

Heavenly Relationships on Earth: Heaven's Radical Love

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[0 : 00] So now to our Bible reading on page 810, and we'll begin reading at verse 20 of Matthew chapter 5.

This is a verse that sums up the previous section where Jesus has said that he has come to fulfill the Old Testament, fulfill the law and the prophets.

And he says, verse 20, for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard it said of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

And I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and then remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.

[1 : 04] First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery. I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right hand causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members, that your whole body will be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members, and let your whole body go into hell.

It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[2 : 18] Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no. Anything more than this comes from evil.

You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. And if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you.

And do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

[3 : 35] So it may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

That is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts and to our minds. Well, you'll need your Bibles at Matthew chapter 5.

That's page 810 in the Church Visitors Bibles. And be helpful if you have also to hand the sheet that I hope you've received on the way in or found on your chair, which is a little outline of this section.

[4 : 30] In Matthew 5, verse 20, Jesus says to his followers that unless their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, the very publicly pious and the professional law keepers, then they will not even enter the kingdom of heaven.

So how on earth can you do that? How can you be more righteous than the most religious people there are? Well, I hope that, as we saw last time, the answer to that is that we have to get to the heart of what God's commands for our lives are really all about.

And in verse 19, you'll see Jesus says he wants his people to be true doers and true teachers of God's commands. And that means listening to Jesus.

Jesus says he wants to be true. As he speaks with authority and as he demonstrates with absolute authenticity what God's righteousness really does look like and must look like here on earth.

And so the rest of chapter 5 and chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel are all about that. In chapter 5, Jesus is teaching true kingdom morality, which is in total contrast to the ethical casuistry of the scribes who had domesticated God's law, who had restricted God's commands, and so on, and robbed God's law of its real intention and purpose.

[6 : 05] And in chapter 6, Jesus teaches and displays what true kingdom mentality is really like, the practice of real devotion to God. That is the thing that alone can give rise to all true morality.

And it's again in total contrast to all the false piety and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. In fact, hypocrite is the word Jesus uses nearly all the way through Matthew's Gospel specifically for the Pharisees, the hypocrites.

That's who he means. And we saw last time that when we get to the very heart of what God's law is really all about, according to Jesus, we see that it is never merely about rules and regulations.

Not at all. It's all about relationships. It's all about the way of true life. Life in all its fullness. Life in all its abundance. In real and living relationship with God the Father in heaven.

And when God's law is rescued from the hands of mere religion and into the realm of real relationship with God, as Jesus does to rescue it and to restore it, then everything is transformed.

[7 : 15] Remember we said it's like the rugby referee who sees at last that the rules are not there to kill the game, but there to set the game free for the enjoyment of free-flowing rugby.

And that means that we are transformed when we see this. We are transformed and liberated to see that God's kingdom righteousness is the way of truly liberating joy in our earthly lives.

The Apostle James says this, The one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Now James is just echoing Jesus here in the Sermon on the Mount. Unlike the Pharisees and the scribes who saw life as all for the law, kingdom people grasp Jesus' teaching that God's law is for life.

It's for the life of those who rejoice to be his kingdom people. And so we saw last time that the real righteousness of the kingdom, the relationships of the kingdom of God, are evidence of that real relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

[8 : 31] They are evidence, if you like, of earthly relationship with heaven, that we are truly connected with the Father's heavenly kingdom. Well, that's all well and good in general terms, but what does that actually look like in practice?

How does it play out here on earth in our daily lives? That's a very important question. And so in his authoritative interpretation of God's commands for his people in this new kingdom age which Jesus has begun, Jesus teaches and teases out in a whole series of examples in everyday life, things that show us what real kingdom righteousness looks like, that show us what a real right relationship with God in heaven will look like here on planet earth, in right relationships within this world.

In other words, real earthly relationship with heaven is visible in real heavenly relationships here on this earth.

And that, in a sense, is what this is all about. True kingdom righteousness is expressed in this world by right relationships among Christ's kingdom people.

And that's what we see in the rest of Matthew chapter 5 here. And Jesus is just expanding what verse 20 really means, what it really looks like in real life, in a whole series of expositions and applications.

[10:04] And we shouldn't be surprised because since the heart of God's law is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourself, then it follows, doesn't it, that right relationship with God must be visible in evidence in right relationships among Christ's followers.

Pervasive and right and holy relationships in our earthly lives. Relationships that express here on earth the character of our Father in heaven, in this world, just in the same way as Jesus expressed in this world perfectly the character of his heavenly Father.

And so also it's to be for his followers. If they're truly his, that is. If they belong to Jesus. Look at the summary verse, just at the very end, in chapter 5, verse 48.

You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Heavenly relationships, visible and real on planet earth.

And that is simply in a nutshell what the whole of this rest of chapter 5 is all about. Now we can't exhaustively study the Sermon on the Mount in this series.

[11:23] We'll never get through the whole thing. I want us to see the main thrust of Jesus' teaching. But there is so much here. Let me encourage you to go and look in the book room if you can get a hold of Martin Lloyd-Jones' classic series of expositions on the Sermon on the Mount.

60 sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. There is a very great deal of rich material there. But I do want us to spend some weeks on these chapters because I want us to get Jesus' words very clear into our minds.

We must take them seriously. And when we realize how searching Jesus' kingdom commands are, we realize these are demands that go very, very deep. in our lives.

Right to the heart of what righteousness really means to a holy and pure and loving God. And just how radical the way of Christian morality really is.

This is very radical business. So before we get to some of the detail of these commands, let me notice a few general points first. First, it really is principally about right relationships and not just rules.

[12:33] Jesus shows us that God's commands are like signposts. They point us in the right direction. So we start going in that direction. We realize and we begin to see just how far on these commandments lead us.

And they turn out to be much deeper, much wider, much, much more pervasive than we could ever have believed. And we're going to see that. Second thing is that the Sermon on the Mount is not an exhaustive or complete ethical code.

It certainly is not containing every single instruction for life that we need. Neither is it, on the other hand, just a very basic series of broad principles.

No. What we actually have is a series of examples in real life applying the spirit of verses 17 to 20 for us. Showing us in real life and experience what this actually means in practice.

And in that regard, Jesus is simply speaking in exactly the same way that Moses did. For example, in the book of Deuteronomy where we have the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and then we have those commands applied and expanded into all sorts of different areas of life with numbers of examples and typical life situations.

[13:48] And what we have is a series of paradigms, a series of patterns to apply to all kinds of other cases that are rather similar. So what that means is that these commands are not limited and the obligations are not confined only to the specific examples that Jesus gives.

No, they're there to serve as a guide for the whole of life, for all kinds of other similar relationships and situations. And the third thing is that there's absolutely nothing random about the order of these paragraphs.

Rather, they're very carefully ordered indeed to make us think, to make us ponder all the implications for our lives of these things that Jesus teaches. First of all, notice that there are six paragraphs, six antitheses, as we call them, where Jesus says, not this, but that.

Look at verse 21. You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. And all six paragraphs are like that. And notice it's not that Jesus says, oh, the Old Testament says this, but now I'm saying this.

No, no, no. Rather, Jesus says, this is what you have heard. They'd heard it from the scribes and the teachers of the law. They relied on them to teach them the scriptures because they didn't have their own Bibles like we did.

[15 : 07] The scrolls of the scriptures were in the synagogues. They were read by these teachers and passed on to the people. And what they had heard so often was religion having perverted what God was actually saying in his law.

But I say to you, says Jesus, that the real purpose of God's commands was always for holy relationships like this. And more than that, now that I'm here, now that my kingdom is here, the time of fulfillment is here.

The time for greater righteousness is here. And so Jesus fulfills and even deepens the demand of the law in new ways and in wonderful ways. Now, says Jesus, is the time for truly restoring heavenly relationships to this earth that are to be seen.

And it must be seen, first of all, among you, my kingdom people, my church. So there's careful ordering of Jesus' words. And indeed, there's also careful symmetry in these paragraphs.

Now, notice that there are two groups of paragraphs, two groups of three. And they're separated by the word again at the beginning of verse 33. That word again, again you have heard. It's a second run.

[16 : 21] It's like a fulcrum. It's like a pivot point. Three antitheses and then again another three.

Now, look at the first three paragraphs, the first three antitheses. They all contain relationships that are the nearest and the most private and the most intensive of our human relationships.

So in verses 21 to 26, it's about love and not hatred for brothers, that is, fellow believers within the Christian community. Then in verses 27 to 30, about lust, it's about purity in our personal and private lives.

And then it's about faithfulness and fidelity in the most exclusive relationship of all, that of marriage, verses 31 and 32. But then in the second set of three antitheses, they concern relationships that are the widest, the most public, the most extensive of all our human relationships.

So verses 33 to 37, about fidelity and truth in public oaths and commitments. And then in verses 38 to 42, it's about purity in public life and in wide-ranging relationships with others.

And then finally, in the last paragraph, it's all about love for those outwith the Christian community, right out to those who are enemies and indeed who hate us. I've laid out on the sheet for you there how you can see that.

[17 : 45] I think the symmetry there is really quite obvious. Matthew's a great user of symmetry, by the way, and it's all through his gospel. It was a common way of teaching, particularly in the Hebrew world. It's rather like how we would use numbered lists or bulleted lists or headings and things.

They often use symmetry to make things memorable and to make it helpful to teach. And I think you can see how it fits together. And we could summarize the overall message perhaps this way.

True kingdom relationships, relationships that express on earth the character of the Father in heaven who is infinitely loving and infinitely pure and holy and infinitely faithful.

Well, these relationships on earth that express the Father will also be radically loving and radically pure and radically faithful and true.

Radically loving, first paragraph, to brothers within the Christian church and the last paragraph to the outsiders, even to enemies. And radically pure relationships in the second paragraph, in our personal lives, in our private lives, but also the fifth paragraph, in our public lives.

[18 : 54] And relationships that are radically faithful and true, in the middle two paragraphs, in our most intensive, exclusive relationships of all, particularly marriage.

And paragraph four, in our most extensive and inclusive relationships, those with all people. Now you can see the first and the last are clearly related because love for God, if it's real, must issue in love for brothers and love for the world.

And the second and the fifth are clearly related because idolatry and hatred of God is expressed so often in lust, both for sexual things and for material things. Sexual gratification and material gratification.

That's the heart of idolatry, of anti-worship. And then the middle two are related, clearly, aren't they? Because infidelity expressed in the marriage bond will almost certainly mean that there is infidelity and unfaithfulness in other less exclusive bonds, too.

Despite the utter nonsense that we hear so much today about, oh, private lives and public lives are two separate things, and you should never inquire about the one from the other. What nonsense. If somebody in public life is someone who will cheat on his wife, then you can be very sure he'll cheat on his voters.

[20 : 09] I'm pretty persuaded that that's the shape of this chapter. I think it just helps to see some of the connections like this because it helps us to see, doesn't it, the full scope of Jesus' teaching.

It sets a trajectory along which we're to think. And it helps us to see how we think right through the full implications of all of his demands, which are both intensive and extensive.

There is no part of our whole life experience that is exempt and excluded from the direction of the radical commands of our King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our public life, our private life, our close relationships, and even those we hardly know. Well, in the rest of our time today, I want to look at the first and the last paragraph, which, as I've said, I think belong together as two poles, as it were, of the direction that Jesus wants us to think about in our relationships with others here on earth.

How is true kingdom righteousness expressed by true kingdom people to manifest heavenly relationships here on earth?

[21 : 25] And Jesus' answer is, first of all, it is through relationships on this earth that are radically loving, that reflect the infinite radical love of God our Heavenly Father.

Look at verses 21 to 26. They're all about radically loving relationships within the Christian community, within the Church of Jesus Christ.

Verse 21, you can see, refers to the Sixth Commandment. You all know that. You shall not murder. That's probably the command we like the best, isn't it? Because we reckon we're least likely to fall foul of that command.

Probably most of us, possibly all of us here this morning, feel, well, I'm all right there. I will not be up against the judgment seat of God for breaking that particular command.

Maybe somebody here who has committed that crime, who's done their time for it, but I think most of us probably feel fairly safe. We're innocent of breaking the commandment not to murder.

[22 : 29] Well, look at verse 21, verse 22. Not so, says Jesus. That's religion speaking, you see. You want to limit God's command to that last desperate act, but God means you to see that from the very first moment, that thought is a seed in your heart.

Anger in your heart that in the end can lead to that act. That is deeply offensive to God and so offensive it's deserving of hell.

No accident, is it, that the very first murder in the Bible, in Genesis chapter 4, we're explicitly told, aren't we, that it began with anger in the heart. Cain against Abel, his brother.

Cain was angry. And in the end, that anger led him to murder his brother. Look at verse 22. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. Whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire. See, even that thought is judged by God as deserving hell.

[23 : 47] Why? Because it's the root, isn't it, of the evil that ultimately bears fruit in that particular act of murder. Now when you think about that, you recognize the truth of it, don't you?

Because it's so easy to maim, it's so easy to murder, without knives, without guns. Were you taught the rhyme, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never harm me.

It's not true, is it? It's not true. Think of the terrible effects that we read of sometimes, of bullying.

And it's not just of children. Not just children who can be bullied, is it? And people can be led into such terrible illness and sickness. And sometimes even driven to take their own life.

And Jesus says we need to be so very careful about our words, and even our thoughts. And Jesus is always speaking like that.

[24 : 49] Read later on Matthew chapter 12, and tremble. Because Jesus says there, do you remember that on judgment day, every one of us will give an account for every single careless word that we have spoken.

What do you think of that? Let me tell you, that strikes fear into my heart. And real shame. And more, every thought of our heart lies open to God who sees absolutely everything.

And so you see, what Jesus says here, friends, is a real warning to us all. Especially about the sins of our tongues. Because so often and so easily, it's the tongue, isn't it, that reveals our true heart.

What comes out of the mouth, says Jesus, proceeds from the heart. Matthew 15 verse 18. And that is what defiles a person.

But out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, blasphemies.

[25 : 55] These, are what defile a person, in the sight of God. And so it's no good, says Jesus, performing all sorts of ceremonial washings, if your heart is full of evil, because God's not blind.

If all these things that the Decalogue tells us God hates, are actually in our hearts, do you think God doesn't care, as long as we don't actually go and do the act of murder in the end? Of course not. And Jesus says here, harboring anger against your brother, and vocalizing it with your tongue, is clear evidence, of a murderous nature in your heart. So beware. The New Testament is so full, isn't it, when you start reading it.

So full of warnings about our tongues, just because so easily, and so quickly, they reveal our hearts. And so often, alas, what they reveal in our hearts, is the very antithesis.

of the heavenly love of our Father. Read 1 Corinthians. It's a letter all full of exposure, by the Apostle Paul, of the talk of the Corinthians.

[27 : 06] They so love the talk, but Paul says, all of that talk of yours, just puffs you up with arrogance. It's the opposite of the love, which builds up, your brothers and your sisters.

Think of what James says, about the tongue. Listen. It's a fire, a world of unrighteousness, set on fire by hell. James 3 verse 6.

It's a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless, our Lord and Father. With it we curse people, who are made, in the likeness of God. From the same mouth, comes blessing, and cursing.

My brothers. Notice he's speaking, to the church. My brothers. This should not be. Does a spring, pour forth both fresh, and salt water? Can a fig tree, bear olives, or a grapevine figs?

Neither can a salt pond, bear fresh water. He goes on to warn them, don't speak evil, against one another brothers.

[28 : 06] The one who speaks, evil against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law, and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law.

You can't be a real believer. There's only one judge, and lawgiver. He who is able to save, and to destroy. But who are you, to judge your neighbor?

Those are pretty strong words, aren't they? From the apostle of Christ. But so are Jesus' words, strong here, in verse 22. Maybe that, calling your brother, raka, or fool, as he says here, is actually to imply, that he's not a brother, at all.

In other words, it's to treat someone, who is a Christian, as though they're not, a real Christian.

Treating them, as if they're in danger of hell. In other words, and what Jesus is saying is, if you do that, you're committing, such a sin against your brother, that you're the one, who's in danger of hell. Because your heart, is being exposed, as full of hate, not full of the love, that belongs, in the father's house. Hence verse 23, look what he says.

[29 : 15] There's no point, says Jesus, in coming to church, to sing hymns, and say prayers, if your heart, is at odds, with your brother, or sister. There's none at all. You can't, possibly relate, properly to God, in Christ, if you're not, relating properly, to your brothers, and sisters in Christ.

That's very, challenging, isn't it? That means, you see, if there's any of us, here today, who know that, we've done wrong, against the brother, and sister in Christ. Not just in deed, but in words, or even in thought.

Jesus says, leave now. You need to go, and get sorted out. Don't sing another song. Don't, don't listen to another sermon, or say another prayer, until you've done that.

But you see, we love to substitute, displays of piety, don't we? Singing, and ceremonies. Substitute that, for the real, in the flesh, costly, relational integrity, and honesty, and wholeness, in relationships.

That is what God, is really interested in, from us. There's nothing new, in what Jesus, is teaching there. The Bible's always told people, that God wants mercy, and he wants a right heart.

[30 : 38] Far, far more, than he wants sacrifices, and offerings. What does the prophet Micah say? Will the Lord be pleased, with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil, as sacrifices?

Don't be daft. He's shown you, oh man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? To do justice. To love mercy.

To walk, humbly, with your God. And Micah, in turn, is just applying, what Moses, constantly taught, in the law. What does God, what does God require?

Fear the Lord, your God. Walk in his ways. Love him. Serve the Lord, with all your heart, and with your soul. Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin, of your heart.

You shall love, the Lord, your God, and keep his commandments. Deuteronomy chapter 10.

There's nothing new, in what Jesus is telling us, that God wants from his people.

[31 : 45] But notice in verse 25, there is, a new sense of urgency. Come to terms quickly, with your brother, says Jesus.

You see, because in Jesus, the kingdom has begun, on this earth. And that means, that the day of the Lord, the great final days, the last days, of this earth, the days of judgment, have begun.

And when that final, last day of judgment, does come, if we have not repented, there will no longer, be any time to repent. No longer be any time, for mercy. And that's why verse 25, is a verse we have to take, very, very seriously, from the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's not merely, teaching a renewed, obedience to God, for God's true people, but he is teaching, a radical obedience, and an urgent obedience, because the new age, has dawned.

Because the kingdom is here. And real kingdom righteousness, that is evidence, of a heart, that is set right, and at peace with God, is expressed, in radical love, from the heart, in his people.

[33 : 05] Ex corde caritas, out of the heart, love. That was my old school motto, by the way. I shouldn't think, one in a thousand people, I had the faintest clue, where it came from, or what it meant.

But love, from the heart, it sums up, what Jesus is demanding here, from all his brothers, from everyone, who is a true brother, and sister, of Jesus Christ.

Peacemaking with man, is a mark, of real peace with God. Real reconciliation, with brothers, and sisters, in Christ, is the mark, of real, and true reconciliation, with God.

And radical, kingdom love, says Jesus, overcomes, the anger, of personal animosity, and grudges, and bitterness, that sadly, so often, is a feature, of the Christian community, and the fellowship, of the church, of Jesus Christ.

And if it's not being expressed, says Jesus, we have to ask, well, where is the evidence, of the grace of God, at work, among this people, in that particular life?

[34 : 19] What did Jesus say, in John chapter 13? They will know, you are my disciples, if, you have love, one for another. Well, that's a real challenge, isn't it?

We have to ask ourselves, is it really like that, in our church fellowship here? Is it like that, in my release the word group? Is it like that, in my home group? Is it like that, in my Bible class? Is it like that, among those, with whom I share fellowship, week by week?

Real, ex corde caritas, love from the heart. A heart at one, with our Heavenly Father. But you see, it's not just, even love for one another.

Love inwardly, within the church. Goodness me, that's a challenge enough, on its own, isn't it? Look at the last paragraph now, verses 43 to 48. You see, it's all about, radically loving relationships, with outsiders, and even, says Jesus, with enemies, with those who hate us.

This stretches out, right, to the boundaries, of the whole wide world, just like, the love, of our Heavenly Father. The scribes, you see, had twisted, God's, laws, command, which said, love your neighbor.

[35 : 34] And they'd added into it, hate your enemy. Which is found, absolutely nowhere, may I say, in the Old Testament law at all. In fact, it's quite the reverse. If you read the Old Testament law, you'll find, that it is full of commands, to love neighbors, which specifically, includes, the alien, the widow, the fatherless, the incomer, the stranger, the foreigner.

Read, later on, Leviticus chapter 19, for example, or read, Deuteronomy chapter 10. Leave, the fallen grapes, in your vineyard, says Moses, for the poor, and for the sojourner.

That's the foreigner. Why? Because I am the Lord, and the Lord's people, act like me. Love your neighbor as yourself, says God through Moses.

And you shall treat, the stranger, and the sojourner, within you, as the native among you. You shall love him, as yourself, because you were slaves in Egypt.

I am the Lord, and you shall obey, all my statutes, and rules. See, he's saying, God's people, are to be like him. And they're to reflect, his heart of love, here on this earth.

[36 : 49] You see, when religion, is your outlook, when religion, is your way of thinking, what you have to do, is limit God's commands, so that you can keep them, religiously. So that you can feel satisfied, that you're doing that.

Satisfied about your goodness, about your righteousness. And so, of course, what you become taken up with, is, how you limit those things, who you don't have to love, and who you do. And then you'll omit, all those commands, that seem to rather jar with that.

Leaving out parts of the Bible, that you don't like. So you'll omit, Exodus chapter 23, verse 4, which says, if your enemy's beast is straying, he must bring it back, even if, he's someone who hates you. You won't like that, and you won't like, Proverbs 25, verse 21. You'll omit that, unlike the Apostle Paul, by the way, who quotes it specifically, to the church in Rome. If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him a drink, and so heap burning coals, on his head. In fact, if you read, Romans chapter 12, and 13, you will find, that they exactly echo, what Jesus is saying here, in his command, to love deeply, both those within the church, and those, outside the church.

[38 : 07] Because Paul says, for the one who loves, another, has fulfilled the law. And that's what God's law, has always been about. It's about showing, the Father's heavenly love, here on earth.

And that's why Paul says, love is the fulfilling, of the law. But religion, you see, is the antithesis, of God's law of love. Remember the story, that Luke 10, tells us, when Jesus met, the religious lawyer, who said to him, what must I do, to have eternal life?

And Jesus says, it's easy, love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. And your neighbor is yourself. But you see, the man wants to know, precisely what that means, and who is his neighbor, and more importantly, who isn't his neighbor.

Who he doesn't have to love. It's pure religion talking. But Jesus turns it upside down, and he shows him, the way of true, heavenly relationship, that is meant to be seen, on this earth.

And he tells him, you remember the story, of the good Samaritan. Samaritans being the enemies, of the Jews, and the Jews the enemies, of the Samaritans. Think about the Jews, and the Arabs, in the West Bank today, and you get a flavor, of just how real, that animosity was.

[39 : 20] And of course, the irony of this story, is that it was the enemy, it was the Samaritan, who grasped the real truth, of God's way, far, far more, than the professional teacher, of the law of God itself, the scribes.

He's the one, who shows love, for his own enemy, in his path. And Jesus says, that's what I'm talking about, that, is radical Christian loving.

But that way, is heaven's way, that way, is foreign to this earth. See, verses 46 and 47, are the way of this world, aren't they?

You do, as you're done by. You love those, who love you, but you hate, those who hate you. You repay good, with good, but you repay evil, with evil. Now that's the way, our world thinks today. We heard all the time, in the political realm, don't we? We want to live, in a meritocracy, a society built, on merit, so that you get, what you deserve. If you do good, and you're a hard working family, you do well, and you get rewarded, and so on.

[40 : 29] But no, says Jesus, no, no, no, that is not, heaven's way at all. I say to you, verse 44, look, love your enemies, pray for your persecutors, so that, verse 45, do you see, you may be sons, of your father, who is in heaven, truly showing forth, on earth, the family likeness, of his heavenly home.

Because God says, Jesus, sends both sun and rain, on all, whether they're good, or evil. His natural blessings, are showered over this whole earth, aren't they?

Even though so many, in this world, despise him, and scorn him. It's what we call, God's common grace, it's the generous, giving heart of God. To everything that he's made, our God is not a, a grabber, getter God.

Love flows out from him, constantly, in abundant giving, that's, what Psalm 145, that we sang, speaks about. He is good, to all that he has made. No creature, would live or breathe, for a day on this earth, but for the generous, provision of life, from God.

No human being, none of us, would be saved, even from, an infection, these days, without the extraordinary, generosity, and giving, and provision, of God's inspiration, of modern science, and medicine, and so on.

[41 : 53] And on and on it goes, God's love, is lavish, for this whole creation. But above all, of course, he has sent his beloved son, to seek and to save the lost.

To seek and to save those, who Paul tells us, were enemies. While we were still enemies, Christ died, for our sins.

And so, verse 48, you see, if we're truly his children, children of this God, how must we be, in our loving? Well, we must be like him, perfect, in our loving.

Perfect here, doesn't mean morally faultless, of course, that's obvious, in the context. What it means, is our love, is to be like his love, it's to be complete, it's to be expansive, it's to be all embracing.

We're to express, in our relationships, in this world, the extraordinary love, of God the Father himself. Even, says Jesus, to those who are, our personal enemies, who hate us.

[43 : 00] Because that's the true manner, of Christ's people. That's true kingdom righteousness, it is all embracing. And unless it is, verse 47, do you see, unless it is, Jesus says, we're doing no more, than any other, pagan person.

We're just acting, like mere men, as Paul says, to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 3, they were doing. But we're not mere men. Of course, we're not superhuman, far from it.

We know, don't we? And I have to read, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, to know how poor in spirit, how spiritually bankrupt we are. But, we are those, who have found, in Jesus Christ, the door, to the Father's house, open to us.

We've tasted, the grace, and the mercy, and the forgiveness, of God, our Heavenly Father. And so, we must, reflect, his heavenly beauty, here on earth.

We must share, radical love, within the Christian community. Loving one another, radically, as I have loved you, says Jesus. With the sacrificial love, of the Savior, who learned, to carry the cross, himself, to save, those who are enemies.

[44 : 11] And the same radical love, expressed outwardly, also to the whole world, that is lost in sin, even to those, who are enemies, of the gospel of Christ. And that love, surely, is expressed above all, in a love, that will suffer anything, in order to share with them, even those who hate us, to share with them, the great good news, of the gospel, of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which alone, they can be saved.

When you hear, what Jesus is saying, and how radical, he's, radically, he's speaking, it sounds, doesn't it? An impossible burden. But it's not, if the love of Christ, is in us.

In fact, it's very practical, and personal. Jesus makes that plain, all through his teaching, not least in that parable, of the good Samaritan. This is not, a Herculean task, that has been given, to any one Christian, to love, to the uttermost, every single person, in the world, like that.

This is not a, a mandate, for the government, or for the United Nations. This is a practical, command, to every single Christian, to say, whomever God, puts in our path, in our lives, whether they love us, or indeed, they hate us, we are to treat, in the same way, as our Heavenly Father, has treated us.

Even those, that we assume, to be enemies. Even those, who really do, seem to hate us personally. And we do find people, who seem to really, hate us personally, especially perhaps, when we speak with them, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[45 : 53] Christ. John Stott says, it's impossible, to pray for someone, without loving him. And impossible, to go on, praying for him, without discovering, that our love for him, grows and matures.

We must not, therefore, wait before praying, for an enemy, until we feel, some love for him, in our heart. We must begin, to pray for him, before we're conscious, of loving him.

And we shall find, our love, break further, first into bud, and then into blossom. Well, I find that, a very challenging thought, don't you?

But it's perhaps, worth asking, you and me, is there somebody, in my life, in my experience, that I need to, start praying for, now, in that way?

You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly father, is perfect. Real, heavenly relationships, here, on earth.

[47 : 02] Real expression, of kingdom membership, means, radically, loving, relationships, that are real, and tangible, inwardly, among our Christian, brothers and sisters, in the church, in the church, in the church, in the church, in the church, but also outwardly, to the very nth degree, says Jesus, even to those, who hate you.

if you greet, only your brothers, says Jesus, what more, are you doing, than others? Don't even the pagans, do the same?

No, you, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly father, is perfect. Well, that's a real challenge, isn't it?

We better ask God, for help. Let's pray. Dear Lord, how your words, humble us into the dust, and shame us. You are the almighty God, of heaven.

You're our maker, our judge. All hearts, are open to you. No secrets, are hidden from you. You see us, and you know us.

[48 : 15] And you know, that we have strayed, from your ways, like lost sheep. We know, that we are of ourselves, poor in spirit. We're empty. We're bankrupt, before you. And yet, Lord, your mercy, your love, has found us, and touched us, and blessed us.

Blessed us, through the grace, that abounds to us, in Jesus, your son. And so, we mourn, for our sin. We long, Lord, for your righteousness.

We hunger, and thirst, to be true children, of our father, in heaven. So that your light, would really shine, through us, in this world. So help us, Lord, we pray.

Restore us, Lord, who are truly penitent, according to your promises, declared to us, in Jesus Christ. And grant, Father, for his sake, that we may live, godly, and righteous, and sober lives, loving, even as we are loved, by you, for the glory, of your holy name, in this world.

a world, a world that you have made, and a world, that you loved, so, so greatly. So let love, be found among us, we pray.

[49 : 34] For we ask it, in Jesus name, Amen.