

Topic	Transforming Love
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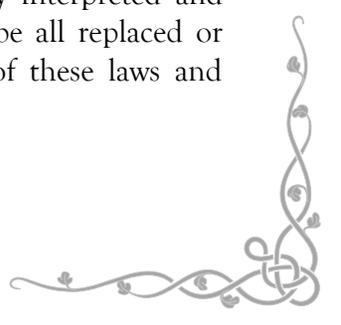
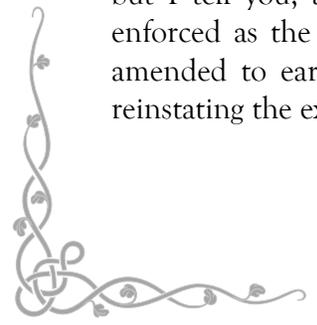
Today we will learn about transforming form. It is a continuation of the series on the Sermon on the Mount that we are really deep diving.

In the famous fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast, all of us are familiar with, the enchantress cursed a cruel and selfish prince, transforming him into a beast and his servants into household objects. She cast a spell on the rose and once the prince that if he can learn to love another and be loved in return before the last petal falls, the spell will be broken. Otherwise, he will be doomed to remain a beast for the remainder of his days. Many years later, a father Maurice and a daughter Bell got themselves entangled in this peace castle, Bell saved the father in exchange for imprisonment by the beast. As the story unfolds, it many twists of good versus evil, love versus hatred, Bell and the Beast falls in love with each other. During the battle between the jealous Gaston and evil cohort and the beast, the beast dies as the last rose petal falls, but as Bell tearfully professes her love for the beast, the curse was undone. Restoring the beast, transforming him back into his human form and they lived happily ever after.

Yes, of course, this was only a fairy tale, but even in that Disney story, we learn so much about personal relationships and the stark ironies of love that is stronger than hate, good triumphing over evil, inner beauty winning over outer beauty. The Bible reminds us that people look at the outward appearance, but the lord looks at the heart and that is the heart of what we will be learning today.

In the passages that were read to us and we looked in today. As we continue to study at the Sermon on the Mount, we will learn and also unlearn from the transformative and the redemptive power of God's love. As we continue to hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, as the beatitudes have taught us in our personal relationships. Hence, I've entitled the message today as transforming love, a Christian's righteousness in redeeming personal relationships.

There is lots to unpack in these three, rather familiar and often quoted passages in the Sermon on the Mount, oath or vows, retaliation or revenge, loving our enemies. We have read this some point of our in our lives before, right? This is the last three of six examples of what Jesus demands in Matthew chapter 5 verse 20, which was preached on a couple of weeks ago that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. It's very serious. The first three verse, you know anger about lust or adultery and divorce. The last three is about oath, retaliation and loving our enemies. And we've learned in the early verses that Jesus said, he has come not to abolish the law but to fulfill them. So not surprisingly in each of the examples, there is a pattern of you have heard that it was sick followed by but I tell you, always correcting what the Pharisees and the scribes had misleadingly interpreted and enforced as the law. He's not saying that the OT laws are now obsolete. It has to be all replaced or amended to earn an OT law 2.0. No, rather Jesus is explaining the true meaning of these laws and reinstating the expectations of true righteousness.



Something that is radically different, deeper, more authentic, something that requires the transformation of our hearts. He is resetting that bar in that standards are high. I've themed the three passages under the motivation of transforming love, because that is the pinnacle of chapter 5.

- Transforming love does not compromise but rejoices with the truth.
- Secondly, transforming love does not seek revenge, but overcome evil with good.
- Thirdly, and finally transforming love does not hate, but actively seeks the interests of others, even our enemies,

Firstly, transforming love does not compromise but rejoices with the truth. This is the passage regarding oath and vows.

Do not break your oath but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.

These were borrowed from Old Testament verses in the Torah from Exodus all the way to Deuteronomy, it is repeated. For example, in Numbers 30 verse 2,

When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word, but must do everything he said.

The OT vows are strictly speaking oath enriched, as the speaker calls upon God to witness his vow and to punish him if he breaks it. Right, but how have the Pharisees misinterpreted or perverted these oath laws, they have placed so much emphasis on profanity. It was just the profane use of the divine name. This is all where swear words, wrong swearing comes from. Every time you say, Oh my God, for the love of Christ, for Christ's sake. This is really profanity because you're using God's name in vain. Versus perjury, which is the dishonest pledging of one's word, which was what the oath were meant to discourage. So what Pharisees did was, they added very elaborate ruse and formula, which made the vows binding. So, one need not be too particular if the divine name is not being used. This example is stated very clearly in Matthew 23.

If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple is bound by oath.

If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by a gift on the altar is bound by that oath.

It's like saying, if you swear by, you know, modern day example, this church building is nothing, but if you swear by the pulpit, it means something, you're bound by oath. If you swear by this, but the stage is nothing. If you swear by the expensive drum sets on top of it, it means everything in you're bound by oath. Jesus says, you are blind fools and blind man, which is greater the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred. Even that sequence they got wrong. But that's beside the point. It's not about swearing by one thing, you are bound by oath and swearing by another. You're not, there is an artificial fixation about this vow formula, which is irrelevant.

What is the modern-day example today? I've listed this song

And I swear by the moon and the star in the sky. And then it goes on actually, this is a mix of a wedding vow in there as well. For better or worse, till death us do part . It was one of the most popular song during my time in college. This is the reason why modern day today we have wedding vows. Dr Peter spoke about this last week that people now write their own vows you know. It is a trend thing. You don't go by the traditional vow, you write your own thing, and you can say whatever you want. That is the reason why today we stand as a witness in court, we have to take the oath. I swear by the almighty God, the evidence I gave that shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

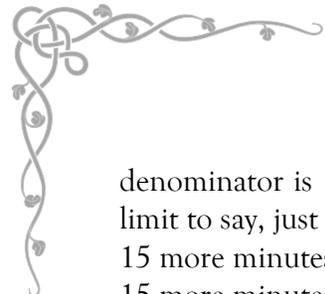
This is also the reason why all kinds of contracts and agreements exist today. Prenuptial agreement. You can't show your ID contracts, whatever tenancy agreements, and you sign your name on it in front of witnesses on the commissioner of oath. You know, in some cases. To break any terms and conditions, you can be sued and you have to pay for damages. But what did Jesus say? Jesus say, do not swear by anything whether it is heaven or earth or Jerusalem, not even by your head because you can't even make one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply yes or no. Not yes but no, that's not what I meant. You know, in some cases it could be a no, no, but no but. It's unconditional.

Jesus goes on to say that anything more or less is likely coming from the evil one, either the evil of our hearts or our deceitful heart in Jeremiah 17 verse 9, the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure who can understand it or coming from the devil who is the father of lies we know in John chapter 8 verse 44, when he lies, he speaks his native language for he is a liar and a father of lies. Remember the story in the garden of Eden where the serpent cast doubt on the Eve's mind. Did God really say you can't eat from any tree? Well, we can, but, but not the one in the middle. No, no, no, no. Surely not for your eyes will be opened and you'll be wise. Don't you want to have the knowledge of good and evil, maybe God didn't put all the fine prints in there. Are you sure? Maybe you're right. Let's, let's add some clauses, okay for free trial. That's the original sin. Jesus is judging the attitudes of the heart, not the action of taking oath. I'm sure Eve would have made lots of promises to the Lord. I won't touch that tree in the middle although I could eat many out of trees. The attitudes of the heart is about keeping our promises.

Somehow ever took this a little bit too literally to the other extreme, the Anabaptists, for example, and the Quakers. The Anabaptist are one of the earliest radical reformers and the Quakers where some religious society of friends founded by George Fox. Some refuse to take oath in court. They declined to swear an affidavit in front of the commissioner of oath. Jesus is not advocating refusal to take oath if it is required by some external authorities. The late A.M. Hunter, who was once a prominent professor of new Testament and an author of many biblical commentaries said this,

“Oath arise because men are so often liars”

How true is that? The heart of the issue that Jesus is addressing is truthfulness. Trustworthiness. Thought about keeping our promises. My son is a great negotiator, and I'm sure some of you as parents can identify with me, can relate to this. So we gave him the iPad, the school requires it. He's really young. He is 6 years old, but he has iPad already, right? Obviously we need to control his screen time. So we were set a limit. Okay. After the limit is reached, it needs to be approved by either myself or my wife. Okay. So the lowest



denominator is 15 minutes, and then he goes one hour and then the whole day. So every time he set the limit to say, just half an hour, okay. After the half an hour, you got to stop. Right. But my son has a classic 15 more minutes promise, 15 more minutes daddy please approve and the puppy face starting coming out, 15 more minutes., okay. Okay, last one, last one. No more. And I approve it after 15 minutes. Guess what, it is a never ending cycle. Even at such a young age, you can see how such temptations make it difficult for us to keep our promises. Contracts and agreements have become a way of life for all of us. Recently, I rented out a place. I had to deal with the tenancy agreement and we didn't want to allow pets actually, but the standard agreement didn't have no pets allowed or whatever in the clause, but we had verbally told the one of the potential tenant, no pets, we prefer no pets. And, you know, they didn't see anything until at the 11th hour when we were about to sign the contract, the potential tenant asks, can I bring my cat in? I can't leave my cat in the old apartment, come on. We, you know, be gracious but unfortunately that was our preference and the deal was off. And I had to add the pet clause into the agreement for the next tenant.

In my line of work, I had to deal a lot with IT contracts. I'm not a lawyer, but I have spent enough time with the legal department reviewing and closing contracts with vendors. This is the dreaded phase in sourcing and procurement, the contract negotiation. One of the most difficult contract we've ever had to close was one that has the phrase, it is coming out here, commercially reasonable endeavors. What is that even? I don't know I'm not a lawyer, but I think the lawyers will know that this is a clause that will protect themselves from failing to meet these obligations and service levels. It is almost bulletproof. There is no way you can take them to court because of the subjectiveness of that phrase reasonable endeavors.

So what happens is they promise the minimum to get away with the maximum. It is the reason why contract negotiations takes so long to close. There's a fundamental trust issue between two parties, and it gets more complicated when the number of parties increases. The biggest example of, you know, when promises are not kept and when contracts are broken is an example with the Enron scandal. The biggest bankruptcy in American history. The leadership, the two CEOs, Kenley Jeff stealing and even including the CFO, Andy Festo, full regulators with fake holdings and off the books accounting practices, which they call Mark to Market MTM. They used special purpose vehicles or special purpose entities to hide it's mountains of debt and toxic assets from investors and creditors. Even Enron's accounting firm, Arthur Anderson offered stamp of approval, signing off corporate reports for years, many promises were made to customers, to shareholders and employees alike, but lies after lies led to the biggest fraud in history.

The story continues, Jeff Skilling is now out of prison and he has resurfaced into the American marketplace. For us, it sounds like a scandal closer to home, but Jesus says love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Love, always want to speak the truth. How do we maintain rather than compromise our integrity? How do we always speak the truth in love? How do we apply this in our family, in husband and wife relationships, parent-child relationships? Are we truthful? Honest and keeping to our words with our spouses and our children. When you promise to not check your phone while driving, do we keep it. I'm completely guilty of that and vice versa. Sons and daughters, are you honest and truthful to your parents when they are not looking. When you promise not to watch certain things in the middle of the night. Do you honor your word?

In our workplace in businesses, do we keep to our word or own up to our mistakes with our colleagues, bosses, the company, or do we allow some rules to be bent in contracts, dealing with accounts, do we use fine prints to go unnoticed or hide some important truth that we don't want to be known. When we file out income taxes, are we honest. By the way, those who have not done it, you've got five more days to do this, end of April.

Do we hide any dishonest gains in society and in everyday running of errands, how do we practice this? You are going to Empire Mall and you're in a rush. The parking is full, but you find a narrow spot, a slot that you might just be able to squeeze in because it's the closest to the door and you do the quick cornering and as you do the quick cornering, you hear the dreaded crack and you come down, you come down and you check, okay, it is like scratch, not so noticeable, you take out your handkerchief and you rub a little bit, and maybe it will go away, the stain may go away. And you just just hope you'll go away please. But no it is there. It's you, you can't, you can't unsee it is there. Do you close one eye and walk away? Or do you write a note with your contact to apologize and offer compensation? Not saying some of you, you run into that often, but, you know, what if you were to victim, I'm sure some of you, I have had my car scratched for no reason when I went and go shopping and then come back and I see scratches everywhere. Right? I don't know who did it, but you know, we could be one. You could be victim as well. So put ourselves into the shoe of that person.

And then you go shop for groceries in Jaya Grocer. After paying your bills, you need to go through it and you know, a few items were missed out. Do you happily walk away calculating how much you have saved or turn back and straighten it out? My wife always reminds me this famous phrase, is your integrity worth that much. In our church, when we say we will pray for others, is that only lip service or do we spend time really sincerely praying for the person we promise to pray to pray for. Transforming love does not compromise, but rejoices with the truth.

Moving onto the second point. Transforming love does not seek revenge but overcomes evil with good. This is the famous passage on eye for an eye and tooth for tooth. It was taken straight off the Mosaic Laws. What is known as the Lex Talionis Principle of exact retribution. It is the modern day tit for tat. So for example, in Leviticus 24 verse 19, if anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Few qualifying points to make here. The Mosaic Laws during the Old Testament times are civil, ceremonial and moral because there wasn't a legal system at that time. It's equivalent to today's civil law, Sharia law and your moral education, your political moral, all in one, you know. As it relates to civil law, they are instructions to the judges of Israel. It forms the foundation of justice that has the double effect of one defining justice in two restraining revenge, contrary to encouraging revenge it is to restrain it, not to promote it.

Now whether or not this was actually literally executed when laws of broken is a different debate altogether, but it's irrelevant here. By Jesus's time, these laws have been replaced in Jewish legal practice. They have a system in place already and you can claim money penalties and damages. It is based on that. The scribes and the Pharisees have extended these laws from the civil courts where it belonged to personal relationships where it does not belong. This retribution principle was used to justify the very thing that it was meant to abolish namely personal revenge. It is tantamount to taking the law into our own hands, you know, using it as an excuse to say for retaliation. This is clearly prohibited throughout the Old Testament,

even in the vertical laws where these were taken, obviously, you know, the Pharisees didn't do their homework. Look in Leviticus 19 for example, it says, do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love the neighbors itself.

Retaliation and seeking revenge has become so prevalent in our times. It is almost second nature to us, and it is innocently portrayed by children, by kids, my two boys. Again parents would relate to this, fighting over toys. You grab my toy, I will grab yours. You hit me, I'll hit you back twice as hard. Needless to say, this happens in every fabric of personal relationships, whether be it husband and wife, amongst colleagues at work, friends in school, even in church. The movies that we watch a full of it. Revenge of the Sith, Transformers, Revenge of the Fallen. From cartoons to Action Sci-fi movies, the TV series all being applauded as glorified endings. That's why they call it sweet revenge.

What is today's example? One classic Malaysian example, your pop at Taipans busiest street in front of Beryl Cake House is one of the busiest street. And when you done your pastry shopping and you come on and there's a car blocking you, and there's no contact given here, so what do you do? First thing you do is to get angry and honk, it goes on for minutes and nobody turns up. So what happens, what happens when nobody's looking and you go and you are fed up. You take your car keys on no one is looking, depending on how big your grudges and your, in your, in your revenge is you can go all the way from the front of the car, through the front door and scratch through the back door and all way to the trunk. This is what happens sometimes. Revenge. I want to make the person pay. More bizarre example. In Malaysia, recently, as I heard from Dr Peter, a lawyer Paul Raj was diagnosed with kidney cancer. He was diagnosed by kidney cancer by three hospitals. But he thought he should get a fourth opinion. And at the fourth opinion, when he did the biopsy, there turns out the biopsy revealed that the tumor was actually benign. This man happened to be a lawyer, too bad. The man is now suing three hospitals, eight doctors for 45 million over wrong cancer diagnosis. And here is what he said in his own words. I'm suing it because of a tremendous untold mental and emotional sufferings, psychological distress, hypertension and restlessness, that is caused. It is the extent to how much people would repay evil for evil.

It get even more bizarre and frivolous in America. A woman in Austin, Texas was awarded \$80,000 because she tripped over a toddler in a furniture store she was shopping in. So she sued the furniture store and she was awarded. And the store owners were surprised about this verdict because the toddler running in the store was the woman's son. How ridiculous can that be, but it is the extent to the human heart, but Jesus said, do not resist an evil person. Do not resist here means to oppose, to withstand, the set oneself against. The evil person here does not mean evil. We are told to resist the devil remember. We are told not to resist God, his will, his truth and his authority, but we are not to resist evil in general, but here Jesus says, do not resist an evil person. Those who wrong you personally.

In case that is not clear Jesus went on to give four illustrations of the extent to which we should resist retaliation or revenge. First, if anyone slaps you in the right cheek turn to them the other cheek also. This is the famous English idiom, turn the other cheek. Being prepared to take another blow. Second illustration was, if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. You would rather be wrong than to enter into litigation and this was mentioned in first Corinthians chapter six. And thirdly, if anyone forces you to go one mile go with them two miles.

During the Romans times, there's a practice of commandeering civilians. For example, the Romans can call a civilian to go carry a luggage for a prescribed distance. So Jesus say, if they ask you to go one mile, go two miles, do more. There was us and finally give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. If you look at these four illustrations, I know what you're thinking in your mind is this is loose situation. Picking up things that people don't want. The other party is getting all the benefit, but what about m. This is downright unfair.

From passive resistance to actually giving more and more and more to active giving. In each of these DA Carson, who is the professor of New Testament, summarizes our Christian response in this way. He says, it is about giving up our humanistic rights and instincts, not your basic human right our humanistic instincts to always want to retaliate. It's giving it up in a self-sacrificial way. It is giving up our rights to retaliate, to wreak vengeance. It is giving up or withholding our rights to possessions, to legal rights, which we, you know, the examples we saw earlier.

Finally it is the hardest, for some of us, is this holding our rights to time and money. This is why should I do more than is what is expected? The point is not to be so preoccupied with the exercising of your rights. Such that it robs you from the opportunity to practice Christian charity and love. Some cautions that would like to bring out what the passage is not because you know, it can be quite easily misunderstood or is a myth around it this passage as well. It is not becoming a door mat, letting people step all over you. You're a weakling and you are like whatever goes, I'm not going to do anything. It is not standing by and doing nothing when ourselves and others are being hurt. For example, if there is domestic violence at home, if there are bullies in school, there needs to be a plan of action to respond and not simply react.

Jesus is not saying that in his passage, it is not withholding self-defense. If someone is trying to hurt you, it is not defending yourself. It is not being irresponsible, turning a blind eye which encourage injustice, dishonesty or vice. If your house is broken into you make a police report and you catch the perpetrator. It is finally not absolute prohibition of the use of all force, including the police and the army, the so-called anarchy or even pacifism ideas. An example of this is Leo Tolstoy. He was a Russian writer regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time whose writing influenced Gandhi. Both Gandhi and Leo drew inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount. They probably studied it better than us. Gandhi took the nonviolence principle into his Sathyagraha or truth force policy. It was his attempt to win his opponents by the power of truth and by the example of suffering willingly endured. So hopefully by doing so hearts to be changed and violence would be curved. Although his humility and sincerity of purposes were during the time of British occupation in India, but put Gandhi in Russia of the 1920s on Germany in 1930s or China anytime he would have been arrested immediately and nothing more would be heard of him.

So there is a separation as a difference between the duties and the function of the state that is to maintain justice is quite different from the individual. Even in Romans 13 verse four, the Bible says for the one in authority is God's servant for your good but if you do wrong be afraid for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. The authorities, the state is sanctioned by God to control justice. Now, whether or not certain governments actually execute justice in a fair manner is a different matter altogether.

Contrary to weakness resisting the evil one is everything about strength and resiliency. Charles Spurgeon, the English Baptist preacher used this analogy. He says resisting the evil one is like the anvil when bad men are the hammers. No matter how hard you hit the anvil it would not break, it would not buckle.

John Stott gave another picture of a strong muscular man, full of control of himself and his love is for others are so strong and powerful that he rejects absolutely every conceivable form of retaliation. That is the portrait of resisting the evil person. Love is ultimately demotivation. Romans 12 reminds us do not repay anyone evil for evil. Leave at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge. Leave room for God's wrath. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. This is love that is prompted by mercy, not justice. This is love that renounces retaliation, because it is God's prerogative to avenge. It is love that is governed never by a desire to harm, but always by the determination to serve their highest good.

In a tumultuous time, the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr., the African American Baptist minister and social activist in the US led a civil rights movement that focused on non-violent protest. King's vision of equality and civil disobedience changed the world for his children and the children of all oppressed people. He changed the lives of African Americans in his time and subsequent decades. At his funeral, this was the excerpt of the eulogy from Dr Benjamin Mays. It was King's spiritual mentor and a distinguished Atlanta educator. He says this in his eulogy. If any man knew the meaning of suffering King knew, house bombed, living day by day for 13 years under constant threats of death, maliciously accused of being a communist, falsely accused of being insincere, stabbed by a member of his own race, slugged in a hotel lobby, jailed over 20 times, and occasionally deeply hurt because his friends betrayed him. And yet this man at no bitterness in his heart, no rancor in his soul, no revenge in his mind. And he went up and down the length and breadth of this world, preaching nonviolence and a redemptive power of love.

Dear brothers and sisters, we may not come close to the injustices that Martin Luther King suffered. Many of us have experienced or even in the midst of experiencing injustices of people with ill intent who repeatedly want to harm or hurt us. Even at home husband and wife, when we claim our rights, it could cause fights, unforgiveness for wrongs committed, in our workplace many injustices could happen by supervisors, your bosses, betrayals and stabbing in back by colleagues. It could cause us to want to retaliate and seek revenge. It is sometimes second nature to us. At school in college, so many opportunities where hurt is caused. So many of occasions where one hurt the other, one betrays the other. This is an opportunity to practice forbearance and non-retaliation, that this non-retaliation love doesn't seek revenge or harbor hard feelings. Even at church relationships amongst church members can get messy and heated at times, and members do get hurt. Do we practice meekness, forgiveness, serving one another and washing each other's feet, following Christ's example.

Transforming love does not seek revenge, but overcomes evil with good and lastly transforming love does not hate, but actively seeks the interests of others, even our enemies. The final example follows quite closely from the previous where Jesus takes the definition of love to the highest degree. It's one thing to not retaliate or seek revenge, but it's another to love them. You have heard, it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Wait a minute, this there's something wrong with this phrase, right? Because this was taken from Leviticus 19 where it says do not hate the fellow Israelite in your heart, rebuke your neighbor frankly, do not seek revenge which we saw earlier, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Surely something had been taken out of context. The Pharisees and scribes have blatantly taken this out of context. DA Carson has this way of saying this. He says a text without a context is a pretext of a proof text. So if you take a text and you take on the context, it can be a pretext for anything that you want to see.

What Jesus is rebuking here is that, that praise love your neighbor and hate your enemy is taken out of context. There are at least four reasons how this Old Testament law has been perverted. First, they have taken out the word, as yourself. If only the Pharisees and the scribes loved as they love themselves. Although ironically, they only love themselves. Secondly, the scope of neighbor here has been reduced to own people, same race, same religion, same status, etc. and the list goes on. In verse 46 and 47, Jesus says, if you only love those who love you, what reward will you get, even tax collectors do that. If you greet only your own people, what more are you doing even pagans do that.

What about in the other parts of Leviticus 19, do not go over your vineyard the second time or pick up grapes that are fallen, leave them, leave them for the poor and the foreigner. Obviously the foreigners are treated as the enemies of the Israelites as well, leave them for the poor and the foreigner, don't hate them. This is far from hatred. Thirdly, the law has been perverted because obviously the Pharisees have chosen to turn the blind eye to other commandments on how we should treat our enemies. In Proverbs 25, for example, it says, and this was requoted by Paul in Romans 12. If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If he is thirsty give him water to drink. This is far from hatred. And finally the phrase hate your enemy was actually never found in the Old Testament if you read it carefully. It was actually the reverse. It was the reverse where the enemies that hate this fiercely and in the Psalm says for no reason sometimes.

So Spurgeon says this was likely a phrase that was parasitically added by the Pharisees and the scribes who interpret it that way. Who may read the Psalms that way? There are Psalms what we call the imprecatory Psalms, the imprecatory Psalms are those that talks about judgment of calamity or curses upon those perceived as enemies of God. Psalm 69 and Psalms 109 for example, but they are all from a different context. So those Psalms are talking about God's enemies. Those who disobeyed God will fully and sin against God. I know this sounds oxymoronic, but there's such a thing as perfect hatred, as opposed to personal hatred.

Perfect hatred in the same way, as there's such a thing as righteous anger. It is the hatred for God's enemies, not your own personal enemies and your personal vendettas. There's where the phrase hate the sin and not the sinner come from. This is never found. What does Jesus say? Jesus had to repackage this Old Testament law in the following manner. Love your enemies and not just love your enemies pray for those who persecute you. In a parallel passage in Luke, it talks about to be sermon on the Mount. It is extended to doing good to those who hate you, to bless those who curse you, love here is the unconditional love of God. The agape love. First John 4:8 says, God is love himself and we are told to love in a way that he has loved. And he is not like your enemies. You don't have to like them but you have to love them. That is what is Jesus is saying here. The question that are certainly on our minds are who are our neighbors? Why must we love our enemies? They're so cruel and unkind to us. Why? And finally how, even if you understand who and why, how it's extremely difficult, it is not natural for us to love.

Our enemies are we to love them. First, who are our neighbors who could potentially be our enemies. In the same chapter, Jesus revealed that this could be verse 39, evil and unrighteous people who defy God's

laws. In verse 44 this may include people who persecute or oppose you or hurt you on account of Christ. We saw that in the beatitudes, this is not only your own people. It is not birds of a feather that flock together, it includes those of the other races and religions as well. It was not of our kind. A parable that best describes what Jesus' mean here by who our neighbors are is the parable of the good Samaritan.

The man who is likely a Jew traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho is attacked by robbers who beat him and left him half dead. The priest came along and walked past, the Levi's that came along and walked past this well, but it was a Samaritan who rescued the man and took care of him. You must understand that the Samaritans are hated foreigners. They are viewed as half-breeds by the Jews. They practice bitter and open hostility towards the Jews and vice versa for here in this parable even the Samaritan whom the Jews considered as enemies are more loving and showed more kindness than the priest and the Levite.

But there is an irony to the question that was asked here. The teacher of the law started asking Jesus, who is our neighbor and can imagine almost a snuck on his face. Jesus, who then is our neighbor, almost sounding like who deserved to be loved, since they are so self-righteous and after telling the parable if you notice Jesus turned the question around is it is who proved to be a good neighbor, but who is our neighbor? Who proved to be a good neighbor and a teacher of law got caught? You know, it is the one who did good and he didn't want to say the word Samaritans. So it's not so much who our neighbors are because it will include everyone and anyone, rather, what matters is whether we ourselves become loving neighbors to others including our enemies.

Secondly, why do we love our neighbors and that may include our enemies. And I think of reasons, there may be more. First and foremost, gratitude and gratefulness. Romans chapter five verse 10 says God saved us while we were once enemies while we were once sinners got died for us. Remember where you've come from. Be grateful that God saved you, for God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son. His love is universal. Secondly, fruitfulness. In verse 45, it says, love your enemies and pray for them so that you may be children of your father in heaven. John chapter 13 verse 34 says a new commandment I give unto you love one another as Christ has loved us by this everyone will know that you are my disciples.

The fruit of loving one another is that we are shown to be a children of God, a disciple of Christ. And in Galatians 5 verses 22, the fruit of the spirit it's love. Thirdly, why do we love our neighbors and enemies, treasures in heaven. You remember in Matthew chapter 5 verses 11 to 12 in the beatitudes, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me, rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven and later in Matthew 6 says for where your treasure is there your heart will be also. John Piper puts it in a different way. It says loving your enemies doesn't earn you the reward in heaven. Treasuring the reward of heaven empowers you to love your enemy. It's not about the more I love the more reward I get in heaven, but treasuring the reward of heaven empowers you to love your enemies. It is about getting our heavenly perspective right that drives us and motivates us to want to live our neighbors and our enemies.

Finally and probably the most important why is that redemptive power to save? Love has a redemptive power to save. Romans 12:20, which we read briefly just now, if your enemy is hungry feed him. If he thirsty give him something to drink. In doing this, you will keep burning coals on his head. This last phrase here might sound a bit strange to us. Those of you have read this verse before, you know, it's asking

the question what does this mean? Why is it that when we feed our enemy and we give him something to drink, why will we hit burning coals on his head? The phrase, heap burning coals on someone's head was really an Old Testament reserved for the wicked. Right. It's a form of a punishment. In Psalms 140, for example, right? What is, what does Jesus mean here, instead of retaliation revenge, violence, it is kindness and love that is hurting him. In returning good for evil and being kind to the enemy it will eventually cause him to repent or change and hence be saved.

I can't say it is better than the late Martin Luther King. He says this, now there is a final reason I think Jesus says love your enemies. It is this that love has within it a redemptive power and there is power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them and they can't stand it too long...Oh they may react in many ways in the beginning, they react with guilt feelings and sometimes they will hate you for a little more at that transitional period, but just keep loving them and by the power of your love they will break down under the load....That's love you see. It is redemptive and that is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up and is creative. It's something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies.

How do we love our neighbors and enemies?

I can think of at least four ways: Choose to bless with words not curse. Our motto for our CIA live group is taken from first John chapter three, verse 18 that says dear children let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. John Stott puts it this way. True love is not sentiment so much as service, practical, humble sacrificial service. It is possible to love our, our neighbors and our enemies, by our words, by our deeds and our actions.

Thirdly we are, we can pray for them. We can pray for an hour. Even our enemies, Bonhoeffer calls this the prayer of love. There is a prayer for the salvation and the redemption from their sin and from evil. Ronald Reagan and Saint John Paul the Great the great was shot 44 days apart. They were not killed when he was shot in 1981, both immediately began praying for the man who pulled the trigger. John Paul met with and blessed the assassin who tried to kill him. It was a Turkish assassin by the name of Mamet Ali, who couldn't fathom why his direct hits hadn't killed the Pope and due to the prayers that was done by Ronald Reagan and St John Paul, Aka eventually fully repented and became Catholic, a believer. Last but not least we can learn we must learn to forgive.

The stoning of Stephen in Acts chapter seven is another example of how forgiveness is possible. While the people perpetrators were stoning him, Stephen prayed, Lord Jesus receive my spirit and he fell on his knees and cried out. Lord do not hold this sin against them. The ultimate forgiveness was obviously portrayed by Jesus at the cross against his perpetrators, his enemies, and he prayed father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Finally, Jesus ended by saying in verse 48, be perfect therefore as your heavenly father is perfect. It means we're not there yet. We're nowhere near perfection. The perfection that the father expects of us, it is a transformative process. In Romans 12 verse two, we are reminded not to conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Then we will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good pleasing and perfect will.