



## On Prayer XIII: Prayer For Our Enemies

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The necessity of praying for our enemies stems from the very essence of the moral teaching of Jesus Christ.

In the pre-Christian era there was a rule: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy* (Matthew 5:43). The majority of people continue to live in accordance with this rule. It is natural for us to love our neighbors, those who do us good, and to treat with hostility and even hatred those who pose evil. But Christ says that our attitude should be completely different: *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* (Matthew 5:44).

Christ Himself, during His earthly life, repeatedly set an example both of love for enemies and of prayer for them. When the soldiers nailed the Lord to the Cross, He experienced frightful torments and incredible pain, but He prayed: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34). At that moment He thought not about Himself, not about the fact that these soldiers were causing Him pain, but rather about *their* salvation; for, by committing evil, they were first of all harming themselves.

We should remember that people who do us evil or treat us with hostility are not bad in themselves. What is bad is the sin with which they are infected. One needs to hate sin, but not its bearer: man. As St. John Chrysostom put it: “when you see that someone is doing something evil, hate not him, but the devil, who is behind him.”

One needs to learn to separate the person from the sin he commits. Priests very often observe during Confession that sin is really separate from the person who repents thereof. We should be able to turn away from the sinful image of man and remember that everyone, including our enemies and those that hate us, are created according to God’s image; and it is this image of God, these rudiments of good that are in everyone, that we should scrutinize.

Why is it necessary to pray for enemies? It is necessary not only for them, but for us as well. We should find in ourselves the strength to be reconciled with people. Archimandrite Sophrony, in his book about St. Silouan the Athonite, says: “Those that hate and reject their brother are flawed in their being; they cannot find the way to God, Who loves all.” This holds true. When hatred for man settles in our heart, we are not able to approach God. As long as we hold on to this feeling, the path to God is barred to us. This is why it is necessary to pray for our enemies.

Every time we approach the Living God, we should be at absolute peace with everyone whom we perceive as our enemies. Let us remember what the Lord said: *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Matthew 5:23-24). And also other words of the Lord: *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him* (Matthew 5:25). “In the way with him” means “in this earthly life.” For if we do not manage to be reconciled here with those that hate and offend us, with our enemies, then we will be unreconciled in the future life. And to make up there for what is missing here will no longer be possible.



[To be continued.](#)

*Translated from the [Russian.](#)*