

Raising the Bar

Just when you thought that you had your head around “loving your neighbour, you find that the bar has been raised, and you are expected to “love your enemies.” This is going to be a stretch. It would be a help to have an understanding of the causes of hostility and resulting violence.

What goes on in the world is a projection of what is going on within you and me. The causes of, and the solutions to, every human problem lies within the heart and mind of each one of us. That means when we want our world free of hatred, greed and injustice, we must begin by clearing our own inner lives of those very qualities. We must stop overlooking injustices, however small, that secretly benefit us while in truth, harm others.

Jesus Christ made the challenge in the Sermon on the Mount chapters 5 – 7 in Matthew’s Gospel. He boldly commands us to “love our enemies.” Never in the history of the world has a more radical moral principle been formed and enunciated more clearly than this. Yet never, through all the centuries since, had humanity rejected any commitment, principal or rule more fully than this: “love your enemies.”

Even Christians in general have seldom been found leading the charge when love of enemies has been required. In our local congregations it indeed seems that many Christians have a tough enough time trying to love their neighbours, never mind their enemies.

It’s easy to imagine that there is a seething cauldron of hate at the heart level that sooner or later is acted out collectively through road rage, air raids and all the other forms of societal displeasure that are revealed.

There are two things to remember. The first is that behind the Christian saying that we should love and not hate our enemies, there is a powerful spiritual law, according to which we tend to become like the object of our hatred. In other words, one must be careful who or what he or she hates because somehow, in the hot fixation of emotions, the hatred recoils on the hater.

The second thing to keep in mind is that the Greek word for love in this context is “agape,” the love that God has for us, His unworthy children. When focused on our enemies it does not necessarily mean anything sentimental. Rather it is showing respect and willing the very best for the other, regardless of how one feels. For example, to love your neighbor or your enemy in this sense, doesn’t mean you necessarily have to like them. Jesus doesn’t say “like your enemies”.

We only need a slight change in the minds and hearts of millions of people to shift the balance towards global peace and justice for all. That’s what spiritual renewal is about. It is a bar which needs to be cleared by all of us.