

How Can We Love Our Enemies?

Rick Railston
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A few weeks ago I gave a sermon on one of the more difficult admonitions from God and that was to have joy in the face of trials. In my opinion, one of the most difficult things God requires of us, even more so than to have joy in the face of trials, is to love our enemies. I think that is probably the most difficult thing for a human being to do.

Notice what Christ commands—it is not a suggestion, it is a command. Let's go to Matthew 5 and we'll begin in verse 43. I'm going to read this out of the New King James Version. This is Christ's first recorded sermon, and He gets to this subject right away, as He adds a spiritual dimension to God's Law.

Matthew 5:43 [Notice what He says in the very beginning] *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (NKJV)*

That exact phrase is not in the Bible. The Bible says yes, we shall love our neighbor—Leviticus 19 says that—but to love your neighbor and hate your enemy isn't found in the Bible, but that's what they were told.

44) [He says] *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (NKJV)*

Now that is a challenge. That is difficult to do. When you look up the word "enemies"—I wanted to see exactly what Christ was referring to when He used the word—it is Strong's #2190. It's the Greek word *echthros*, and it means *someone who is hateful, passively odious*—meaning "stinks" [laughs]—*or actively hostile; an adversary, a foe.*

Christ says the people who hate you, who are hostile toward you, who are adversarial toward you, you have to love. That is a commandment from our Savior Jesus Christ. When someone opposes us, when someone wants us to fail at whatever activity it is, loving them is difficult. It really is. When someone hates us, or gossips about us, or tells lies about us, loving them, after that, becomes all the more difficult—very, very difficult.

The sad fact is—I've said it before, and I think most of us realize this—that most of us have been treated far worse by brethren inside the Church than outside the Church. Loving our enemies is something God requires of us, absolutely requires. The question then becomes how can we love our enemies? How can we do that? The Bible has

some answers and that's what we're going to look at today. That's the title of the sermon:

How Can We Love Our Enemies?

The focus today is going to be on loving those within God's Church who call us their enemy. We shouldn't call anyone with God's Spirit our enemy, but people have done so—called people with God's Spirit their enemy. The principles we will cover today that we find in the Bible apply to whether people are in or out of God's Church. We're going to look at some principles that the Bible reveals to us of how we can come to the point where we can love the very people who want to destroy us. Christ's life, and the example He set, has a lot to do with that. The first point, when you study the subject, is to realize that we, as well as our enemies—those who call us enemies—are all seeking the same goal.

1. We are all seeking the same goal.

If we are in the Church, and we have God's Holy Spirit, those who oppose us (might even hate us, might even gossip about us), despite that fact, we all are seeking the same goal. We know what that is: Matthew 6:33. In Matthew 6:33, a scripture we all know by heart, Christ is speaking and is instructing us, all of us.

Matthew 6:33 *But seek ye first [the very first thing is to seek] the kingdom of God [but added to that] and His [meaning God's] righteousness, and [then] all these things shall be added unto you [all the other things you worry about]. (KJV)*

We see here that part of His righteousness—part of God's righteousness—is loving our enemies. If we're going to be righteous as God is, righteous as Christ was when He walked the earth and is today on the right hand of the Father—if we are going to be righteous like Them, we have to love our enemies. That is a tall order! Notice Paul's goal. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians 2 and we'll read just one verse, verse 19. Paul had the same goal of seeking first the Kingdom of God, but his goal involved the brethren under his care. Notice what Paul says:

1 Thessalonians 2:19 *For what is our hope ... [he says what is our] joy ... [what is our] crown of rejoicing? [What is that? Then he gives the answer] Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (KJV)*

Paul's goal should be our goal of having all of God's people come to the point where they are ready to marry Jesus Christ, ready to enter into the Kingdom of God as His eternal children. Before we can get there personally, guess what we have to do? We have to prove to God that we will love our enemies, because if we don't, we won't be there. As we are going to see, that's what Christ did. He showed love to those who opposed Him and who wanted to kill Him. We should want the best for God's children,

in this life, now, even when they slander us; they assassinate our character; spread lies and gossip about us—we should want the best for them *now*. Because—notice what John said in 1 John 4, he said it very plainly—God is not going to deal with people who are hypocrites. We have to love out of a pure heart. Notice 1 John 4, verse 20.

1 John 4:20 *If a man says, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar:*

Very clear—if a man says, I love God, and he turns around and hates his brother, he does not love God; He is a liar.

20 continued) for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21) [For] ... this commandment have we from him, [not a suggestion, not a thought, a commandment we have from Him] That he who loveth God love his brother also. (KJV)

There is no qualifier here. It doesn't say it's okay to love your brother as long as your brother is nice to you. It doesn't say that. The implication is that no matter what your brother does—misguided as your brother might be, no matter how provoked your brother is by Satan, and does something evil towards you—that is not a reason not to love him. We need to realize when someone opposes us and is obviously our enemy, we need to look at ourselves first to make sure we are not doing anything wrong. If we are trying to follow God and there is opposition anyway, we have to realize that those who oppose us are still God's children. Once we realize they're still God's children—and God is working with them, and God wants them in His Kingdom—then it becomes easier for us to love them, once we understand that fact.

The first point is that we are all seeking the same goal. Sometimes we stumble and slip, sometimes we have bad attitudes, sometimes we allow Satan to provoke us—if we get off-track, and God has mercy with us, guess what?—we should have mercy with each other. We should be ready to forgive our brother or sister, but love them at all times because they are God's children. The second point:

2. We need to realize that we, as well as those who call us an enemy, are not in the same place spiritually.

We are not all yellow pencils. All of us start our spiritual journey—when God calls us—from different places. We are not all in the same place. Let me give you an example of two people in the Church I've known over the years—I won't use any names, but I know them personally—just to see how different people can be when they come into God's Church, and what their starting place is and how different that starting place can be.

The first individual grew up with two very loving parents. They were not converted but as parents they were as good as you can get. They dedicated themselves to the family;

they dedicated themselves to each individual child and set a very good example. They were loving, they didn't fight, argue or throw things. They didn't berate; they just set a great example. They lived in a small town—back in those days no one locked their doors; people left their keys in their car—there were no problems in this little town. All neighbors and friends were upright, moral people. There was no local crime and everyone got along—it was an idyllic, almost millennial situation. This individual worked to go to college and later earned an advanced degree. After that, God called that person.

Now let's contrast that with another person with whom I am personally very familiar. This individual grew up with an extremely violent and abusive father and a passive mother. The father used violence as discipline. I remember one account where, as a young boy, he did something to violate his father's wishes, and his dad picked him up and threw him across the room. He hit the middle of the wall, fell to the floor (obviously, after bouncing off the wall), and his father came over and kicked him in the head. That's discipline. Then, after his two older brothers reached puberty, they began to sexually abuse him, every morning, for years. The parents knew about it but allowed it to happen. He was told he was inferior by his father. His brothers made his life miserable by calling him dumb, stupid, slow, and all of that. As a result, in his early teen years, he turned to drugs and alcohol to escape the misery of his home life. He had a long-term problem with drugs and alcohol. He never finished high school, and guess what? God called him.

Both of these individuals—both of them—were called to begin their journey toward the Kingdom of God. If you liken the Kingdom of God to a penthouse on the top of a high-rise, the first individual probably started on the fifth or the tenth floor, walking the way up to the penthouse. The second individual began three or four stories down in the basement to begin his journey up to the penthouse.

The point I am making is that we don't start at the same place. We have different backgrounds, different environments, different parents and the examples they set—we have different IQ's, different levels of intelligence, different educations, and so on and so forth. In addition to all that, on any given day we're not in the same place spiritually, either, even for people who grew up with similar backgrounds. On a given day we are not in the same place spiritually. On a given day our knowledge and application of spiritual principles varies—over time, hopefully, we get better and better at it—but on any given day, our knowledge and application of spiritual principles can sometimes be lacking. Even something as small as how much sleep we've had, or how we're feeling that day, or whether we're sick or not, or whether we're in pain or not [can make a difference].

We vary day to day in spiritual wisdom and maturity, and we vary over time. We also know that day to day we vary in our closeness to God. Some days we feel really close to God; other days maybe not so much. It is a continually moving thing, and all of these vary day to day. Once we realize this, it should make it easier for us to love someone

who opposes us or disagrees with us, because of all these variables. If someone is opposing us today, guess what? They might change and tomorrow they might agree with us! Over a period of months or even years, the source of the opposition may change. They may turn and apologize down the road. All of us have to keep that possibility open—ready to forgive, ready to reconcile and come together. Once we know that, it is easier for us to love them.

All of us are a work in progress. God is not through with any of us. He is still working with us despite our bad attitudes, our fatigue, our pain level, our slips and stumbles, our disobedience to God's Law—God is still right there with us. He is faithful to us and we need to realize that and be thankful, in our case, that God is that way, but also realize that that is true for our brothers and sisters who may be in opposition to us. We have to look at Christ's example. Let's go to Luke 23:32. As I said in the beginning, Christ set the ultimate example of loving His enemies. We're going to see that here, one of several scriptures on the subject. Christ has been taken and He has been led to where He is going to be crucified.

Luke 23:32 *And there were also two others, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

33) And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

34) [Notice Christ's example] Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do ... (KJV)

And as He was saying that, they were parting His raiment and casting lots of who was going to take His clothes. The fellows had just nailed His hands and feet and people were disparaging Him, cursing Him, challenging Him, deriding Him. Yet look at the love He had for those who were in the exact process of killing Him—putting Him to death. The thing that Christ understood is He knew that these misguided people would someday be called and converted. But at that moment, when they were crucifying Him, or spitting on Him, or whatever they were doing—at that moment they did not know what they were doing. They didn't comprehend what they were doing. Christ understood that and He asked His Father in Heaven to please forgive them because of His love for them as future sons and daughters in God's Kingdom.

Let's understand that we're not all in the same place spiritually on our spiritual journey, at any given point in time. Therefore, we have to exercise God's Holy Spirit toward others, regardless of what they happen to be doing to us at that moment, or any given moment. If somebody is cursing us, or if somebody is lying about us or gossiping about us, we have to just take a deep breath and realize, look, I don't know what is going on in their life, I don't know how strongly Satan is provoking them—probably a great deal—I don't know what other trials they have in their life, and maybe I'm just the cat that gets kicked. Maybe I'm the one they're venting their frustrations on in their own life. We just don't know—God knows. We still are commanded to love those who oppose us. Let's

go to Galatians 5:22. You know what this is—I'll read it out of the New King James—talking about the fruits of God's Spirit. This is what we have to exhibit to those who oppose us, who call us an enemy, if we are to fulfill Christ's commandment of loving our enemies.

Galatians 5:22 [Notice how many of these would relate to loving our enemy.] *But the fruit of the Spirit is love*, [obviously, that is the big one, then we know] *joy*, [but notice this] *peace*, [we should seek peace] *longsuffering*, [meaning putting up with somebody's abuse; not fighting back evil with evil] *kindness*, [somebody is showing the opposite to us, we should go back to them with kindness and] *goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness*, [and] *self-control*. *Against such there is no law.* (NKJV)

Self-control, meaning if they are angry and screaming at us, it doesn't give us the right to scream and yell back at them. If they are doing evil toward us, that's not permission to go do evil back toward them. When we realize—closing out this second point—that we're not in the same place spiritually, it becomes easier for us to understand those who call us enemies. Therefore, if we understand that, and understand we're not in the same place spiritually, then it's easier to love them and have compassion for them because they might not be in a good place spiritually. We need to accept that and understand that, and take that into account—and as my dad used to say, sometimes you need to cut some people some slack. Don't keep the rope (he was an old cowboy) so tight on the horse, or the reins on the horse, or the cow that you just roped—cut them a little slack. Make it a little easier for them.

Now we come to the third point.

3. All of us, in our Christian walk, must make decisions in our life that are not popular.

All of us must make decisions in our life that are not popular. What I mean by that is, when we don't do what people want us to do, we can often become their enemies. People have certain expectations of us. When we don't fulfill those expectations, they are not happy with us. They get upset with us. If they allow themselves to get grossly upset, then they can begin to call us, and treat us like, their enemy.

Let me give you a personal example of when I first came into the Church. Obviously, one of the first things we gave up when we came into the Church was keeping Christmas. In our household, Christmas was a big, big deal. My brother and I went away to college, and then after college, we obviously had jobs not in our hometown, and we would come home for Christmas. Once we were called, that stopped. Because Christmas meant so much, particularly to my mother, that was not a popular decision. That was not something she accepted easily or readily, or with a smile on her face. She actually, to her death, never got over it. Never got over that her kids weren't with her around the Christmas tree, giving presents—the whole deal of Christmas. She never

got over it. In fact, twenty years later, she said, “I am tired of playing second fiddle to that church.” That was her attitude—that we were putting God before her, or the Church before her. In a situation like that, we all know we don’t have a choice, do we? We could keep Christmas to please parents, let’s say, or a mate or something like that—or we could follow God and suffer the consequences.

God makes it very clear. Acts 5:29—the religious powers-that-be told the apostles that you can’t preach this Jesus, you can’t preach His resurrection, you can’t say that He is the Son of God—and all of that. They were beaten, they were put in jail, they were threatened (Acts 5:29—they were under a lot more pressure than we are today), then Peter and the other apostles answered (when they were saying you can’t do this), and said, we ought to obey God rather than men. The point I’m making here is that in obeying God, living in the world we live in, some of the decisions we make to comply with God’s wishes are not popular decisions, and will bring persecution on us. In a similar way, a minister sometimes has to make decisions or choices that are not going to be universally popular. Certain individuals may need discipline; that happens very rarely, but occasionally it happens. Some people may be asked not to attend services; you can count on one hand, in forty plus years as a minister, I’ve had to do that. Every once in a while you have to, and when you do that, some people don’t like it. Now they become your enemy.

It goes back to what I said before, when you don’t do what people expect you to do, or want you to do, then they can view you as an enemy. It doesn’t make any difference what it is—if you don’t meet their expectations, and some people get their backs up about it—now you are the enemy. You are not the friend anymore, you are the enemy. Then again, certainly as a minister, you don’t have a choice! We have to obey God—all of us have to obey God and act according to God’s Word. We have to put God first! Let’s go to 2 Timothy 4:1. Paul is speaking to this young minister, Timothy, and giving him some advice and also giving him some commands, some duties, that he must fulfill. Paul made it very clear what his expectations of Timothy were.

2 Timothy 4:1 [Paul is speaking to Timothy; he says] *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, [so this is pretty serious] who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his [referring to God’s] kingdom ...*
(KJV)

This is the instruction, this is the charge: Preach the Word! You can’t back off from God’s Word! You can’t say, okay, this part of God’s Word is going to be offensive to some people so I’m not going to preach this part of God’s Word. I’ve had people here in the last year come to me and say, you can’t preach this because it’s not going to make some people happy. They’re going to be unhappy with you. I mentioned to this individual, now wait a minute, you’re saying that if I preach the truth, that we all agree is in the Bible—if I preach that, it’s going to make some people upset and become offended. So, then, you want me to put these people, who might be offended, before God. In order to keep them happy, we don’t preach God’s truth—is that what you’re

saying? I don't think this individual had thought of it quite in that way, but he said well, but you don't have to preach *all* the truth. [Laugh] Well, I beg to differ—God's truth is God's truth—it is all there. Shame on us if we don't speak it, if we don't preach it. We see here, in 2 Timothy 4, verse 2:

2) *Preach the word*; [he says (I'm reading out of the KJV)] *be instant* [the Greek means *be present*] *in season, out of season*; [in other words be there for the people; be there with them in season, out of season—but notice—you have to] *reprove*, [Paul says that means you need to correct somebody who's heading off in the wrong direction] *rebuke* [you might have to rebuke somebody from time to time, and you need to] *exhort* [to uplift, to encourage people] *with all longsuffering and doctrine* [or teaching]. (KJV)

As we all know, this is not what many people want today. They don't want that, as this example I just mentioned shows. Let's go to Isaiah 30—obviously talking to Ancient Israel, but it is a prophecy for spiritual Israel also. Isaiah 30, we'll begin in verse 9. God is condemning Israel and anybody who has this same attitude.

Isaiah 30:9 [Notice what God says] *That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD* [LORD all caps; Yahweh, or Jehovah—don't want to hear God's Law, don't want to be reminded of God's Law]

10) *Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, [rather] speak unto us smooth things* [easy things to be accepted and digested], *prophecy deceits*:

We'd rather you would lie to us if it sounds good, if it makes us feel better. We'd rather you would lie to us is what they're saying.

11) *Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path* [is what they want to happen], *cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us*. (KJV)

It just blows my mind that when we started studying about God, and the roles God and Christ have, and the relationship between the two of Them, and the activities between the two of Them—I thought that once that understanding came to all the elders and brethren (and it's happening all over the country) people would rejoice. People would be so excited and so happy that the Bible just exploded in front of them. That isn't the way it worked with a lot of people. I was totally unprepared for the opposition, for the hatred, for the gossip, for the outright lies that have been hurled our way because we dared preach about God. I've had people say that! I had one elder scream at me, "How dare you talk about Almighty God! How dare you talk about the Living God!" Maybe I'm confused here, but isn't this the Church of God? Aren't we wanting to be in the Kingdom of God, and aren't these God's Commandments and God's Holy Days? So maybe we should be talking about God! You would think that would be welcome, but in some circles it's just not the case. We have to remember who is behind it all. The last

thing Satan wants is for people to know the truth about God. Look at Galatians 1:10. Talk about opposition. Paul suffered probably more opposition than any apostle and he had to make decisions—do I follow God or do I keep the people happy, or keep the government off my back. Galatians 1:10—I'll read this out of the New Living Translation [an older, online version]. It says it very bluntly.

Galatians 1:10 [Paul says] *Obviously, I'm not trying to be a people pleaser. No, I am trying to please God [and that's true for all of us—we should please God first]. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant.* (NLT)

How true that is! As ministers, sometimes we have to make decisions we know will cause opposition, will cause some people to get offended—but frankly, it just comes with the job. As they say, it comes with the territory. You'd better expect it because it's going to happen. The question for those on the receiving end of the decision that maybe they don't like or disagree with—let me ask the question of them: When you disagree, do we have to become enemies as a result of the disagreement? Just because you disagree with somebody, does that make him your enemy? Should it make him your enemy? Of course not! Because I disagree, am I entitled then to hate? Because I disagree, am I entitled to gossip and to slander, and assassinate someone's character just because I disagree? Well, of course not! The question really boils down to the fact of who do we put first? When making a decision that might not be popular, who do we put first? Do we put pleasing God or pleasing other human beings? The obvious answer is that we must put God first, we must please God first, and then let the chips fall where they may fall. That's just the way it is.

So, in closing out this third point, we all have to make decisions in our life that are not popular. We need to make sure those decisions are based on God's Word; God's expectations; what God wants us to do. Then once we make those decisions, we can go forward against all manner of opposition if we know God has our back, if we know God is behind us, if we know God is motivating us. That leads to the fourth point, and this is something that applies to us when people hurt us because they call us an enemy, or they even hate us, lie or gossip about us.

4. We must overcome our own hurt in order to love our enemies.

If we can't get past the fact that people have hurt us, how can we love them? As I mentioned in the introduction, people in the Church have treated Dorothy and me far worse than people in the world (people outside the Church). When somebody in the Church hurts us, it has more impact, because they're our brothers and sisters—they're God's people. We thought we were friends; we thought we were going toward the Kingdom of God together, and yet when they become an enemy, you see, the hurt is deep inside *us*. That is something in order for us to forgive and in order for us to love, we have to overcome that. If we don't overcome it and we hang on to hurt and bad feelings, then our salvation becomes in jeopardy.

Look at Christ's own words. We're going to go to two scriptures where Christ speaks directly to this point. Let's go to Matthew 10 and we're going to begin in verse 34. Christ is obviously talking to the people around Him, yes—but it's a prophecy for today. It's a prophecy for all time, but it's particularly true today as the end gets nearer and nearer.

Matthew 10:34 [Notice what Christ says] *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth:* [Now the world thinks Christ came to bring peace—all the Christmas carols and all the things at the end of the year: joy, good will and all of that to men. Christ is saying] *Think not that I am come to send peace on [the] earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

35) *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*

36) [This is very important] *And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.* (KJV)

That is true physically, but it's also true spiritually. What is our spiritual household? That's the Church! Who are our spiritual brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers in the Church? Obviously, our brethren! A man's foes shall be they of his own spiritual household, we could add.

37) *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* (KJV)

It's interesting, you see, Christ is saying your foes can come from within your spiritual household. When that happens it hurts us more than somebody outside the Church because we are brothers and sisters; we've always been friends (or thought we were friends) and we're heading to the path of God's Kingdom. We're trying to obey God and Christ and yet, all of a sudden, now we're the enemy. That hurts a lot. Let's go to John 16 and we'll begin in verse 1. This is how bad it's going to get. It happened in Christ's day; it happened in the days of the apostles; and it for sure is going to happen in the end days.

John 16:1 [Christ is speaking and these two scriptures speak directly to this subject. Christ says] *These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended* [when people oppose you, when people become your enemy, when people hate you].

2) *They shall put you out of the synagogues:* [we could say, out of the Church today, in their minds] *yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

3) *And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.* (KJV)

How can somebody do that, if they know God and they know Jesus Christ? The point is, they wouldn't. Beginning of verse 4:

4) *But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them ... [We'll stop there.] (KJV)*

The point is Christ is saying I'm telling you it's going to happen. There is going to be a time—has been times—when brother will turn in brother, or turn against a brother, and people who kill you think they're doing God's bidding. It refers, obviously, not to just taking somebody's life. You can kill somebody's reputation. You can kill somebody's character in front of others by gossip, slander and innuendo.

That has happened all too often in God's Church, and yet the people who are doing it think they are doing God a service by killing somebody. These two verses—Matthew 10 and John 16—are coming to pass right before our eyes. Most times what happens is this: somebody hears a rumor about a brother or sister. Guess what they do? They don't verify whether the rumor is true. They just accept it, believe it, and then what do they do? They repeat it. They repeat it to somebody else who does exactly the same thing. Nobody ever stops the chain of events and says, you know—this doesn't sound right, this doesn't sound like Susie or Joe. I'm going to call them and find out if this is really true. That doesn't often happen. It just doesn't.

Guess who is provoking this behavior behind the scenes to cause division, character assassination, turmoil and upset in the Church? Who is our adversary? We know who our adversary is and who is planting those thoughts and provoking those emotions, where people listen to rumors, jump on them, believe them one hundred percent—and then start repeating them.

We know from personal experience that it doesn't take long—the pipeline in the Church is very short and very direct and very big, especially with the Internet going on these days—it doesn't take long for rumors to become fact in other people's minds. Then people's character gets destroyed or their reputation gets destroyed. That's never happened as easily before because back in the days when Christ walked this earth, you didn't have the Internet. You couldn't spread false information halfway around the world in a matter of a minute or two, but it happens today with light speed. All of that can occur in a very, very short period of time. Guess who's taking advantage of it? Our adversary, the evil one.

Look at God's attitude towards those who repeat rumors. As we read this scripture—let's turn to Proverbs 6—put yourself in a position of having just repeated a rumor that was not true, or you didn't check it out to see if it was true. Proverbs chapter 6, we'll begin in verse 16.

Proverbs 6:16 [This is serious stuff, and the brethren in the Church, for decades, have violated this scripture to their own peril.] *These six things doth the LORD [all caps, Jehovah, YHVH] hate: [not dislike, not be upset with, but hate] yea, seven are an abomination unto him: (KJV)*

This is a linguistic emphasis here in verse 16, wherein you have one number and then you add another number to it—six; no, but even seven—that’s there for emphasis. It’s showing how bad it is: These are the six, yea, the seven things that are an abomination to God.

17) A proud look, [notice this] a lying tongue...

We can be told a fact, at least the person telling us presents it as a fact, but what if it isn’t a fact—in other words, it’s not true. Then if we repeat it without verifying it, we are actually lying because we are telling a falsehood and we never stopped to check it out to see if it is indeed a falsehood—we just repeated it. Thereby, with one phone call or one conversation, we can have a lying tongue, a proud look ...

17 continued) ... and hands that shed innocent blood,

That can be referring to murder, but also, idiomatically, it could be referring to assassinating somebody’s character—somebody who’s innocent, and yet is being lied about. Verse 18:

18) ... [A] heart that deviseth wicked imaginations ... (KJV)

How many times have we heard somebody say, I know what’s in their mind, or I know what’s in their heart, or I know why they did this. We don’t know—we don’t take up residence in their head. Only God and Christ do that because they have made Their abode in us. For us to say that we can understand somebody’s heart, we know somebody’s heart, we can read their mind—is just absolute stupidity, and it goes against God’s Word. A heart that devises wicked imaginations: Oh, I know they’re going to do this—you just wait, they’re going to do this.

One minister of a prominent group said publicly, you just watch, Pacific is going to start preaching that Christ is a created being. He said that publicly as though he knows what’s in all the elders’ minds, he knows what’s in all your minds—so he can make this prophecy! I e-mailed this minister and told him, look—you just said this—we’ve never talked about it, we never discussed it. How can you claim to know what we’re going to do? I’m here to tell you we don’t believe this; never have, never will, because it is against what the Bible teaches. I would like you to publicly withdraw that statement. Guess what? Never heard another word after that, so you see, there are hearts that devise wicked imaginations. We can’t go there because we do not know what’s in anybody’s heart. We don’t know what they’ve been through, or what they are going through. Thereby, we have to be a little forbearing, a little patient, cut some people some slack.

18 continued) ... [A heart that devises wicked imaginations,] feet that be swift in running to mischief,

19) *A false witness that speaketh lies*, [here it goes again: lying tongue, false witness that speaks lies, and this last one is the worst] *and he that soweth discord among brethren.* (KJV)

By repeating something that's not true, and has never been verified, that individual is guilty of sowing discord, and God says, I hate that. How would we like to stand before God and try to justify that kind of behavior? Too many people don't follow Matthew 18:15. It's been in the Bible, but that is probably the most violated commandment in the Bible, at least one of the top ones.

Matthew 18:15 [We know it by heart] *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee* [brother does something that we perceive is against us, what are we supposed to do?] *go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone ...* (KJV)

Emphasis on the word *alone*. Go talk to him! You said this—at least this is what I thought you said, or what I thought I heard you say. It really hurt my feelings and it offended me. Did you really mean that, did you really say that, did I hear you correctly? Give it a chance that maybe part of it is our fault, too. Go to that person and try to settle it.

15 continued) [It goes on to say] *if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.* (KJV)

It takes character to go to somebody and say, face-to-face and eyeball-to-eyeball, you hurt my feelings. I've been thinking about it—this is what I heard you say, or this is what you did, what I saw you do—now, can we talk about it in a spirit of love, gentleness, patience, kindness? Maybe I'm wrong. Let's work this out; let's discuss it. If people did that, we wouldn't have near the rumor mill that we do in the Church. Go to your brother alone. This would stop a lot of discord, a lot of division, and a lot of trouble. Look at Galatians 6:1. (This says the same thing but in more depth. These two scriptures directly tie into one another.)

Galatians 6:1 [Paul says] *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault* [he's just caught up in sin in a time of weakness, or something like that], *ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.* (KJV)

“Go to them in a spirit of meekness.” This implies going directly to your brother or sister to sit down and have a talk. I saw you do this—are you going through a hard time; are you having some problems; is there something I can help with? I don't want to see this from you, you're my friend. Then start a discussion. If that happened, and we were on the receiving end of that, we would be thankful that the person came to us directly. As one minister famously said, there are two kinds of people in God's Church: those who pick up their Bible to see what God says, or those who pick up their phone

to see what their Church brother thinks. We have to go by God's Word, and Galatians 6 and Matthew 18 are in God's Word. If we just stopped it there, face to face, we wouldn't have the trouble that we've had over the decades in God's Church.

For someone we don't know well, it's easier to love them from a distance because we don't know them all that well. If they do something wrong, it's easier to forgive or say maybe they're having a bad day or something like that. When someone is inside the Church and has been your friend, and treats you as an enemy, that means the hurt is exaggerated—the hurt is more because they were supposedly our friends, maybe for decades. Because they have been very close to us for decades, and then view us as an enemy, we have to overcome additional hurt in order to love them. We have to overcome additional hurt in order to forgive them. The bottom line is that it's our duty, it is absolutely our duty, to overcome that additional hurt so that we can love those who oppose us, love those who slander us, love those who tell lies about us.

The fifth and last point—there are three parts to this point. As I was studying this (I often try to figure out what is God trying to tell us) and in this fifth point I asked myself the question—why does God want us to love our enemies? He could just as easily say hate your enemies, wipe them out. But God said love your enemies; Christ said love your enemies.

5. Why does God want us to love our enemies?

There has to be a reason. There have to be lessons in it for us. The first, point A:

5A. Why does God want us to love our enemies? So that we can learn to be like Jesus Christ.

We can learn to be like Christ, because Christ loved His enemies, and if we can learn to do that then we become like Jesus Christ. Therefore, He's more apt to marry us because we're like Him! He loves His enemies, we love our enemies—therefore, we're more like Jesus Christ. Let's go to Luke 6 and we'll begin in verse 22. Christ is speaking. This is what Christ wants, and if we're going to follow in His footsteps, we have to do what Christ wants. We have to follow His example. Luke 6, beginning in verse 22. I'll read this out of the King James.

***Luke 6:22** Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you [that's counter-intuitive], and when they shall separate you from their company [when they walk away from you], and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.*

23) Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: [we're told, because he says] for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (KJV)

Ancient Israel did speak evil of the prophets. We've already read that. Don't tell us the

truth; speak smooth words, and if you don't, we'll kill you. We'll run you out of town.

- 24) *But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.*
25) *Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.*
26) *Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! [Oh really?] for so did their fathers to the false prophets. [Be careful about the praise of men.]*
27) *But [in contrast, Christ is saying, but] I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,*
28) *Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*
29) *And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.*
30) *Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.*
31) *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*
(KJV)

When we're tempted to repeat something that's not verified, that we don't know for a fact is true, would we want somebody to do that to us? Of course not! So why should we do it to somebody else?

- 32) *For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.*
33) *And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same [thing].*
34) *And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.*
35) [Here it goes again] *But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, [and notice this] and ye shall be the children of the Highest: [God Almighty—Christ is speaking—children of the Highest] for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. (KJV)*

Why shouldn't we be also? We see here Christ set the ultimate example of loving our enemies. That's point A.

5B. We need to learn to retrain our minds as to what we think.

That's part of Christian conversion. Let's go to Philippians 4:8. Paul is telling the Philippians, and us today, this is where our minds should be. We can do this through the power of the Holy Spirit. It means retraining our minds, getting control of our minds, being aware of our thoughts, and casting out thoughts that are not godly, and replacing them with thoughts or emotions that are godly.

Philippians 4:8 [Paul says] *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, [truth and honesty] whatsoever things are just,*

[we would say today “fair”] *whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; [not a bad report; not a slanderous report; not an evil report—but a good report] if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (KJV)*

The only way we can do that is through the power of the Holy Spirit. The only way we can do it; because of human nature, we want to think of the worst. We want to dwell on the negative. We want to wallow in all the bad stuff that other people allegedly have done. We need to remember what we allow ourselves to think, that we become. I’ll say it again—what we allow ourselves to think, that we become. If we allow negativity to dominate our minds, evil to dominate our minds, then that’s what our minds become—evil, negative. We have to be careful about what we think.

The point here, point B, is we have to retrain our minds, focusing on the positive, focusing on the end goal. The end goal is God’s Kingdom. The end goal is to be righteous like God and Christ. The end goal is to have all of the fruits of God’s Spirit, which are love and joy and peace and kindness and goodness and faith and mercy. That is what our focus should be on, not dwelling on the negative and not dwelling on any alleged, real, or perceived wrong done to us. Point B, lessons we can learn—why God wants us to love our enemies—is to learn to retrain our minds as to what we think. The third—and this is one of the hardest—is to learn to discipline our tongues.

5C. To learn to discipline our tongues.

That is the hardest—to put a cage around our mouth, so to speak. Let’s go to Hebrews 12 and verse 14. This is what we have to be careful of; it’s a warning by Paul.

Hebrews 12:14 [He says] *Follow peace with all [word “men” is in italics: follow peace with everybody] men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: [we all want to see God, we all want to see Christ]*
15) Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; [and how does that happen?] lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, [and he adds] and thereby many [not a few—many] be defiled;

It’s sad today that many people gossip and slander out of a root of bitterness, and they don’t have a clue what they’re talking about because they’ve never gone to the individual to verify whether it’s true or not. Satan has planted a spirit of bitterness, and they go gossiping and attacking and slandering, and they never check it out. They feel absolutely free to repeat unverified rumors. How bad is that? They hear a rumor about somebody—a negative thing—and they repeat it freely, without ever going to check it out. Look at 1 Peter 2:21. Peter is talking about our calling and how we should follow Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:21 [Peter says] *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: [we*

should look to see how He handled opposition and persecution and slander, and follow what He did]

22) *Who did no sin, neither was guile* [we don't often use that word—the Greek means *trickery* or *deceit*—and there was no trickery in Christ's mind, there was no deceitfulness in Christ's mind or] *found in his mouth*:

23) *Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not*; [remember, He could have called down, He said—I could call down twelve legions of angels and wipe all of you out—but He didn't] *he threatened not, but committed himself to him* [His Father] *that judgeth righteously*: (KJV)

Now let's go to Titus 3:2. If people would just obey this, the Church and the relations in the Church would be a lot more pleasant.

Titus 3:2 [Paul is speaking, and notice what he says to Titus] *To speak evil of no man* [or woman—we shouldn't speak evil about anybody], *to be no brawlers*, [fighters] *but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men*. (KJV)

That is a commandment, and woe to us if we don't follow that. There will be a price to pay for an undisciplined tongue. We're all going to have to pay that price. Let's go to Matthew 12:36. This is the price we must pay when we speak something that is not true—when we repeat a rumor that has not been verified. Even if it is verified, we don't have to repeat it, you don't have to say it.

Matthew 12:36 [Christ is speaking] *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment*. (KJV)

When we repeat a rumor that we haven't gone to the source and checked out, that becomes an idle word, and someday we're going to have stand before God and justify that. How can we do that? We can't. Remember, it's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. We need to be very careful about that. The point is that God wants us to learn these three lessons so that we can be useful to Him—we can be a sharp instrument in His hands to do His will. By learning to love our enemies we learn powerful lessons, and we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Let's conclude now. Let's go back to Matthew 5:43. We read that in the beginning. I'll read this out of the NLT.

Matthew 5:43 *You have heard that the law of Moses says love your neighbor and hate your enemy* [you've heard that].

44) *But I say unto you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!*

45) *In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.*

46) *If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.*

47) *If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the pagans do that.*

48) *But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (NLT)*

The problem is we live in the Laodicean era. We know that Laodiceans say (Revelation 3:17) I have need of nothing. I am just fine, thank you. We just want things to go along smoothly, don't want to make any waves, don't want to have any trouble—we just want to keep going the way we're going. But, you see, there is a problem coming down the road. Look at Revelation 11:1. This is going to happen, and if you look at the context, this is going to happen before the two witnesses arrive on the scene. Before they arrive on the scene!

Revelation 11:1 *And there was given a reed like a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein [measure the people]. (NLT)*

What's to be measured? We know, we won't turn there—2 Corinthians 6:16—we're the temple of the Living God! God wants us to measure ourselves in light of Christ's example, in light of the Father's commandments. We see that God wants us, at these end days, to measure our life and to make changes, so we can be like God and Jesus Christ. God doesn't say it's okay to hate those who hate us. Loving our enemies is not dependent on what they're doing to us, specifically, at any moment in time.

We are to measure ourselves by the example of Jesus Christ, loving our enemies no matter what—no matter what they say, no matter what they do. We love them because we're following the example of Jesus Christ, and we have God's Spirit, which is the spirit of love. When we do that, the scriptures are very clear: If we can come to the point where we love our enemies, we can become like Jesus Christ and God the Father, and thereby we will be His eternal children forever.