

Matthew 5:38-48

A Christian's Righteousness (Part 4): Non-Retaliation and Active Love

Friday, March 11th, 2005

Introduction:

We conclude our study on a Christian's righteousness as Christ illustrated in His six antitheses. As with each of the previous illustrations, the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law is contrasted with the surpassing righteousness of the Kingdom of God. Christ alone lived out this standard of righteousness and, as we will see again today, the expectation is for us to strive for the same goal...

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." – Matt 5:48

Read Matt 5:21-48.

"Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth..."

What was the purpose of the Mosaic "Law of Retaliation"? (see Ex 21:22-25; cf Deut 19:15-21)

- Ex 21:22-35 - *Lex Talionis* – principle of EXACT RETRIBUTION
 - purpose: 1) defining justice – specifying punishment that wrong-doer deserved
 - 2) limit compensation to equivalent (no more) / prohibited taking law into own hands (abolished revenge)
 - context: instruction to judges of Israel
- Deut 19:15-21 – "you must purge the evil among you..."
 - additional role of judgment: to *deter* others from committing the same offence
 - context: before judges / requires witnesses (v.17-18)

From the examples the Christ gives in vv.39-42, how did the Pharisees and teachers of the law distort this teaching? (v.38, cf Lev 19:18)

- likely extended principle of just retribution from law courts to personal relationships – ie. to justify personal revenge
- ignored Lev 19:18 (vengeance forbidden)
- Rabbi Shammai – taught literal application of this judicial principle for private vengeance (legalism)
vs. Rabbi Hillel – object to School of Shammai's extreme position on this issue

What does Christ teach us regarding how we should respond to one who inflicts personal injury? (v.39-42) How does this relate to what we have already learned in the Sermon on the Mount?

- "Do not resist an evil person"
 - v.39: non-retaliation "turn the other cheek"
 - v.40: not insisting on our personal legal rights
 - v.41: not resisting government demands
 - v.42: giving & lending of our possessions
 - What we have already learned: recall... blessed are the MEEK, the MERCIFUL, and the PEACEMAKERS
- } dying to SELF as manifested in how we respond*

How do Paul and Peter's writings on this subject help us to understand the motivation for such a response?

- Rom 12:14-21; cf Prov 25:21-22

- Rom 12:14-21:
 - v.17,19: leave justice to God
 - v.21: not giving in to evil... rather, overcoming it with good
- Prov 25:21-22: shame your enemy to repentance

- 1 Pet 3:8-12; cf Ps 34:12-16

- 1 Peter 3:8-12:
 - v.9 – were called to respond to evil with blessing "so that you may inherit a blessing"
 - v.10-12: quotes Ps 34:12-16 – by turning from evil and doing good → find life gratifying; days good; and God's eyes are on you and His ears attentive to your prayers

- 1 Pet 2:21-23; cf Matt 5:10-12

- 1 Peter 2:21 – "because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."
- Matt 5:10-12 – evidence of our salvation; when we suffer persecution we join company with the prophets who were persecuted before us

How did Christ himself fulfill this teaching? (see Isa 50:6; Mk 14:53-65; 15:16-20)

- Fulfilling prophecy, Christ did not respond with evil when facing beatings before the Sanhedrin and at the hands of the mocking soldiers
- not contradicted in John 18:19-24; Matt 18:15-17 – in these cases the law (not self justification) is upheld (ie. not personal vengeance)

“Love your neighbor and hate your enemy...”

What did the Mosaic Law teach regarding how God’s people were to relate to their neighbor? (see Lev 19:17-18; cf Matt 22:34-40)

- Lev 19:17-18 – “...do not hate... seek revenge... bear a grudge... but LOVE your neighbor *as yourself*. I AM THE LORD”
→ commanded to LOVE – **because of who God is** (cf. vs. 48 – be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect)
- Matt 22:39 – second greatest commandment → Love your neighbor as yourself

According to Christ’s teaching, who is your neighbor? (v.44; Luke 10:25-37; cf Lev 19:18)

- Neighbor includes your *enemies* and *those who persecute you* (v.44) in addition to your brother (Lev 19:18)
- Luke 10:25-37 – expert in the law asks Jesus: “And who is my neighbor?” → Jesus’ reply: Parable of the Good Samaritan
recall: Jews viewed Samaritans as half-breeds both physically and spiritually; the two groups practiced open hostility toward one another (NIV)

How did the Pharisees distort this teaching? (v.43)

- Narrowed the STANDARD of love (omitting “as yourself”)
- Narrowed the OBJECT of love (by excluding enemies)
- Added to the law: instructing that we should hate our enemies

What does it mean to love your neighbor? (v.44; recall Luke 10:25-37; Rom 12:14)

- Love → good deeds (taking care of their practical needs) – v.44, Luke 10:30-37
- prayer (even for those who persecute you) – v.44
- word (bless those who curse you...) – Rom 12:14
- rebuke them when necessary – recall Lev 19:17

Why are we to love our neighbor?

- v.45-48; cf. Luke 6:27-36; Matt 5:9

- **Because of who our FATHER is...**
 - v.45 – the common grace that he shows...
 - v.48 – because of the example of the Lord who is perfect: “Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect”
 - “perfect” (Aramaic): “all-embracing” → to love even our enemies
 - cf Luke 6:36 (parallel passage) – “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful”
- **Evidence of our salvation – that we might be called *sons of God***, not pagans and tax collectors
 - v.45-47 – if we do not, we are no different from pagans and tax collectors
 - cf. Matt 5:9 – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God”
 - cf. Luke 6:35 – “... and you will be called sons of the Most High”
- **Great reward** – Luke 6:35 – “The your reward will be great...”

- Rom 13:8-14

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 - v.8-10 - the commandments are *summed up* in the one rule: love your neighbor as yourself
→ **LOVE encompasses the rest of the law** – love does not harm your neighbor (v.10) – *also WHAT it means to love...*
 - v.11-14 – “**because our salvation is near**” – time of judgment is coming

“Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect” – How is this possible? (see Matt 19:26; Rom 5:9-11)

- Matt 19:26 – “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*”
- Rom 5:9-11 – “*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, **when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son**, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! **Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.***”
→ **ONLY A CHRISTIAN (as described in the beatitudes) can live in this way**

Reflection and Application

At the conclusion of Christ’s last antithesis, we are challenged to “*Be perfect therefore as [our] heavenly Father is perfect*”. In this challenge, we are driven appropriately to where we began – to a keen realization of our own spiritual bankruptcy in light of the Kingdom standard of righteousness. Left to our own, we see that we have the same tendencies that were exposed in the Pharisees. The sin in our lives manifests in a self-righteous hunger for vengeance, a love for those who love us, and a hate for our enemies. And yet, we are not left in hopelessness. Through faith in Christ, we have peace with God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit that enables us to live in obedience. We need not concern ourselves with vengeance or with bringing those who have wronged us to justice. In Christ we are able love our enemies in meekness, trusting that God is just and will bring all to either salvation or judgment.

What evidence of “sonship” to you see in your life? in your dealing others who have wronged you?

“What more are you doing than others?” (is your love of your neighbors any different from those who are not in Christ?)