

Transforming Love

Matt 5:38-48
SS Lesson for 07/21/2019

Devotional Scripture: Rom 12:9-21

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Matt 5:43-44

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

LOVE IS NOT RETALIATING (MATT 5:38-40)

Instead of retaliating trust in God (Isa 50:6-7)

Instead of retaliating endure suffering for good because it commendable before God (1 Pet 2:20)

Instead of retaliating know that God judges justly (1 Pet 2:23)

Instead of retaliating let God repay (Rom 12:19)

Instead of retaliating be patience and pray about it (Phil 4:5-6)

Instead of retaliating know that God will never forsake us (Lam 3:27-31)

Instead of retaliating respond by blessing (1 Peter 3:9)

Instead of retaliating do what is right (Rom 12:17)

Instead of retaliating be kind (1 Thess 5:15)

LOVE IS "GOING THE EXTRA MILE" (MATT 5:41-42)

Going the extra mile is giving all that we have (Mark 12:42-44)

Going the extra mile is giving when we don't have it (2 Cor 8:2-3)

Going the extra mile is laying down our lives for others (1 Jn 3:16)

Going the extra mile is trusting in God when life is shaken (Ps 112:6-8)

Going the extra mile is helping those who mistreat you (Rom 12:20)

Going the extra mile is praying for those who persecute (Matt 5:44)

Going the extra mile is working even harder doing God's work while enduring trials (1 Cor 4:12)

Going the extra mile is being kind and forgiving those who have harmed you (Eph 4:32)

LOVE IS LOVING ENEMIES (MATT 5:43-47)

Love my enemies because it is part of the conviction of God (Rom 12:20)

Love enemies because there is a reward for doing so (Luke 6:34-36)

Love enemies because we are called to do so by God (1 Pet 3:9)

Love enemies because we are to forgive and love so as to be in unity with God (Col 3:13-14)

Love enemies by loving them as we love ourself (Rom 13:8-10)

Love enemies by serving them (Gal 5:13-14)

Love enemies as we have been taught by God (1 Thess 4:9)

Love enemies by defending them and sharing with them (1 John 3:16-19)

LOVE IS LIVING A PERFECTED LIFE (MATT 5:48)

Be perfect by purification of those things that contaminate the body and spirit (2 Cor 7:1)

Be perfect through unity and peacefulness (2 Cor 13:11)

Be perfect by being like God through the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:15-16)

Be perfect by being made perfect in Jesus (Col 1:27-28)

It is God's plan for me to be made perfect (Heb 11:40)

Be perfect through perseverance finishing its work (James 1:4)

Be perfect through God's purification (2 Cor 7:1)

Be perfect because God is perfect (Lev 20:26)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Fifth Example: The Old Testament and Retaliation (38-42)

Sixth Example: Who Is My Neighbor? (43-48)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

What limits should there be to retaliation against a person who has wronged you? Imagine a situation of two rival villages. One villager insults the chief of the other village. The result? The insulted chief takes a war party to the other town, kills all the people, and burns it to the ground. Rather than return the insult in kind, or even escalate violence only against the insulter, the retaliation is without limits, as bad as it could be. Several centuries before Moses gave the law to the people of Israel, a Babylonian king named Hammurabi developed a set of laws to regulate the government and the behavior of citizens in business and other situations. Some of the Code of Hammurabi seems quaint and primitive now, but it represented advances in legal protections not seen before. One of those was Hammurabi's edict, "Only one eye for one eye." This embodies the principle of limited retaliation, that punishment or compensation for an injury should be equivalent to the originally inflicted injury. Moses gave similar instruction to Israel, "Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: ... eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Leviticus 24:19, 20). In legal tradition, this is known as the *lex talionis*, the law of legal, limited retaliation. Punishment for a crime should be in proportion to the offense. A jaywalker should not be executed. A premeditated murder should receive more than a small fine. A person who makes a snide comment should not be beaten senseless.

Matthew 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount, makes up the largest uninterrupted block of Jesus' teaching found in the Gospels (over 100 verses). His teachings in these three chapters are seen by some as defining the essence of what it means to be a Christian and a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom of Heaven is the establishment of God's promised rule over the world. Sin has made us God's enemies. But in God's kingdom, God reestablishes his reign over all. He overcomes sin and invites sinners—his enemies—to become his friends. In Matthew 5, Jesus challenged his disciples to move beyond the righteousness they saw in the religious leaders—the teachers of the law and Pharisees. Jesus did this to push his followers to go beyond the behavioral righteousness of the Pharisees to a broken and contrite heart yielded fully to God (compare Psalm 51:17). Jesus' followers don't just avoid murder; they eliminate murderous anger (Matthew 5:21–26). They don't just avoid adultery or divorce; they control their lustful thoughts (5:27–32). They don't just avoid breaking oaths; they make oaths unnecessary by always telling the truth (5:33–37). The ethics that Jesus teaches are the way of the kingdom of Heaven. As such, they often run counter to popular thinking and earthly wisdom. This lesson continues Jesus' teaching on righteousness in two more areas: retaliation and love for others.

Key Verse: Matt 5:43-44

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

5:21-26. Jesus' first illustration pertained to an important commandment, **Do not murder** (Ex. 20:13). The Pharisees taught that murder consists of taking someone's life. But the Lord said the commandment extended not only to the act itself but also to the internal attitude behind the act. Of course, murder is wrong, but the anger prompting the act is also as wrong as plunging in a knife. Furthermore, becoming **angry** and assuming a position of superiority over another by calling him a derogatory name (such as the Aram. **Raca** or **You fool!**) demonstrates sinfulness of the heart. A person with such a sinful heart obviously is a sinner and therefore is headed for **the fire of hell** ("hell" is lit., "Gehenna"; cf. Matt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; 7 of the 11 references to Gehenna are in Matt.). "Gehenna" means valley of Hinnom, the valley south of Jerusalem where a continually burning fire consumed the city refuse. This became an apt name for the eternal punishment of the wicked. Such wrongful attitudes should be dealt with and made right. Reconciliation between brothers must be accomplished whether the "innocent" (5:23-24) or the "offending" (vv. 25-26) brother takes the first step. Without such reconciliation, gifts presented **at the altar** mean nothing: Even **on the way** to a **court** trial a defendant should seek to clear up any such problem. Otherwise the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court of 70 members, would send him to **prison** and he would be penniless.

5:27-30. A second practical illustration dealt with the problem of **adultery** (Ex. 20:14). Once again the Pharisees' teaching was concerned only with the outward act. They said the only way one could commit adultery was through an act of sexual union. They correctly quoted the commandment, but they missed its

point. **Adultery** begins within one's heart (looking **lustfully**) and follows in the act. The lustful desire, **in the heart**, as wrong as the act, indicates that one is not rightly related to God. Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 5:29-30 have often been misunderstood. Obviously Jesus was not teaching physical mutilation, for a blind man could have as much of a problem with lust as a sighted person, and a man with only one **hand** might use it also **to sin**. Jesus was advocating the removal of the inward cause of offense. Since a lustful heart would ultimately lead to adultery, one's heart must be changed. Only by such a change of heart can one escape **hell** ("Gehenna"; cf. v. 22).

5:31-32 (Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Among the Jewish leaders were two schools of thought regarding the matter of **divorce** (Deut. 24:1). Those who followed Hillel said it was permissible for a husband to divorce **his wife** for any reason at all, but the other group (those following Shammai) said divorce was permissible only for a major offense. In His response, the Lord strongly taught that marriage is viewed by God as an indissoluble unit and that marriages should not be terminated by divorce. The "exception clause," **except for marital unfaithfulness** (*porneias*), is understood in several ways by Bible scholars. Four of these ways are: (a) a single act of adultery, (b) unfaithfulness during the period of betrothal (Matt. 1:19), (c) marriage between near relatives (Lev. 18:6-18), or (d) continued promiscuity. (See Matt. 19:3-9.)

5:33-37. The matter of making **oaths** (Lev. 19:12; Deut. 23:21) was next addressed by the Lord. The Pharisees were notorious for their oaths, which were made on the least provocation. Yet they made allowances for mental reservations within their oaths. If they wanted to be relieved of oaths they had made **by heaven... by the earth... by Jerusalem, or by one's own head**, they could argue that since God Himself had not been involved their oaths were not binding. But Jesus said oaths should not even be necessary: **Do not swear at all**. The fact that oaths were used at all emphasized the wickedness of man's heart. Furthermore, swearing "by heaven," "by the earth," or "by Jerusalem" *is* binding, since they are **God's throne... footstool, and city**, respectively. Even the color of the hair on their heads was determined by God (Matt. 5:36). However, Jesus later in His life responded to an oath (26:63-64), as did Paul (2 Cor. 1:23). The Lord was saying one's life should be sufficient to back up one's words. A **yes** always ought to mean **yes**, and a **no** should mean **no**. James seems to have picked up these words of the Lord in his epistle (James 5:12).

5:38-42 (Luke 6:29-30). The words **Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth** come from several Old Testament passages (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21); they are called the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation. This law was given to protect the innocent and to make sure retaliation did not occur beyond the offense. Jesus pointed out, however, that while the rights of the innocent were protected by the Law, the righteous need not necessarily claim their rights. A righteous man would be characterized by humility and selflessness. Instead he might go "the extra mile" to maintain peace. When wronged by being struck on a **cheek**, or sued for his **tunic** (undergarment; a **cloak** was the outer garment), or forced to travel with **someone a mile**, he would not strike back, demand repayment, or refuse to comply. Instead of retaliating he would do the opposite, and would also commit his case to the Lord who will one day set all things in order (cf. Rom. 12:17-21). This was seen to its greatest extent in the life of the Lord Jesus Himself, as Peter explained (1 Peter 2:23).

5:43-48 (Luke 6:27-28, 32-36). The Pharisees taught that one should **love** those near and dear to him (Lev. 19:18), but that Israel's enemies should be hated. The Pharisees thus implied that their hatred was God's means of judging their **enemies**. But Jesus stated that Israel should demonstrate God's love even to her enemies—a practice not even commanded in the Old Testament! God loves them; **He causes His sun to rise on them and He sends rain** to produce their crops. Since His love extends to everyone, Israel too should be a channel of His love by loving all. Such love demonstrates that they are God's **sons** (cf. Matt. 5:16). Loving only **those who love you** and greeting **only your brothers** is no more than **the tax collectors and pagans do**—a cutting remark for Pharisees!

Jesus concluded this section by saying, **Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**. His message demonstrated God's righteous standard, for God Himself truly is the "standard" of righteousness. If these individuals are to be righteous, they must be as God is, "perfect," that is, mature (*teleioi*) or holy. Murder, lust, hate, deception, and retaliation obviously do not characterize God. He did not lower His standard to accommodate humans; instead He set forth His absolute holiness as the standard. Though this standard can never be perfectly met by man himself, a person who by faith trusts in God enjoys His righteousness being reproduced in his life.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Love is not Retaliating (Matt 5:38-40)

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

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

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

Instead of retaliating trust in God (Isa 50:6-7)

6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. 7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.

Instead of retaliating endure suffering for good because it commendable before God (1 Pet 2:20)

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

Instead of retaliating know that God judges justly (1 Pet 2:23)

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Instead of retaliating let God repay (Rom 12:19)

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Instead of retaliating be patience and pray about it (Phil 4:5-6)

5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Instead of retaliating know that God will never forsake us (Lam 3:27-31)

27 It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. 28 Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. 29 Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope. 30 Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. 31 For men are not cast off by the Lord forever.

Instead of retaliating respond by blessing (1 Peter 3:9)

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Instead of retaliating do what is right (Rom 12:17)

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

Instead of retaliating be kind (1 Thess 5:15)

15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Love is "Going the Extra Mile" (Matt 5:41-42)

41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

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

Going the extra mile is giving all that we have (Mark 12:42-44)

42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything-- all she had to live on."

Going the extra mile is giving when we don't have it (2 Cor 8:2-3)

2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

Going the extra mile is laying down our lives for others (I Jn 3:16)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Going the extra mile is trusting in God when life is shaken (Ps 112:6-8)

6 Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. 7 He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. 8 His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

Going the extra mile is helping those who mistreat you (Rom 12:20)

20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Going the extra mile is praying for those who persecute (Matt 5:44)

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

Going the extra mile is working even harder doing God's work while enduring trials (1 Cor 4:12)

12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;

Going the extra mile is being kind and forgiving those who have harmed you (Eph 4:32)

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Love is Loving Enemies (Matt 5:43-47)

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

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

45 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.

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

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

Love my enemies because it is part of the conviction of God (Rom 12:20)

On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Love enemies because there is a reward for doing so (Luke 6:34-36)

34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Love enemies because we are called to do so by God (1 Pet 3:9)

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Love enemies because we are to forgive and love so as to be in unity with God (Col 3:13-14)

13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Love enemies by loving them as we love ourself (Rom 13:8-10)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love enemies by serving them (Gal 5:13-14)

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Love enemies as we have been taught by God (1 Thess 4:9)

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

Love enemies by defending them and sharing with them (1 John 3:16-19)

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence

Love is Living a Perfected Life (Matt 5:48)

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Be perfect by purification of those things that contaminate the body and spirit (2 Cor 7:1)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Be perfect through unity and peacefulness (2 Cor 13:11)

Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Be perfect by being like God through the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:15-16)

15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Be perfect by being made perfect in Jesus (Col 1:27-28)

27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

It is God's plan for me to be made perfect (Heb 11:40)

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Be perfect through perseverance finishing its work (James 1:4)

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Be perfect through God's purification (2 Cor 7:1)

7 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Be perfect because God is perfect (Lev 20:26)

26 You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Fifth Example: The Old Testament and Retaliation (38-42)

Perhaps no standard of justice is better known than this one: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Jewish interpretation took this instruction as biblical support for retaliation and revenge. If someone says something against me, I have every right to do so against him. If you hit me in the face, you'd better expect the same from me.

Jesus reminded His listeners that this was never intended as a proof-text for revenge, but as a principle of justice. This is especially clear in the passage in Deuteronomy (19:16-18). This is an administration principle of justice, given as a guideline for the judges who arbitrate a dispute or a claim. The very purpose of this system was to avoid personal revenge and vigilante law. Whenever we begin to retaliate we always do so to a greater degree than we were injured. No one has put this more plainly than Nikita Krushchev:

"We Communists have many things in common with the teachings of Christ. My sole difference with Christ is that when someone hits me on the right cheek, I hit him on the left so hard that his head falls off."

The principle of both the Old and New Testaments is that we are not to retaliate against those who wrongfully use us, instead we are to go beyond the minimum required of us, and in a cheerful spirit (Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 25:21; 24:29; Lamentations 3:30). Four specific examples of our response to distasteful situations are given.

The first comes out of a direct personal insult. What is described is not a right cross, or fatal knife wound. It is an insulting slap on the right cheek, given by the back of the hand. It was not so much an attempt to do bodily harm, but a deliberate effort to insult, and perhaps provoke retaliation. To such an encounter, we should 'go the extra mile' by giving opportunity to strike the other cheek. Here is a willingness to accept insult without revenge.

The second comes from the law courts. If someone should sue you for your shirt, you should be willing to go beyond this demand and give your outer garment as well. This is very interesting because the Old Testament forbade the keeping of one's outer garment overnight since it was that person's source of warmth and protection (Exodus 22:26,27; Deuteronomy 24:12,13; etc.). It was, in effect, his blanket. What a man had every right to keep, he was to willingly give up in order to maintain harmony and unity (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, esp. verse 7).

The third illustration comes from the context of an occupied territory, under the military rule of Rome. Under such conditions, one might expect to find himself impressed into service (cf. Matthew 27:32). In such a case service ought to be rendered with an attitude of willingness to do even beyond what was demanded. A spirit of cooperation is evidenced rather than one of begrudging service and rebellion.

Fourth, we are not to turn aside one who asks to borrow from us (verse 42). True Christian charity cheerfully responds to the needs of others. This was taught in the Old Testament Law (Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 19:17; 28:27; 31:20, etc.). Generous, cheerful giving to the one in need was God's way for His people.

Does this mean that we should 'give a dime (now 30 cents) for a cup of coffee' to a skid road beggar? Not if he will use it to buy a drink and thereby dig his own grave. But it may mean that we should actually buy him a breakfast. What about the man who wants a handout? The Scriptures say that if one will not work he should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It is my personal conviction that we as a church should always have a few odd jobs to do around the building, and if a man is willing to work, he should be paid on the spot before he goes his way.

In the Old Testament the poor were provided for by gleaning from the fields. I am not in favor of the kind of welfare which does all the work for the needy and robs them of their dignity and incentive (Proverbs 16:26).

While the Bible instructs us not to retaliate, I do not believe that it teaches pacifism. I believe that God would not be pleased if I were to stand idly by while my family were mistreated or injured. I see a difference between what is called self-defense and revenge. It is revenge that the Bible condemns.

Legalism has a decided inclination toward one's 'standing on his rights.' That is what our Lord is getting at here. We are not to be those who demand our rights. So often marriage is conducted on this level. The husband and the wife think only of their rights, but Paul speaks only of responsibilities (cf. Ephesians 5:22ff.). Christians are those who have surrendered all their rights to the Savior.

There is one final word which must be said. There is a great deal of difference between standing up for our rights and standing up for what is right. While we may (and should) be willing to suffer innocently for the cause of Christ, we have a responsibility as Christian citizens to stand up for law and order and justice. This is the reason, I believe, that Paul refused to be quietly let out of jail and sent out of town (Acts 16:35-39). Had he allowed this injustice to have gone unchallenged, the entire Christian community would have been subject to the continual illegal harassment of the legal authorities. May God help us to differentiate between our rights and what is right.

Sixth Example: Who Is My Neighbor? (43-48)

Nowhere is the abuse of the Old Testament Scripture by the scribes more evident than it is here: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy'" (Matthew 5:43). Here is a statement which finds no support in the Scriptures at all. The narrowness and sectarianism of Judaism looked only within the ranks of their own to find their neighbor. It was no accident that the lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). This was a crucial question to the Jews.

The Jews could easily proof-text their hatred of the Gentiles. After all, God ordered Israel to kill all the Canaanites. The Psalmist prayed for the downfall of the wicked, who were his enemies. God brought death and destruction to the Egyptians at the Exodus. Should not the Jew show love toward his fellow-Jews (the upstanding ones) and hate toward the rest?

The Old Testament instructed the Israelites to show kindness toward the foreigner, and even to their enemies (Exodus 23:4,5; Proverbs 25:21-22). One's neighbor, as Jesus clearly taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, was anyone in need. It was not enough to cease from retaliation. Christianity goes even further than this—we are to return good for evil. This is the distinctiveness of true believers.

In any group of people they will tend to respond warmly to their own kind. Gentiles love Gentiles; Jews love Jews. The kind of love we must reflect is love for our enemies. In common grace, God gives blessings (rain and sun) to all men without distinction. If we are to reflect Him, we must be indiscriminate in our acts of goodness also.

Narrowness is often one of the criticisms against Christians. Oftentimes this criticism is justified. According to God's Word, it has no place among Christians.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/fatal-failures-religion-2-legalism-matthew-517-48>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu teacher and leader, was famously a student and admirer of Jesus' teachings. Gandhi is often attributed as saying, "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind." Gandhi understood Jesus exactly at this point. In the kingdom of Heaven that Jesus introduced, equalizing violent responses is no answer. It leaves two injured parties. The lex talionis principles of Hammurabi, Moses, and others continue to guide legal systems today. Fair courts the world over still seek to limit punishment to fit the crime. Jesus, however, exhorts his followers to go beyond limited and equal retaliation to have hearts that don't desire it. Are you willing to endure insults without trying to get even? Are you willing to love people who will never love you back? God's love transforms us so we can learn to love others in the same way, even those who have hurt us deeply. Let us follow his example and find ways to love our enemies.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Do Not Seek Revenge - The law of Moses taught an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Initially, this law was given to judges to encourage them to give sentences which fit the crime. However, eventually this principle became an excuse for revenge. Jesus taught just the opposite—when personally insulted, resist treating the offending person the same way. Let God be the defender, and do not seek retaliation.

Give to Your Enemies - Jesus also said if someone wants to take your shirt, give him your outer cloak as well. Roman soldiers made Jews carry their heavy backpacks for a mile, so Jesus said, carry the pack two miles. Paul and the other New Testament writers reinforced this principle of not overcoming evil with more but with good.

Love Your Enemies - The command to "love your neighbor" had been added to with the words, "hate your enemy." Jesus changed the added hateful clause and totally flipped the script. Love, speak well of, and serve those in opposition to you, He said. This kind of behavior imitates our companionate Savior and demonstrates one's relationship to Him.

Love from the Heart - Those who obey this teaching will be mature. Does that mean you will never sin or make any mistakes? No. It means you love from a pure heart, in good conscience, and you're sincere in your actions and attitude toward those who may not share your values and are difficult to befriend. The Holy Spirit can give us this kind of love for the unlovable—if we ask Him. Jesus constantly described the kind of life His followers ought to live. Anything less than this would neutralize the Christian mission. Suppose Jesus when He was mocked had come down from the Cross and called a legion of angels to assist Him. The plan of salvation would have been null and void. Thankfully, He stayed on the Cross and said about those who crucified Him, "Forgive them, Father, for what they are doing."