

# St. Paul's Love to His Enemies Perfect in Kind.

by Daniel Steele

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*Daniel Steele's sermon explores St. Paul's profound love for his enemies as a reflection of divine love and a model for Christian perfection.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30:6, Matthew 5:43, Romans 9:1, 1 Corinthians 9:22, 2 Corinthians 12:15, Ephesians 5:25, Philippians 1:8, Colossians 1:24, 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 Timothy 2:1

**Topics:** "Christian Perfection", "Divine Love"

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## Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the concept of Christian perfection, emphasizing that love for one's enemies is the essence and evidence of Christian perfection, as demonstrated by Paul's sacrificial love towards his foes, even to the point of being willing to give up his own life for them. Paul's love reflects divine love, walking the earth incarnated in human form, and exemplifying perfect love by surrendering his life for others. His universal love extends to enemies, fellow believers, spiritual infants, backsliders, and even strangers, showcasing a selfless and sacrificial love that mirrors Christ's love for the church.

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## Transcript

We shall use the phrases entire sanctification and evangelical or Christian perfection as synonymous. though strictly speaking, the former is an act of the Holy Spirit, and the latter, called by St. John perfect love, is a state following that act. -- Deut. 30:6.

We are told by the great Teacher in Matt. 5:43-48, that love to one's enemies is the essence and evidence of Christian perfection. Man's love becomes, not in degree, but in kind. like God's love, when it pours itself out in benefactions upon the thankless and thankful alike, as he sends sunshine and rain on the evil and the good. Did Paul love his enemies in this Godlike style? His bitterest foes were his Hebrew brethren. Christ's prediction, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household," was fulfilled in the case of Paul. The Jews thirsted for his blood. They bound themselves with an oath of starvation that they would kill the great Hebrew heretic. They mobbed him in Jerusalem, and stoned him in Gentile cities. They hounded his footsteps wherever he journeyed. Hence he ran the risk of "dying daily," of being "killed all the day long." He was "in deaths oft." It was not the Romans, but "the Jews who five times waled his bare back with "forty stripes save one."-- 2 Cor. 11:24.

Could Paul love men so full of malice and cruelty? I do not wonder that he prefaces and fortifies his almost incredible answer with four solemn asseverations, bespeaking credence to a statement so contrary to human nature: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy

Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." Then he astounds the world with the declaration of love to his malignant and venomous fellow-countrymen, so strong as to prompt him to surrender up his life upon the accursed tree, making an atonement for them, in addition to that already made by the Son of God, if it were possible for a creature to make an acceptable propitiation for sin. "For I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." -- Rom. 9: 1-3.

Here angels and men saw divine love walking the earth a second time, incarnated in human form, and uttering from the same cross the same prayer for murderous enemies: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Does Christ prove "his love toward us, in that, while we were sinners, he died for us"? St. Paul asserts his willingness to do the same for his foes. If this is not love of the purest kind possible in men, in angels, and even in God himself, then we know not what perfect love is. Here Paul professes perfect love, excluding all that is antagonistic to it, and hence cleansing from all inward sin. Indirectly he declares that the Holy Spirit has sanctified him wholly. The same divinely implanted, unselfish love, which is attended by sacrifice, and seeks no earthly recompense, is found in his declaration -- (2 Cor. 12:15), "I will very gladly spend, and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." No taint of selfishness can be justly predicated of such love. It is as pure as that which glows in the heart of a seraph.

Let us look at Paul amid the perplexities of his administration of church discipline. He had ordered the trial and expulsion of an immoral member of the Corinthian church. His anxiety to hear what effect this excision had upon the rest of the church, and the love of the apostle's heart, which prompted this disciplinary act, are graphically portrayed in 2 Cor. 2:4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." Here we are assured that "more abundant" love grasped the pruning-knife, and cut off the diseased branch. Query. Is the absence of strict discipline in the modern Christian church not a proof of deficient love on the part of the administrative officers, since abundant love is manifested by Paul in purging the church of an unworthy member? The boundless breadth of Paul's love shows that like that of God it is perfect in quality. Hear his exhortation, which must reflect his own practice, unless he was a hypocrite, not a guide, but a guide-post pointing out to others the way, but not walking in it himself (1 Tim. 2:1): "I exhort therefore, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God."

The same universal love crops out in this statement. "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."-1 Cor. 9:22. "I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." -- 1 Cor. 10:33. Such self-abnegation in the interest of all unsaved men indicates that Paul had reached the final step "in the long road to the end of self." His love for the church is like that of Christ, who loved the church, and as an indisputable proof "gave himself up for it." Eph. 5:25. -- R. V. Paul was always on the stretch to be filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." -- Col. 1:24. For her sanctification and salvation, he shrank not from crucifixion with his Lord, "being made conformable to his death." Here is an entirety of self-surrender to Christ, a wholeness of devotion, a perfectness of love, utterly inconsistent with the least remaining carnality, which, in the regenerate, always causes a divided heart.

We cannot leave this subject without bringing forth a few of the manifold proofs of the intense ardor of Paul's love. His heart was a furnace heated sevenfold, not to burn up his enemies, but to consume their sins. Let those who conceive of Paul as a man stern and austere, study the following texts: --

1 Thess. 2:7, 8, 11, "You know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children: we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our [my] own souls, because ye were dear unto us [me]." Here is a scene for a historical painting: Paul, the great theological polemic, raised up to run a dividing line between Judaism and Christianity, in such a way as to include in the latter every permanent ethical principle, and to exclude everything national and transitory in the former, with slippered feet moving noiselessly about in the nursery among the cradles, tenderly ministering to the puniest infant in whom is the breath of spiritual life. This is a photograph of perfect love.

Phil. 1:8, "God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." This text implies an identity with Christ, so intimate that his heart beats in the apostle's bosom with an unspeakable intensity of yearning love. Surely Paul fulfilled the second table of the law; he loved his neighbor as himself. This was possible only when he was obeying the first great commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' We have educed proofs that are absolutely unanswerable, that the Apostle to the Gentiles was fulfilling both tables of the law.

If Paul is the only one who has measured up to Christ's command, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," it is sufficient to prove that the command is not an unattainable ideal, but a practicable requirement which all believers in Christ have the gracious ability to perform, if they have received their heritage in Christ, the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's love was universal, embracing every character and condition of mankind. We have noted his intense affection for his enemies, his abundant love toward the disorderly Corinthian church and its offending member, as well as his tenderness toward spiritual babe-hood.

It remains for us to speak of two other classes, who were the objects of his melting love: First, the Galatian converts on the spiritual retrograde. Hear his tender expostulation, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you. Where is the blessedness ye spake of? Am I to become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"-Gal. 4:15-19; and secondly, his love for Christian strangers whom he knew only by report. For such he is ready to lay down his life. "As much as in me lies, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome" -- implacable, relentless, cruel Rome, fattening on the spoils of nations, and thirsting for the blood of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Why did Paul thrust himself into this cage of ravenous beasts? Rom. 1:9-12, "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you in my prayers . . . For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established."

We have heard of preachers who daily bear on their hearts in prayer the churches to which they have proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ, but how many can be found in the whole course of history, who, "without ceasing," pray for the churches in which they may be stationed in the future?

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