

March 15, 2015 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

“Giving it Up: Giving Up Enemies”

Matthew 5:38-48

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

A truck driver is sitting in a crowded roadside diner ready to eat his lunch. It's not just any diner and any lunch. It's his favorite diner on the road and his favorite lunch. Just as the waitress brings the truck driver's meat loaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, and green beans to his table, a motorcycle gang comes in the door.

Most of them sit at the table next to the truck driver but there's not room at that table for all of them. The gang members left standing turn to the truck driver and say, "Move! We want that table!"

The truck driver calmly says, "I haven't finished my meal." One member of the gang takes his dirty finger, swipes it through the mashed potatoes and gravy, sticks his finger in his mouth and says, "Hey, not bad." Another gang member takes the trucker's cup of coffee and slowly pours it over the remaining food on the plate and snarls, "You're finished now!"

The trucker stands, takes his napkin, wipes his mouth, walks to the cash register, pays for his meal, and silently walks out the door. All the bikers are laughing now. One of them says, "Ain't much of a man, is he?" The waitress says, "And he's not much of a truck driver, either. He just backed his rig over your motorcycles."

How do you react to people who make life difficult for you? We all encounter people who are hard to live with; How do you treat the "jerks" in your life?

We have some direct instruction on this issue from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus raised the bar for those who followed Him; He teaches:

- Don't resist an evil person.
- Don't try to get even

- Turn the other cheek
- Go the extra mile
- Do good to those who hate you

Jesus teaches His followers that they should respond differently than the world and counter to their own instincts. Jesus' words are unusual and sound like strange advice that goes against our human nature, and every advice most Americans are given. Nevertheless, His words are wise and His way is right and we will discover that to be so if we give them a chance. But you have to admit the teachings of Jesus in this section are impossible to keep unless we are energized by the power of the Holy Spirit within.

Yes these things are against human nature. That's why you need a spiritual birth you have to be born again to have them. You have to be born of God.

This, and all of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' way. This is true Christianity. Yet these are the most ignored words by Christians in all of scripture, though they are the basis for everything Jesus stands for.

This is how you know if you are a true Christian.

This is how you know if the Holy Spirit has been born in you.

This is how you can check yourself - by these attitudes and actions.

If these attitudes are not yours keep following and asking the Lord to change you by His Holy Spirit.

Before we look at this passage, there are two basic principles about interpreting and applying the Bible that are important in understanding this section.

First, Jesus sometimes used a method of teaching that was popular in that day. Jewish Rabbis would sometimes deliberately overstate their case or emphasize just one side of a truth to motivate students to look at it with a fresh perspective. Jesus also would use this method of using extreme examples to make a point.

There are times that Jesus' teaching is to be taken seriously but not literally, or you'll wind up being legalistic and impractical. Here as well Jesus uses extreme examples to make a point about the attitude His followers are to have.

The second principle in understanding this section of the Sermon on the Mount is that Jesus words have to be interpreted in light of other Scripture. God's Word does not contradict itself. Rather, it is the best interpreter of itself.

So with those principles in mind, let's look at this section that teaches how we are to treat people who are difficult to live with; or how we can give up enemies.

How should you deal with **A PERSON WHO HUMILIATES YOU**

Mt. 5:38-39 – "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury:

'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' (Ex. 21:24) But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.

“An eye for an eye” was the Old Testament system of justice. It may sound severe to us, but in its time it set guidelines to prevent escalating personal vendettas among people. It also gave judges a guideline for dealing with a crime. That is, as the NLT brings out “the punishment must match the injury” or the punishment should fit the crime. So this law limited vengeance and helped the court administer punishment that was neither too strict nor too lenient.

It was meant to prevent crime, establish justice, and avoid overreaction.

- Prevent crime – by providing the knowledge of punishment before the crime occurs
- establish justice – it was given not for personal retribution but to be administered by legal authorities such as judges and other governmental leaders
- avoid overreaction – by providing fair, just and impartial punishment

But Jesus raised the bar. He said (v39a), “do not resist an evil person! Now, that has to be taken in light of other scriptures; for we’re told to resist evil in our society and to resist the devil. So there are exceptions to this command.

- This command doesn’t apply to national security or defense
- This command doesn’t apply to self-defense

The striking on the right cheek Jesus talks about is actually an insult. If, as the majority of the world, you are right handed, you cannot strike someone on the right cheek with your right hand except with a backhand slap. That, even today is an act of contempt.

I like the story of an Irishman who was a boxer but left the ring to become a preacher. He was setting up his tent in one particular town to bring revival services. Some of the local tough guys began to give the preacher a rough time. Eventually, one of them came over and physically challenged the preacher to a fight.

The preacher said, “So, you’d like to take a swing at me, would ya?” And with that the preacher stuck out his jaw on the right side and said, “All right then, go ahead and hit me.”

The local tough guy took a swing, connected his fist with the preacher’s jaw, and the preacher went down to a knee. The preacher stood up, shook his head to clear the cobwebs, and turned his left jaw to his opponent and asked, “Would ya like to try it again?” The tough guy takes another swing, connects with the preacher’s left jaw, and the preacher went down on his other knee.

Then the preacher stood up, took off his suit coat, rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, and said, “The Lord has not given me any more instruction.” Then gave that guy a boxing

lesson by beating the snot out of him.

Now I'm not exactly sure that's what Jesus was talking about. I am sure that He meant that we would be more Christ-like if we absorb insults rather than always retaliating. If all we ever did was to continually seek vengeance from those who injure us with insults, we'd all be walking around blind and toothless.

How should you deal with **AN ANTAGONISTIC PERSON WHO SUES YOU**

Mt. 5:40 – If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. Another version (NIV) says, “And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”

In Jesus' day, there was a difference between the tunic and the cloak. The tunic was the garment worn closest to the skin. The cloak was the outer garment that doubled at night as a blanket.

Ex. 22 teaches that every person had an absolute right to his cloak, since it was vital to existence. It was not permissible to sue another to take their cloak and even if you did, the Law required you give it back before nightfall when it would be needed as a blanket.

Jesus said if some enemy wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. In other words, if he's that desperate, give up your basic rights. Don't demand your rights all the time.

“Com' on, Jesus, don't you know that kind of thinking goes absolutely contrary to our gut instinct. It's inborn to protect yourself; to demand our rights. Get even. Don't let anyone get away with anything. Is Jesus saying we should never go to court or should never sue anyone?”

No, Jesus is not saying that Christians should refuse to participate in the criminal justice system. What Jesus is saying is don't always insist on your rights.

There are four “rights” mentioned by Chuck Swindoll in commentary on this passage:

- 1). My “right” to dignity ... to be treated without insult
- 2). My “right” to comfort ... to cling to what pleases me
- 3). My “right” to privacy ... to do only what I prefer
- 4). My “right” to possessions ... to keep all I wish.

Jesus says that as His followers, we shouldn't focus so much on our rights as our responsibilities as His subjects in the kingdom of God.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage in *The Message*: “If someone sues for the shirt off your back, gift-wrap your best coat and make a present of it.”

I recently read a story about a traveler, who between flights at an airport, bought a small package of cookies. She then sat down in the busy snack shop to glance over the

newspaper. As she read she became increasingly aware of a rustling noise. Peeking over her newspaper, she was shocked to see a well-dressed gentleman sitting across from her, helping himself to her cookies. Half-angry and half-embarrassed, she reached over and gently slid the package closer to her as she took one out and began to munch on it.

A minute or so passed before she heard more rustling. The man had gotten another cookie! By now there was only one left in the package. Though beside herself, she didn't want to make a scene so she said nothing.

Finally, as if to add insult to injury, the man broke the remaining cookie into two pieces, pushed one piece across the table to her with a frown, gulped down his half and left without even saying thank you. She sat there dumbfounded. "Of all the nerve!"

Some time later when her flight was announced, the woman opened her handbag to get her ticket. To her shock, there in her purse was her package of unopened cookies. And somewhere in that airport was another traveler still trying to figure out how that strange woman could have been so forward and insensitive! But he didn't insist on his right to eat the cookies he bought. He shared with someone who demanded that she eat them.

How should you deal with...

### **A PERSON OF AUTHORITY WHO MAKES UNREASONABLE DEMANDS ON YOU**

(Mt. 5:41) "If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles."

The word "demands" is a word that means, "press into service."

There was a Roman law that gave their soldiers the right to force civilians into service for a period. You couldn't refuse or you would be severely punished. But there were limitations. For example, a Roman soldier had a right to make you carry his pack for one mile, but not any further. But Jesus said, "If a soldier demands you carry his equipment for a mile go with him two miles."

We all have people who have authority over us. If they love power they can make life miserable. The natural instinct is to find some way to resist. But Jesus raised the standard, don't just go a mile, go two miles.

It's amazing how much better we feel about ourselves when we go the extra mile. It's amazing how quickly most relationships are smoothed over when we do more than expected. What a testimony to the work of Christ in our life when we perform the extra-mile service with a smile instead of grumbling and complaining.

Of course you have several exemptions as a Christian. First you are not to do anything unethical or illegal and second you have a right to confront and not be a door mat.

### **How should you deal with A NEEDY PERSON WHO REQUESTS MONEY FROM YOU**

(Mt. 5:42) "Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow."

It's interesting that Jesus says this in the section of His sermon on the subject of loving our enemies

But let me point out that this doesn't mean we should give to every person and agency that requests money from us. But if we work hard to find a reason not to give, it's probably because we want to follow our natural instincts rather than walking by the Spirit.

Again there are some exceptions

We are not to loan to people at an exorbitant interest. If you know they can't repay it, give them a gift with no expectation of repayment. (Also don't hold it over their heads for the rest of their lives how you helped them "that time.")

We are also instructed not to give to a person who can work but refuses to work.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat."

We shouldn't give money to a person we're sure will spend it on something destructive. (However, we can still help them).

How should you deal with **AN ENEMY WHO PERSECUTES YOU**

(Mt. 5:43-48) "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' (Lev. 19:18) and hate your enemy (we don't find that in the law. However, "Neighbor" came to mean love people who love you back. And the law was misinterpreted to say hate the enemies of God). But I say, love your enemies! (Luke 6:27-28 adds, "...Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.) Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Even the best of Christians are going to have some enemies. Jesus said, treat your enemies with compassion. Your instinct tells you to lash out and do to others before they do it to you.

But to the contrary

Rom. 12:20-21 "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If someone does evil to you, in return you do good to them. That doesn't seem natural, our instincts are, you hurt me, I'm going to hurt you. But the way to overcome evil is not with more evil, that only adds to the evil. The way to overcome evil is with good – because good is much more powerful than evil.

- If an enemy refuses to speak to you, love them anyway.
- If an enemy talks bad about you behind your back, you be positive about them in return.
- If an enemy tries to hurt your reputation, trust God and respond with kindness.

Hate is such powerful thing. It destroys your life both inside and out. Hate should not be a common thing in your life. We should hate evil. But we must never hate people.

Loving an enemy means choosing to let our love OVERRIDE our feelings of disgust. Jesus calls us to agape love --the kind of love that actively seeks the other person's highest good no matter how they are treating us.

Granted we do not love our enemy the same way we love God, our spouse, our children, our fellow church members, or our friends, but we must love them..

That word "perfect" there causes us a lot of problems because we think of something "perfect" as being without any flaw or blemish. And no matter how hard we try, we know that there are going to have flaws & blemishes in our life.

But the Greek word that is used here literally means "mature, fully equipped, ready & able to do the job that needs to be done." And I believe that that is what Jesus expects from us in putting into practice God's love in this world. When you show mercy and grace, you'll remind people of your Father in heaven.

I read a story about a burly platoon sergeant who had at one time lived a life of drinking, cursing, swearing, and sexual immorality. He could be arrogant and rude to his soldiers. However, he had become Christian and turned his life around. When asked about what made the difference, he told about a private in his platoon that was courageously Christian in his outlook and behavior.

This private was frequently harassed by other but was faithful to Christ. One night the private came into the barracks quite late. It was a very rainy night. Before getting into his bunk, he knelt, as was his custom, to pray. The sergeant in a foul mood picked up one of his own boots, which was heavy with wet mud, threw it across the room and hit the private in the side of the head. The private said nothing. He wiped the mud from his face and crawled into bed.

The next morning, however, when the sergeant woke up, he found his muddy boots cleaned and polished by his bedside. He said: "It broke my heart."

Jesus requires us to pray for those who behave like enemies toward us

Lk. 6:28 – “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Pray for your enemies.”

Charles Spurgeon: “Prayer is the forerunner of mercy. ”

We’re also told to forgive one another

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.  
– Mother Teresa

Jesus Himself is the perfect example for us to follow. He was arrested, slapped, beaten, insulted; The authorities spat in His face, blindfolded Him; the Roman soldiers mocked Him by crowning Him with thorns and putting a purple robe on Him, and a weak reed in His hand as a make-believe scepter. They jeered at Him, “Hail King of the Jews!” Then they scourged Him.

Jesus had the power to strike them blind, to paralyze their hand, to choke them on their own spittle, to condemn them to hell, but, He held His peace.

1 Pet. 2:23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly”

Jesus prayed, “Father forgive them.” He didn’t return evil for evil, but He silently turned the other cheek. He did all that for you; and He wants you to follow in His steps.

He wants us to give up enemies.