

# Loving Our Enemies

In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

As followers of Christ, we have been made light of the earth (v13) and are commanded to imitate the character of Jesus. Why are we called to shine our light in this world? This is so that others may see our deeds, repent and be saved, and give glory to God (v16). In 5:38-39, Jesus provides three examples in which Christians should show patience during persecution and one example of serving those in need. One reason is to overcome evil with Good and the other to produce peace out of a very tense situation.

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**Read Matthew 5:38-42. If time permits, read the surrounding passages for context.**

- 1) Which passages from the Old Testament does Jesus draw from? (v38)
- 2) What is the purpose for this command in the Old Testament? Would you consider it a just or unjust command? Why?
- 3) How could the Israelites have abused this system of law and corrupt its intended purpose?
- 4) Are Christians called to be pacifists based on what Jesus teaches in verse 39?
  - a. How should we think about protecting our families and others from those that try to harm them?
- 5) What is Jesus' intention behind "do not resist the evil person"? (v39)
- 6) How serious do you think is a "slap on the right cheek" in its physical harm to a person? How might that help us to understand the command Jesus gives us?
- 7) How does this second example Jesus gives us differ from the first? (v40)
  - a. In what way are they similar?
- 8) What is the outcome if a Christian does not resist the one who wants to take your "shirt" or something of equivalent value?



- 9) How much do you think is the value of a “shirt” or “cloak” in those days? How might this help us to understand the context of this passage?
- 10) Should a Christian *always* give to everyone who wants from them? Why?

The first example that Jesus gave was in the event of a physical attack (v39). The second was for a financial attack (v40) and this third example is the attack on a person’s liberty (v41).

- 11) How can we practise wisdom with verse 42?
- 12) If we are unable to fulfill the request of someone, how might we still shine our “light” towards them?

#### **Read Luke 6:27-31**

- 13) What additional insight can Luke’s account add to what we have discussed so far?

## **Conclusion**

Jesus draws from Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21 where God gave the ‘eye for an eye’ legal system to Israel. This system was to be carried out by those placed in positions of authority in order to carry out justice within the community and punish the one who does evil. This was a fair system and would make anyone think twice about committing a crime. Some with the intent of revenge, however, would not leave justice to God through the governing authorities (Rom 13:1-7) but rather took justice into their own hands and went after their enemies. This could cause a never-ending situation of revenge attacks between two individuals or groups of people and is not the original purpose of the law.

Adam Clarke states that, “...to improve the injustice of man to our own advantage, is to exercise under it meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering... for he that avenges himself must lose the mind of Christ, and thus suffer an injury ten thousand times greater than he can ever receive from man. Revenge, at such an expense, is dear indeed.”

Proverbs 24:11 instructs us that we should “rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter” while Jesus tells his disciples on the night of his betrayal, “...if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.” (cf. Luke 22:36) The Bible teaches that we have the right to defend ourselves from attacks that could be fatal to ourselves or others. Yet wisdom is to be used if persecution comes in the form of minor attacks. For the sake of peace and love, some situations should be patiently endured with suffering while we pray for those who are against us. We can see that Jesus does not just instruct us to turn the other cheek but that he himself faced this very same situation which is recorded in John 18:22-23. Joseph Benson comments concerning Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 5:42, “Neither can it be thought that he [Jesus] commands us to give every idle fellow all he may think fit to ask, whether in charity or in loan. We are only to give what we can spare, and to such persons as out of real necessity ask relief from us.”