

Forgiveness

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Because in Christian morals “thy neighbor” includes “thy enemy,” and so we come up against this terrible duty of forgiving our enemies.

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us.” It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven.

“Love your neighbor” does not mean “feel fond of him” or “find him attractive.”

So loving my enemies does not apparently mean thinking them nice either. That is an enormous relief. I can look at some of the things I have done with horror and loathing. So apparently I am allowed to loathe and hate some of the things my enemies do.

Hate a bad man’s actions, but not hate the bad man: hate the sin but not the sinner.

... the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them. But it does want us to hate them in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves: being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere, he can be cured and made human again.

Does loving your enemy mean not punishing him? No, for loving myself does not mean that I ought not to subject myself to punishment - even to death.

“Well, if one is allowed to condemn the enemy’s acts, and punish him, and kill him, what difference is left between Christian morality and the ordinary view?” All the difference in the world. Remember, we Christians think man lives forever. We may kill if necessary, but we must not hate and enjoy hating. We may punish if necessary, but we must not enjoy it. In other words, something inside us, the feeling of resentment, the feeling that wants to get one’s own back, must be simply killed.

Even while we kill and punish we must try to feel about the enemy as we feel about ourselves - to wish that he were not bad, to hope that he may, in this world or another, be cured: in fact, to wish his good. That is what is meant in the Bible by loving him: wishing his good, not feeling fond of him nor saying he is nice when he is not.

I admit that this means loving those who have nothing lovable about them. But then, has oneself anything lovable about it? Perhaps it makes it easier if we remember that that is how He loves us. Not for any nice, attractive qualities we think we have, but just because we are the things called selves. For really there is nothing else in us to love: creatures like us who actually find hatred such a pleasure that to give it up is like giving up beer or tobacco ...