

**PP Twisted Scriptures: *Loving Unreasonable People***

**Part 1-Matthew 5:38-44**

6/11-12/2016

The passage before us has been twisted sometimes horribly and painfully

Here is the beginning of it: ***“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***

It’s been used by abusers-political or personal-to keep their victims in line as doormats

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, the philosophy that sought to 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

How thankful we should be that William Wilberforce resisted those who were evil helping to end slavery, and those who are fighting against many forces of injustice and evil

But this scripture has nothing to do with pacifism, the death penalty, or whether one can serve in the military and in 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, so we start at the end with **verse 43**

***“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” 5:43-44***

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

Let me draw your attention to the particular words of Jesus in the beginning of our passage:

***“You have heard that it was said”***

You may notice that this phrase, or similar phrase occurs 6 times in chapter 5

The 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew could rarely read, so the Pharisees and Scribes verbally taught the people God’s Law, but they had narrowed the Law to behaviors, ignoring the heart attitudes and motives

Legalism always moves God’s laws to behavior and away from the heart, the gospel of grace moves it fundamentally to the heart and then shows the power of God available to live them

One example is, You shall not murder, so they entirely focused on the physical act of murder, meanwhile, ignoring the furious wrath and anger they held toward others

So Jesus says, ***‘But I say to you’***

He isn’t changing God’s law, and He makes this clear in **verse 17**, ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17***

He corrects the narrow distortion of the Law that the Jewish teachers had created, and reaffirms the intended spirit of the Law of God showing how the Christian must live

**PP 1-The Christ-follower must not resist the evil person**

***“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.”***

***‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’*** 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**

It was given to make sure that *the punishment fit the crime*, no more

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 Pharisees and Scribes, Jewish pastors and lawyers, permitted and actually mandated that the offended person to 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

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 of 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

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’***

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 then this: *the Christian gives up rights*

Dozens of arguments immediately form, yet our Lord Himself is our example of this, ***“who,***

**PP** ***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

Yet there are times where love demands we abandon these rights following the example of Jesus

As we look at these examples, let’s learn one more crucial thing, about the word ***‘resist’***

The word was often used for taking legal action against someone, and again, Jesus is about to

show us that the one who follows Him must hold loosely to personal rights for the sake of bearing witness to the gospel

## **PP 2-The Christ-follower must be willing to yield personal rights**

**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***

There are Christian brothers and sisters who believe strongly in the law of non-retaliation, and this is one of the key passages for their view  
 Martin Luther gave a bizarre example of a man who *'let lice nibble at him and refused to kill any of them on account of this text, maintaining that he had to suffer and could not resist evil'*  
 Most of the 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  
 In fact, one Rabbinical law ruled to hit a man with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as punching him, and both Romans and Jews made this a prosecutable offense  
 Instead of returning insult for insult, or defending yourself, or pursuing legal action so that your enemy would have to pay a heavy fine, ***'turn to him the other also'***  
 In big insults or small, our flesh wants to rise up, defend our own honor, and insult the person back in a worse way, getting more than even  
 This is what the Pharisee would do, but ***“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

**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***

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

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

Hold your rights to your possessions, comfort and dignity loosely, be willing to let them go in order to demonstrate love

To be so persuaded and confident that our Heavenly Father hears our cries, and He is compassionate, He will care for us, so don't angrily defend your legal rights

**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

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 and then volunteer to go ‘the extra mile’

The right to freedom is not to be cherished at the expense of love

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

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

***“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 indiscriminately, which can be destructive to the person

For we are told not to give money to the one who will not work

One man yelled to Jesus to tell his brother to give his share of the inheritance, but Jesus didn’t, instead warning against greed that tears families apart

So verse 42 is not a call to indiscriminate giving, but generous 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, Eisha to spread a meal before the Assyrian army that had come to kill him

It requires the Christ-follower to yield all rights to personal possessions, to be used as God directs by His Spirit and His Word

So let me ask you, 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, then you are seeing the experiencing the collision between our old nature and new nature

How well do you tip when the service has been poor?

Have you ever given extra to the cab driver?

Have you ever done your chores and then offer to do more?

Have you completed your work for the day, and then helped your coworker with his or hers?

Have you ever torn up a personal loan you have given, motivate by voluntary love?

How can we live in 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 His people, how He demands we live

The summary of the entire sermon is in **5:48**: ***“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”***

The goal of God in the Christian life is that we become like Him  
 The entire sermon of Jesus, including what we just studied it to lead people to an overwhelming  
 sense of spiritual bankruptcy that will lead people to Him, our great Savior, the only One  
 Who can enable us to meet God's standard of perfection  
 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

Who can make us righteous?

**PP** ***"This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."*** Rom 3:22

The One who has perfectly yielded His rights, loving those who opposed 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 was forced to carry His cross in Roman custom, to His own crucifixion site

The tree that He created now become the device for His cruel death, yet He yielded to the shame

Let me close by summing up this passage of Scripture

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 old nature screams in reaction to these commands, we must flee to Christ, Who has  
 made us righteous, and will give us the power to live in the way He has exemplified

Amen?

Pray