# "WHEN YOU FIND IT HARD TO FORGIVE"

**TEXT: Matthew 5:43-48**

**INTRO: A.** Extending forgiveness is both the easiest and hardest thing you will ever do. It is easy because it is simply a matter of the will – you CAN do it if you will it. It is the most difficult because your flesh doesn't want to forgive…it wants to retaliate or be bitter, cruel or hard.

**B.** "Love one another" is easy; "love your enemies" is difficult. The passage before us deals with the subject of love and forgiveness; you cannot love if you cannot forgive. The word "forgive" includes the idea of canceling a debt, or reconciliation, pardon, overlooking offenses, giving up resentment, forgetting any claim you have to punish, purging the past.

**C.** V. 44 is our text and in this one small verse we have a guide which reveals our spirituality or lack of it. It spells out THE MEASURE OF A MATURE SAINT…

## I. THE NATURAL LAW: v.43,46-47

### A. Love Friends – Hate Enemies: v.43

1. The command to love your neighbor was from God. Mt. 19:19
2. The concept of hating your enemies was from man. V.46-47

**ILLUS:** Perhaps because of God's commands in the OLD TESTAMENT about exterminating the enemies of Israel, this concept developed. Or perhaps it came because of imprecatory Psalms where the psalmist prayed God's judgment down upon God's enemies. However the difference is that those acts were judicial judgments issuing from a righteous and holy God due to an affront to His glory, not in personal relationships between people.

3. The Lord reminds His disciples that there is no reward given for doing what comes naturally. V.46b

### B. Love Friends Because They Love You: v.46,47

1. This is purely humanistic.
2. Even the hated tax collectors did this much.

**ILLUS:** The tax collectors were hated for several reasons: they represented a foreign power which had forced itself upon the Jews; certain Jews were acting in that foreign powers stead; they collected whatever they could extract, often cheating the people and pocketing the difference. But even these "low lifes" treated their friends with respect.

## II. THE SUPERNATURAL RULE: v.44,45,48

**ILLUS:** In this passage there are 4 levels of spirituality or maturity. V.44 gives us a means whereby we can measure our maturity; it is in fact THE MEASURE OF A MATURE SAINT… The question is: How do YOU measure up?

### A. Level 1: Love Your Enemies

1. An enemy is not just someone who is not friendly, but one who is hostile.

2. The command is not just to tolerate your enemies, but to love them.
3. You might ask what this all has to do with forgiveness; the answer is that forgiveness must precede love.

**ILLUS:** Mt. 18:21-35 Act out this parable.

a. There are 2 kinds of love: Love based on conduct. Fickle.
b. Love based on forgiveness and benevolence, i.e., even if we disapprove of the other persons conduct.

1) This is a law unique to Christianity.
2) This is the highest test of spirituality.
3) This is the most difficult thing for a believer to learn and practice.

**B. Level 2: Bless Them That Curse You**

1. To "bless" means to speak well of or to praise them.
2. It means when they curse us we speak highly courteously to them and of them
3. The principle is good words for bad words.

**ILLUS:** King David did this with King Saul. Former (praise the Lord!) President Clinton, and his cronies, left the White House a mess. They removed the "W" keys from computer keyboards, wrote filth and graffiti on the rest room walls, put a sticky substance under furniture, cut phone and computer lines, crossed out interoffice phone numbers making communication a nightmare among staff members, etc., etc. President Bush's response? He simply dealt with it and moved on, proving who the better man was. He did not attempt to retaliate, or publicly attack Pres. Clinton. He has chosen not to vilify him in the media concerning the questionable pardons issued or the stripping of Air Force One and the White House of china, silverware, insignia, etc.

**C. Level 3: Do Good To Them That Hate You**

1. Words without works = 0!

**ILLUS:** Matthew Henry said of a preacher: "The way to make him a friend was to do him an ill turn" seeing the way he treated his enemies! Jack Hyles taught me this lesson by setting the example.

A king asked what a good king should do. He was told not just to do good to his friends, but to do good to his friends and make friends out of his enemies. (This is not always possible, and should not necessarily be our goal. We don't do this for them, but for us and for Him and His glory.)

2. Jesus uses an illustration in v.45 and is saying that His provision is not based upon the goodness or lack of goodness of men on earth, but that He acts consistently, regardless.
3. These very people may blaspheme His Name, hate Him, and are evil and foul; thus He is teaching us that we don't have to like them or what they do, we just have to be bigger than them and do good to them.

**D. Level 4: Pray For Them That Persecute You**

1. This is not simply hostility, but hatefulness and harmfulness.

2. There may be legal action implied in the term "despitefully" i.e., they are out to ruin you or slander you in the courts.
3. You may never reach them, but the Lord is unlimited and can reach them, so prayer is your resource for these really hard cases.
4. By praying for the man we do not like, we are not just liking them, but loving them.

**ILLUS:** Sometimes Christians say, I have to love them, but I don't have to like them. It is ridiculous to command anyone to like everyone. Liking someone is responding to that in them which attracts you. There may be nothing there to like. But in praying for someone, you are going beyond liking them for what they are or what they do. Martyn Lloyd Jones said "What does matter is that we pray for the man whom we do not like. That is not liking him but loving him."

**D. Level 5: Perfection**

1. Jesus is saying that if you do the things I have outlined here, you will have reached spiritual maturity.
2. We know we will not reach sinless perfection, but that should nonetheless be our goal.
3. The word "perfect" means "complete" or "fully mature." How are you doing?

**CONCL:** So why not "CLAIM THIS PROMISE…WHEN YOU FIND IT HARD TO FORGIVE"? And use this passage of Script. and Jesus' teaching here as THE MEASURE OF A MATURE SAINT?