

## Lesson 5: Non-retaliation and Loving Others

**Lesson Theme:** Emphasis on the limitation of eye for an eye justice and why we should love our enemies

**Text: Matthew 5:38-48**

<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’

<sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

<sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

<sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

<sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

### Love for Enemies

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

<sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

<sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### Introduction

It is helpful to remember the historical context of Jesus’ time. The Jewish people were living in their homeland, but under Roman rule. On a daily basis, the Jewish leaders and individual people were reminded that they did not rule their own country. The Jewish leaders were constantly having to interact with Roman leaders, finding ways to compromise, to appease, to undermine Roman law. Individuals were always under threat of punishment or persecution from Roman soldiers. It is one thing for a country to be in conflict with another country. It is another thing to endure being under the authority of your enemy.

Here Jesus continues the application of his message in vs. 3-12. The common wisdom of the world is to resist enemies, to seek revenge or retaliation. Jesus not only turns the wisdom of the Pharisees upside down (last week’s lesson on vs. 17-37), but he turns the wisdom of the world upside down.

**Matthew 5: 38-42**

Jesus begins this passage with a reference to Old Testament teaching (“You have heard it said”). Jesus reference to “eye for eye” justice is sometimes read as implying that the people of his day had taken a statement limiting retaliation and made it into one giving permission for vengeance. While this insight correctly shows how the Old Testament passage should be read, “do not resist an evil person” seems to demand more than just this. Justice that is “eye for eye” is not sufficient for disciples. We must focus on how to be peacemakers in the world where we are salt and light. The world's love of vengeance—we love it, too—we cheer it in movies—will not remove evil from society.

Hauerwas writes: “According to Bonhoeffer, the fifth chapter describes the extraordinary character of being a disciple of Jesus. To be a follower of Jesus entails nothing less than becoming a visible alternative to the world” (p.37).

**Discussion: How can “turning the other cheek” be “heaping coals of fire on your enemy”? (Rom. 12:20, Prov. 25:21f)**

**Discussion: How do you advise a friend obviously abused by a spouse so that both you and the friend can fulfill “do not resist evil” and “do to others as you want them to do to you”?**

**Discussion: What does Jesus require of us when a neighbor is trashing our property or is taking things which are ours?**

**Discussion: What should we tell our son to do if other children at school are hurting his little sister? How does he turn the other cheek?**

**Discussion: It is sometimes suggested that discipleship will at times put us in the position of having demands (loving enemies and loving those who love us) which cannot be simultaneously met. Do you agree with this since the parable which ends this sermon calls on us to hear Jesus' teaching and to obey?**

**Discussion: What does a disciple do each time a stranger on the street asks for money?**

**Discussion: Should a disciple refuse jury duty since that places one in the position of helping the state to enforce “eye for eye” justice?**

**Discussion: How do these particulars from Jesus' life and testimony shed light on each other: “Resist not evil,” cleansing of the temple, going willing to the cross, “take up your cross and follow me.”**

**Discussion: Is resisting the devil and his works (Ephesians 6:10-13) at odds with Jesus' “resist not evil”?**

Several of these questions—such as those about giving to all who ask--bring up hard considerations:

- Whether these teachings are duties we must follow with no regard to the consequences;
- Whether our giving to every request prevents our giving to greater needs;
- Whether our immediate response has a negative outcome on the recipient;
- Whether the only consideration for acting is meeting our own sense of being righteous.

As many others in Scripture and elsewhere, Jesus often used images that pointedly showed his meaning: be salt and light, leave your gift in front of altar, cut off hand, gouge out eye, a log in your eye, throwing pearls to pigs. We do not fail to understand these expressions if we do not force them to be literal; but, because of the images, we understand with greater clarity. Perhaps, we should consider these observations when we face the expressions that often perplex us: do not resist evil, turn the other cheek, hand over your coat also, makes her commit adultery. If certain of Jesus' hard sayings were not intended to spell out our exact actions in every case, they do make unquestionable the direction and goal of what we do.

It might be helpful to list several ways difficult says of Jesus [“Do not resist evil.”] have been read:

1. If you have real faith, it will be easy to do everything this sermon mentions.
2. The absolutist view reads each such passage literally and seeks total obedience.
3. The double standard view expects all Christians to follow these teachings as far as they can; but only the “truly spiritual” ones are able to accomplish it. So, there are average believers and true saints.
4. These statements show what the demand of true holiness is. Since we cannot keep everything, we learn how much we need the grace of God and are lead to repentance.
5. Jesus is simply using hyperbole as he does in Luke 14:26 [“To follow me, you must hate your parents.”]
6. Jesus is primarily speaking of attitudes, not acts.
7. The demands of this sermon are hard, but we must keep trying depending always on God's grace and help.

Discussing such methods of interpreting Jesus's sayings and the pros and cons of each could help us understand how we and others see these matters

In regard to loving our enemies, Harris insists our biggest challenge is not loving our enemies—we have so few—but rather loving those who merely irritate us. This teaching, he says, may be the least followed part of Jesus' sermon.

**Discussion: In Jesus' day, Jewish men could be compelled to serving the Roman soldiers “for a mile” and adversaries could sue for “your tunic.” What would be examples of how we might be compelled to serve our enemies today?**

**Discussion: What would be examples of going the extra mile today?**

**Matthew 5: 43-48**

**Discussion: Why is it difficult to pray for our enemies? What makes it easier?**

**Discussion: Which of the beatitudes is most helpful to you in preparing your heart to pray for your enemies?**

**Discussion: In what ways is love the fulfillment of the law?**

**Discussion: Which is harder to do—to love a stranger or to love your family and friends? Which is harder to do—to forgive a stranger or to forgive your family and friends?**

**Discussion: Does vs. 48 contradict earlier verses about our sinfulness (esp. “poor in spirit.” In what sense are we to be perfect as God is perfect?**

**For Additional Reading**

Hauerwas, Stanley. “The Way of the Church.” In David Flerer and Dave Bland, eds. *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007.

Harris, Randy with Greg Taylor. *Living Jesus: Doing What Jesus Says in the Sermon on the Mount*. Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2012.