

“Loving Your Enemies”

[31 August 1952]

[Atlanta, Ga]

In this handwritten outline, the earliest known version of this oft-given sermon, King invokes Jesus' call for people to love their enemies as a solution to the problems facing modern society¹ He contends that Jesus's teaching was not “the pious injunction of a

¹ “‘Loving Your Enemies’ Rev King, Jr’s Subject,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 30 August 1952 For a later example of this sermon that follows this early outline, see King, “Loving Your Enemies,” Sermon Delivered

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utopian dreamer” King continues, “This command is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. Love is the key to the solution of the world’s problem, yes even love for enemies.”

- I Int. In the 5th Chapter of Matthew’s gospels verses 42 and 3 we find these pressing words flowing from the lips of our Lord and Master “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”²
- A Historical setting
- (1) Hebrew idea of tooth for tooth³
 - (2) Tribal God idea
 - (3) Love was binding only in the tribe
- In the midst of this Jesus comes out with a new and revolutionary idea He says in substance love not only your neighbors and friends, but love even your enemies
- B Man’s reaction to this command
- (1) Over the years men have looked upon this command as an impractical ideal Many people are convinced that it just isn’t possible Many would say that this is just additional proof that Jesus was an impractical idealist of yesterday who never quite came down to earth
- Yet far from being the impractical idealist, Jesus has become the practical realist and the words of our text glitter in our eyes with a new pertinence Instead of being the pious injunction of a utopian dreamer, this command is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization Love is the key to the solution of the world’s problem, yes even love for enemies
- II The ~~inevitability of enemies~~ [~~strikeout illegible~~] ~~all of us have enemies~~ hardness of the command I think Jesus realized that it was hard
- III How does one go about Loving his enemy
- (1) First analyze self We may be somewhat [*responsible?*]
 - (a) It is true that some people hate others for no reason
 - (b) However there might be causes on your end You might have done something in the past
 - c Notice the international situation Communism is our enemy because of many of our blunders

at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 17 November 1957, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, vol. 4. Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron, Kieran Taylor (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 315–324, see also King, *Loving Your Enemies*, Sermon Delivered at Detroit Council of Churches’ Noon Lenten Services, 7 March 1961, pp. 421–429 in this volume, and King, *Strength to Love*, pp. 34–41

² Matthew 5:43–44

³ This idea can be found throughout the Pentateuch, for an example, see Exodus 21:24

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Quote Jesus "How can you see the ~~beam~~ mote. etc.⁴

- (2) Always be willing to see the good points in your enemy
- (3) Whe the possibility of defeating your enemy presents itself, you must not do it

This would not follow with all out war between nations This deals with enmity between individuals

IV Why Should one Love his enemy

- (1) Because the process of hate for hate brings disaster to all involved
- (2) Because hate distort the whole personality
- 3
- (3) Because love has within in a redemptive power

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 1, "Loving Your Enemies "

4 Cf Matthew 7 3-5