

# Love Thine Enemy

by George MacDonald

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*We are called to love our enemies, not because they are lovable, but because they are of one nature with us, and because God loves them.*

**Scripture:** Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 5:43, Matthew 6:14, Matthew 18:21, Luke 6:35, John 17:21, Romans 12:20, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 4:7

**Topics:** "Divine Love", "Forgiveness"

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## Description

George MacDonald preaches on the profound message of loving our enemies as a way to reflect the divine nature within us, emphasizing that true perfection lies in loving others unconditionally, just as our Father in heaven loves both the good and the evil. He challenges the notion of hating those who wrong us, urging us to see beyond their faults and recognize the divine essence within them that calls for our love and compassion. MacDonald highlights the importance of acknowledging our own faults and seeking forgiveness, as well as extending forgiveness to others, trusting in the transformative power of divine love to heal relationships and bring about reconciliation.

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## Transcript

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.--Matthew v. 43-48.

Is not this at length too much to expect? Will a man ever love his enemies? He may come to do good to them that hate him; but when will he pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him? When? When he is the child of his Father in heaven. Then shall he love his neighbour as himself, even if that neighbour be his enemy. In the passage in Leviticus (xix. 18,) already referred to as quoted by our Lord and his apostles, we find the neighbour and the enemy are one. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord."

Look at the glorious way in which Jesus interprets the scripture that went before him. "I am the Lord,"--"That ye may be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Is it then reasonable to love our enemies? God does; therefore it must be the highest reason. But is it reasonable to expect that man should become capable of doing so? Yes; on one ground: that the divine energy is at work in man, to render at length man's doing divine as his nature is. For this our Lord prayed when he said: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Nothing could be less likely to human judgment: our Lord knows that one day it will come.

Why should we love our enemies? The deepest reason for this we cannot put in words, for it lies in the absolute reality of their being, where our enemies are of one nature with us, even of the divine nature. Into this we cannot see, save as into a dark abyss. But we can adumbrate something of the form of this deepest reason, if we let the thoughts of our heart move upon the face of the dim profound.

"Are our enemies men like ourselves?" let me begin by asking. "Yes." "Upon what ground? The ground of their enmity? The ground of the wrong they do us?" "No." "In virtue of cruelty, heartlessness, injustice, disrespect, misrepresentation?" "Certainly not. Humanum est errare is a truism; but it possesses, like most truisms, a latent germ of worthy truth. The very word errare is a sign that there is a way so truly the human that, for a man to leave it, is to wander. If it be human to wander, yet the wandering is not humanity. The very words humane and humanity denote some shadow of that loving-kindness which, when perfected after the divine fashion, shall include even our enemies. We do not call the offering of human sacrifices, the torturing of captives, cannibalism-humanity. Not because they do such deeds are they men. Their humanity must be deeper than those. It is in virtue of the divine essence which is in them, that pure essential humanity, that we call our enemies men and women. It is this humanity that we are to love--a something, I say, deeper altogether than and independent of the region of hate. It is the humanity that originates the claim of neighbourhood; the neighbourhood only determines the occasion of its exercise." "Is this humanity in every one of our enemies?" "Else there were nothing to love." "Is it there in very deed?--Then we must love it, come between us and it what may."

But how can we love a man or a woman who is cruel and unjust to us?--who sears with contempt, or cuts off with wrong every tendril we would put forth to embrace?--who is mean, unlovely, carping, uncertain, self-righteous, self-seeking, and self-admiring?--who can even sneer, the most inhuman of human faults, far worse in its essence than mere murder?

These things cannot be loved. The best man hates them most; the worst man cannot love them. But are these the man? Does a woman bear that form in virtue of these? Lies there not within the man and the woman a divine element of brotherhood, of sisterhood, a something lovely and lovable,--slowly fading, it may be,--dying away under the fierce heat of vile passions, or the yet more fearful cold of sepulchral selfishness--but there? Shall that divine something, which, once awakened to be its own holy self in the man, will loathe these unlovely things tenfold more than we loathe them now--shall this divine thing have no recognition from us? It is the very presence of this fading humanity that makes it possible for us to hate. If it were an animal only, and not a man or a woman that did us hurt, we should not hate: we should only kill. We hate the man just because we are prevented from loving him. We push over the verge of the creation--we damn--just because we cannot embrace. For to embrace is the necessity of our deepest being. That foiled, we hate. Instead of admonishing ourselves that there is our enchained brother, that there lies our enchanted, disfigured, scarce recognizable sister, captive of the devil, to break, how much sooner, from their bonds, that we love them!--we recoil into the hate which would fix them there; and the dearly lovable reality of them we sacrifice to the outer falsehood of Satan's incantations, thus leaving them to perish. Nay, we murder them to get rid of them, we hate them. Yet within the most obnoxious to our hate, lies that which, could it but show itself as it is, and as it will show itself one day, would compel from

our hearts a devotion of love. It is not the unfriendly, the unlovely, that we are told to love, but the brother, the sister, who is unkind, who is unlovely. Shall we leave our brother to his desolate fate? Shall we not rather say, "With my love at least shalt thou be compassed about, for thou hast not thy own lovingness to infold thee; love shall come as near thee as it may; and when thine comes forth to meet mine, we shall be one in the indwelling God"?

Let no one say I have been speaking in a figure merely. That I have been so speaking I know. But many things which we see most vividly and certainly are more truly expressed by using a right figure, than by attempting to give them a clear outline of logical expression. My figure means a truth.

If any one say, "Do not make such vague distinctions. There is the person. Can you deny that that person is unlovely? How then can you love him?" I answer, "That person, with the evil thing cast out of him, will be yet more the person, for he will be his real self. The thing that now makes you dislike him is separable from him, is therefore not he, makes himself so much less himself, for it is working death in him. Now he is in danger of ceasing to be a person at all. When he is clothed and in his right mind, he will be a person indeed. You could not then go on hating him. Begin to love him now, and help him into the loveliness which is his. Do not hate him although you can. The personality, I say, though clouded, besmeared, defiled with the wrong, lies deeper than the wrong, and indeed, so far as the wrong has reached it, is by the wrong injured, yea, so far, it may be, destroyed.

But those who will not acknowledge the claim of love, may yet acknowledge the claim of justice. There are who would shrink with horror from the idea of doing injustice to those, from the idea of loving whom they would shrink with equal horror. But if it is impossible, as I believe, without love to be just, much more cannot justice co-exist with hate. The pure eye for the true vision of another's claims can only go with the loving heart. The man who hates can hardly be delicate in doing justice, say to his neighbour's love, to his neighbour's predilections and peculiarities. It is hard enough to be just to our friends; and how shall our enemies fare with us? For justice demands that we shall think rightly of our neighbour as certainly as that we shall neither steal his goods nor bear false witness against him. Man is not made for justice from his fellow, but for love, which is greater than justice, and by including supersedes justice. Mere justice is an impossibility, a fiction of analysis. It does not exist between man and man, save relatively to human law. Justice to be justice must be much more than justice. Love is the law of our condition, without which we can no more render justice than a man can keep a straight line walking in the dark. The eye is not single, and the body is not full of light. No man who is even indifferent to his brother can recognize the claims which his humanity has upon him. Nay, the very indifference itself is an injustice.

I have taken for granted that the fault lies with the enemy so considered, for upon the primary rocks would I build my foundation. But the question must be put to each man by himself, "Is my neighbour indeed my enemy, or am I my neighbour's enemy, and so take him to be mine?--awful thought! Or, if he be mine, am not I his? Am I not refusing to acknowledge the child of the kingdom within his bosom, so killing the child of the kingdom within my own?" Let us claim for ourselves no more indulgence than we give to him. Such honesty will end in severity at home and clemency abroad. For we are accountable for the ill in ourselves, and have to kill it; for the good in our neighbour, and have to cherish it. He only, in the name and power of God, can kill the bad in him; we can cherish the good in him by being good to it across all the evil fog that comes between our love and his good.

Nor ought it to be forgotten that this fog is often the result of misapprehension and mistake, giving rise to all kinds of indignations, resentments, and regrets. Scarce anything about us is just as it seems, but at the

core there is truth enough to dispel all falsehood and reveal life as unspeakably divine. O brother, sister, across this weary fog, dim-lighted by the faint torches of our truth-seeking, I call to the divine in thee, which is mine, not to rebuke thee, not to rouse thee, not to say "Why hatest thou me?" but to say "I love thee; in God's name I love thee." And I will wait until the true self looks out of thine eyes, and knows the true self in me.

But in the working of the Divine Love upon the race, my enemy is doomed to cease to be my enemy, and to become my friend. One flash of truth towards me would destroy my enmity at once; one hearty confession of wrong, and our enmity passes away; from each comes forth the brother who was inside the enemy all the time. For this The Truth is at work. In the faith of this, let us love the enemy now, accepting God's work in reversion, as it were; let us believe as seeing his yet invisible triumph, clasping and holding fast our brother, in defiance of the changeful wiles of the wicked enchantment which would persuade our eyes and hearts that he is not our brother, but some horrible thing, hateful and hating.

But again I must ask, What if we are in the wrong and do the wrong, and hate because we have injured? What then? Why, then, let us cry to God as from the throat of hell; struggle, as under the weight of a spiritual incubus; cry, as knowing the vile disease that cleaveth fast unto us; cry, as possessed of an evil spirit; cry, as one buried alive, from the sepulchre of our evil consciousness, that He would take pity upon us the chief of sinners, the most wretched and vile of men, and send some help to lift us from the fearful pit and the miry clay. Nothing will help but the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, the spirit of the Father and the Brother casting out and revealing. It will be with tearing and foaming, with a terrible cry and a lying as one dead, that such a demon will go out. But what a vision will then arise in the depths of the purified soul!

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect." "Love your enemies, and ye shall be the children of the highest." It is the divine glory to forgive.

Yet a time will come when the Unchangeable will cease to forgive; when it will no more belong to his perfection to love his enemies; when he will look calmly, and have his children look calmly too, upon the ascending smoke of the everlasting torments of our strong brothers, our beautiful sisters! Nay, alas! the brothers are weak now; the sisters are ugly now!

O brother, believe it not. "O Christ!" the redeemed would cry, "where art thou, our strong Jesus? Come, our grand brother. See the suffering brothers down below! See the tormented sisters! Come, Lord of Life! Monarch of Suffering! Redeem them. For us, we will go down into the burning, and see whether we cannot at least carry through the howling flames a drop of water to cool their tongues."

Believe it not, my brother, lest it quench forgiveness in thee, and thou be not forgiven, but go down with those thy brothers to the torment; whence, if God were not better than that phantom thou callest God, thou shouldst never come out; but whence assuredly thou shalt come out when thou hast paid the uttermost farthing; when thou hast learned of God in hell what thou didst refuse to learn of him upon the gentle-toned earth; what the sunshine and the rain could not teach thee, nor the sweet compunctions of the seasons, nor the stately visitings of the morn and the eventide, nor the human face divine, nor the word that was nigh thee in thy heart and in thy mouth--the story of Him who was mighty to save, because he was perfect in love.

O Father, thou art All-in-all, perfect beyond the longing of thy children, and we are all and altogether thine. Thou wilt make us pure and loving and free. We shall stand fearless in thy presence, because perfect in

thy love. Then shall thy children be of good cheer, infinite in the love of each other, and eternal in thy love. Lord Jesus, let the heart of a child be given to us, that so we may arise from the grave of our dead selves and die no more, but see face to face the God of the Living.

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