

RETALIATION AND LOVE
(Matt. 5:38-48)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Have you ever had the urge for revenge when someone did you wrong? Have you ever said, "I'll get even with that guy; in fact, I will give it to him double!" This morning, the Lord is going to speak to us about our personal attitudes about revenge and those who are our enemies.
- B. The Jewish teachers had perverted the Old Testament teaching on retaliation and love because of their man-made rules and traditions that they added to the Old Testament law. The Lord Jesus gives the proper meaning to the Old Testament and then gives a deeper intent of the law.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING AND JEWISH INTERPRETATION ON RETALIATION -- 5:38

- A. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said,"* -- The Jews gave their own private interpretation of the Mosaic Law and perverted it.
- B. *"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:"* -- There is no doubt that the law of the Old Testament did make provision for retaliation (Lev. 24: 19, 10; Deut. 19: 18-21; Exo. 21:22-25). A careful student of the Old Testament would make two basic observations about retaliations:
 - 1. God gave the Law to limit revenge and to control its excesses. The tendency of human nature is to strike back and do even more when a person is hurt. The Law was given to see that equal payment or retribution was given when damage was done. An eye for an eye meant only one eye could be taken for the loss of an eye. The one who lost his eye could not take two eyes when he sought his vengeance. The punishment must fit the crime and not be in excess of it. No revenge could be doubled, tripled or quadrupled. It must be no more than equal. The law then had as its purpose the limitation of revenge.
 - 2. Retaliation was to be sought within the judicial system of the Jewish law courts. One private individual could not independently work his vengeance on someone who wronged him. It was to be accomplished by the courts.
 - 3. Jewish Interpretation: The Jews made the Old Testament teaching on retaliation personal rather than something for the law courts. They felt it their personal duty to retaliate when someone did them wrong.

III. CHRIST'S TEACHING ON RETALIATION -- 5: 39-42

- A. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you,"* -- Now the Lord gives the real spiritual meaning of the Mosaic Law on the matter of retaliation.
- B. *"That ye resist not evil:"* -- This is the big passage of those who call themselves pacifists, for they say Christ taught killing in any sense is wrong. They carry this

logically out and oppose wars, soldiers and capital punishment. Some go so far as to say that police and magistrates are unchristian. Pacifist are guilty of taking this verse out of context for 1) it is talking about “born again” believers in Christ who understand salvation; therefore it has something to do with their relationships to other people; 2) this verse says nothing about non-Christians or nations; 3) this context says nothing about killing or war.

POINT: This is truth for real Christian who must live in a world that is hostile to Christ. It tells Christians how to react when they suffer unjustly at the hands of the unbelieving world because of their stand for Christ. Christians are not to retaliate when they suffer unjustly for Christ. Our Lord gives four illustrations to make his point: in the areas of 1) personal assault, 2) law courts, 3) official demands, and 4) requests for help.

- C. *“But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”* -- When a person suffers assault either physically or socially because of his stand for Christ, he is not to fight back or retaliate in any way. Christians are not to defend themselves out of a sense of pride. A spirit of non-vengeance and of non-retaliation ought to characterize the Lord’s disciples. The true disciple is to become indifferent to criticism, insult and abuse, for vengeance belongs to the Lord and he will handle the situation.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember the story of Hudson Taylor who, standing on a riverbank in China one evening, hailed a boat to take him across a river. Just as the boat was drawing near, a wealthy Chinese man came along who did not recognize Hudson Taylor as a foreigner because he had dressed like the Chinese. So when the boat came the wealthy Chinese man pushed Taylor aside with such force that the latter fell into the mud. Hudson Taylor, however, said nothing; but the boatman refused to take his fellow-countryman, say, “No, that foreigner called me, and the boat is his, he must go first.” The Chinese traveler was amazed and astounded when he realized he had blundered. Hudson Taylor did not complain but invited the man into the boat with him and began to tell him what it was in him that made him behave in such a manner. It was the love of Christ that constrained him. Needless to say, Taylor had a wonderful opportunity to witness for Christ to this wealthy Chinese man.

- D. *“And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.”* -- If an unbeliever takes a Christian to court for unjust reasons, the Christian is not to have a spirit of bitterness and revenge. This does not mean that a Christian is not to defend himself in court. We know that the Apostle Paul used the legal courts often in the spreading of the gospel. The coat is the outer garment; the cloke is the undergarment. If a man sues for the coat, do not be afraid to give him the undergarment as well. But the Christian is not to have a revengeful heart, for God will take care of him.
- E. *“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain (two).”* -- This deals with official demands. These Romans had a law which said any person could be compelled by a Roman official to carry government materials one mile. (Carry shield and Armour of a Roman soldier.) Every Jew hated the subjection of the Romans and had a bitter and revengeful spirit against them. Christ tells his disciples not to balk at this law but to go two miles for the Roman officials.

NOTE: The first mile was rendered unto Caesar, the second mile unto God.

POINT: Real righteousness goes the extra mile and seeks a way not to have a revengeful spirit.

ILLUSTRATION: What would you do if you were socially persecuted on your job. Supposing you were given the dirty jobs simply because you were a Christian. Would you go the second mile? It is when the unsaved man sees this spirit of no revengefulness that he begins to see his need of Christ.

- F. “Give to him that asketh thee, and from that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” -- The fourth illustration of non-retaliation deals with the unsaved man’s request for help, apparently one who has been antagonistic to the gospel. We are to give and do it gladly because a revengeful spirit is not of God.

NOTE: This verse does not mean that Christians are to be gullible “suckers” who are easily taken in. Not to give to every drunk or lazy people. “Kill them with love.” The Bible says, “If any will not work, neither let him eat.” Christians are to use discernment, for some neighbors are “free-loaders,” who will take advantage.

- G. **CONCLUSION:** While the Old Testament made provision for retaliation, the Lord told his disciples not to use it. But he goes further and says that they must not only not seek revenge but they must see the well-being of those who would harm them.

NOTE: What the Lord is really asking is that the Christians set aside self and serve God. Self-pity, self-defense, self-sensitivity and self-pride are to be set aside for the glory of God. The losing of self is the finding of Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: George Muller found the secret of setting aside self for Christ and gave this testimony: There was a day where in I died, utterly died to George Muller and his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval of blame of even my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.

IV. **THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING AND JEWISH INTERPRETATION ON LOVE.** -- 5:43

- A. “*Ye have heard that it hath been said,*” -- Again this refers to the Jewish interpretation of the Mosaic Law.
- B. “*Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.*” -- The command to love one’s neighbors is most certainly taught in the Old Testament. (Lev. 19:18; 19:34). However, the clause hate your enemies is nowhere found in the whole of the Old Testament. This was Jewish tradition and an invention of the rabbis. The Jews said that “neighbour” meant only an Israelite; so they taught Jews to love Jews but to hate everyone else and regard them as an enemy. The Jews so hated Gentiles that they called them “dogs.” Tacitus, a Roman writer, charged the Jews with “hatred of the human race.”

V. **CHRIST’S TEACHING ON LOVE** -- 5: 44-48

- A. “But I say unto you, Love your enemies,” -- The Old Testament implied that believers are to love all men but the Lord Jesus makes it even more specific by saying the Christians are to love their enemies. To love a person, who injures you, is humanly impossible. Only God can place this kind of love in the human heart.

ILLUSTRATION: Saint Augustine said good for good is natural; evil for good is devilish; but good for evil is divine.

- B. “*Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*” -- Our Lord teaches that Christians are to counteract evil by doing good. When a person does us a wrong, we are to do him a good. When he curses us we are to wish only good on him. When he persecutes us, we are to pray for God’s blessing on him.
- C. “*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven:*” -- One does not become a child of God by loving his enemies. Besides, the context tells us that He is talking to His disciples who are already Christians. By loving their enemies Christ’s disciples show and display the fact they are godlike. Love is a definite test of our discipleship (John 13: 34, 35).
- D. “*For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*” -- God is good to the saved and unsaved alike in his natural blessings and so should the Christian be good to all men indiscriminately.

POINT: Regardless of race, color or culture, Christians are to love all men because God is love, and Christian’s are to reflect to all men the God of love.

- E. “*For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?*” -- Love responds to love and any one can have that kind of love, but there is no real reward in loving that way. Real love learns to love the unlovely.
- F. “*And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?*” -- Love is to go beyond our Christian brethren to all men. But it is to be extended even further to those who are our enemies. When we can love our enemies, we are beginning to enter in to Christlike love. When we do, there is no need to be revengeful. “More than others” -- There is a higher standard for the followers of Christ.
- G. “*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*” -- This has been a very perplexing problem for many because they have not known the Greek. How can any Christian be perfect as God in heaven is perfect? The words “be ye perfect” are a quotation for the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy 18:13. The Hebrew word translated perfect means whole or complete. The Greek word here means complete or mature. God is totally complete and supremely mature in His love towards all. In the same way, Christians are to have a complete and mature love towards all.

POINT: It is not an incomplete and imperfect love (that is, just for friends) but a complete and mature love (embrace even our enemies).

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. The Bible tells us that God is love and that He loved men when they were yet His enemies. Man naturally is a rebel and alienated from God. But when men were opposed to God, God sent His Son to die on the cross. He loved the unlovely.
- B. You here this morning without Christ, you cannot really love as Christ loved until you come to know the God of love personally. He can only be known by receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour. The love of God is known in the forgiveness of sins through Christ. The God of love can also only be known through Christ. Today the Lord may be calling you to place your trust in Him. *“God is love”* and *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*