

## TELL ME YOU DIDN'T MEAN IT, LORD!

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In the sermon on the mount Jesus said: "BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES, BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU, DO GOOD TO THEM THAT HATE YOU, AND PRAY FOR THEM THAT DESPITEFULLY USE YOU" (**Matthew 5:44**). The fact that our culture is geared to watching out for old number one in no way modifies, tempers, or sets aside Jesus' instruction. A young woman known to me was heard to say she would lie if it gave her some kind of advantage. One problem with lying to gain an advantage is that the lie spitefully uses someone else. Another consequence of the lie is that it makes the one suffering the wrong an enemy to the liar. The liar will sooner or later face the consequences of the lie, but what about the individual who suffers the wrong brought on by the lie? That is the person Jesus is speaking to in the mountain top discourse. Do good to your enemies, pray for them; bless, not curse!

It isn't enough to restrain oneself from picking up a 2x4 and knocking the liar upside the head. We must bless, not curse, and do good to the one who demonstrates hate. Paul wrote to the Romans: "THEREFORE IF THINE ENEMY HUNGER, FEED HIM; IF HE THIRST, GIVE HIM DRINK: FOR IN SO DOING THOU SHALT HEAP COALS OF FIRE UPON HIS HEAD" (**Romans 12:20**). The apostle doesn't mean for us to render good for the evil begrudgingly either, because in the very next verse he writes: "BE NOT OVERCOME OF EVIL, BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD."

When one has been wronged, there are two things to be on guard about: the actions--do not avenge yourself (**Romans 12:19**), and the attitude--bless, not curse (**v. 14**). With regard to the former, it may not be too difficult to resist picking up the 2x4. It may, however, not be so easy to have the right attitude toward being wronged, but we develop it because that is what the Lord commands.

A friend of this writer, a man who served many years as a deacon in the church, recently passed away. Some of the past words and deeds by a number of his relatives suggest a war over material possessions may arise. Some of his kin may cheat and defraud other family members. If they do, they will have their reward. But what of those who are mistreated? They will have the difficult task of keeping their actions and attitudes consistent with the teachings of Christ and Paul.

However, they have a consolation. It is the same consolation the beggar Lazarus had. The faithful are carried to Abraham's bosom, and the sinful--who have made themselves better off through fraud--will have the same end and eternity as the rich man. The consideration of where we desire to spend eternity should make all the difference between whether we seek vengeance and harbor a grudge or take wrong joyfully, knowing that, by returning good for evil, we will have a greater reward than material wealth.