The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:38-48

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39But I tell you not to 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 away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. 43"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44But 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, 45that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?  48Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

Here we find Jesus as Lord declaring a radical departure from the standards of the Old Law and giving us an entirely new way of dealing with adversity. Let us take a look.

First the Old Covenant: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Here is the passage.

Exodus 21:23-25*—"But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, 24eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”*

Under the law, If poked in the eye, you could poke back. If you were slapped on a cheek, you had the right to slap back. Jesus says, turn the other cheek to him also. Grasp that Jesus is saying to show the person trying to offend you that you are NOT feeling insulted at all. The one who is actually degraded is the one who slapped you. When you turn the other cheek to an offender, that person is likely to accuse you of being a coward. However, the opposite is actually true. It takes great courage to turn the other cheek.

Jesus goes further. If a person sues you and takes your tunic, let him have your cloak also. By that you are showing the person you are not harmed. The enemy takes this action to break you. By giving more than he wins, we show him we are not harmed.

Further, Jesus teaches that if compelled to go one mile, go ahead and do one more. “Going the extra mile” was used for years in the English language to indicate a person who did more than was required of them. Today, most people try to get by on “minimal” or no investment of time, energy, or money. If we are minimalists, we are not in line with the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus also teaches us to be generous with those who need help by giving to them and lending to them. Most of the time these days we as Christians do not like to follow this teaching. We fear that our treasure will be wasted or not returned. We betray that our treasure is NOT in heaven but on the earth.

Now, Jesus turns to dealing with our enemies. He reports the common attitude as this: *“You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'”* (Matthew 5:43) The scribes and pharisees were twisting the scripture and inventing words not in the text. Here is what the old covenant actually says.

Leviticus 19:18--*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*

Jesus gives us a four-point plan for dealing with adversaries.

* Love your enemy
* Bless those that curse you
* Do good to those who hate you
* Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you

Jesus also tells us why we should do this: *“45that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”*

If we are paying attention to this sermon, we will remember that Jesus said in the beatitudes,

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* (Matthew 5:9) Thus, **Jesus is actually giving us strategies on how to be a peacemaker**. Jesus also said this in the beatitudes: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:10-12) **Jesus is also telling how to respond to those who persecute us.**

Here is a **fundamental** question: Did Jesus tell us these strategies with the idea that we would feel free to ignore them if we wanted? The answer is simple. Of course not! Jesus tells us why He is so serious about this. The reason is simple—This is exactly how the Father in heaven deals with enemies. *“For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?”* It is easy to love those who love you. God loved us when we didn’t love Him. Jesus gives us this challenge: “*48Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

What many of us fail to remember is that prior to our becoming part of the family of God, we were God’s enemy. Consider these two significant passages.

Romans 5:6-11—*For when we were still without strength, in due time* ***Christ died for the ungodly.*** *7For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.* ***8But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*** *11And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

Colossians 1:21-22—***And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22in the body of His flesh through death,*** *to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight*

Jesus is plainly saying in His sermon that we need to pass on to those who are against us the mercy and grace that He and the Father gave us when they enabled us to be reconciled to them. Will we accept the challenge of Jesus?