

PP The King and His Kingdom-The Conduct of a Disciple of Christ
Part 18-Matthew 5:38-42 Loving Difficult People 6/17-18/2017

Illus Martin Luther once told of a man who *'let lice nibble at him and refused to kill any of them...maintaining that he had to suffer and could not resist evil'*

This passage has been used by corrupt abusers to justify their horrific actions

Some have taken it to create a doctrine of pacifism or non-resistance

The Anabaptists of Germany, traditional and current Mennonites, Quakers or Friends, all take this passage as grounds to never enter the military

The famous writer Leo Tolstoy based his highly regarded book, *War and Peace* on this passage, believing that society should eliminate police, the military and other forms of authority, bringing about a utopian society...which, at the end of his life, admitted doesn't work

Yet thankfully William Wilberforce resisted the evil of slavery, and many are actively fighting against sex trafficking and other forces of injustice and evil

***"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil."* 5:38-39**

This scripture has nothing to do with pacifism, the death penalty, or whether one can serve in the military and it cannot be used to keep someone silent in the grip of an abuser

It has everything to do with the kind of love Jesus expects His disciples to have toward those who are unreasonable and difficult toward us

Love can show the world Christ, especially as it is displayed toward those who are evil

Look with me at how Jesus begins in **verse 38**, ***"You have heard that it was said"***

Recall that He does this 6 times as He shows His disciples the conduct He desires from them

The first was heart murder, then heart adultery, then heart divorce, then heart lies

Now He shows us the heart of retaliation and revenge that lurks in an unredeemed heart, and the difference in living that the born again, new heart disciple must have

And to show this, He will first examine the original Law of God, then the distortion that the scribes and Pharisees made, and then correct and elevate it to its ultimate goal: to love God and love others

PP 1-The Old Testament Law

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

This was called the Law of Retaliation, included in almost every ancient civilization's legal books: Greek the Law of Solon, the Romans' Law of Twelve Tables, Babylonian Code of Hammurabi and the Old Testament in three places

PP *"If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him."* Leviticus 24:19-20

If a man of one tribe wounded a man of another, the injured one's tribe would often attack the offender, so this law was put into place to put a boundary, a cap on vengeance

Someone hurts us, we want to hurt back...but worse...a pound of flesh for an ounce of offense

But it was meant to be legally decided by a judge or ruling body of citizens, leaving no room for vigilante justice without due process and this is where it began to be twisted

The purpose of this law was to control revenge, and administer justice through the courts with appropriate punishments, ensuring that *the punishment fit the crime*, no more

There is no evidence that it was ever *literally* carried out in Judaism, since the putting out of the aggressor's eye did nothing to relieve the sudden burden of the one who had been injured
 If the judge ruled in the victim's favor, the one who inflicted the injury had to pay for his loss of wages, medical expenses, life disability if that occurred, as well as social humiliation
 Yet the problem with all these laws, and by the way, the exact problem with our own Judicial system, is that it could do nothing about the heart of either the victim or culprit
 The culprit remained self-justified, unrepentant, the victim remained vengeful and resentful

PP 2-The Scribes and Pharisees' distortion

The Pharisees and Scribes, Jewish pastors and lawyers, permitted and actually mandated that the offended person become his own judge, jury and executioner
 God's law, meant to bring about justice and stop revenge, was turned into individual license and civil justice was distorted to personal vengeance
 You see, and this is critical to understand, they insisted on defending personal rights and honor

It is shocking to read what My Utmost for His Highest's author Oswald Chambers wrote:

PP *"The only right a Christian has is the right not to insist upon his or her rights."*
 Seldom does any statement receive more pushback than this: *the Christian gives up rights*
 Dozens of arguments immediately form, yet our Lord Himself is our example of this, ***"who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."*** **Philippians 2:6-7**

Our country's Declaration of Independence says we have been endowed by our Creator certain inalienable rights-that among these are the rights to Life, Liberty and Happiness
 But Jesus aims much deeper, right into the heart, to change the rights-defending, angry, vengeful heart with one of love toward the one ***'the one who is evil'***

PP 3-The fulfillment of the Law

"But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil" **5:39a**

PP The word ***'resist'*** means *to set against or oppose*, and in this context, the disciple of Christ should not have personal resentment, spite or vengeance toward one who does us harm
 Jesus then gave 4 examples of what this looks like in situations familiar with His day

PP a) *Be willing to give up the right to dignity*

"But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." **Matthew 5:39**

Most Jewish people were right-handed, and to slap a person on the ***'right cheek'*** required a backhanded slap, which was not a violent punch but a massive insult
 A slave referred a whip to the back rather than a slap of insult by his master

In Jewish law, to hit a man with the back of the open hand was twice as insulting as punching him, and both Romans and Jews made this a prosecutable offense with a heavy fine. But Jesus says, instead of returning insult for insult, or defending your right, or pursuing legal action, *‘turn to him the other also’*

The scribes and Pharisees demanded an equal response or there was injustice

Yet Jesus taught His disciples, *“unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Matthew 5:20

PP b) Be willing to give up the right to comfort

“And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” 5:40

The example Jesus gives here is not a robbery, but a lawsuit in a court of law where the judge ruled in the favor of your opponent

A *‘tunic’* was the undergarment worn against the skin, the *‘cloak’* the outer garment used as a robe during the day, a blanket at night

PP *“If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.”* Exodus 22:26-27

Jesus says if someone sues you for your tunic, give him your cloak also

Legally you will have it back at night, but you will suffer embarrassment during the day

Most Jews owned only one cloak and probably one or two shirts or tunics, as clothing was expensive and hard to make

Be willing to let go of your rights to your cloak, demonstrating uncommon desire that as far as it depends on you be at peace with all men and you will show the love of the Christian

PP c) Be willing to give up the right to freedom

Remember, the aim of Jesus’ teaching is to show us how to love our enemies

And now He draws on the burdensome fact that Israel was a captive people to the Romans

“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” 5:41

Roman law gave their soldiers the right to force anyone in their kingdom to carry his pack for one Roman mile, slightly shorter than our modern mile, 1,000 steps

If you felt the touch of the spear on your shoulder, then this law was being exercised over you

You would burn with shame as you were forced to carry the weapons, baggage of your oppressor

Jesus taught that love will not begrudge, but will get to the end of the mile of forced labor, not demand to be unloaded of the burden, but will volunteer to go *‘the extra mile’*

The right to freedom is not to be cherished at the expense of love, for demanding our rights has no power to show the world the love of Jesus

Love displays itself powerfully toward the one who is unreasonable to us

Jesus said in verse 46, *“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”* Matthew 5:46

Gospel love, the love of God must be our love, and friends, it looks wildly different than that of the nonbeliever

It is beautiful, powerful, and so impossibly difficult in our own power, and one more example will be like the fingernail on the chalkboard to our souls

PP d) Be willing to give up the right to possessions

“Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

Matthew 5:42

This is not a call to give to any and every person without discernment
 Jesus does not have in mind giving to and enabling lazy, irresponsible people, and in fact the New Testament will tell us not to give to the one who can but won't work
 One man yelled to Jesus to tell his brother to give his share of the inheritance, but Jesus wouldn't, instead warning against the destructive power of covetousness
 So verse 42 is not a call to indiscriminate giving, but generous, open-handed giving

PP “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” James 2:15-16

Cheerful generosity moved Abraham to give the best of the land to his nephew Lot, Elisha to spread a meal before the Assyrian army that had come to kill him

We are to live free from the love of money, and be ready to share with those in need, seeing our possessions as given by God to meet ours and others' legitimate needs

Christ demands His followers yield all rights to personal possessions and give generously

Have you ever said nothing when slandered or insulted, and instead prayed for that person?
 How well do you tip a waiter or waitress, even when the service has been poor?
 Have you ever done your chores and then come back to your parents offering to do more?
 Do you ever finish your work for the day, and offer to help your coworker with his or hers?
 Have you ever torn up a personal loan you have given, motivated by voluntary love?

How are you feeling now that we have looked at the meaning of this passage?
 In each of these 4 examples, did you begin to mentally argue, saying, ‘But what about??....’
 Were you feeling overwhelmed? Angry? Defensive? Exasperated?
 If so Christian, then you are experiencing the collision between your flesh and your new nature
 We can live this way because Jesus has worked and is working in us so that our hearts are free from insisting on our rights for dignity, comfort, freedom and possessions

This sermon of Jesus shows us the perfect standard of God's expectation for how we must live
 In fact, Jesus says ***“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” 5:48***
 The goal of God is that the Christian becomes like Him, living His way before the world
 The entire sermon of Jesus is to create in people an overwhelming sense of spiritual bankruptcy, of powerlessness, that leads people not to despair but to Jesus

This is why the His very first statement in the sermon is ***“Blessed are those who are poor in spirit”***...meaning the one who has come to the reality of their impotence and need
 Spiritually bankrupt people come to Jesus Who upheld perfectly every law of God, and in the moment of trusting in His righteousness rather than our own, saves us

PP “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Rom 3:22
 Jesus, Who perfectly yielded His rights, loving the very people who persecuted Him

He was insulted, slandered, told He was like the company that He kept

PP *“The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”* **Matthew 11:19**

He was mocked insulted at His flogging, His trials, His crucifixion

His clothing was taken from Him and gambled away

PP *“When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.”* **1 Peter 2:23**

PP He prayed for them, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* **Luke 23:34**

He as forced to carry His cross in Roman custom, to His own crucifixion site

The tree that God created became the device for His cruel death, yet He yielded

Christian, we must die to ourselves, denying ourselves, yielding our rights and love, not only those who love us, but even more persuasively those who use us for their own advantage

And as our flesh screams in reaction to these commands, we must flee to Christ, Who has

made us righteous, and He will give us the power to live in the way He has exampled

Do not defend your honor; let go of your comfort; do not worry about your freedom; and give generously of your possessions...to those who oppose you

This is so difficult, yet the disciple of Jesus can and must live this way!

Amen?

Pray