You don't know these people.

About one year ago today when we were back studying in the book of Jonah, that was exactly the heart of Jonah for the people of Nineveh. He ran to Tarshish because he said to God, if I go there and tell them your good news, they might very well believe that. I do not want them to believe. I do not want them to experience your grace. We better be careful that we don't have the attitude that is similar to that. So we can pray for those who fall into this category of being our enemy. Those who are unjust, who are not kind, who are not good to us.

We could pray for their evil to be restrained. Not only can we pray for their salvation, but it is perfectly in order to pray that the evil that they may be committing themselves to would be restrained by the sovereign work of God, that He would confuse and confound. Remember that was the advice that the wise counselor gave to David, that David's opposition would get confusing counsel. We can pray something very similar. Ezekiel and Jeremiah both talk about evil shepherds over God's people. I have prayed many times as I see things in our world today and see people who fall into that category of evil shepherds who are leading people astray. There is nothing wrong with praying that God would limit their influence that would limit and restrain the harm that they may do and bring through their counsel or through their actions. First of all we can pray for our enemies.

The second thing He says that we can do is we can simply be good to them. That's the whole point verse 45. How God treats the righteous and the unrighteous and He sends rain and sunshine. That is just a general grace of God. We can do the same. Someone said to return evil for evil is demonic. To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine. And that's what Jesus is saying. In that same verse, Jesus basically says children reflect their parents. Children reflect their parents. Not in every situation or in every circumstance is that true, but the principle is there. The principle is there and we are to reflect our heavenly Father. When we do kind deeds and acts of kindness to others that are not in the category that we would normally see as our friend, we are responding in kindness and reflecting the character of our heavenly Father.

Verse 47. Another thing we can do. We can greet them. I think you just expand that out to say as it does in verse 47: "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" It is simply again talking about a gracious greeting. There could be somebody at work that just totally gets under your skin every day and maybe even they have it in for you. Maybe somebody in your neighborhood that has not been a very good neighbor for any number of reasons. What do you do? One of the very simple things you can do is you pray for them. You can find ways to do acts of kindness towards them. Jesus says you can do something as simple as just greet them. Augustine said many have learned how to offer the other cheek but do not know how to love him by whom they were struck. So there Jesus gives us some fairly simple things. Disarm them with good. Greet them. Don't speak evil about them. Pray for them. Love them.

Appropriately, this chapter ends in verse 48: "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Here is the divine work of God in our lives. What do you need to do to please God? What would get you to heaven? if you ask a man or woman on the street they would almost to a person say, unless they knew the gospel, I'm just going to do the best I can. I'm just going to be the best person I can be and hope that in the end that all works out. Jesus has a different standard. In answering that question, Jesus says you have to be perfect. Not 99% of the time but 100%. What an incredible challenge and what an appropriate challenge as we end this chapter.

So let's look at that. What does Jesus mean when He says we have to be perfect? Does it mean we have to be perfect? This is a word that is in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In both the Old and New, it means basically the same thing. To be complete. To be whole. It is simply the idea of perfection, maturity, lacking nothing, attaining the goal. If that's what Jesus means, then again we have to say I can't do that. When Jesus says be perfect, we have to say I can't be perfect. How is this going to be realized in our life? How is verse 48 going to come true for us? You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. We know that it begins at salvation. It begins at salvation. The Bible tells us that having come to faith in Christ, God sees us as He sees His Son. He sees us as being perfect. He sees us as being complete. He sees the righteousness of Christ in us. So in one sense in terms of our position, we are perfect already. But then of course what Jesus has in view here is our day-to-day walk with Him as well. So in that regard, it becomes a matter of reaching this goal of maturity that God has for us. Paul says in Philippians – He who has begun a good work in you will complete it. Jesus, having begun that good work, has promised that in our day-to-day walk with Him we will be conformed more and more to the image of Christ as we walk in obedience to Him. Jesus gives us that picture in Philippians of His own experience, of His own outlook. “Let each one of you look not only to his own interest but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

This whole fifth chapter revolves around the willingness on our part to yield our rights, to die to self, to love even our enemies. In so doing we're giving to everyone around us a picture of our Father, our heavenly Father. All of that comes together to point us to Christ and to the gospel. So much of it has to do with the life of this body and how we interact with each other and how we encourage each other and how we have opportunity to build each other up and grow us in this faith. It brings us closer to the image and likeness of Christ, to be there for us to pick each other up when we're down, to encourage us, to build us up in our faith. That's the goal that Christ has in mind for us. Simply stated there are no people to whom the light and the warmth of this gospel that's in our lives is not to be shared and not to reach. Jesus said love even your enemy.

How do we do this? Let's close with this thought. Take a few minutes as this day unfolds and maybe come back to this. Who in your life would you put in that category? Who in your life would you view as an enemy, a person that you would just rather not love? It may be for a whole series of reasons. What do you think God would call for you to do in light of what Jesus said in this passage this morning? What actions can you take to express God's love to this person?

Let's pray. Father, the words of Jesus are always challenging. They're hard sometimes to hear and they're even harder to put into practice. We're grateful that You have begun that good work in our lives. Lord, we want to walk in obedience to Your word and in obedience to Your truth. We want to reflect well on our heavenly Father. We want people to see in our life that we belong to You. As Jesus had said already, that men may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. That is our prayer again this morning, Father. In Jesus's name, amen.