

The Sermon on the Mount #7

Personal Retaliation Corrected (5:38-42)

Introduction:

1. Our Lord continued the body of His sermon by rescuing true righteousness from the perversion of Pharisees.
2. Having explained clearly that His intent was not to destroy the Law, He rightly applied the Law (5:17-20).
3. Having explained the importance of the least commandments and the totally inadequate righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, He exposed their wickedness in applying the Law of Moses for civil retaliation.
4. The Lord Jesus continued His definition of kingdom righteousness by applying mercy to personal offences.
5. The Jews by tradition justified personal vengeance for minor offences by invoking the law for civil judgment.
6. Self-righteousness, or presumed blamelessness before God, is always by applying God's laws to fit your life.
7. It is very important to see that Jesus opposed what had been said, not what Moses had written or intended.
8. Many foolishly suppose that this sermon was Jesus Christ correcting and improving the Old Testament.
9. Missing the lesson could cause you to think Jesus was an effeminate pacifist and rejected civil judgment.
10. It is ignorance and abuse of passages like this that some lay hold of to oppose capital punishment and/or war.
11. Our Lord commended those who do and teach His least commandments, so I will apply Moses' Law of retaliation to civil matters only and apply mercy to personal offences to exalt His righteousness (Matt 5:19).
12. Let the position of this lesson be instructive: our Lord has dealt with relationship problems (5:21-26), sexual and marital problems (5:27-32), and speech problems (5:33-37); now we face relationship problems again.
13. The Pharisees exalted retaliation over mercy until no one was guilty, even if possessing a violent temper or vengeful spirit; Jesus limited retaliation and exalted mercy until everyone is guilty! But He obeyed His interpretation, and that righteousness is yours by justification and representation (Rom 5:15-19; II Cor 5:21)!
14. All men have retaliated for minor personal offences, and you will give an account of it on Judgment Day.
15. Let us tremble before God's word, search our hearts, commit our souls, and pass over all minor offences.
16. Our generation needs this teaching of our Lord Jesus and its application more than any other generation, for the pride, selfishness, and intemperance of this generation has exalted retaliation as self-protection and right.
17. For this church to grow and prosper by God's definition of spiritual maturity and fruit, we must learn this lesson well and never forget it, for there will always be constant opportunities to practice it. Get ready!
18. This passage is excellent for learning how to study the Bible and arrive at the sense of apparent difficulties.
19. As the servant ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, I will defend the integrity and sense of His teaching here.
20. This great subject is a constant theme throughout the Scriptures (Pr 10:12; 15:1; 19:11; Rom 12:17-21; etc.).
21. To get your attention, consider wisely the Parable of the Debtor that Jesus used for this topic (Matt 18:21-35).
22. You will now hear pure Christianity, which if you reject in hearing or doing, proves a vile and wicked heart.

The Text Explained

- A. Jesus identified the traditional interpretation Israel had been taught by scribes and Pharisees (5:38).
 1. He refers to what they had heard about personal retaliation, not what had been written about it.
 2. Our Lord did not identify or correct, "It is written," but rather what had been preached in Israel.
 3. He did not correct, change, or modify Exodus 21:24; Lev 24:20; or Deut 19:21; He corrected the wrong application that had been made by the Jews to justify personal revenge for minor offences.
 4. He condemned the oral teaching and traditional interpretation the Jews had heard in synagogues.
 5. The scribes and Pharisees taught the tradition of the elders, "Ye have heard that it hath been said," which misapplied the Law of Moses for civil government to personal relationships.
 6. They had taken God's ordinance and misapplied it to justify personal retaliation and revenge
 7. Moses ordered retribution (Ex 21:24; 22:1-6; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21). Jesus did not destroy that.
 8. Jesus Christ did not modify the law of God at all; He restored the law from Pharisee corruption.
 9. There are foolish and weak men who will not fight for any cause by missing the Lord's lesson.
 10. They foolishly conclude Jesus rejected all fighting, resistance, retaliation, or punishment.
 11. By basing Bible study on the sound of words rather than the sense of words, they err greatly.
 12. They leap at His words here and those in the next lesson to become effeminate pacifists.

13. The Mennonites, Quakers, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh Day Adventists are large cults that miss the lesson and slander Christianity with their pacifism, even with national safety at risk.
- B. Moses had definitely taught that retaliation and retribution should include "an eye for an eye."
1. If fighting men hurt a pregnant woman, identical retribution was required (Exodus 21:22-25). Let this ruling from heaven settle when God considers life to begin and what He thinks of abortion!
 2. Causing a blemish or loss to a neighbor was to receive identical retribution (Leviticus 24:17-22). Let this ruling from heaven answer at once on how to solve and eliminate crime in a nation!
 3. A false witness was to be punished with the same judgment he had sought for his enemy (Deut 19:16-21). Let this ruling from heaven put an end to frivolous lawsuits and perjured witnesses!
 4. PTA and PETA humanists reveal their foolishness when they deny such laws deter criminals.
 5. But look! These laws were civil ordinances applied and enforced by judges and priests, when the nation and church were one: these were clearly civil laws (Ex 21:22; Lev 24:22; Deut 19:17).
 6. The identical retribution was determined by the judges and executed by the whole congregation.
 7. This judicial principle of the same punishment and retribution should make perfectly good sense.
 8. Do you resent or appreciate such wonderful laws? Even wicked men understand (Judges 1:6-7).
 9. God did not give rulers to coddle or reform criminals, but to punish (Rom 13:3-5; I Pet 2:13-14).
 10. The fear of God is cultivated in our lives by fearing the power of parents, rulers, and masters.
 11. Torture is not ungodly, regardless of what PETA, the Geneva Convention, the PTA, the U.N., the ACLU, or other effeminate organizations committed to protecting criminals might have to say!
 12. The blessed and holy God will Himself will torture the wicked for eternity in the lake of fire.
- C. Jesus contrasted the righteousness of His kingdom to the teaching of scribes and Pharisees (5:39).
1. There is a very definite contrast and opposition here by our Lord's use of the disjunctive "but."
 2. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; He did not apologize for His superior religion!
 3. He dogmatically declared that God's standard of righteousness was far higher than the Jews!
 4. He did not flatter the false teachers or commend them in any way, because they were heretics!
 5. He did not excuse them from their error; He simply and boldly declared them wrong before God.
 6. Our Lord did not blanch or cringe dealing with torture; He authoritatively and strictly applied it.
 7. The teaching of Jesus Christ was powerfully superior to the Jew's oral tradition (Matt 7:28-29).
- D. As in the previous lessons of this Sermon, our Lord corrected the Pharisee abuse of God's words.
1. Jesus is not changing the Law of Moses to teach nonresistance and pacifism (Matthew 5:17-20).
 2. Jesus Christ has no more respect for Mahatma Gandhi than He does for Idi Amin or Pol Pot!
 3. Old Testament saints understood overlooking minor offences and leaving civil judgment for major offences to the magistrate (Ex 23:4-5; Lev 19:18; Pr 24:29; 19:11; 20:22; 25:21).
 4. Our Lord's plain command to "resist not evil" must be understood in its proper sense and place.
- E. First, our Lord's command for nonresistance to evil must be understood in a very limited sense.
1. If we do not rightly divide the word of truth, we will end up in shameful error (II Timothy 2:15).
 2. Are these words absolute or relative? Do we trust the sound of them? Or search for the sense?
 3. Our Lord Himself resists evil by dashing the nations in pieces and severely chastening His sons.
 4. Is the devil evil? Of course! Should we resist him vigorously? Of course! (I Pet 5:9; James 4:7!)
 5. Our Lord resisted evil vigorously when He purged the temple of moneychangers (John 2:13-17).
 6. Should parents resist evil in their children? Governments resist evil in criminals? What think ye?
 7. Ministers and saints must oppose and resist false teachers and doctrine (Titus 1:9-11; Jude 1:3!)
 8. Correction, rebukes, and warnings are a big part of the New Testament (Acts 20:31; I Thess 5:14; I Tim 5:20; II Tim 3:16; 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15; Jas 5:19-20).
 9. The rest of the verse (5:39) indicates precisely what kind of offences are under consideration, which leaves entire fields of human relationships outside the scope of this lesson from our Lord.
- F. Second, our Lord's command for nonresistance to evil must be understood of personal retaliation.
1. The Pharisees had taken a civil ordinance for the national government and applied it personally.

2. The apostles of our Lord endorsed civil retaliation by a government as the ordinance of God to be feared and obeyed (Rom 13:1-7; I Pet 2:13-17). Jesus did not condemn civil judgments at all.
3. John Baptist did not tell soldiers to lay down their arms when he had opportunity (Luke 3:14).
4. Paul admitted willingness to die, if he had committed some crime worthy of death (Acts 25:11).
- G. Third, our Lord's command for nonresistance to evil must be understood of only minor offences.
 1. The Pharisees were applying "an eye for an eye" to minor matters far inferior to losing an eye!
 2. The context shows the Lord is dealing with slaps, coats, hauling luggage, and giving supplies.
 3. He is not dealing with thieves at night, attempted rape of your wife, or lawsuits for all you have.
- H. The smiting of a cheek is a small personal matter affecting the pride far more than the body (5:39).
 1. Being slapped on a cheek does not justify retaliation, but it may justify a question or two!
 2. Observe our Lord's example of turning the other cheek (John 18:19-23 cp I Peter 2:20-23).
 3. But Paul did not turn the other cheek when he was smitten on trial for his life (Acts 23:1-5).
 4. Providing for one's family includes self-defense and the use of force in resistance (I Tim 5:8).
 5. Physical resistance is not used, however, when facing physical abuse for Jesus Christ's sake.
 6. Children have a ditty, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me."
 7. When it comes to small, personal matters, we should rather suffer defrauding (I Cor 6:1-8).
 8. We do not have rights or instruction to personal retaliation for such (Rom 12:17-21; I Thes 5:15).
- I. The taking of a coat is a small personal matter affecting one's possessions and goods (5:40).
 1. God provided in the Law for using maximum force in resisting thieves at night (Exodus 22:2-4).
 2. When Lot and his goods were taken, righteous Abram resisted with armed force (Gen 14:13-16).
 3. If nonresistance causes family neglect, then pacifism is worse than infidelity (I Timothy 5:8).
 4. The verse does not forbid efforts to keep your coat, but to end the dispute generously if forced to.
 5. The Law of God taught this charity and mercy toward the poor and needy (Deut 15:7-11; 24:19).
- J. Being forced to travel a ways is a small matter of inconvenience affecting comfort and time (5:41).
 1. Roman soldiers might compel an occupied nation's citizens to carry their weapons and supplies.
 2. The proper reaction to such a requirement should be willingness to go further to keep peace.
 3. The Law of God had taught this charity and mercy (Exodus 23:4-5; Deut 22:1-4; Prov 25:21).
- K. If asked material goods by someone, Jesus Christ teaches us to give and not turn them away (5:42).
 1. Of course, this does not mean espionage where you would disclose national secrets for a request!
 2. Of course, this does not mean a thief asking for your car for having a very minor fender bender!
 3. Giving to those in need was taught in the Law of God (Deuteronomy 15:7-10; Proverbs 3:27).
 4. Comparing Scripture, we learn that such charity ignores sluggards (II Thes 3:10; Proverbs 20:4).
 5. Paul exhorted us to entertain strangers, since some have entertained angels unawares (Heb 13:2).

The Text Applied

- A. Our Lord Jesus Christ began with the most difficult and pervasive problem and temptation among men and women – godly relationships involving the heart, tongue, and actions (5:21-26). But in the first lesson you were the perpetrator of the offence and the lesson was restraining your actions. In this lesson, you are the victim and the instruction and warning are regarding your reactions!
- B. He then took up the second most difficult and pervasive problem and temptation among men – sexual fidelity in marriage and godly service to the needs and temptations of others (5:27-32).
- C. He then took up another great area of temptation and sin – the profane use of our mouths (5:33-37).
- D. He followed these three areas of temptation by returning to our relationships with others and responses to their offences against us, which surely as a great area of sin (5:38-42).
- E. We have shown above the limited sense of our Lord's words and the proper occasions for retaliation.
 1. Civil government not only has a right to retaliate and require retribution, but it is bound by duty to God and citizens to do so against offenders in or out of the nation (Rom 13:1-7; I Pet 2:13-17).
 2. It is not sinful for followers of Jesus Christ to participate in the armed forces of their nation, for John the Baptist did not tell the soldiers that came to him to lay down their arms (Luke 3:14).

3. Nor did Peter tell Cornelius he needed to quit the Roman army before baptism (Acts 10:1-48).
 4. If being a soldier is wrong, then so is being a policeman (enforcing internal laws), an executioner (executing internal laws), a legislator (declaring war), or a judge (deciding capital punishment).
 5. We are to live peaceably with all men, but that does not include thieves, robbers, and rapists.
- F. It will be our wisdom and righteousness to review ways that we break God's laws against retaliation.
1. God's laws are exceeding broad: it is our duty to examine ourselves in their breadth (Ps 119:96).
 2. Given our Lord's expanded interpretation of murder, adultery, and swearing in preceding lessons, we must apply His warning about retaliation to all aspects of dealing with offences.
 3. We will consider a few other Holy Spirit examples of God's expanded definitions of sinning by revenge or retribution (Lev 19:18; Pr 24:28-29; I Cor 13:4-7; Eph 4:1-3,31-32; Col 3:12-14).
 4. Each and every one of the offences that follows violates directly or indirectly, "Resist not evil"!
 5. It is a horrible shame to our religion, when (a) we commit these sins ourselves, (b) allow others to commit them with relative impunity, (c) expose ourselves to temptations in this area of our lives, or (d) do not treat the offenders as heinously as we would a vindictive murder (Pr 25:23).
- G. First, when someone transgresses against you, the glorious thing to do is pass over it (Pr 19:11). This is what great men with noble spirits will do; base men with profane hearts must retaliate. It is this glorious principle that is a key to Solomon's wisdom and to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.
1. Here is a fact of life: you will be offended in the ways described in this lesson throughout life.
 2. There is no family, church, or neighborhood without sinners, so you must prepare to remember this lesson and apply it. You cannot eliminate others' offences, but you can respond righteously.
 3. There is a devilish spirit in you that wants to fight in self-defense (Gal 5:13-16; Jas 3:14-16; 4:1).
 4. Christian charity – true love as defined by God – passes over offences (I Cor 13:4-7). Consider "suffereth long," "is not easily provoked," "thinketh no evil," "beareth all things," "believeth all things," "hopeth all things," and "endureth all things." This is true love! Anything else is hate!
 5. It is this loving way of overlooking offences that covers sins between people (Prov 10:12; 17:9).
 6. The Lord knows we will have a multitude of offences, but how will you respond (I Peter 4:8)?
 7. How does love cover sin? It fully forbears, forgives, and forgets (Eph 4:1-3,31-32; Col 3:12-14).
 8. How often should love cover sins? More than Peter thought (Matt 18:21-22)! What about you?
 9. You should be willing to suffer defrauding in these ridiculously small things of life (I Cor 6:7-8).
 10. The religion of Jesus Christ condemns grudges, bitterness, revenge, or retaliation (Lev 19:18; Pr 20:22; 24:28-29; 25:21-22; Rom 12:17-21; I Thes 5:15). Do not be devilish (James 3:14-16)!
 11. The "I don't have to put up with this stuff" is a voice from hell. Other voices are, "I have my rights, too," and, "This is a matter of principle," and, "I am not going to be a doormat to anyone." Why not? The Lord Jesus Christ was lower than a doormat for you. Grow up, brat!
 12. Let the Parable of the Debtor sink deep into your heart and soul based on the infinite degree to which you have been forgiven by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:23-35).
- H. Second, when you cannot overlook a minor offence, there is a very specific process to resolve it.
1. If you remember an offence at all, or it is affecting your relationship, then you must deal with it.
 2. You start with the offender alone, and the Lord provides the church as backup (Matt 18:15-17).
 3. Did you understand the previous process? You do not tell others about the offence (Pr 25:9-10).
 4. No one else cares to hear your pride, immaturity, devilish spirit, backbiting, or talebearing.
 5. The Lord Jesus designed the New Testament church to handle these offences (I Cor 6:1-8).
- I. Third, when borrowers want some of your stuff, you should be prepared to part with your goods.
1. There is a place to determine if a person deserves charity, but most times you should just give!
 2. It is a command of the Lord Jesus Christ to be gracious and generous of those asking for help.
 3. This righteousness and wisdom was not new (Deut 15:7-14; Job 31:16-20; Ps 37:21,25-26; 112:5-9; Pr 3:27-28; 11:24-25; 19:17; Eccl 11:1-6; Isaiah 58:6-12).
 4. It is an important part of true Christianity (Matt 25:35-40; Luke 6:31-36; 14:12-14; II Cor 9:6-15; I Tim 6:17-19; Heb 6:10; 13:16; James 1:27; I John 3:14-19).

Conclusion:

1. Do not despise avengers in your thinking, unless you are free from the expanded interpretation of retaliation!
2. Do not think highly of yourself in God's sight, until you are fully free from all pride, revenge, and retaliation.
3. Do not presume that your worship of God is accepted, when you have bit back at those biting you. You lose!
4. Have holy hatred for any bitterness, grudge, or slighting of any other person. Why are you doing it? Revenge?
5. Consider the great Day of Judgment, when you shall give an account for every wicked thought, retaliatory word or action, and your lack of forgiveness, which you will so much desire from the great and dreadful God.

For Further Study:

1. The sermon outline, "[1 Corinthians 6](#)," will provide a detailed explanation of the defrauding Paul commended in 6:1-8.
2. The sermon outline, "[Bitterness Will Destroy You](#)," condemns the forgotten sin of bitterness that leads to revenge.
3. The proverb commentary, "[Proverbs 15:1](#)," teaches the wisdom of responding to an angry attack with a soft answer.