

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
November 13, 2011

Loving As God's People

Matthew 5:43-48

Key verses: "But I [Jesus] say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45).

Dave Haigler worked as an umpire in a recreational baseball league. One day, Dave was pulled over for driving too fast. He tried to talk the police officer out of giving him a ticket by telling the officer that he was normally a very safe driver. But the police officer said if Dave did not like receiving the ticket, he could take the matter to court.

A few weeks later, baseball season began. Dave Haigler was umpiring behind the plate. And the first batter up was—you guessed it—the policeman! As the officer was about to step into the batter's box, the two men suddenly recognized each other.

The policeman asked awkwardly: "So, how did the thing with the ticket work out for you?"

Dave Haigler, the umpire, said: "All I've got to say is—you better swing at everything."

Ah, sweet revenge!

Everyone knows the feeling. We also know that one of the most difficult things we ever attempt to do is to obey Jesus' command: "Love your enemies." The so-called friend who stabs you in the back...the business associate who pretends loyalty and honesty while, behind the scenes, is robbing you blind...the spouse who promised to love you forever and then is unfaithful.... It may well be that the hardest thing we ever attempt to do is to obey our Lord's command: "Love your enemies."

But remember, Jesus never call us to do anything unless He also provides the grace and strength to do it!

Loving and forgiving an enemy may be more attainable when we realize that to "love your enemy" is not necessarily to have warm feelings toward her. In fact,

loving your enemy is not primarily a matter of feelings at all. Rather, it is a *choice* you make.

A great Christian, Corrie ten Boom was sent to a Nazi concentration camp because she and her family offered shelter to Jewish refugees. After the war, Corrie struggled with her feelings of anger toward one of her German captors. She believed that she had forgiven him, but she couldn't forget. Finally, Corrie cried out to God for help.

God's help came in the form of a pastor with whom Corrie shared her problem. This is what that pastor told Corrie: "Up in our church's bell tower is a bell that is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging—first 'ding' and then 'dong.' Slower and slower it goes until there is a final dong and the bell stops. I believe forgiveness works that way. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But if we have been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we must not be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They are just the dinging of the old bell slowing down."

Loving your enemy means taking your hands off the rope—taking your hands off the rope of revenge and bitterness and hatred. Loving and forgiving your enemy is not so much a feeling as it is a choice you make.

Finally, why should I love and forgive my enemy?

1. *Because of what it does for my enemy.* When I demonstrate forgiveness and love to my enemy, God can use that choice to change the heart of my enemy. Someone said: "How can you destroy your enemy? Make him a friend."

2. *Because of what it does for me.* When I choose to forgive and love, my own heart can heal. Someone has observed: To hold on to revenge and bitterness and hatred is like "burning down your own house to get rid of a rat."

3. *Because of what it does for the cause of Christ.* My choice to forgive and love an enemy may be one of the most powerful witnesses I can ever give to the power of Christ and His love!

Jesus said: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your Father in heaven." Like Father, like son. Like Father, like daughter. We may be most like God—and closest to God—when, by His grace, we forgive and love our enemies.

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