

## **"God's Standards for Human Relationships"**

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

**Introduction:** Tonight we return to our study of the Sermon on the Mount and in so doing we have come again to Matthew 5:38-42. Before we get into the verses that are before us tonight let me do a quick review to refresh your memory.

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon that has ever been preached and as Jesus preaches through Matthew 5:21-48 six times He points to the system of the religious leaders of His day and He then contrasts it with the Truth of God. So six times He says, "Ye have heard" (reference to their teaching), "but I say" (reference to the Truth of God). The religious leaders of Jesus day had taken the Word of God and twisted it in such a way that it fit their sinful lives. They did the very same thing that people do today. People today that trust in their own righteousness will take the Word of God and they will do their best to "modify" it so that it fits the way that they live. This is all done in an attempt to justify their sinful lifestyles. That is exactly what the religious leaders of Jesus day were doing and they had poisoned the minds of many people with their teaching.

Now the last time we were together we looked at Matthew 5:38 and in this verse Jesus made a reference to an Old Testament teaching the religious leaders had completely taken out of context in order to justify the way they were living.

#### **Notice Matthew 5:38**

The phrase "*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*" is an Old Testament truth that was found in 3 different passages. It is found in

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**Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21.** So the religious leaders were correct when they taught that it was found in the Bible but they made a major mistake with the way they applied it to their lives. They were guilty of teaching it was ok to retaliate or to seek personal vengeance when someone offend them. In other words they saw the Old Testament teaching as a personal mandate to get even with those who had offended them. That was never *God's* intent with this Old Testament teaching. In every one of the 3 places it is found in the Old Testament it is always connected with the civil court. You see *God* never gave this as a mandate for personal vengeance but it was instead a guideline for the court system. The phrase "*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*" simply meant that the punishment was to fit the crime. It was given so that the punishment would never exceed the crime.

We must understand there is one practice for the court system and another practice for personal relationships and the two are to be kept separate. It is justice in the court and forgiveness in the heart. We would not want the court system to practice forgiveness for then it would not do what *God* intended for it to do. Can you imagine a judge telling criminals something like this, "We are going to forgive you for what you have done; Now go on your way and try not to do it again but if you do we will forgive you again because the Bible teaches we are to forgive you seven times seventy times or with unlimited forgiveness."? If that were the way our system worked it would be total chaos in our society and the innocent would have no protection from the criminal which is the very reason for the court system. In the same way we would not want to see the practice which *God* intended for the courts to be carried out in personal relationships. If you were mowing the

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grass and a rock came out from the blades and went through your neighbor's window you would not want him to stop by when he got home and while you were eating dinner have him throw a rock through your dining room window. Therefore it is justice in the court room and forgiveness in the heart. This is the way God intended it to be.

The religious leaders of Jesus day were practicing personal vengeance in their lives and they were using the Old Testament verses that were never intended for that purpose.

Now as we continue tonight we shall see what God expects of us when someone has done something that has offended us.

## I. The Proper Response to an Offence

### Notice Matthew 5:39a

In contrast of "*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*" Jesus says that we are not to resist evil. Now at first glance it looks like Jesus is calling on His people to be "doormats" for others to wipe their feet on but the reason people think this is because they do not understand what Jesus is saying here.

Let us remember that Jesus is addressing the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees and the attitude they possessed when they were offended was one of retaliation and vengeance.

Jesus knew the first response of every person when offended would be retaliation because of the sin nature within us. Therefore Jesus is addressing the attitude that controls us when we are offended. When we who are believers are offended we are to respond as Jesus responded when He was mistreated.

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### **John 18:22-23**

*<sup>22</sup> And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?*

*<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*

Let me tell you what Jesus was saying here. "If I have done something wrong and I deserve this treatment then please tell me. But if I have not done anything to deserve this then why have you struck me? The intent behind the Words of Jesus was to cause this man to search his heart and consider the reason for his actions. There was no thought of retaliation in the mind of Jesus. Notice what Peter tells us about Jesus;

### **1 Peter 2:23**

*<sup>23</sup> Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:*

Let us get back to Matthew 5:39a. Jesus is not saying that we are to allow evil to exist. The Bible tells us and teaches us that we are to stand against evil.

### **James 4:7**

*<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Neither is Jesus saying that we should not defend ourselves against evil in this world. Some people say that Jesus is telling His people that

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we are to just sit back and let evil run its course. That is not at all what Jesus is saying. I think that God has placed in everyone of us the will to survive and the will to preserve our lives. So what is He saying here? Let us look closer at the verse.

*<sup>39</sup> But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil:*

There are 2 words here that will help us to get a deeper understanding of what Jesus is saying. The word “**resist**” means “**to set against**”. The word “**evil**” here has to do with “**one who opposes you**” or “**one who wrongs you**”. Therefore, what Jesus is saying here is that we are not to “set ourselves against the one who offends us”. In other words we are not to seek vengeance or retaliation; we are not to have an attitude that desires to get even. We are not to fight against someone who violates our rights. This is what Jesus is saying with this statement. This is the very same principle that is taught by Paul in the book of Romans.

### **Romans 12:17-21**

*<sup>17</sup> Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

[Instead of seeking to retaliate we are to seek peace]

*<sup>18</sup> If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

[As we seek peace we are to give place unto wrath and the proper place for wrath is with God]

*<sup>19</sup> Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

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[Then Paul goes on to explain how we are to treat those who have violated our rights]

*<sup>20</sup> Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*

*<sup>21</sup> Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Verse 21 is so important. We are told not to be overcome with evil. Some people when they are offended will go home and sit and dwell upon the offence until they come up with a plan to even the score. The Bible tells us we are not to do that but we are to return **GOOD** for evil.

Jesus is now going to continue and He gives us 4 illustrations as to how we are to respond when someone offends us.

### **A. Personal Respect (5:39)**

#### **Notice Matthew 5:39**

As children of the Most High God we deserve respect because of our position in the family of God but that does not mean we will always get it. There will be times when people will not show us respect and they will do their best to belittle and degrade us.

Now in order to understand what it means to "turn the other cheek" we need to know some history. First of all it does not mean we are to let them hit us twice and then pound them into the pavement. To the Jews one of the most disrespectful things you could do to them was to slap them on the face. To get in a fight with them was to treat them as an equal but to slap them was to show the great disrespect. Now to take that disrespect even farther someone would slap them with the back

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of their hand. That would show the greatest disrespect. Notice the words of a Roman slave;

*"A slave would rather be thrashed with a whip than slapped with the back of his master's hand."*

This seems to be the very thought that Jesus had in mind. Think about this; if I were to slap you on the RIGHT cheek (presuming I am right handed) I would have to slap you with the back of my right hand.

So what Jesus is saying is if someone does something that is extremely disrespectful to you don't retaliate but instead let them do it again. Instead of thinking of a way to get even let them do it again. Retaliation should be the furthest thought from our minds. This was exactly what Jesus did when He was treated with disrespect. We must keep in mind there is coming a day when the world will see who we really are and in that day we will get the respect that is due the children of God. But in this sinful world we may be treated like animals at times. When that happens we must not retaliate for that only damages our testimony.

## **B. Personal Needs (5:40)**

### **Notice Matthew 5:40**

Now in order to understand this verse we must again understand some history. There are 2 words in this verse that we must understand. The word "**coat**" referred to an under garment that both men and women wore. Some people who were poor only had one of these others may have 2 or 3. The word "**cloak**" refers to the heavier outer garment that was used as a coat and a blanket on cold nights.

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The idea behind this verse is that we have done something that offended another person and they have taken us to court. If they then sue us and win the case and are awarded our "coat" that is our inner garments Jesus says that we are not to fight it but instead we are to willingly give to them our "cloak" which is our outer garment and our blanket for cold nights. Our Lord is saying that we are to go to the extreme to demonstrate God's love through our lives. When we are willing to sacrifice that which is so important in our lives it catches the attention of many people but especially the one who is determined to show no compassion to us.

This attitude is contrary to what the sin nature desires for if we were to be taken to court and made to give up something that we really needed such as our coat, the sin nature would cry out, "That's not fair! Where is your compassion? I need that!" If we are not careful there would be a root of bitterness that would develop rather quickly.

The Jews that were listening to Jesus would have had a major problem with this teaching because of what was written in the book of Exodus.

### **Exodus 22:26-27**

*<sup>26</sup> If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment [cloak] to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:*

*<sup>27</sup> For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.*

The Jews would have claimed the right to keep the outer garment. But Jesus said give it to the one who has sued you. There is a deeper

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thought here that I want you to see. He was saying, "When you follow me you must be willing to surrender your rights."

### **Matthew 16:24**

*<sup>24</sup> Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

### **C. Personal Time (5:41)**

#### **Notice Matthew 5:41**

There is some interesting history behind this verse. Hundreds of years ago the Persians developed what we would call the first postal system. They had people we will call couriers who would deliver mail or other packages. The empire was mark of in different sections and there were what we would call "post offices" that were set up at a distance of one day apart. In other words when the courier received the mail he would ride for one full day and he would then reach his stop where there would be a fresh horse and a place to stay.

Now if something happened to the rider or his horse the government gave the courier the right to chose someone along the route to take the mail and assist in finishing out the journey for him. This practice can be seen when Jesus was carrying His cross and when He could go no more Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry His cross. So if you were traveling the highway on your way to a very important meeting and the courier stopped you and compelled you to assist him on his route you had to do it. There would be no concern for your plans. There would be no concern for your personal time. Now there was a practice in Jesus day that if the courier was in need of your assistance he would only ask you to go one mile.

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This is what Jesus had in mind when He spoke the words of **5:41**. He was saying if the courier asks you to go one mile then be gracious and go two miles. Don't complain and don't claim your rights just submit to what you have been compelled to do.

Let me give you an illustration that will help understand. Let's say someone calls you and they ask for a ride somewhere because they cannot get to where they need to be without assistance. In your mind you are thinking if I drive them where they desire to go I will have to sit with them there for several hours or even all day. I have a week's worth of work that needs to be done at home and I have plans with my wife to go out for the evening. On top of all of that I will burn up my fuel and you know how much that costs. What are you going to do? **If you are controlled by the Spirit of God you will drive them where they need to go and sit with them until they are finished with what they need to do.** Someone may say, "That is asking me to go too far." Could I remind you how far Jesus carried the cross for you? Could I remind you of the burden He carried for you? Could I remind you that we are here to make Jesus known to those around us?

#### **D. Personal Property (5:42)**

##### **Notice Matthew 5:42**

Here Jesus tells us that if someone asks for something we have we are to give it to them and if they need to borrow something we are to allow them to use whatever it might be. This is easy to do if the person who is borrowing is very neat with what they own. But this also applies to the family with 4 kids who are out of control at times that need to borrow your car.

## **Deuteronomy 15:7**

*<sup>7</sup> If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:*

If we are not careful we can become very possessive with what we have. That possessive spirit is not of the Lord.

### **Conclusion:**

Justice belongs in the courts but in the believer's heart there is to be love and forgiveness. We are going to be mistreated at times. We will be taken advantage of at times. When this happens we are not to harden our hearts toward people nor are we to figure out some way to retaliate. We are not to set ourselves against them. But we are to commit the matter to God.

George Mueller had a firm grasp on living **Matthew 5:39-42**, notice his words;

*"There was a day when I died, utterly died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."*

## **Matthew 16:24**

*<sup>24</sup> Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*