

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 31**

#### **Love your enemies**

#### **Matthew 5:43**

*by Maurice Barratt*

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

This is the last time Jesus says, “Ye have heard that it was said ...”. Six times he has repeated it, and each time he has shown that what people “have heard” is often very different indeed from God’s intention or the spirit of the law. Jesus’ examples begin from the Ten Commandments (Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery), but then they move away to more obscure parts of the law. Now Jesus quotes something which is actually not in the law at all; in fact it is contrary to it. “Love thy neighbour” is certainly in the law, but “hate thine enemy” is not in the law, nor in the entire Old Testament. God’s people were never given permission to hate.

Leviticus 19:18 is the verse that tells us “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Who is your neighbour? Perhaps you have heard that question before somewhere. We will return to it later.

You may ask, Did not Israel destroy all their enemies? Was not Joshua told to destroy everything that breathed, not to spare man, woman or child? That is true. But they were told to destroy, not to hate. Joshua was carrying out God’s vengeance, not his own. The army of Israel were executing God’s judgement on the Amorites and the other nations who possessed the land of Caanan, as God had told Abraham hundreds of years before: “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years ... But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” (Genesis 15:13,16)

The “iniquity of the Amorites” had to run its course for hundreds of years; but then came the time for God’s judgement, and the instrument of God’s judgement was Israel. It was nothing to do with Israel hating their enemies. Israel were not in the promised land because of their own righteousness. God specifically warned them, when they were about to go in, “Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land ... Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine

heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Deuteronomy 9:3-4)

So Israel had no justification whatever for hatred, even of their worst enemies.

“But I say unto you ...”

Jesus now gives four examples (verse 44), and I believe that they are four different applications of the principle. Like so much of Jesus’ teaching, they are also progressive. Firstly, he says, “Love your enemies”. Love comes from the heart. It is an inward attitude, and it is the first stage.

Why should we love our enemies? Because our enemy is our neighbour. That question I asked earlier on, “Who is my neighbour?”, has already been answered by Jesus. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows that “my neighbour” is my enemy as well as my friend.

Next Jesus says, “Bless them that curse you”. Love is in the heart, but blessing is in the mouth. No Christian can prove that they love their enemies just by believing it is so in our heart, because none of us know our own hearts. So Jesus instructs us to use our mouth as well, and to actually speak blessing on a person who has personally done us wrong. This is harder, but it begins to prove our motives. Of course, if I bless the person who curses me, that in itself is not a full proof that I truly love him. I could still be speaking deceitfully - I may still hate the person - but at least it is manifest in words, and not just a belief in the heart.

We can prove our motives further by adding actions to our words. Jesus now says, “Do good to them that hate you”. It is progressive. If it’s hard to speak words of blessing or kind words about your enemies, it’s even harder to actually do them something good. It goes against everything natural.

### **Why do good?**

Why should we do good to our enemies? Because the bible says time and time again that we may say one thing, and yet our actions give the lie to our words. “He that saith, I know God, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.” (1 John 2:4,9). It’s common knowledge even in the world that “actions speak louder than words”, and that if we want to prove that our words are not just talk, we should “put our money where our mouth is”. Actions prove the sincerity of our words.

So we have believed in our heart that we love our enemies, spoken blessing upon them, even done good and kind deeds for them. Have we gone the whole way now? Have we proved beyond doubt that we really do love our enemies? Not yet! The heart is deceitful, and actions as well as words can be deceitful. It certainly proves our motive somewhat. But something more is needed. What is it?

“Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”. Pray? Doesn’t that seem like a bit of an anticlimax? Isn’t praying for your enemy much easier than doing good to them? Well, no, actually, it’s not. It’s the hardest thing of all. Certainly, to mumble a few grudging words to God about “Please bless so and so” is easy enough. But to really pray from the heart - that’s the one thing that is genuine proof that you actually do love and care for your enemy. To pray to God for your

enemy's welfare, to beseech God to bless him and show him grace, to plead with God that he would be kind, merciful, and abundantly gracious to the person who hates you and causes you terrible problems - that's the thing that really proves our motives. That's why it is the last example, the end of the progression. Prayer is the key.

### **The Key**

But because prayer is the key, it sometimes has to be the first thing we do. We may be unable, despite our best intentions, to bless our enemy or do good to them. We just don't have it in us to do it. But if you can truly pray for your enemy, then to do all the other things will be relatively easy for you - in fact, once you have prayed in true faith and sincerity to God for your enemy, you may find that suddenly you have the power to be able to speak blessing and do good to your enemy; things that you found difficult or impossible before will become unexpectedly easier.

Prayer brings the secrets of the heart to light. Many Christians find it impossible to pray for their enemies because, in their heart of hearts, they don't really want reconciliation with them. This is a major stumbling block, and often this truth is hidden from ourselves. We can speak blessing and do good and be very righteous about our attitude to our enemy, but we can't pray for reconciliation - because we're afraid that God might answer the prayer, and then my enemy would become my friend, and I wouldn't actually want that person to become my friend! In fact, I'd hate the idea that they would be coming round to the house and talking to me and spending time with me!

If you want reconciliation, you'll be able to pray. That's the simple fact, and the hardest thing. But somehow we must do it - and we can do it, each one of us, because of the fact that we have Christ living within us. We may not be able to do it in our own strength, but Christ can do it; his character is love. All we need is more of him.

Jesus was himself an example of the four stages he taught. Jerusalem had become his enemy. The Jews hated him and persecuted him, and when he came to Jerusalem for what he knew would be his betrayal and death at the hands of God's own people, he did four things. First, he saw Jerusalem. "He beheld the city." And in his heart he loved it. Then "He wept over it", manifesting his grief and his heart of love for it, and spoke words of tender sorrow over it. Then he died for it. He paid the ultimate price out of love, and his actions proved the sincerity of his words. And finally he prayed for his enemies, even as they were crucifying him, saying "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

### **Which Father?**

Lastly Jesus tells us why it is imperative to have this attitude towards our enemies. "... that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven". It is because God is like that, and if we are to be children of God, we must be like him. Children have the character of their parents. Jesus proved he was God's Son by having the same character as his Father. Only our character reveals whose child we are. Our doctrines prove nothing. The Jews had perfect doctrine according to the letter of the law, but Jesus told them their father was the devil! Their character proved it; they hated Jesus and

opposed him at every turn, just like the devil. There are only two spiritual fathers we can have. Your father is either God or the devil. The only thing that will prove that we are God's children is whether we are like our heavenly Father. What is he like? "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust" (verse 45). "He is kind to the unthankful and the evil" (Luke 6:35). This is hard for us to take. Especially if we have been brought up on the sort of "faith doctrines" which say that God treats us better than everyone else. It's not true. Blessing comes to the evil as well as the good. Problems, disasters and tragedies hit Christians as hard as they hit unbelievers.

## **The Final Challenge**

Jesus' final challenge is a strong one. Why should God reward us, he says, if we only do what the world does - tit for tat, "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine". That's the old law of "eye for eye". It may be just and fair, but God goes beyond justice to grace - undeserved favour - and he wants us to do the same. Loving your brother or sister in the church is fine - but everyone loves their friends. God wants us to be like him - perfect. When Jesus says, "Be ye therefore perfect", he is not talking about "sinless perfection". His remark is in the context of these examples. He is talking about the perfection of love. To love your enemies is perfect love. If you can love your enemy, you can love anyone, because no one is harder to love than your enemy. Your love has become perfect! Jesus wants us to be children of our Father, whose love is perfect, who loves the sinner and the saint, his friends and his enemies. We are to be like him, if we want to be called the children of God.

## **Experiences From Life**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **"Live In Heavenly Places"**

When I was a young girl I was often encouraged to read the book "Tortured For Christ" by Richard Wurmbrand, but always refused. I didn't want to know about the horrors people in other countries with different governments had to face. I lived in Britain and was blessed with religious freedom. I was very happy to be naive, it meant I could sleep peacefully at night. But peace is just a dream if our hearts are full of hurt. There is a worldly song entitled "We always hurt the one we love". I have experienced being eaten up with hatred and bitterness towards loved ones whom I felt had treated me badly, but my heart went through a dramatic transformation when I eventually read "Tortured For Christ" because I realised that my grievances counted for nothing but self pity and hurt pride. These Christians, even in the face of their terrible persecutions, show the character of Christ. I think that is a real challenge to anyone who professes Christianity - after all, if we can't love our own (family, friends), no matter how much they offend us, how will we ever be able to love our enemies?

Richard Wurmbrand has had a tremendous influence on my faith and I felt that you too would benefit from this recent article he has written ...

Dear brothers and sisters, "... every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..." (Ephesians 1:3)

It is written in Ephesians 1:3 that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing. Sometimes when we look around we see nothing beautiful. We do not feel 'blessed'. Jesus is the King of kings and John says you will be like Him. You can be like Him only because you have the life of Jesus within. As an embryo matures to be a full man, we will be such a high being. We can be safe from the misery, from the ups and downs of human life, because we have become partakers of the divine nature. I met a man who told me that he heard me preach 18 years ago. I asked him, "What did I preach?" To my great amazement, he knew. He said, "Eighteen years ago you told us that a Communist officer had come to torture you with his implements of torture - rubber truncheons, knives, red-hot irons with which to burn - and you looked into his eyes. You admired his eyes and told him what beautiful eyes he had."

I never hated Communists. I love them with all of my heart and I pray that they be saved. They imprisoned thousands of Christian, and some of us, who were considered more dangerous, were each put in a cell alone. For three years I was alone in a cell, thirty feet beneath the earth, never seeing sun, moon, stars, flowers, or snow. There was a time I forgot these things existed. We never saw a colour, and for a time I forgot that blue, yellow, violet, and pink existed. We saw only the grey walls of the cell and our grey uniform. We did not have a Bible or any other books. We were very, very hungry. There were beatings. For 14 years I never had a pen in my hand; I never had paper or anything. There was no intellectual activity of any kind. There were tortures. I will not describe the tortures. You would not sleep if you knew what tortures your brothers and sisters in Communist countries endure, and in the Muslim world the situation is no better.

### **No Voice**

In these years of solitary confinement, we never heard a voice, we never heard a whisper. Every one of us was alone. We were so alone. Those who passed near the jail did not know it was a jail. Before God created the world, He was alone. When we were in prison, we were also alone. We did not know if it was March, October, Tuesday, Saturday, eight o'clock in the morning, or ten o'clock at night. We did not know the difference. We lived in timelessness. We said to ourselves, "Like God we are alone, like God we are outside of time, like God we have nothing. Then let us act like God: let us create our world." In these dark, subterranean prison cells we created for ourselves a beautiful world.

It started like this. I spoke to Jesus, although I did not see Him or sense His presence, I believed in and spoke with Him. (When you speak much with Jesus, with God, and you really speak in faith, something happens.) We can meditate on erotic things, or our minds can meditate on spiritual things. We can choose to meditate on the presence of Jesus. In your mind you can evoke the presence of someone. For instance, I can close my eyes now and see my son and my grandchildren. In solitary confinement, we evoked the presence of Jesus. We evoked beautiful forests, lakes, and seashores - so many beautiful places. We lived in this world that we had created, a world with so

many good and saintly men. It was a pleasure to be with them and to talk with them. Although years passed, we did not observe the passing of time; there was no time for us. We had created for ourselves a beautiful world. This was our experience. We had our sufferings there, just as you have yours. Many of you feel very alone. You have married, yet you still feel alone because your spouse does not understand you. You have children, but they break your heart. You have parents who are unkind; they don't understand you, In your church, you are misunderstood, There is so much loneliness, but hallelujah, God knows how we feel because He was once alone too.

### **Paul's Heavenly Place**

The apostle Paul was in a subterranean jail in Rome, It seemed like my cell, which was under the earth. He sat on a stone. He had no bed. There on the stone, beaten and hungry, he wrote to the Ephesians, "(God) raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). If you asked him what he meant, he would tell you, "Well, this is the material world in which I am detained, I am a son of God. I can envision another world, and I can see myself and my dear brethren seated in heavenly places." I am not writing to tell you how much Christians suffer in other countries and how many beatings they get, and how much you should help them. I want to tell you that they have spiritual experiences apart, which could be the common treasure of Christians also in the free world. You don't have their sadness, but you have yours. You have your grievances and your sorrows. However, you must not live in your pains. You can be above all these things - you can be seated in heavenly places. I plead with you, learn from the underground church.