

Sermon on the Mount, Part 4: Love Your Enemies

For Parts 1, 2, and 3 of this series, see [Sermon on the Mount, Part 1: The Beatitudes](#); [Sermon on the Mount, Part 2: Salt and Light](#); and [Sermon on the Mount, Part 3: Dealing With Anger](#) under the Bible Studies tab at www.ChooseJesusToday.com.

Part 3 of this series discussed Jesus' teaching about how to deal with anger. Jesus instructed us never to harbor anger against another person but rather to go and be reconciled. As Jesus continued his Sermon on the Mount, he turned his attention to how we should treat our enemies. How should a Christian respond when attacked by another? How should a Christian feel about another person who hates him or her? Jesus taught that we should not retaliate or seek revenge against another who harms us. Instead, Jesus taught us to love our enemies.

Matthew 5:38-42, covers Jesus' teaching about retaliation and revenge:

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.

The saying that Jesus referred concerning an eye-for-an-eye is a provision found in the Mosaic Law that mandated that anyone who injured another person must be made to suffer that same injury. This provision is found in the Old Testament in Leviticus 24:19-22:

Anyone who injures another person must be dealt with according to the injury inflicted— a fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Whatever anyone does to injure another person must be paid back in kind. Whoever kills an animal must pay for it in full, but whoever kills another person must be put to death. This same standard applies both to

native-born Israelites and to the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God.

The intent of this provision of the Mosaic Law was to not promote vengeance and retaliation. It was not to promote vigilante justice. The purpose was to make certain that the sentences handed out actually suited the crime committed. God's intent was to ensure that relatively minor offenses were not punished too harshly and that heinous crimes were not punished with a slap on the wrist. In his "Wiersbe Bible Commentary", Dr. Wiersbe explains, "Because this principle has been misunderstood, many people have called it cruel and unjust. They have questioned how a God of love and mercy could enunciate it. But this law was actually an expression of God's justice and compassion, because it helped restrain personal revenge in a society that had no police force or elaborate judicial system. Apart from this law, the strong could have crushed the weak at the least offense."

Here, Jesus is not teaching that we should place ourselves in physical danger. He is also not making a political statement against war. Rather, Jesus is explaining that, when it comes to personal insults and slights, Christians should be willing to respond to hatred and insults with love, not with vengeance. Retaliation and vengeance only make situations 100% worse, never better. If we retaliate, we may feel good for a minute or two, but retaliation only serves to prolong, inflame, and worsen conflict. While "turning the other cheek" may result in continued insults or attacks, we still win because Jesus will help us to overcome the situation. Showing others the love of Jesus Christ – even in the face of trouble – not only draws sinners to Christ, it also builds our character.

Jesus went on to explain that we should love our enemies. Matthew 5:43-48 says:

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.

While man's tradition may have taught hatred for one's enemies, God's law taught the opposite. For example Exodus 23:4–5 says that if we see an enemy in trouble, we are to offer help. Jesus goes even further and teaches that Christians are to love those who curse us, hate us, and exploit us selfishly. Dr. Wiersbe says, "Since Christian love is an act of the will, and not simply an emotion, [Jesus] has the right to command us to love our enemies. After all, He loved us when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10)." We should view our enemy as a lost soul desperately in need of the love of Jesus Christ. That person will either spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell, and we should strive to draw them to Christ by showing love. What does it mean to love our enemies? It means to bless them by doing good to them and praying for them.

Not only is loving our enemies the right thing to do, it shows that we are spiritually mature and true followers of Christ. After all, God shares the beauty of his creation with those who hate him as well as with those who love him. He does not deprive his enemies of oxygen, sunshine, and rain. God blesses everyone with his grace and abundance. Dr. Wiersbe explains, "Matthew 5:45 suggests that our love "creates a climate" of blessings that makes it easy to win our enemies and make them our friends. Love is like the sunshine and rain that the Father sends so graciously." Loving our enemies also makes us a light in an ever-darkening world. It is a testimony to others. As sons and daughters of the Lord and vessels of the Holy Spirit, our lives should reflect the Light of the World, which is none other than Christ Jesus.

Jesus wants us to love those who are difficult to love. It is easy to love those who love and treat us well. But, like most things in life, love is a choice. Jesus wants us to choose to be more like him. Choose to turn the other cheek. Choose to love our enemies. And most of all, choose Jesus today!

God bless!