

THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

Session 24

“Getting to the Heart of Retaliation”

I. Review

A. The Sermon on the Mount is the Normal Christian Life

1. Remember **Jesus began with the Beatitudes**; a picture of how different His people are from the world:

- The world is proud and feels little need for God, but the Christian is “poor in spirit”
- The world sins and feels no remorse, but the Christian mourns over his sins
- The world pursues pleasure, but the Christian hungers and thirsts after righteousness

2. The whole sermon is a presentation of what it looks like to be “born again”.

3. The Christian is altogether different from the world! He is salt in the midst of decay, he is light in the midst of darkness.

4. Today, in our 24th lesson, Jesus will show how the Christian will deal with one of the most common expressions of human nature outside of Christ, which is retaliation...

II. Getting to the Heart of Retaliation

A. Basic Instinct

1. One of the most basic instincts of the human heart is to retaliate against those who hurt us.

“Retaliation”

Action taken in return for an injury or offence. The act of returning like for like; from a Latin word which means “to pay back in kind”

2. Nothing is more common to human nature outside of Christ than to strike back when stricken.

a. Retaliation says: “Don’t let them get away with it”; or “It’s payback time!”

3. In our textbook for the series, “Studies in the Sermon on the Mount”, the late David Martyn Lloyd Jones says...

“The tendency to wrath and anger, to retribution and retaliation, is at the very depths of human nature.”

4. But again, Jesus comes to show us how different the Christian is from the world. Here is our text for today...

**"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'
39 "But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. "And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. "And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.**

Matthew 5:38-42 NASB

5. Remember that in this section of the Sermon, Jesus is correcting the religious teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees regarding God's Law and commandments; so we need to answer 3 questions.

III. We Must Answer 3 Questions

3 Question Approach:

- What did the Law actually say?**
- What were the Pharisees teaching?**
- What does Jesus say about it?**

A. First: What Did God's Law Say?

1. The statement 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' is found in God's instruction to the judges of Israel Exodus xxi. 24, Leviticus xxiv. 20 and Deuteronomy xix. 21.

"The object of this Law was to make sure the punishment fit the crime and not be in excess of it."

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

a. If someone injured you and knocked out a tooth, you couldn't demand that their eye be gouged out; if someone causes you to lose your eyesight you could not demand they be put to death.

2. So God established the courts of Israel to give justice to the injured party, but only in proportion to the injury suffered.

B. But What were the Pharisees Teaching?

1. The religious leaders of Jesus day were perverting the principle that the punishment must fit the crime to teach the people that it was their duty to demand payback if injured!

“They were teaching that ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ was something the people should insist upon; that it was their right to restitution and their duty to go after it. It was a legalistic outlook which thought only of one’s rights.”

David Martyn Lloyd Jones.

2. This sounds like where we are today, where our courts are jammed with lawsuits over women’s rights, gay rights, or civil rights.

3. God had given them the Law of an “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” to make sure that the punishment fit the crime and no one was unjustly punished; but the Pharisees were teaching the people to seek payback or revenge for the last offences.

4. Lawsuits were encouraged!

C. But What Does Jesus Say on the Subject?

Turn the Other Cheek!

“But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.”

Matthew 5:39

1. Here we have one of the most startling statements in the Sermon on the Mount!

2. If there’s any verse in the Sermon that proves Jesus’ message here is only for born-again believers, it’s this one; because no one who is not a Christian can consistently live like this!

3. The normal reaction to a strike on the cheek is retaliation; to strike back. But God has given us a different spirit! Consider the Apostle Peter’s words...

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered* for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:21

And what are His steps?

He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.* He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

1 Peter 2:21-23 NLT

4. Look at our Lord Jesus! Or as Pontius Pilate said at the trial...

“Behold the man!”

John 19:5

- There He is, dishonored in His own hometown
- There He is, brought to trial on false charges
- There He is, mocked, whipped, and crucified

5. **Peter said, “He is our example, and you must follow in His steps”;** the one who was willing to choose humiliation over retaliation.

D. Practical Application

1. I know I belong to God; but the temptation to retaliate is still real.
2. There is always a choice to make:
 - a. It can be as simple as not striking back to something my wife says that feels offensive
 - b. It can be as complicated as making a decision not to expose false brethren who damaged me or strike back at them for lies they had told about me

3. And that's the key; retaliation is all about ME; my rights, and my offences; or what I think is right; but that's not who I am in Christ. I can let it go because I belong to Him.

**No man can hope to live like this unless he is born again. It is all a question of this attitude towards self. God have mercy upon us and fill us with His Spirit.
David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

IV. Caveat: Don't Misuse the Teaching

A. No Shortage of Errors

1. Jesus message is addressed to His disciples; it is not to be applied to the civil government.

a. In Russia, Count Tolstoy, took the verse at face value. He said that to have soldiers, or police, or even magistrates, is unchristian. Evil, he maintained, is not to be resisted; for Christ's way is not to resist evil in any sense.

b. The American Quakers refused to participate in wars.

c. Even today, there are Christians who try to apply Jesus' message of non-retaliation to our civil governments in the name of love and peace.

d. All these errors come from a failure to understand that God Himself established civil governments as a means of preserving the peace and punishing criminals in a sinful world. (See Romans 12)

2. Jesus' message is addressed to His disciples; it is not to be applied to the nations of the world.

a. God Himself has ordained the nations; some are good, some are evil.

b. God establishes righteous nations to oppose what is evil and unrighteous; and the orthodox Christian church has always had a doctrine of “Holy War”

3. We must not take Jesus’ clear word to His disciples and misapply it as His message to the world or to the nations!

The Christian is not to be concerned about personal insults. and personal defense. But when it is a matter of honour and justice, righteousness and truth, he must be concerned and thus he makes his protest.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

B. Conclusion

1. Nothing is more common to the natural man than retaliation
2. But our conversion to Christ gets to the heart of the matter
3. God gives us the power to walk in the footsteps of Jesus!

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