

June 9, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Perfect Righteousness (Part 4)

Matthew 5:38-48

Contrast #5: Response to Others (verses 38-42)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 38)
2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 39-42)

Contrast #6: Love for Others (verses 43-48)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 43)
2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 44-48)

Many of you have heard the story of Martin and Gracia Burnham, the New Tribes Missionaries to the Philippines. They were taken hostage on May 27, 2001, by the Abu Sayyaf Group from the Dos Palmas Island Resort at Honda Bay off the island of Palawan in the Philippines, where Martin and Gracia were celebrating their 18th wedding anniversary. Last Friday (June 7, 2002), a rescue attempt was made. We don't quite know the full story yet, but apparently, at the first noise of gun-fire, Gracia ran to her freedom, while Martin was killed by his captors (along with Philippine nurse, Deborah Vat).

We have mentioned and prayed for these missionaries on several occasions at Rock Valley Bible Church. I believe now that the need to pray for them is greater than ever before. She will have an opportunity to speak to millions of people. In recent days, the demand to hear Jim Bowers (whose wife, Roni, and daughter, Charity, were killed by the Peruvian Airlines in April 2001) has been so great, that he has established his own website (www.jimbowers.org). What will Gracia Burnham say? We need to pray for her response to the many who will inquire. This morning we will look at the response God requires from us.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 5. For the past three weeks, we have been looking at verses 20-48, where Jesus is contrasting the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with the righteousness that is needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees had established their standard for righteousness, but Jesus is presenting His. In past weeks we have seen four contrasts of the Pharisees' teaching and Jesus' teaching. This morning, we will examine the fifth.

Contrast #5: Response to Others (verses 38-42)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 38)

In verse 38, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'" For the fifth time, Jesus quotes from the Old Testament to describe the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus quotes a passage that appeared in the Pentateuch three times: Ex 21:24; Le 24:20; De 19:21. In each case, God was establishing the legal procedures that should take place when harm done to another individual. The simple principle is often called, "Lex Talionis," the "law of retaliation." Jesus is simply saying, "The punishment shall fit the crime."

Today, it works out like this. If I am outside playing baseball and break my neighbor's window, the law requires me to pay for a new window -- not 10 windows. If I am driving my car and accidentally hit another car so as to damage it, I need to pay for its repair -- not for a new car. If I scraped the paint, I need to pay for a new paint job. If I dented the fender, I need to pay for it to be straightened out. If I totaled the car, I need to buy another one of equal value (not a new Porsche). "Eye for an eye; tooth for tooth; ox for an ox; window for window; car for car."

There is nothing wrong with this principle. In fact, it is the basis upon which the Jewish legal system (and ours today) is built. We understand this today, quite easily, because this is how our society is established. However, as we have learned with our other contrasts, the way in which the Pharisees took this teaching actually distorted the teaching.

When God originally established, "AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH," it was for the purpose of

1. limiting the liability of the guilty party - to repay only for the damages done, rather than far greater.
2. protecting the innocent party - to receive what was damaged.

But the Jews had taken this instruction given to the court system and had applied it to their personal relationships. Rather than allowing the courts to decide a fair way to recompense for any wrong done, they took it upon themselves personally to apply whatever vengeance is needed. As a result, they fostered this vindictive spirit that always stood up for their own personal rights.

For instance, ...

1. if your neighbor yells at you and calls you a dirty name, you are to yell right back with the same intensity and volume

using the same word back to him ("eye for eye; tooth for tooth; insult for insult).

2. if your neighbor has borrowed your roto-tiller to till his garden, but never returned it, you ought to take his snow blower next winter and never return it to him.

3. if your neighbor asks you to help him move some heavy landscaping rocks, he has to help you cut down your dead tree.

4. if you gave your friend 5 dollars to support his son's little league team, he must give your daughter 5 dollars to support her soccer program.

5. if your friend borrowed some money from you, but is late in repaying, you should go and take something of equal value to make up the difference.

But it goes further than this. The Pharisees not only taught that you can do every one of these things, but that you should do every one of these things. It is your right. You need to stand up for your rights and make sure that nobody takes advantage of you. You are blameless in your way when you do this, despite your vindictive attitude. Don't let others walk all over you!

You deserve your vindication. Sue the individual. Go for everything you can! After all, you have your personal rights for which you need to make a stand and defend yourself. Now, does that sound familiar? This sounds much like our society today.

But Jesus contrasted their teaching....

2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 39-42)

Jesus first gives the principle of His teaching and follows this with five illustrations of the principles. He said, "But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil;

1. but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.
2. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.
3. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.
4. Give to him who asks of you,
5. and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (verses 39-42).

Suppose somebody comes along and wrongs you in some way. The Pharisees taught that you can and should fight against him. You should resist him at every step of the way. After all, doesn't the law say, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"? Jesus contrasts this statement by telling those gathered on the mountain that day not to resist such an individual. Rather, you ought to have an attitude of patience and forgiveness and love toward this person, rather than an attitude of vengeance, which seeks your own rights. The whole thrust of Jesus' teaching is that we ought to respond in graciousness to others.

Illustration #1: "but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also" (verse 39).

In this instance, Jesus speaks of the one who has been insulted and physically assaulted. Suppose that someone does this to you, what is your first response? My first response is to clench my fist and go after that guy.

You see it in athletic events in the replays. One athlete hits or bumps another athlete. And inevitably, the one who is hit strikes back! You see it in your children. Two children are playing with each other. Things are getting a bit rough. And one pushes or hits the other a little too hard. The other pushes or hits back. You see it in yourself. Recently, my daughter was behind me, trying to tickle me underneath my arms. Her tickling soon turned into scratching. My reaction against her was to pinch her fingers under my arm and physically dumping her off my back to the floor, because it hurt. She is only 7 years old and I love her greatly, yet, my response was quickly one of retaliation in the flesh.

Jesus said, that perfect righteousness won't resist the physical harm with retaliation. Rather, Jesus said that it will offer the other cheek instead.

Illustration #2: "And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also" (verse 40).

Jesus here speaks about the one who takes you to court to seek damages for a wrong done against them. The implication here is that you were guilty of something. They are seeking your shirt in recompense. Jesus says, don't just give him your shirt, but give him your coat also. Rather than "an eye for an eye," give two eyes for an eye. Rather than "a shirt for a shirt," give your shirt and your coat. Jesus instructs us to go beyond the mere letter of the law. Show your genuine remorse by generosity.

Jesus is using a desperate situation to illustrate this truth. When you are being sued for the clothes on your back, it demonstrates that you don't have anything else. Jesus says, be gracious and give it all. Now, the Pharisees would never demand the coat also. They knew what the law said, "If you ever take your neighbor's coat as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his coat for his body. What else shall he sleep in?" (Exodus 22:26-27).

My instinct is to protect what I have and keep it, rather than giving it to my enemy in the court. But Jesus instructs us to admit your guilt and be gracious and kind in efforts to go beyond what they are seeking. If you have done a wrong, make it very right! If you break the neighbor's window, you ought not only to pay for its replacement, but also send a batch of fresh baked cookies over to your neighbor's home.

Illustration #3: "And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two" (verse 41).

In this instance, Jesus is referring to the ancient custom of the Persians, which the Romans adopted. At any time, the Roman government could summons you and compel you into their service. A case in point is Simon of Cyrene. After Jesus had been flogged and beaten, He was too weak to carry his cross to Golgotha, where He was to be crucified. The Romans found Simon and "pressed [him] into service to bear His cross" (Matt. 27:32).

Imagine travelling down the road this morning, on your way to church, only to be flagged down by a policeman, who approaches your car. He says, "There has been a bus accident, with many children involved. Come, I need you to transport some children in your car to the hospital." You think, "This is pretty inconvenient! This wasn't in my plans this morning. I was planning on going to church with my family. Hey officer, how about those guys in that care over there. You should ask them. I'm too busy this morning." Our natural response is to make excuse after excuse after excuse, rather than to have a helpful attitude to everybody that asks.

The spirit of Jesus' words here would instruct us not only to do our duty, but to go beyond and take two trips to the hospital, with your car full of children.

Illustration #4: "Give to him who asks of you" (verse 42).

If someone is in need of something and you have it and he asks for it. Give it! I know my own heart to seek all sorts of justification why I shouldn't give to others. Often it is only after great reluctance, often times, that I give to those in need with great reluctance. But Jesus instructs us not to resist him. Rather, we ought to be gracious and give. After all, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

Illustration #5: "and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (verse 42).

Your neighbor comes and says that his lawn mower is broken. "Can I please borrow your lawnmower to mow my lawn?" At first this isn't so bad, but this is the tenth time this summer. You begin to think about all of the wear and tear that he is putting on your lawnmower. You are going to have to purchase another one sooner than you expected. Furthermore, he doesn't take care of it. Whenever he returns it, it is covered with grass and dirt. Once, he lost the screws which hold the push handle straight. You had to repair it. On top of that, he never refills the gasoline. You are coming to think that he has no intention of fixing his lawnmower any time soon. (Why should he? He has a great deal going with you). If you are like me, you would rather that your neighbor get his own lawnmower. Jesus says, "do not turn him away."

Soon, your neighbor figures out what a kind and loving person you are and says that his car is broken, "Can I borrow your car?" What sort of response to you have? In your heart. I know that mine is to protect my car. Jesus says, "do not turn him away."

These are the five illustrations that Jesus uses to confront the sin of the Pharisees. They are all essentially the same. Some harm is being done to you (whether you are being physically insulted or you are being taken to court) or someone is asking you for something that you have (your time or your resources), and your natural response is to resist it.

You ask your little child, "Johnny, why did you hit your little brother?" He responds, "Because he hit me!" Of course I have a right to hit him. You ask your little child, "Johnny, why did you take that toy from your little brother?" He responds, "Because it is mine." Of course I have a right to have and enjoy my own things. This is the natural response of children when they have been harmed or cheated of their physical resources.

This is our natural response as well. Furthermore, our natural response is to justify it. We say things like, "I have every right to repay the evil that he did to me. ... These are my possessions. He doesn't have a right to them." But Jesus says, "do not resist him who is evil" (verse 38). Paul said the same thing, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Jesus was saying to the Pharisees, "Hey, you want to have a righteousness that is enough to enter the kingdom? This is the kind of righteousness that you need -- the righteousness that doesn't resist him who is evil." Again (one last time), let's come back to the context of Jesus' words. I repeat the key verses in Jesus' sermon once again...

- "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).
- "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48).

Church family, let us never be guilty of the sin of the Pharisees by lowering the standard to which we are called. We are called to be respond in perfect love and kindness and graciousness and care and compassion, "looking out for the interests of others, rather than ourselves" (Phil. 2:4). Anything less than this is sin. Whenever we fail to respond in this way, our sin ought to be very evident before us. We ought to see that we are never going to live up to God's standards. We need to continue to see our need for the One who fulfilled the law for us (Matt. 5:17). We ought to rejoice that He took our sin. We ought to rejoice that He gave us His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

Just as Jesus has been piercing our hearts with conviction with the previous four contrasts, he is doing the same now. If your heart is convicted with sin, find comfort in the cross of Jesus Christ. Don't justify yourself. He is the only way you will ever attain to the righteousness you need to enter into His kingdom.

Before we move on to the next contrast, I feel the need to comment further on these verses. As I read the commentaries on this passage, the question always came up, "Are we to literally do all these things? Are we really supposed to be doormat for others to walk all over us?" It is a good question.

You realize that Jesus was struck on the cheek. When he was struck, He didn't simply give them the other cheek to strike! Instead, He said, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" (John 18:23). When Paul and Silas were beaten with rods unjustly and thrown into the jail in Philippi, upon their release, they didn't simply walk away, nor did they volunteer for prison duty again, but rather rebuked the policemen for beating them unfairly (Acts 16:37).

Furthermore, if we begin to give anything to anyone who asks, it will result in pandemonium. Every tele-marketer that calls, you give to. Every ministry that asks for financial help, you give. Every beggar that asks for money, you give. It's late in the middle of the night, and a thief breaks into your home. You are awakened from your sleep, and you see the thief fleeing from your home with your television set in hand. You say, "Hey, wait! Stop! Take my stereo also. Here are some cookies for you as well."

If this were the case, pretty soon, the world will find out that the people of Rock Valley Bible Church are the most generous people in the world. Simply ask them for something and they will give it to you. They will figure this out and knock on our doors and ask for our beds and our silverware and our tables and our computers and our phones and our cars and whatever else we have. Then we are all camping every weekend, because we will have no homes.

Let me simply say that Jesus is addressing our hearts, not our society. Our society is built upon the principle of fairness and equity. "Eye for an eye and tooth for tooth" is how a society must operate. Yet, within our relationships, our hearts must be ready and willing to forgive when wrongly treated and to help wherever we can and to give from what we own. This is genuine Christianity.

Hudson Taylor's great-grandfather, James Taylor, took Jesus' words literally. On one occasion, he preached an eloquent sermon. A woman came up behind him with a greasy frying-pan in hand. "She had seen the good man go by wearing a light-coloured overcoat, and thought it an excellent opportunity of provoking him into a quarrel. Coming up behind, she vigorously rubbed the greasy, sooty utensil all over the back of his tidy garment, using her tongue meanwhile to the amusement of onlookers. But it was her turn to be discomfited when Taylor turned round with a smile, suggesting that if it afforded her satisfaction she might grease the front as well. Covered with confusion the woman retired, but the incident was not easily forgotten" (The Growth of a Soul, p. 14).

On another occasion, James Taylor (Hudson Taylor's great-grandfather) was constantly persecuted. "Pelted with stones and refuse, struck down and dragged through the mire, he had been rescued at the last moment - only to preach again. Returning from a meeting on one occasion he was accosted by a couple of men who appeared to be friendly. Engaged in conversation with one of them he did not notice the movements of the other, who suddenly rubbed into his eyes a mixture of pounded glass and mud calculated to blind him for life." When his employer urged him to take out a summons (i.e. press charges), he said, "No, the Lord is well able to deal with them. I would rather leave it in His hands." (Rom. 12:19). The magistrate carried out the prosecution anyway. "In the witness box, the culprit denied the charge, calling upon God to strike him blind if he had had anything to do with the outrage. Shortly after, all Barnsley knew that he had lost his sight. For the rest of his life he had to be led by a dog through the familiar streets, and ultimately sunk into extreme poverty. His accomplice also was obliged to confess that nothing ever prospered with him from the time of their cruel attack upon James Taylor" (The Growth of a Soul, p. 13).

And so I ask you, church family, "Are you vindictive? Do you seek revenge? Do you respond in love to those who ask?" God calls us to respond rightly in every circumstance.

Contrast #6: Love for Others (verses 43-48)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 43)

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, and hate your enemy'" (verse 43). The first part of this quotation comes from Leviticus 19:18. We are familiar with this quotation, because Jesus often quoted this as one of the two greatest commandments (Matt. 22:39). On four occasions, Jesus exposit this Old Testament reference (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Luke 10:27). Paul quotes it twice (Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14) and James refers to it as well (James 2:8). So, it is very familiar to us.

But we are not so familiar with the second quotations, "to hate your enemy." The reason is because it appears nowhere in the Old Testament. For the first time in all of these contrasts, we see Jesus failing to quote the Old Testament. Rather, he quotes what the Pharisees taught. Now, the Pharisees obviously knew that this wasn't in the Old Testament.

I believe that the Pharisees came to this conclusion through **logic**. They reasoned that if you are commanded to "love your neighbor," then the opposite must be true. The opposite of "love" is "hate." The opposite of "neighbor" is "enemy." Therefore, you are commanded to "hate your enemy."

I believe that they also taught it through Old Testament **example**. Often, God is described as hating His enemies. "The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates" (Ps. 11:5). It also says in Psalm 5:5 that God "hates all who do iniquity." God instructed the nation of Israel to thoroughly destroy the Canaanite nations in the promised land. The example of David (a man after God's own heart) is present in the Old Testament as well. He prays in the Psalms, ...

"O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth" (Ps. 58:6).

"Pour out Thine indignation on them, and may Thy burning anger overtake them" (Ps. 69:24).

"Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children wander about and beg; and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes" (Ps. 109:9).

So, the Pharisees confidently stood as those who could say, "hate your enemy." God did! David did! Furthermore, your hatred could be justified and you could be blameless in your hatred of others. In the Pharisees eyes, you could have intense, internal hatred for others, which worked itself out in a spirit of anger and animosity, and yet, be a totally righteous man, free from any sin.

This is why the Pharisees often concerned themselves over the question of who their neighbor really was. For instance, in Luke 10, an expert in the law demonstrated his knowledge of the two greatest commandments, loving God with all your being and loving your neighbor as your self. This expert wanted to justify himself that he was loving his neighbor as himself. So, he asked Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. And said that your neighbor is the person in need, even if this person is your "enemy" (as Jews and Samaritans were).

This expert's question simply demonstrated how the Jews had sought a lower definition for God's standard of righteousness, so as to justify themselves in their righteousness. They had interpreted "neighbor" to mean, "friend" and thus, lowering God's standard. Jesus said that the person in need is your neighbor.

Once again, we see Jesus correcting their error....

2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 44-48)

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on [the] evil and [the] good, and sends rain on [the] righteous and [the] unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more [than others]? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (verse 44-48).

In **verse 44**, Jesus simply states the opposite to what the Pharisees taught. We ought not to hate our enemies. Our attitude toward our enemies must be that of love. Our love toward our enemies must be demonstrated on our knees before God, as we pray for them.

Notice that Jesus here presses our love for our enemies far deeper than we would like to go. We would like to "be at peace" with our enemies (Rom. 12:18) -- outward cordiality. But Jesus presses it deeper, because He seeks our righteousness to be perfect. Psalm 28:3 depicts those who have an outward cordiality, but an inward hatred, "Do not drag me away with the wicked and with those who work iniquity, who speak peace with their neighbors, while evil is in their hearts."

When you are on your knees before God with judgement day honesty, it is then that you need to be praying for your enemies. Jesus gives us two reasons to love and pray for our enemies...

1. To be like God ... who extends His love and care for all men, some of whom are His enemies.

"In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on [the] evil and [the] good, and sends rain on [the] righteous and [the] unrighteous" (verse 45). The desire of every child of God is to be like his Father. We demonstrate this when love and pray for our enemies.

2. To be unlike the world ... who extend their love and care to those who love and care for them.

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more [than others]? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (verses 46-47). It's no big deal to love those who love you. Even the gang members love and care for one another. Those in the bar care for one another. Certainly, the Muslim hijackers, who slammed their planes into the World Trade Center Towers, cared for one another.

Jesus is calling us to be unlike the world.

Think with me of an enemy that you have in your life. This person might be a Christian (in this church or in another). This person might be a non-Christian. Perhaps this person is making your life miserable (at work, a family member, or a neighbor). Perhaps this person has done great harm to you in the past. Think of someone.

I know there is someone like this in your life. The story is told of the man who lived to be a hundred years old. A reporter came to interview him for the local paper. The reporter asked, "What are you most proud of?" The man replied, "Well, I don't have a single enemy in the world." While the reporter was reflecting on how wonderful and beautiful this was, the man continued, "Yep, I've outlived every last one of them." So, I know there is someone like this. Think about this person.

Now, let me ask you, "Do you pray for them? Do you have in mind their best? Do you desire, from the depths of your heart, that God would bless them mightily in their life?"

It is hard to pray for our enemies. It is hard to have compassion for them. People in the Bible had difficulty having compassion for their enemies. Take, for example, Jonah. God called this Jewish man to go to Nineveh and preach a message of repentance and forgiveness.

Nineveh was an Assyria city. They were the enemies of Israel, who would eventually come and destroy them. These were great enemies to which God called Jonah to preach. Rather than going to Nineveh, Jonah got up and went the other way, to Tarshish.

Let me put it in our day. Suppose God told me, to go to Afghanistan and preach the gospel to the Taliban there, for their wickedness is very great. Rather than going to the Middle East, I go on vacation to California (the opposite way). It is difficult for us to extend to the Taliban today, because we are at war with them.

But the fascinating thing about Jonah is this why he refused to go. When God finally got his attention by sending a storm at sea and rescuing him through the agency of a big fish, Jonah confessed, "I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 4:2). In other words, Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh, because he knew that God demonstrates His compassion to those who repent. Jonah didn't want Nineveh to repent, because Jonah didn't want Nineveh (his enemy) to repent and be blessed by God!

So, again, I ask you, "Do you earnestly desire your enemy to be blessed by God?" If you do, you will pray for them.

I have been greatly challenged by a book written by Richard Wurmbrand, which I purchased about a month ago. Richard Wurmbrand was a Romanian pastor, who was imprisoned by the communists for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the 40's, 50's, and 60's, where he was tortured and mistreated for 14 years. Finally, two Christian organizations (the Norwegian Mission to the Jews and the Hebrew Christian Alliance), heard about his story and gathered \$10,000 ransom to pay the Communist government in Romania, to allow him to leave Romania as a free man. He wrote a book entitled, **Tortured for Christ**, in which he pleads for those Christians in the west (that's us) to awaken to the mistreatment of Christians around the world. He was the founder of Voice of the Martyrs. He went home to be with Jesus last year (2001). This book perfectly illustrates my point!

Listen to what happened to him while in prison for preaching the gospel....

"I was thrown into [an ice-box] while I had very little clothing on. Prison doctors would watch through an opening until they saw symptoms of freezing to death, then they would give a signal and guards would rush in to take us out and make us warm. When we were finally warmed, we would immediately be put back into the ice-box cells to freeze. Thawing out, then freezing to within minutes of death, then being thawed out--over and over again! Even today there are times when I can't bear to open a refrigerator" (page 35).

"We Christians were sometimes forced to stand in wooden boxes only slightly larger than we were. This left no room to move. Dozens of sharp nails were driven into every side of the box, with their razor-sharp points sticking through the wood. While we stood perfectly still, it was all right. But we were forced to stand in these boxes for endless hours; when we became fatigued and swayed with tiredness, the nails would pierce our bodies. If we moved or twitched a muscle--there were the horrible nails" (page 35).

"the tortures and brutality continued without interruption. When I lost consciousness or became too dazed to give the torturers any further hopes of confession, I would be returned to my cell. There I would lie, untended and half dead, to regain a little strength so they could work on me again. ... In the ensuing years, in several different prisons, they broke four vertebrae in my back, and many other bones. They carved me in a dozen places. They burned and cut eighteen holes in my body" (page 39).

On top of this, when he was captured, he had no idea what happened to his wife. "Only after many years I learned that she had been put in prison, too. Christian women suffer much more than men in prison. Girls have been raped by brutal guards. The mockery, the obscenity, is horrible. The women were forced to work at hard labor building a canal, fulfilling the same workload as men. They shoveled earth in winter. ... My wife has eaten grass like cattle to stay alive. Hungry prisoners ate rats and snakes at this canal. One of the joys of the guards on Sundays was to throw women into the Danube and then fish them out, to laugh about them, to mock them about their wet bodies, to throw them back and fish them out again. My wife was thrown in the Danube in this manner (page 45).

At this time his son was orphaned. To care for a Christian orphan was against the law, so boys and girls on the streets suffered greatly. The parents in prison suffered greatly not knowing what has been happening to their children.

Richard Wurmbrand had many enemies. Yet, listen to his heart of love for his enemies, "I hate the Communist system but I love the men. I hate the sin but I love the sinner. I love the Communists with all of my heart. Communists can kill Christians but they cannot kill their love toward even those who killed them. I have not the slightest bitterness or resentment against the Communists or my torturers" (page 52).

This is the testimony of other prisoners as well. They loved their enemies.

"A minister who had been horribly beaten was thrown into my cell. He was half-dead, with blood streaming from his face and body. We washed him. Some prisoners cursed the Communists. Groaning, he said, 'Please, don't curse them! Keep silent! I wish to pray for them'" (page 57).

"When one Christian was sentenced to death, he was allowed to see his wife before being executed. His last words to his wife were, 'You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don't know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don't have bitterness in your heart because they killed your beloved one. We will meet in heaven'" (page 43). What a powerful testimony! It led to the conversion of the officer of the secret police who attended the discussion

between the two (page 43).

Wurmbrand continues, "I have seen Christians in Communist prisons with fifty pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold -- and praying with fervor for the Communists. This is **humanly inexplicable!** It is the love of Christ, which was poured out in our hearts" (page 55).

This is the point of our passage that we have been looking at in Matthew 5. The love of a Christian is different than the love of the world. In fact, the only way to explain the love of a Christian is by explaining that it has divine origin. It comes from God. It is the same as God's love. "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. ... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ... We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son [while we were enemies]" (Romans 5:5, 8, 10).

This is a divine love. It is the love that God pours into our hearts. It is vain to try to muster it up within yourself. You must realize that such love is God given. Any self-generated love will fail. What gave these prisoners great love for their torturers? It wasn't the loveliness of the torturers or the great ability these people have to love. It was because it was God-given.

My heart is drawn to the testimony of Elizabeth Eliot, whose husband, Jim, was killed by the Auca Indians in Ecuador on January 8, 1956. She returned to live among these people, as a testimony of God's great love. Many in the tribe were converted.

My heart is drawn to Gracia Burnham, whom I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon. I am thankful for her husband's own testimony while in captivity. Gracia said of him, "Martin was highly respected by every one of the Abu Sayyaf members. In the beginning they laughed in disbelief at how he responded to being a captive and their terror, but as time went on they were awed of his confident faith in the Lord Jesus. Martin always graciously offered to carry things for the Abu Sayyaf and other hostages. Martin was chained to a tree at night by an Abu Sayyaf guard. Every night for the whole year, Martin would thank the guard who chained him and wished him a good night. Martin showed the love and compassion of Christ throughout this year of terror, to both his captors and other hostages. Martin had lengthy discussions about the claims of Christ with all the Abu Sayyaf guards and hostages. On one occasion he was having a very serious talk with Abu Sabaya about God's judgment on sin and that one day, God would judge his sin. Gracia said she was in the background motioning him to 'cool it' but Martin very gently continued sharing the truth of Christ with Sabaya." (This quote was found on www.ntm.org). How will Gracia Burnham ever love her enemies? How will she love those who held her hostage for over a year and who killed her husband? Only by God graciously pouring out His love in her heart. We need to pray for God to overflow in Gracia Burnham's heart to love her enemies.

In fact the love of Christians for their enemies is how the church began and how it conquered the world. Muslims today are trying to conquer the world through hate. Christians have always done it through love, especially love for one's enemies. In the first three hundred years of Christianity, the Christians were severely persecuted and tortured. However, by 325 A. D., Christianity had come through the persecutions victorious. Philip Schaff, one of the greatest church historians, commented, "The final victory of Christianity over Judaism and heathenism, and the mightiest empire of the ancient world, [was] a victory gained without physical force, but by the moral power of patience and perseverance, of faith and love" (The History of the Christian Church, Volume 2, page 8).

All of these contrasts that Jesus has given us, ...

- Contrast #1: Animosity (verses 21-26)
- Contrast #2: Sexual Sin (verses 27-30)
- Contrast #3: Marriage Policy (verses 31-32)
- Contrast #4: Speech (verses 33-37)
- Contrast #5: Response to Others (verses 38-42)
- Contrast #6: Love for Others (verses 43-48)

... they are for one purpose: to teach us of our sin and our great need for a Savior. Yes, they teach us how to live. Yes, they show us how life in the kingdom ought to be lived. Yes, we need to seek these ideals. But, Jesus' teaching so penetrate our hearts deeply that we have no other recourse, but to cry out to God for His mercy in Christ Jesus.

This should have been the response of the Pharisees. Sadly it was not. They were proud in their works. If your response the morning is like the Pharisees, it is a sad day for you. God looks at the one who is "humble, contrite of spirit, and who trembles at His word" (Is. 66:2). If any word is going to humble you, it has been these words of Jesus we have studied these past four weeks. May God bless His word to us at Rock Valley Bible Church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 9, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.