

CHAPTER TWO

A Christian and His Enemies

One of the basic tenets of the Christian religion is Love. And one of the most difficult and demanding expressions of that love is that which relates to a person's enemies. A prominent characteristic of the world is to vent hatred for one's avowed enemies. However, when Christ enters the life this attitude undergoes a radical change. One of the greatest demonstrations of the power of Christ working in a man is to see his hatred toward an enemy turn into love.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stated this principle in the clearest terms. "Love your enemies," he said, "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). See also Luke 6:27, 35. It would be difficult to imagine how Jesus could have made this point any plainer.

Obviously, a Christian could not love his enemies and at the same time engage in armed warfare against them. Jesus emphatically stated that this love required that we "do good to them." Unfortunately, there are people who deride this injunction of Jesus by referring to those who are trying to obey it as "do-gooders." But no stretch of the imagination or rationalizing of the situation can make the horrible acts of war "doing good" to the enemy! War calls for inflicting the greatest amount of physical and moral harm upon the enemy with the primary intention of bringing about his utter ruin or surrender. Contrary to this, however, the Christian is required to bestow upon his enemies only such things which prove helpful to their physical and moral condition.

The great apostle Paul outlined specifically what this doing good to enemies involved when he said, "But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to

drink..." (Romans 12:20). There may be Christians who would consider this course of action "unreasonable" or "foolish" but, if the proper attitude of love exists in the heart, it will become the normal and natural way of treating an enemy. If this is not being practiced today, the fault lies in a lack of Christ-like love and not in a lack of understanding what the Bible teaches on the subject. The difficulty of carrying out any obligation is no valid argument for rejecting it.

The objection is often raised that when Jesus and Paul mention "enemies," they mean only such personal enemies as one might acquire in his day to day activities. This view holds that such enemies cannot refer to members of the military force of an opposing nation with which our country may be engaged in a declared or undeclared war. The reasoning follows that we are obliged to do good to personal enemies but that the Scriptures which teach this do not apply to enemy soldiers during wartime.

In reply to this it should be pointed out that the Greek word from which our English word "enemy" is translated is "ekthros", and is used thirty-two times in the New Testament. It is rendered as "enemy" and "foe", both in the singular and plural. It is significant to note that the same word is used in reference to both personal and national enemies.⁶

In Luke 19:41-44, Jesus laments the coming fate of the city of Jerusalem for having rejected him. In verse 43 he says, "For the days shall come upon thee, when thine enemies shall cast up a bank (trench, KJV) about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side." This is an unmistakable allusion to the Roman army, under Titus, as it besieged the city of Jerusalem prior to its fall in 70 A. D. Here the word "enemies" (from ekthros) refers to a national armed force preparing for a violent act of destructive war. This is the same word for the "enemies" whom the Christian is commanded to love. See also the prophecy of Zacharias, in Luke 1:67-79 where the term "enemies" is also used in a military sense, (although its use there appears to be figurative.)

But does war actually breed hatred of one's enemies? Does the physical and emotional training of fighting men instill in them compassion or contempt for their foes? Few men who have confronted the enemy in the heat of

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fierce battle would hesitate in answering this question. Let a professional soldier of international reputation provide us with some insight into this matter.

General Dwight Eisenhower lamented the apathy of the public toward all-out war preparation which immediately preceded the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. He cited this attitude on the part of the people as a factor in making it more difficult to secure "toughened fighting men, emotionally and professionally ready for warfare."⁷

What did Eisenhower mean by "emotional" readiness for war? Just what kind of preparation do fighting men receive before going into battle? Does the army chaplain stand before the troops, as they assemble below the ship's deck arrayed in battle dress and prepared to land on an enemy beachhead, and urge them to remember the words of Jesus, "Love your enemies...do good to them that hate you"? Would the teaching of the Bible regarding a Christian's attitude toward his enemies be appropriate pre-battle instruction?

I well recall that tense morning in 1945 when I was assembled with army troops aboard an attack amphibious ship off the coast of Japan. The soldiers were dressed in full battle combat gear. Within an hour they would scramble over the side and into landing craft which would shuttle them ashore on one of the Japanese home islands. Although a formal treaty had been signed a few weeks earlier, these soldiers were briefed to expect a fanatic, last ditch stand by the Japanese since this was a remote area of the country which may not have heard of the official surrender of the nation's leaders.

What would the navy chaplain say to these grim men? Perhaps we should tell you what he did not say. He completely ignored any reference to the Bible's teaching on a Christian's attitude toward his enemies. He could not have mentioned this subject if those men were to hit that beach prepared to face an enemy they had been trained to hate. Emotionally they had to be made ready to kill or else suffer the same fate themselves. The Christian principle of love for enemies has no place in war.

To help you get an idea of the attitude toward one's enemies which is encouraged by war we reproduce the following article taken from the recent number of a religious magazine.

As part of the military training in World War II, the inductees were shown a film entitled "Kill or Be Killed." The picture, as I remember was vividly barbaric, and yet the U. S. Government knowing full well that most of us were reared in homes of reasonable peace and tranquility, felt that our minds as well as our bodies must be properly conditioned for mortal combat. After all, they reasoned, war is a matter of survival of the fittest and certainly the nation with the most people surviving would emerge victorious.

The film depicted the sadistic methods of fighting used by the enemy. Everything was fair! Nothing was too cruel! All rules for human dignity were completely forgotten—this was total war and our leaders wanted each of us to know it and to respond in like manner. It was appalling but later it proved to be the one great factor responsible for our survival. We had a mission to perform—it was a mission of death. We must fight the enemy with his own methods—we must fit ourselves for the right to live. "Kill or Be Killed," they said and it had to be the most important thing in our lives. They taught us well.⁸

Perhaps the best way to sum up the feelings which war arouses in a man toward his enemies is in the words of a sturdy, handsome South Vietnamese soldier, Nguyen Van Ham, 23 years of age. Interviewed by a newspaper correspondent concerning his role as a member of the South Vietnamese army he said, "I hate the Viet Cong, and I love my country. I have killed three Viet Cong. When I shoot them, I don't know why, but I feel very good...I still want to go more often into the field and kill the Viet Cong."⁹ This young man is a Roman Catholic.

In the face of the atrocities being committed by the Viet Cong, it is not too difficult to see why this young man is so strongly motivated to kill. But the teaching of Jesus still stands. While it may not be easy, yet the Word of God commands the Christian to love his enemies, and to act like it. This he cannot do and go to war against them.

NOTES FROM CHAPTER TWO

6. G. H. C. Macgregor, *THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS OF PACIFISM*, (Nyack, N. Y.: Fellowship Publications: 1960) page 47.
7. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *CRUSADE IN EUROPE* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc.: 1948) page 10.
8. Ike Henderson, "Think It Over," *CHRIST FOR THE WORLD FAMILY MAGAZINE* (Orlando, Fla.): (Vol. 28, No. 12, Dec. 1968) p. 19.
9. Orlando (Florida) Evening Star, Friday, July 16, 1965, p. 12-A