

## The Commands of Christ

### Sermon # 7

#### *“Going the Second Mile”*

#### Matthew 5:38-48

*“In our relationships with others, often what passes for love is little more than a neat business transaction. People are kind to us, so we repay them with equal consideration. When they threaten us unjustly, our negative response is really what they asked for. Everything is so balanced, so fair, so logical with this eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth kind of justice. But Christian love never settles for only what’s reasonable. It insists on giving mercy as well as justice. It breaks the chain of logical reactions....”* [Our Daily Bread. [www.bible.org/illus/nt/nt/Matt 5:44](http://www.bible.org/illus/nt/nt/Matt%205:44)]

We are introduced to the thought of this new section in verse twenty-eight where we read, “You have heard that it was said, *“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”*”

Even people who don’t know the Bible often quote this standard of justice, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But in most cases they completely misinterpret its meaning. They think that it gives them the right to retaliate for injuries against themselves and their loved ones. But this law as it was given in Deut 19:21 was intended by God to limit vengeance. Under Old Testament law retributions were limited to that which was equivalent to the loss. Given an opportunity to retaliate for hurt done to them, people will over-retaliate.

The seventh command in our Commands of Christ Series actually occurs in Matthew five, verse forty-one, “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.” The verb translated, “go” (hupage) is an imperative present active.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount (5:38-48), I believe that the Lord is calling us to a new level of response to our fellow man. I want you to notice how we are told to respond to personal slights. Look with me at four postures and four responses.

The First Posture – “Don’t Mess With Me!”

The Christian Response - We Are To Take Insults With Grace (v. 39)

“But I tell you not to resist an evil person....”

First we are told that we are “not to resist an evil person” but what does that mean? “Jesus’ illustration and personal example depict not the weakling who offers no resistance....They depict rather the strong man whose control of himself and love for others are so powerful that he rejects absolutely every conceivable form of retaliation.”

[John Stott. Essential Living: The Sermon On the Mount. (InterVarsity Press, 1978) p. 107]

I think that Paul words found in Romans 12 (v.17, 21 ) are a commentary on this teaching of Jesus, "Repay no one evil for evil... (21) Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

"... But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

Surely this is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted passages in the Bible. We have probably all heard it paraphrased this way, "The Bible says when someone slaps you on the cheek to turn the other cheek, but if he slaps you again, it does say what you have to do then." That of course is missing the point entirely!

People have used this justify everything from pacifism to non-violent protests. But at it core this passage does not deal with physical violence at all. The slap that is described here was the highest form of personal insult known to that culture.

Even today, slapping a man across the face is the greatest insult you can give in many Middle Eastern countries.

In fact it is not just a slap, today we would call it a "backhand." Since the blow is to the right cheek, and since most of the world is right handed, the blow if it were meant to hurt you, would be to left cheek. So a blow to the right cheek, without some unusual contortions would have to be delivered with the back of the hand. The intention was not so much to do bodily harm, but was a deliberate effort to deflate, put down or belittle someone. According to Jewish rabbinic law to hit a man with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as to hit him with the flat of the hand.

It is designed to be an blow that is intended to be an insult to one's character. What Jesus is talking about is our response to a deadly, calculated insult.

But How Are To React? Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."

"This principle really works in a variety of situations we all face regularly. It works when someone cuts you off in traffic... It works when someone gives you a harsh word. You see, if you lash out in anger when you are in any of these situations you only escalate the conflict. If you respond by being kind and generous, which is the unexpected response, then you catch your antagonist off guard and they, not knowing quite how to respond, calm down a bit.

This works in a marriage relationship. When you see the tensions beginning to rise because someone is irritable, you have a strategic decision to make. You can become irritable yourself. We have all done this and know where this leads. Or you can respond in kindness and gentleness. Which works better? Kindness and gentleness. And when the conflict has already

started and you have impulsively shot your mouth off and said the wrong thing, if you will immediately stop and admit you are wrong, you can get a handle on the situation. It is hard to do that. There is something within us that hates to admit we are wrong, even when everyone, including us, knows we are. But if we will be big enough to make the first move, we will experience the secret, positive power of returning a soft word.

This works in the workplace when unreasonable bosses are flexing their irritating muscle. It works in the school situation when demanding and implacable teachers, who think their class is the only one that counts, give you unreasonable assignments. You can become bitter or better by how you respond. [J. David Hoke. Sermon entitled "Thinking Biblically About ..Loving Enemies." [www.horizonsnet.org/sermons/tba06](http://www.horizonsnet.org/sermons/tba06)]

But in contrast a desire for revenge and a an attempt to retaliate often backfires. I heard a story that I think is a classical illustration of this. Many years ago there was a radio series called the "Amos and Andy Show." In one of their routines Andy was particularly exasperated over a certain fellow on the street who, as Andy walked by him on his way to work each morning, would slap Andy on the chest and say hello. Andy complained to Amos about the situation and told him that he had resolved to do something about it. He said that on the next morning he would strap some dynamite to his chest and when the annoying fellow slapped it, he would blow his hand off. I think you see so obvious difficulties with Andy's plan for revenge, it would cost him as much or more than his enemy. Revenge often does!

The Second Posture – "Don't Infringe On My Rights."

The Christian Response - We Must Learn To Move Past A Concern For Our Rights (v. 40)

"If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also."

We live in a society very much concerned with maintaining our rights. We hear about human-rights, women's-rights, children's-rights, worker's-rights, gay-rights, criminal's-rights, victim's-rights and on and on. People believe that they have rights and are in many cases, not only pleading for them but demanding them.

As Christians we also think that we have rights, don't we? Many think they have the right to success and prosperity; the right to a home and a family; the right to a good name; the right to be respected. Well do we have this as our rights as Christians? No, in fact, Christ is challenging us as believers to move past constantly thinking of our rights and think of our responsibility. The apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor 9:4-6,12, 19) says <sup>4</sup>Do we have no right to eat and drink? (5) Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (6) Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?... (12) If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.... (19) For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might

win the more.” Paul here declares that he willingly gave up his rights for the sake of reaching others with the gospel.

The Third Posture – “Don’t Cost Me My Time.”

The Christian Response - We Must Be Willing To Do More Than Is Expected Of Us (vv.41-42)

“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.” As we considered Jesus’ words we must first of all need to remember that Palestine in the days of Jesus was an occupied country... Rome enforced its rule over the people of Israel by maintaining garrisons of Roman soldiers stationed throughout the country. According to the law (Roman law) a Roman soldier could require a Jewish citizen to carry his pack for him for a distance of one mile. The law obligated them to this first mile of servanthood.

An obvious Biblical example of this is Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32), the man who was made to carry the cross of Jesus.

There are two ways to obey being commanded by a soldier to carry his pack; (1) Grudging Acceptance and (2) Gracious and Cheerfully. Grudging acceptance is like the little boy who was told to go sit in the corner and as he sat there with his arms crossed he said, “I may be sitting on the outside but I am standing on the inside.” Or you could do what you have been asked to do graciously and cheerfully.

First mile things are obligations – ordinary things, but the second mile was to be seen as an opportunity. The Lord was teaching that as you and I go down the road of life we are to look at the tasks we are given --- even the unfair ones –as opportunities to serve others cheerfully as we reflect the love of Christ even in our attitudes.

The Fourth Posture – “Don’t Ask Me For My Money.”

The Christian Response – Don’t Hesitate to Give To Those In Need. (v. 42)

Verse forty-two tells us that we are not to turn aside from those who ask to borrow from us. “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

Does this mean that we should give money to every panhandler who asks us for money? Are we to give money to individuals who we strongly suspect will use the money to buy alcohol? No, but it may mean that we should actually buy them something to eat.

There are few things in life that reveal as much about us as what we are willing to allow to part us from our money.

Jesus continues his teaching in verse forty-three, "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.

C.S Lewis the Christian author explained the principle found in these verses when he wrote, *“The rule for all us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less... The difference between a Christian and a worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or likings and the Christian has only charity. The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he likes them; the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on – including the people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.”* [C.S. Lewis. Mere Christianity. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958). pp. 101-12]

Jesus summarizes his teaching in beginning in verse forty-five, “that 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. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (48) Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

According to Jesus the test of perfection, that is the test of maturity, is the capacity to love those who do not love you.

## Conclusion

So then we are to move past mere posturing – and

1. We Are To Take Insults With Grace.
2. We Must Learn To Move Past A Concern For Our Rights.
3. We Must Be Willing To Do More Than Is Expected Of Us.
4. We are not to Hesitate to Give To Those In Need.