

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

June 02, 2024

I. Introduction

A. **Matthew 5:38-42**, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ [39] But I say to you, **do not resist an evil person**; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. [40] If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. [41] Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. [42] Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

B. Toward godly maturity and Christ-like love

1. The wisdom of loving God above all others, and all else, is the most important lesson we can learn. It is also the most sensible, secure, mentally and emotionally healthy way to live. Loving those around us as we want to be loved is just as important as loving God supremely, for our well-being and the well-being of those around us.
2. However, knowing this truth is one thing. Yielding to God and His word, and doing our part to be transformed by this truth is another. The first requires learning. The second requires living according to what we have learned – and that is what we have been created to do.
3. According to the way God created us, we begin as babies and grow to adulthood.
 - a. And though we begin life with all the equipment necessary to live a godly life to the fullest, we don’t begin with an established faith in God, or a godly understanding of love, or with the self-discipline, education, and the values and beliefs necessary to live a reasonably mature Christian life.
 - b. In other words, we begin with what we have and build on that to grow into the mature adults God created us to be.
4. In the same way, the Sermon on the Mount follows this pattern of growth. For example, the Beatitudes begin with humility and end with persecution. In the six “You have heard it was said” statements, Jesus begins by showing that relationships hold the same value as life itself, and ends by telling us to turn the other cheek and love our enemies.
5. The point is, the beginning lesson or foundation necessary for valuing relationships enough to, of our own free will, turn the other cheek and love our enemies, is Jesus’ teaching on relationship murder.

6. However, if we treat relationships as something we can move on from and form new ones more to our liking, and if we treat adultery and divorce as minor evils, then the beliefs, values, and patterns of thinking we use to do that will make Jesus' teaching on turn the other cheek seem irrational – because it leaves us vulnerable.
7. However, all that God is asking of us is to treat others the way we want to be treated, for as Jesus says in **Matthew 7:12**, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

C. Pray

II. Responding with love and meekness when forced to endure mistreatment

A. [38] “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’

1. If we take into account the three OT scriptures that speak of “an eye for and eye” (**Exodus 21:22-25**; **Leviticus 24:17-20**; **Deuteronomy 19:16-21**), it seems God's intention was to prevent the legal system from administering punishments greater than the offense.
 - a. For example, **Exodus 21:22-25**, “If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. [23] But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, [24] eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, [25] burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”
2. It also appears this command was never intended to give individuals the right to take revenge on someone who wronged them. This is supported by **Leviticus 19:18**, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”

B. [39] But I say to you, **do not resist an evil person**; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek (*forced physical abuse*), turn the other to him also. [40] If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt (*forced legal abuse*), let him have your coat also. [41] Whoever forces you to go one mile (*forced service*), go with him two. [42] Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you (*forced generosity*).

1. Though to most people, this “turn the other cheek” teaching makes no sense, there is a small group of people who take non-violence as

- a rule of life. Gandhi and ML King are two examples. People like this chose passive resistance in response to oppression, discrimination, persecution, and the unjust, unloving use of force.
2. But Jesus is not calling us to passive resistance. His words are, “**do not resist an evil person.**”
 - a. In other words, when someone who has the power forces us against our will to do their will, Jesus calls us to accept the situation as it is, and respond with a submission that promotes godliness (*a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees*) and protects loving, caring relationships (*i.e., a response that refuses to engage in any form of relationship murder*).
 - b. But Jesus does not stop there, He says we are to **go beyond** what we are being forced, or required, or requested to do. We are to turn the other to cheek, give up our coat also, go the extra mile, and lend to the one who wants to borrow.
 - c. In other words, like meekness in response to the unjust use of power, Jesus is calling us to put only good into a relationship or situation – even though it is an evil person forcing us into the relationship or situation.
 3. Who is the evil person?
 - a. The evil person is the person or group or system who has the power, or is given power, or usurps power, and uses it in unscrupulous, unjust, evil ways to take advantage of, control, mistreat, abuse, harm, persecute, imprison, or murder us.
 - b. Examples are the tyrant, the dictator, the cruel master, the dishonest policeman or immoral soldier, the torturer, those who are prejudiced, hateful, and hostile toward particular people groups or religions, the demanding, self-serving, meanspirited boss, the physically abusive husband or parent – or anyone else who uses their power to rule over you or abuse you or force you against your will to do what they want.
 - c. In other words, the **evil person** is anyone who demands his own way at the expense or to the death of the relationship – be it the marriage relationship, parent/adult child relationship, employer/employee relationship, robber/robbed relationship, or a conquering/conquered relationship – such as in war.
 4. The important point here is not the evil person and what they are doing to us, but our response to such evil people – be they inside or outside our home, and be it a hidden response in our heart, or an open, eye for eye response driven by what is in our heart.

- a. But why is Jesus is saying our response matters more than the wrong being done to us? After all, we aren't the ones doing anything wrong, we are the ones being wronged!
- b. The reason our response matters more than the wrong being done to us is because God wants to at least limit, and were possible, bring an end to the evil being put into our relationships, homes, communities, church, nation, and world.
- c. And though we may have done nothing to deserve the mistreatment being forced upon us, we will become as evil as the evil person if we respond with the "eye for eye" mentality. And when two evil people do evil to each other, they increase the evil being done, not limit or end it.
- d. It is only as we choose love, choose to trust our well-being to God, and choose to respond in ways that only put love and godliness into the relationship or situation that we become part of God's work of limiting or potentially ending the evil that the evil person intends.
 - (1) This is simply "loving your neighbor as yourself" (**Mark 12:31**), and "Treating people the same way you want them to treat you" (**Matthew 7:12**).
 - (2) Another way to see this is that Jesus is calling us to break the cycle of unkindness, ill-will, hatred, hostility, anger, the selfish use of power, the wrong use of control, injustice, or other evil actions that commonly prompt us to fight fire with fire, hate the hater, or return evil for evil.
- e. And though you may not find Jesus' example very motivational (*yet it ought to be*), isn't this what He did when facing the cross, dying in our place, and making it possible for us to be saved from the penalty of sin and reconciled to God?
 - (1) Did He only do this because this is what His Father required? Did He only do this because this was the only way we could have our sins forgiven and spend eternity with God?
 - (2) Though these two reasons have truth in them, they are not the full truth. Jesus **also** did this because (1) this is what righteousness and love does, (2) this was His way of demonstrating to us and to the unbelieving world that in a sinful world, the only way to limit the destructive effects of evil forced on you is by responding with good, and (3) when facing false accusations, cruel treatment, and an unjust death on a cross, it was His commitment to putting only good into that situation

that enabled Him to remain the spotless Lamb of God, and therefore able to take away the sins of the world.

- C. At this point you may be bursting with questions, like:
1. If we do not resist the evil person, won't we be overrun by him, and won't he continue to do evil to others? Isn't this encouraging evil?
 2. Is Jesus saying self-protection is wrong? How can it be wrong to protect ourselves?
 3. What about my rights? When will justice come? If justice does not come during my lifetime, then I will have to live with this evil until I die.
 4. Those may be worthy questions deserving worthy answers. But my recommendation is, **first** learn why you are to love your neighbor as yourself—even when your neighbor is forcing you to do his will. **Then**, you will be better prepared to ask your questions and make sense of God's answers.

- D. For now, the more important questions are: When faced with unwanted, undeserved, unjust, evil treatment from others, what do you value? Who do you trust with your well-being? Who's good do you want to promote or protect? Where is God in your choices and behavior? Do you believe relationships are as sacred as life itself? Are love and goodness more important than your personal safety, security, and happiness? How serious are you about your faith, your commitment to love, and your determination to put only good into your relationships and situations?

III. I know this is not Jesus' intent here in **Matthew 5:38-42**, yet for the sake of encouraging love in our homes between husbands and wives, and parents and adult children, I want to turn this teaching around and look at it from the viewpoint that you might be the evil person – as I have been, to my shame.

- A. You may not see yourself as the evil person, I didn't at first either.
1. In fact, you may see yourself as trying to do good, or well-intentioned, or just wanting to be happy, or just keeping the peace – even though you are doing so by leaving conflicts unresolved, or using ungodly, unloving methods to control those around you – all behaviors that damage or even kill your relationships with those around you.
 2. This is not about condemning you as a horrible, awful, evil person. This is about asking you to examine your choices and behavior to see if you are acting in some way as an evil person in your home.
 3. It is possible that in some way or other, you are an oppressor, a controller, or the one using anger to make those around you do what

- you want. And even though what you want may be good, you are forcing other adults against their will – which is contrary to treating them like you want to be treated.
4. Maybe you are the one who is using passive resistance, or who is, in a very sweet way, refusing to resolve conflict or work through issues that push others away – and in so doing forcing those around you to live with your hurtful, unloving, relationship damaging behavior.
 5. You might be using threats, sarcasm, put-downs, or unkind comments to press those around you into doing what pleases you even though it does not please them.
 6. You might believe you know best how others should live, or how your home should be run, or what others should want – and maybe you do. But you are taking away their freedom to choose and removing their opportunity to come to their senses and grow by forcing your beliefs and values on them, even though they are adults.
 7. This is not the way God treats you; nor is it the way to gain mutual love and trust; nor will it build meaningful relationship. In fact, it pushes people away, and turns them against you – and for what? So you don't have to be the one submitting to what you don't want to live with? And isn't that a double-standard?
 8. If this is you, and if you are willing to see it is you, then consider: what you are doing, **at best**, is becoming an evil person in order to stop an evil person, and **at worst**, you are becoming an evil person in order get your way. Either way, it is ungodly, unloving, relationship destructive, and contrary to the teaching here in **Matthew 5:38-42**.

IV. Conclusion

- A. This is not an easy truth to put into practice, for it means living with what you don't want to live with, and shouldn't have to live with. It means forgoing your own happiness while others are finding happiness in getting their own way. But it also means that you are loving those around you and treating them as you want to be loved and treated. And it means you are acting like God by not forcing other adults to do your will, just like He does not force you to do His will.
- B. If, as God's word says, love is the perfect bond of unity, then may we be among those who turn the other cheek so that those who force us against our will, will see that nothing is more important to us than God, godliness, love, love controlled relationships, and putting good into our world – in spite of what is being done to us or what we must endure.