

Teachings of Jesus (16)
Sermon on the Mount (15)
Turn the Other Cheek
Matthew 5:38-42

Today, we come to the 5th of 6 examples that Jesus gives in describing the type of righteousness God wants us to have. This is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount. It is also a section that some view as the most controversial of the statements of Jesus in this sermon. Let us talk about turning the other cheek.

NOTE: This is a passage that remains controversial as it is used by some to avoid military or law enforcement service (conscientious objectors), owning a gun, pacifism or even defending yourself and your family from intruders. Thus, addressing this brings up current issues that can potentially divide us as a country and sometimes as brethren. But in this I will give my understand of this text.

I. You have heard that it was said...

- a. "An eye for an eye" –
 - i. A statement found 3 times in the LOM -
Exodus 21:22-25 – men fight and hurt a woman with child – whatever happens to the child shall be done to the one who hurt that child and mother
Leviticus 24:19-20 – if a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor – what he has done shall be done to him
Deuteronomy 19:16-21 – concerning a false witness, if he is found it is to be done to him as he intended to be done to his brother (think about that one – TT).
 - ii. Some observations about these passages:
 1. All three were dealing with judicial decisions – in other words, the outcome was decided by "the courts". They are the ones who have the right to exact punishment. Cf. Romans 13:1-3 notes the authority of governments to bring judgment and punishment for evil deeds.
 2. In reality this was a just way to take care of such things:
 - a. It was merciful – in that it made "the punishment fit the crime" rather than being too severe
 - b. It was just – because it was a suitable punishment (not too light or too heavy).
 - c. It prevented vigilante justice – the real point. Get it away from the emotional response.
 3. Together these standards could deter criminal behavior (when punishment is excessive, it tends to more resistance, when too lenient it doesn't deter at all).
 4. This is HOW the statement was found in the LOM.
- b. How had the scribes and Pharisees corrupted this?
 - i. **By making a judicial application apply personally.** Thus, they taught personal vengeance which is NOT what the expression means.
 - ii. **By taking the law into their own hands** – vigilante justice, or personal retaliation
 - iii. **By reinterpreting punishments** – one source noted that in the time of Jesus rather than taking an eye or a tooth, they had valued these things (much like our personal injury litigation). And is it possible, that like today, people seek not only compensation but the destruction or ruin of the offender (and there are plenty of lawyers to help them).

II. “But I tell you”

- a. Jesus gives us five examples to consider. We want to notice each of these, but FIRST consider some things about what He said:
 - i. In each of the examples Jesus gives, His point is that we should go out of our way to be different from the world around us in an exemplary way
 - ii. What Jesus says in each example must be qualified in light of His overall point – don’t retaliate, or for the sake of the kingdom, don’t even resist being wronged or compelled to do something. We will see in each of the examples given, there is a context.
 - iii. BUT we must be careful to NOT dismiss what is actually stated by interpreting our own exceptions into what Jesus said.
 - iv. Furthermore, we need to apply these things throughout our lives continually – including the “little things” which we are more likely to come across than the “bigger issues” (such as military service, civil service & self-defense in a home invasion, etc.). Do we apply these things when someone cuts us off while driving, or someone takes advantage of us or maybe curses us – whether for our faith or just because we did something they didn’t like?
 - v. Our purpose is to further the gospel by letting our light shine. You “overcome evil with good” and let God take care of the injustices and vengeance.
 - vi. We are more prone to underemphasize how far we should go, rather than overemphasizing it. We will illustrate this too as we examine what Jesus said.
- a. **Not to resist an evil person.**
 - a. Is Jesus saying that you must always allow an evil person to have his way? Is He saying you cannot protect yourself? Is He saying you should be a spiritual “doormat” and let everyone walk all over you? Or that you ignore evil?
 - b. No! The word for “resist” is a word that means to actively oppose something. In the NT, there are many things we are to oppose:
 - i. Acts 13:8 – Elymas “withstood” Paul and Barnabas. Note that Paul did not passively take it – He struck him blind for a season and rebuked his deceit (vs. 10-11).
 - ii. Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11), he used his Roman citizenship to his advantage preventing being beaten (Acts 22:25-29)
 - iii. Jesus continually defended Himself, and until the time He was not taken captive, including slipping away from an angry crowd in Nazareth (Luke 4:29-30)
 - iv. Galatians 2:11 – Paul resisted Peter to his face for his hypocrisy
 - v. Both 1 Peter 5:9 and James 4:7, use the same word to tell us to “resist the devil”
 - c. The point – ACT like a Christian at all times, ESPECIALLY when you are being mistreated (whether for the cause of Christ or not) – DON’T retaliate in kind when you are wronged. Let God take care of it – Romans 12:18-21 is a good summary of this.
Can we agree that we have enough ugliness around us without us contributing to it with harsh words, loose tempers and an “I’m going to get even with you” mentality?
This is about how we will not always get our way and at times things that are unjust and even evil will prevail and maybe even hurt us. Don’t try to get even and if needed be willing to suffer wrong and maintain your Christian demeanor.
 - d. Consider several examples of this:
 - i. Joseph was clearly wronged by his brothers (Genesis 39), but later in life he forgave them and even protected them (Genesis 45, 50:19-21 – “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...”)
 - ii. David, on many occasions spared King Saul’s life because he did not want to be the one who took the life of God’s anointed. This in spite of Saul’s hatred for him.
 - iii. Jesus was often wronged, but consider everything He did for us – 1 Peter 2:21-23

- iv. Stephen, who being stoned to death, prayed to God to forgive them, just as Jesus had done on the cross (Acts 7:59-60, cf. Luke 23:34).
 - e. These are the types of things we must think about when the ungodly of this world act evil. 1 Peter 3:8-9, *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*
 - f. In the rest of this text, Jesus gives us examples of this
- b. *Whoever slaps you...turn the other cheek.***
- a. Was Jesus saying we cannot defend ourselves? Consider how He told His disciples to sell his garment to get a sword (Luke 22:36). NOTE: It was for self-defense, and not for aggression (cf. Matthew 26:52). Paul defended himself when appropriate – by appealing to Caesar, his Roman citizenship.
 - b. You are insulted personally -consider Jesus mentioned the “right cheek”. Most people are right-handed, so this could have been a backhanded slap – which was an INSULT! Like challenging one to a duel.
 - c. WHEN insulted how do we respond? Jesus said to turn the other cheek. DON’T return the insult. When someone says something hateful or does something rude and you are tempted to respond in kind, or say something hateful – DON’T. BE a Christian! Ephesians 4:29, 31-32 – Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth...let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away from you...
 - d. One author described this by saying - perhaps offering the other cheek is a gesture of love (you know there’s a problem and you want to help resolve it); Another said – “Walk away!” Turn away from them (turn the other cheek) and leave rather than retaliating or acting in kind.
- c. *Whoever wants to sue you for your tunic, let him have your cloak also***
- a. Litigation can get ugly, and we live in times where we find it everywhere. Sadly, most of what we see advertised is not about restitution as much as it is about revenge and the destruction of the offended party.
 - b. Here we find one suing you for what little you have. IF you have wronged someone – ADMIT IT and seek to make it right. I think of what Jesus said earlier about when your brother has something against you – Matthew 5:24-26 – do what you can to resolve it BEFORE you get to court, EVEN if it means you pay a little extra to resolve a dispute.
 - c. And EVEN if you are wronged, consider the consequences of what one is doing. Remember Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:7 spoke of brethren taking each other to court (likely civil). Paul notes its better for you to suffer a little wrong than for the name of God to be maligned.
 - d. The point: ACT LIKE A CHRISTIAN! There’s more to life than stuff!
- d. *Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two miles***
- a. Under Roman law, a soldier or other dignitary could at any time compel someone to carry their personal gear for the distance of about 1 mile. Imagine this in Jerusalem that was under Roman rule and they did not think highly of Romans. They may have complied, but probably with complaining the whole way and bitterness that their time and pride had been unwillingly taken
 - b. Jesus said, don’t just go that one mile, but take it a second mile. Be willing to go “above and beyond” and do so WITHOUT complaining (James 5:9, 1 Peter 4:9).
 - c. Your rights and time have been insulted – we live in times where everyone demands their rights! “Don’t you dare infringe on my rights” (or my “personal space”), so many will say. There is disrespect for authority and even for others in general. If someone asks for help with something, the question is, “What’s in it for me?” The Christian ought to be benevolent and caring of others – we do good even to those who despise us (more on this next week). We will give our best in whatever we do and if we are able to do a little extra, we will do it.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 – love is kind, suffers long, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own..., etc. Philippians 2:3-4 – look out for interests of others.

- d. The point: ACT LIKE A CHRISTIAN! Let your attitude and actions demonstrate your faith.
- e. ***Give to him who asks or wants to borrow – don't turn him away.***
 - a. Jesus next speaks of giving and lending to those in need.
Again, the LOM had some instructions concerning these things. They were to be a generous people to others, especially their brethren. They were to be compassionate especially to the poor and defenseless. In fact, they were forbidden from charging interest to their brethren and every seven years there was to be forgiveness of debts (Deuteronomy 15:7-14)
 - b. Very likely there was abuse of these things as Jesus spoke of some devouring widow's houses (Matthew 23:14). You also find greedy usury in the book of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 5)
 - c. Galatians 6:10 calls for us to do good to all, especially our brethren (I believe both spiritually and physically). 1 Timothy 6:17-19 – the rich are commanded to do good and share.
 - d. Jesus is simply emphasizing, we need to be compassionate toward others and their needs. IF we know someone has a need and we can help, we need to help (James 2:14-17). And it should not be self-serving ("What's in it for me?").
 - e. Simply stated, ACT LIKE A CHRISTIAN.

In this teaching we find some very practical things we need to be doing. Easy to understand, but it can be difficult if we have not opened our heart to God as we ought to. Let us strive to apply these principles in everything we do, EVEN the hard things. Thus we find, as Paul himself said, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21) How do you respond the unrighteousness around us? Think about it!