

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

An Eye for an Eye, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 5:38-42

Code: 2224

Turn with me to Matthew 5. Our wonderful, rich study of the gospel of Matthew has become a joy to many of you and I trust in God's great grace that it will continue to be so as we look this morning and in weeks, months, and perhaps years ahead to all that God has for us here.

To remind you, we are studying the greatest sermon of the New Testament. It is called the Sermon on the Mount, and was preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sermon designed to show men that they fall short of the standard for entrance into God's Kingdom. It is a sermon directed primarily at the Jewish audience on the hillside, most specifically to the scribes and Pharisees, because they had concocted a human religion. They had invented a system of religion that was sub-standard; sort of a quasi-biblical one, based on human achievement, self-effort, and dead works. They believed in their hearts that because they kept these low standards which they themselves had devised, they therefore were just before God.

As Jesus confronts the society of His day, and confronts the religion of His people, first, He wants to knock the props out from under this system. Before they can be desperate enough to see the need of a Savior, they have to see the inadequacy of their system. So Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, basically shows the difference between true religion and their system, between divine truth and human wisdom, between a sub-standard religion of human achievement and God's religion of divine accomplishment. Jesus, then, is destroying their confidence in their self-made Judaism and reasserting God's standard.

So really, the Sermon on the Mount has, first of all, a negative intent. That is to show people that they come short of God's standard. All you have to do is read the Beatitudes and you'll find a very obvious recognition of that. They start out with a person who is beggarly in spirit, who is mourning over sin, who is meek before God, who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness. In other words, the Sermon on the Mount begins in desperation, it begins with an overwhelming sense of inadequacy, it begins with the knowledge that you don't have the resources to attain God's standard

Then Jesus moves into Matthew 5:21 and begins to show the disparity between God's standard and the system of religion of His day, to show them that they are sub-standard and they need to have a Beatitude mentality. You see, they were smug, sufficient, prideful, ego-centered, and expecting God to lock arm-in-arm with them at their own level, and go walking into the Kingdom. They had no contrition, no repentance, no sense of sinfulness, unworthiness, no mournfulness. They then had to

be broken, you see, to come to that place where they would have the heart of the one in the Beatitudes.

So Jesus is endeavoring to destroy their system. He shows them the standard to begin with, then tells them they aren't there. He has a very significant way of doing it. All through Matthew 5:21-48, He compares their system with God's truth. He uses a little code, which is this, "You have heard it said," that's their system, "But I say to you," and that's God's. He says, "Your's is here, God's is up here. You think it's enough not to kill, God says don't even get angry. You think it's enough not to commit adultery, God says you shouldn't even think it in your heart. You think it's enough to do the paperwork when you get a divorce, God says you shouldn't even get a divorce, except for fornication. You think it's enough that you put an oath behind your word, God says everything you say should be true, so you don't even need an oath."

Now, in our verse, He says, "You think that it's enough to give equal vengeance, God says you shouldn't be giving vengeance at all." Verse 43 says, "You think it's enough to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. God says to love your enemy." You see? The whole point is that their system was sub-standard. On the basis of a system that only deals with externals, with the outside and never with the heart attitude of anger, or the heart attitude of hatred, or the heart attitude of adultery, or the heart attitude of hatred, or the heart attitude of truthfulness and love and forgiveness, that kind of a system is inadequate. Basically, the Sermon on the Mount is a sermon on sin. It is to show us we're sinners.

It isn't only the Jews gathered at the feet of Jesus on the hillside of Galilee who got the message; we get it today too. We who pride ourselves on the fact we've never killed anyone, but we have been angry and hated. We who pride ourselves on the fact that we haven't committed adultery, and yet the thought has been in our minds. We who pride ourselves on the fact that we keep our word when we make an oath, and yet there are times when we've shaded the truth and lied. We who pride ourselves on the fact that we are very just and fair, and yet we have been vengeful. We who pride ourselves on the fact that we have such love, and yet our enemies so very often don't fall within the purview of that love.

What Jesus is trying to do is destroy their confidence in themselves and force them to the fact that they desperately need a righteousness they can't attain, therefore they are in need of a Savior. He can't talk about the Savior element until He causes their system to be destroyed and leaves them desperate, grasping, hungering, thirsting for a righteousness they cannot attain.

We come to the fifth of His illustrations, in verse 38, that show their system to be sub-standard. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go

one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

At first reading, it sounds like Jesus wants to make us all into sanctimonious doormats. You've got to be kidding! Turn the other cheek? If he sues for my shirt, I have to give him my coat? If he wants me to go a mile, I have to go two? Anyone who asks me or wants to borrow, I have to give it or lend it? I've got my rights!

You know, our old nature naturally retaliates. The other day, I had occasion to play golf, because a dear man who wanted to express his love gave me a set of golf clubs. He makes golf clubs, and made me a beautiful set with the sign of the fish. I thought, "This is terrific! Ten strokes off my game! These are sanctified golf clubs." So I thought I had it made; I went out there and took out the beautiful five-iron with the sign of the fish and said, "Alright, Lord, it's Your club; do something with it." I swung that thing and hit a long shot. I have a tendency to hook the ball a little bit, and I hooked the shot into a guy's back yard. It wouldn't have been so bad, except he was out there. I heard a bellowing voice say, "Nice shot!" and then an epithet that I will not repeat.

So I walked down, and felt a little guilty. I hoped I hadn't hit him while he was lying in his pool, or that the ball hadn't gone through his patio window, or something awful like that. As it turned out, there is a little slope in his yard, and it just hit the corner of his yard down by the fence. It was just down in the dirt area; he hadn't even done anything to landscape that. It had hit the hill and rolled down, but he came down the hill and got the ball, and went back up the hill. I said, "Perhaps I could have my ball back. Thank you." He said, "I play golf too, buddy," and put the ball in his pocket.

If I hadn't been preaching this sermon-- you see, I was tremendously pressed at that point. I had asked the Lord for some way to illustrate this message, and I thought, "If he wants a golf ball, I'll hit him eight more." That was my first reaction, "I'll just tee up, and he can have all of them." Then I began to think about it, and thought that it's kind of a sad thing that someone wants to live life by alienating people. How much lovelier it would be for him to act graciously, to extend love, and to be loved in return. What a sad thought.

Then I thought that what I need to do is find his address and send him a dozen of the same kind of balls because I knew he liked that one so much. But I had to override my natural instinct, which was to tee off in his yard. That is an illustration of what Jesus is saying here. He is saying, "The fact that your heart is prone to retaliation, to get even, is evidence enough that no system of human religion can deal with the heart of the human problem. You need a Savior, a righteousness beyond our own." That's what He's saying, and that's the heart of the matter here.

Let me give you another illustration. I know you think I shouldn't tell stories like that about myself, but I want you to know that I'm like you are. But hopefully, I deal with those things when they come

because Satan will tempt us that way. I want you to meet the Apostle Paul, who had a similar problem. It wasn't in such a recreational activity as golf, but it was in a much more serious case that he confronted himself with the very same temptation for his sinful self to assert itself.

In Acts 22, Paul has been made a prisoner and is being held by the Romans in Jerusalem, but the Romans have no idea why. All they know is that the Jews want him held. Of course, the Jews are very angry with Paul because of his message about Christ. It is a very disconcerting thing to have someone going all over your city preaching that the person you crucified is none other than your Messiah, and that there is a new day, and the dawning of a new era, the church age.

So they are livid about Paul, and they have managed to have him incarcerated. This particular captain of the Roman army, wanting to do his duty rightfully according to Roman justice, knows that he cannot keep a prisoner without a charge. So he seeks to find some kind of indictment against Paul to justify his incarceration.

Acts 22:30, "The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released Paul from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them." So this captain brings Paul down and says, "Look, I can't just hold just guy; there will have to be some kind of charge against him," and he calls the Sanhedrin together. Then we see what happened.

"Then Paul, looking earnestly, beholding the council," and the term 'earnestly beholding' means he looked into their eyes, eyeball to eyeball. This is a familiar bunch to Paul, because this is the Sanhedrin of which, at one time, he was a member. There are no doubts in my mind that Paul knew these people. Some of them had been fellow students of Gamaliel, some of them were fellow Pharisees, some of them were fellow persecutors of the church.

Here was Paul, looking at them eyeball to eyeball with that honest, unconscious look of integrity that lifts its head, looks them in the eye, and says, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." He says, "I don't know anything against myself; I don't have anything to accuse myself about. I can look you in the eye and say there is no charge that can be justly laid to my account. I'm innocent."

That absolutely infuriated Ananias, who was the high priest. By the way, Ananias was a wretched individual. This is a different Ananias than the one Paul had met earlier in his life, and he was a vile man. Ananias had literally stolen the tithes that belonged to the common order of priests to pad his own coffers; Ananias had committed immoralities, assassinations of people who were in his way, he was a vile prostitution of everything representative in the priestly office. If anything came his way in terms of punishment, it was justly deserved.

"Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth." When Paul said what he said about a clear conscience, Ananias said to one of his henchmen 'tupto,' which means 'to give a violent blow of the fist,' he said, "Punch that guy in the mouth." So one of the soldiers no doubt let Paul have it in the mouth. Ananias, as I said, was a vile man, and the system was an evil system, and they had violated Paul's rights; he had done nothing. It was ridiculous, the whole thing.

What was Paul's reaction? Verse 3. "Then Paul said to him, 'God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!'" Now wait a minute, Paul, I think you just lost it. When he said, "God smite you," if you want to put that in the vernacular, he said, "God damn you, you whited wall." A whited wall was simply a representation of hypocrisy. A wall was a big mud pile, that's all; just some bricks and mud, ugly, brown dirt. To make it look good, they would cover it with whitewash. When you called someone a whited wall, as Jesus did in Matthew 23 when He spoke to the same group, you're saying, "You look good on the outside, but inside, you're dirty."

He says, in effect, "God damn you, you hypocrite." That was his flesh; that was his normal response before he came to Christ. That was the instinct of the sin principle, but it wasn't right. It couldn't have been right; the people were shocked in verse 4. They stood by and said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" They said, "What are you doing? You're reviling God's high priest!"

I was amazed to read that they didn't get so excited when Ananias had someone punch him in the mouth even though he hadn't done anything; was it alright for the high priest to slug someone in the mouth, or have one of his henchmen do it, but not alright for the man to retaliate? Double standard. You know what the law, the tradition of the rabbis, said? It's very simple, very straightforward. It said, "He who strikes the cheek of an Israelite strikes, as it were, the glory of God. He strikes the Holy One."

Well, Paul responded by saying this, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest." Maybe he didn't have on his high priest uniform, or maybe he was hidden behind something and Paul hadn't seen him in the crowd that was there. Paul says, "I didn't know that. If I had known he was the high priest, I wouldn't have said that, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people,'" Exodus 22:28 says that. It says that you're not to do that. So Paul says, "I was wrong," and he condemned himself by the Scriptures.

I like the response, don't you? I like that he admitted he was wrong and even brought the Scripture in to condemn himself; he apologized. What's interesting to me is that everything he said was true. That guy was a whited wall, and God would bring judgment on him. This day, except for the grace of God unknown to us, he is in eternal Hell; God did smite him. But that is not the way we are to respond in personal relationships.

Compare to that John 18:22-23, where the Lord Jesus is in a very similar situation before a very similar tribunal. Look at these verses.

"And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, 'Do You answer the high priest like that?' And this guy just punched Jesus in the same way that Paul was punched. What did Jesus say? "Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?'"

What a different spirit. It's completely different. He said, "If I have done evil, and I deserve this, then tell me. But if I have not done evil, why did you do that?" You know what he was doing? He was forcing the man to think of his deeds before he did them. He wasn't thinking of Himself. He was saying, in effect, "You want to be sure that you have reason to do what you do and that it is valid." There is no retaliation.

When Jesus was reviled, Peter said, "When He was reviled, He reviled not again." He never reacted that way; Paul and Jesus are different. Jesus didn't sin, Paul did. What about you and me? How do we react to those kinds of situations? Are we like Jesus? Do we say, "You should think about those things before you do them. If I deserve them, fine. If not, why did you do that?" Or do we lash back?

Let's find out how we are to respond and go back Matthew 5. Last time we learned that there are three elements in these six contrasts that Jesus gives. First of all, the principle of Mosaic law is given in verse 38. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'" It was their traditional teaching, but it did come from the Mosaic law; it is recorded in Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, Deuteronomy 19. That statement is biblical.

Three times in the Old Testament, it says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But keep in mind, this was a stipulation for the law courts, the legal system, not a mandate for personal vengeance in human relationships. It's so important that we understand that. This is not an issue of personal vendetta; it is not to take revenge and personal vindication out of personal action. That's why God designed law courts and judges and rulers, and why He gave us laws like this law, which in ancient times was called *lex talionis*, tit for tat, which simply means equal punishment for the crime. The punishment never exceeds the crime, that's what it's saying. It is to control justice so justice is fair and equal.

This simple law, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," is the foundation principle of all human justice. All human justice is based on the fact that the punishment must never exceed the crime. It also is a law given by God to restrain vengeance, to take vengeance out of human relationships and put it within duly constituted authority so that it can be dealt with properly.

Human relationships and law courts are two distinct categories, and there are two distinct operations within each one. For example, we do not want courts to act as human relationships act; we don't want human relationships to act like courts. So if a person commits a crime, we don't want the court to say, "Oh, I'm so sorry that you did this, and I want to be gracious and merciful. You're forgiven; forget it. Just go out and remember that if you do it again, we'll forgive you again. If you do it again, we'll forgive you again, seventy times seven. We'll just keep forgiving you."

Wait a minute! We would have absolute holocaust if the court acted like a human relationship. We're not looking for mercy in a court, we're looking for justice to preserve society. But nor do we want a human relationship to act like a court. If your wife, for example, does something that offends you, you don't say, "Bend over; you gave me one, now you get one." No, we don't want lex talionis at home. If someone wrongs you, if your neighbor borrows something of yours and breaks it, you don't go over and say, "So what do you want me to break?"

We don't operate relationships like that; we must keep a distinction between the law court and the area of human relationships. In the law court, justice operates on an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth basis. In human relationships, love and forgiveness operate. In one, you're dealing with crime, and in the other, you're dealing with a human relationship. Those are kept distinct.

Where the Jews missed the point was that they took lex talionis out of the law courts and put it in their personal lives, so this was the way they operated in their relationships - with vendettas, vindications, revenges, and vengeance. That's not the way God intended it.

We saw in our last study, first of all, the principle of Mosaic law and then the perversion of Jewish tradition. They had taken this and turned it into a cherished spirit of vengeance, an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. "You can't do that to me; you can't step on my rights. You can't take my rights away, or I'll react back to you." That was their mentality.

Let's see how Jesus approaches it in verse 38 with a new instruction, a new principle. "But I tell you not to resist evil." That verse has been so misinterpreted. People think it is a reason for absolute pacifism, that we should say, "Go ahead, walk all over me. Abuse me, hit me, steal all I own. Go ahead, sin, we don't care. We're not going to resist evil, we'll just realize that evil is evil is evil, and it will do its thing."

No, that isn't what He's saying. People who take that approach really miss the whole point; the Bible talks about resisting some evil. For example, other Scriptures like James 4:7 say, "Resist the devil." I Peter 5:9 says, "Resist the devil." We must resist evil when it comes in a Satanic form. I don't say, "Here comes the Devil again. Oh well, Devil, go ahead. Whatever." No! Resist the devil; resist evil.

When Peter sinned in Galatians 2, Paul didn't say, "There goes Peter, poor fellow. Sin has him." Paul said, "Peter, you're out of line, cut it out," and withstood him to the face. In I Corinthians 5, it says if you find someone in your congregation who is committing fornication, put them out of the church. In I Timothy 5, if you find an elder who is sinning, rebuke him before everyone so all will know he's a sinner, and put him out if he doesn't respond. In Matthew 18, it says if someone sins, go to him about his sin. If he doesn't hear you, take two or three witnesses; if he doesn't hear them, tell it to the church. If he still doesn't hear, put him out of the church.

We are to deal with sin personally, in relationships, in the church, and we are to resist crime. The powers that be are ordained of God, Romans 13 says, and the government is given to us to protect the good and punish the evil. If we don't uphold that, then we don't uphold a God-given institution. If we don't deal with the government properly, if we don't uphold the standards of the government, then we're denying a God-ordained institution. If I see a crime, I should report it to the police. If I know where a criminal is, I must tell the police, not aid and abet crime within a society, because government and the agents of government are ministers of God who bear not the sword in vain, but serve the Lord.

So we do resist evil in a government by our laws, in a church by our purity, in a relationship by confronting people. I think that we have to remember that Jesus resisted evil; in John 2, He made a whip and cleaned the temple. In Mark 11, He did it again. He didn't just become a doormat for everyone. I think, too, that there is a God-given sense of self preservation. If someone comes to do something to me, it is very normal for me to protect myself and my family, my interests and people that I love. Even Proverbs 22:3 says, "A prudent man foresees the evil and hides himself."

It is just obvious that there is going to be self-preservation. That isn't trying to make us into people who lie flat and let everything happen. So what does He mean? "Resist not evil." Understand it from this standpoint: 'resist' means 'to set against,' anthistemi. The evil here is taponeros. Apparently, it has to do with one who opposes you, or one who wrongs you. What He's saying is, "Don't set yourself against one who wrongs you."

In other words, don't start a feud, or a vengeance thing. Don't get some revenge going, that's all He's saying. He's not talking about categorical evil and letting it overrun your life; He's saying, "The one who wrongs you is not to be resisted or opposed." Don't fight someone who violates your rights.

This isn't anything that is isolated to the Sermon on the Mount. This is a general principle in Scripture. Look at Romans 12:17. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Don't repay evil for evil. If someone does something to you, don't do back to them. Just do this, "Live as much as is possible peaceably with all men." Be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath." Where is the place of wrath and vengeance? Where do I put it? It's right here, "It is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." You just take it

and give it to the Lord; don't be vengeful. Give it to Him.

So what do you do with your enemy? If he's hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him a drink. What does that mean? "In so doing, you'll heap coals of fire on his head." What does that mean? It's like the little Irish lady who had a drunken husband. She went to the pastor and said, "I've given up; I've done everything to correct his life. I have chased him around with a frying pan," and she went on. He said, "Oh my dear lady, have you thought about heaping coals of fire on his head?" She said, "My dear pastor, I've thought of some awful things, but never that!"

She didn't get the point; 'heaping coals of fire' is simply turning back hate with love that brings shame. It's very embarrassing, you see; people get lit up bright red when you return their hate with love. That's what He's saying. Overcome evil with good. That's a tremendous truth.

Jesus picks out four little cameo illustrations from life, and I want you to see these, they're really insightful. He picks out four basic human rights: dignity, security, liberty, and property. By the way, if we had time, we'd go into the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees those things to us. We have the right to dignity, to security, to liberty, and to own property. Those are four basic human rights.

Let's look at the first one, dignity. We say in our society, "I have the right to be honored as a human being. I should be dignified, respected, treated with kindness. I am a person made in the image of God and I should be dealt with accordingly." We hear people say that today; "I'm a human being. I won't be treated like that. I have my rights, I have dignity. You can't demean me or dishonor me. I'm a human being."

That's right. You are made in the image of God and you do have a right to some dignity, but you know what? You're not always going to get it! Sometimes you'll be treated like some kind of animal or some kind of worm or something. People are going to treat you in a terrible way. They may treat you that way in a gas station line, or in a restaurant, or your family might treat you that way. Sometimes the people closest to you treat you badly and you say, "What did I do to deserve this? Don't they realize that I'm made in the image of God? I have some rights to dignity. I shouldn't be so demeaned and dishonored."

What does Jesus say about that? Verse 39. "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." This is so pregnant with meaning. The Jews said that the most demeaning, contemptuous act was to slap someone in the face. To have a fight was to treat someone as an equal, but to just slap them was demeaning. The Jews said that the most demeaning, doubly-contemptuous, arrogant act of a man is to slap you with the back of his hand. Epitetus, a Roman slave, wrote, "A slave would rather be thrashed with a whip than slapped with the back of his master's hand." It was just demeaning.

It's most interesting to look at verse 39, "Whosoever smites you on the right cheek," why did he use that? Because a right hand will always smack someone on the right cheek, if it is the back of the hand. The right cheek being slapped would mean he was being hit like that, granted that most people are right-handed. In other words, when your dignity is taken away, when you are disdained, when you are dishonored, when you are demeaned, when you are arrogantly humiliated, let them do it again before you ever retaliate. That's what it means.

It doesn't mean just turn the other cheek. If that's all it meant, then just wait for two slaps, then grind them to a pulp. That's not the idea. You see, it's the non-retaliating, non-vengeful, forgiving, loving spirit, and you don't have enough cheeks to carry on the illustration. The point He's making is this: when you are demeaned, dishonored, and your dignity is tread upon, don't retaliate. Let it happen again.

People always say, "In John 18, that soldier smacked Jesus on the cheek and He didn't turn the other one." They miss the point; you know what He said? "If I've done evil, tell me what it is. If I haven't, why did you do that?" He turned His cheek plenty of times, because from then on, they just plucked it.

Isaiah 50:6 says, "I gave myself to the smiters and to those that plucked My beard. I gave Myself to those who spit all over Me." Don't tell me He didn't turn the other cheek; they spit all over Him, rammed a crown of thorns on His head, pulled His beard out, mocked Him, beat Him, whipped Him. That's His attitude, and then He comes to the Cross and hangs there. While all of His organs are being suffocated, He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

What Jesus is saying is that when someone treats you in a way that is less than you deserve, when someone takes the right to dignity that you have, don't retaliate. Be slapped again before you would ever think to retaliate. Take as much as they want to give, but don't retaliate.

If you're worried about dignity, beloved, someday you're going to be a son of God in the image of Jesus Christ and you'll stay that way forever. God's going to pour out all the goodness of His grace on you forever and ever, so if you're worried about your dignity, just hang on; you'll get it. Don't fight for it here, because if you do, you disavow that you are a son of God and you are related to Jesus Christ because you won't be acting in a way consistent with Them.

The second illustration is very graphic, and it is in regard to our security. Spurgeon said, "Sometimes we have to be the anvil while bad men are the hammers." That's true; sometimes, people will take advantage of us. Verse 40, "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." You say, "Wait a minute! If someone tries to sue me, I'm going to get him!" No, Jesus says, "Let him sue you, and then give to him." What is He saying here?

I believe the idea here is not to just hang around when people sue you. If people found out that Christians believe this wrongly, they'd start suing us all over the place and take everything we have. We'd say, "Well, take it. If you like my house, here's my car. Take anything." That isn't the idea; the idea is that there is apparently some justification for this person's suit. He is suing you for your coat.

Now 'coat' in the Greek means your tunic, the undergarment, the normal cloak that was worn on the inside. It was like a shirt, only it was full-length; they didn't wear trousers as men do today. Women and men wore a long undergarment. Maybe a poor man would only have three or four of those, some people only had one.

What the idea is here is that you've done something and you're being sued in court. There is a place for that; the courts have to decide certain disputes. So what happens is that you don't have anything to pay except that thing that you're wearing. I mean, you're down to nothing. He's going to get your proverbial shirt. When he gets your shirt, just to show how magnanimous your heart is, and just to show how sorry you are that you ever did anything to cause him trouble, give him your coat too.

To a Jew, this would be absolutely devastating. They would immediately jump out of their seats and say, "Wait a minute! We know what the Bible says in Exodus 22:26-27. The Jewish law allows an outside tunic," which is the word for the cloak, "To be given only as a pledge, but it had to be returned by nightfall," because it was the blanket they slept on, "And you have a right to security! You can't strip me naked and leave me to the elements." And don't forget it can get cold in Jerusalem, it's a mile high.

You say, "I'm supposed to give my last security? This is all I have in the world, my cloak." They would wear it in the day to keep them warm, and they would cuddle in it at night for warmth; it was their blanket and their coat. That's why Exodus 22 says you can take anything a man has but his coat, and then only as a pledge, and you must give it back at night.

But Jesus is saying, "If someone has come to court and you have to give him your shirt, don't begrudge him. Don't be angry, bitter, retaliatory. Show him you're really sorry that it ever happened, and that you're so magnanimous, all you have left to keep you warm, your last little bit of security, you're willing to give him."

That will shock him; that will show him the love of Christ. That will show him what verse 44 means, to love your enemies and bless those that curse you and do good to them that hate you and pray for them that spitefully use you. If someone has the nerve and gall to sue you and take everything you've got, and maybe he has some reason for it, then just to show how your heart is right toward him, give him more than he even asks for.

People can't handle that. They don't know how to handle that kind of thing. You'll show them verse 45, "That you are the sons of your Father." Let me add another side to this. Don't be in a hurry to sue everyone. In the first place, I Corinthians 6 says you have no right to sue another believer at all.

I had a news reporter say to me recently, "I met this certain man who is a minister over in this area, on the radio and television, and he is without a doubt the most litigious man I've ever met," and that means prone to litigation. She said, "I've never met a man anywhere who was so in a hurry to sue everyone for everything he could get." What kind of a testimony is that? "I've got my rights; I'm going to sue."

It's better to be defrauded, better to be sure that you're the son of your Father and absolutely forgiven, says the Apostle Paul. The assumption here is that the Christian is only involved in a suit as the defendant, and that there's a reason why he's being sued, and he's supposed to give his shirt. The assumption here isn't that you're going to sue someone. There may be times when the court will have to make a judgment in certain things, I understand that, but our heart attitude should not be one that seeks to get everything that we can get out of everyone.

There is a third area. Not only dignity, security, but also liberty. We have a right to freedom, to be free. God has made us independent; we all have our own brains, feet, hands, eyes, and ears. We can go and do and say; we have liberty. God has given us that. We have the right to speak, to hear, to see, to move about, to accomplish things. God has even made us individual and unique so that no two of us are alike. We are like snowflakes. We have an amazing liberty to be free and God intended that, so that we could express all that we are in His creation. But it's going to be so in the world that people will step on your freedom.

A lot of times in my life, I say, "Oh, boy." Maybe I'll have some time with my wife, Patricia, and then something will come into my life. Something happens, this happens, I have to go here, go there, and I say, "Oh, man, am I going to give up my whole life for everyone else? I have my rights; I need liberty." Jesus speaks to that in verse 41, "Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two."

This is interesting. We think that in America, we invented the pony express, but we didn't. We did not invent the pony express; the Persians did. It's another idea we stole. The Persians had a great idea. They marked off their whole country and had a very sophisticated postal system. They had little weigh stations one day's journey apart all over Persia, and it was a big empire in those days. Men would ride horseback basically from dawn until sunset, on day's journey, then they'd stop. There would be fresh horses and provisions for them, and they'd go the next leg, and the next leg.

During the time that was developing, the term angaros came to be used. An angaros was the courier, the Persian courier moving along that kind of path. The Romans picked up the term, and they used it to refer to couriers as well. What was interesting was that, in the Persian system, if something happened to the guy carrying the mail - if he was injured, or ill, or something - he could conscript a

citizen along the wayside and force him onto the horse to finish the day's journey. So the angaros became the conscripted courier, and by the time the Greek word appears in the New Testament, it has to do with someone conscripted by an official for some public duty.

A classic illustration is when Jesus was taking His cross to Golgotha to be crucified, He got to the point where He could no longer carry it. So the Romans find a man, Simon of Cyrene, and solicit him to carry the cross. He became an angaros; he was compelled to do that by the government.

That would be interesting if our society was that way, wouldn't it? Imagine you were driving down the road to a very important meeting, and all of a sudden a policeman pulled you over and said, "I don't know what your plans are, but I have this little package for you to take to Sacramento today." You'd say, "What? Sacramento? This is a gas shortage. I have things to do, I can't do that!" But he would say, "Yes, sir, you'll be going to Sacramento immediately." That's the way it was in Persia. I don't suppose that people walked on those postal routes very often.

That's the way it was in Roman times; they had to face the fact that they conscripted, as Simon was. But there was apparently a little rule that they had, at least in Jesus' time, and that was this, which apparently happened quite often: when a Roman soldier asked a citizen to carry his pack, he could never ask any one citizen to carry it more than one mile or the equivalent. So what Jesus is saying is, "When someone infringes on your liberty, and says, 'Will you carry my pack one mile?' and he happens to be a hated Roman and you're a Jew, and he happens to be going somewhere you couldn't care less about, the opposite direction for you, and you're literally carrying the weapons of warfare against your people, and this is your avowed enemy and he asks you to go one mile, go two." This is what Jesus is saying.

You say, "That's hard to do." Right, but that's the spirit of your Father in Heaven. If God only went the first mile with us, we'd be in real trouble. He's carried our burden far beyond that. Don't be concerned with your liberty any more than you're concerned with your security or dignity. God will give you the freedom of the sons of God, the security of His home in Heaven forever, the dignity of the image of Jesus Christ. Don't chase the things here that destroy the testimony that God wants you to be.

The final illustration is property. The last thing we hang on to is what we own, right? Someone said to me yesterday, "I've got everything I own paid for. Isn't that great?" I said, "Now, if someone wants it, you can give it and you won't have any bills." What? If someone says, "I need a car. Can I borrow your car?" What happens? You have a conversation with your wife that goes like this: "He wants to borrow the car." The response is, "Oh, no. We just polished the car. Those kids of his, with the mud all over their feet, they'll get their sticky hands everywhere. I've seen that guy hit the curb a dozen times," and you go through that whole deal.

We're possessive about things, about property. What does Jesus say? "Give to him who asks you." You say, "There have to be more adjectives in that verse. What do you mean, give to him that asks?" Right. If someone asks, and I think it implies a real need, I don't think you should help beggars along because you'll just make beggars out of them.

Little kids in Israel and other parts of the world who beg have learned they can make a better living begging than they can working because they play on the sympathy of people. So you should be aware of that. But when someone has a need and they ask, you ought to give it to them, without even asking what for. It's your heart; God is saying, "This is the kind of heart you ought to have." If you don't see this in you, it is a great evidence that your system of religion isn't cutting it.

"Give to him that asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." If someone wants to borrow what you have, let him have it. You have here the principle of self-sacrificing generosity. God help us to be generous. Deuteronomy 15:7 says, "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs." When you give to him, give him all that he needs, not tokenism. Don't try to buy off your conscience; be generous.

Jesus isn't prohibiting justice; justice belongs in the courts. But in human relationships, He wants us to be forgiving and loving. If our rights are stolen, the right of dignity, or security, or liberty, or property, we don't retaliate. We just commit it all to the Lord and act in love.

The key to this is what George Mueller talked about when he said, "There was a day when I died, utterly died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

That's really the key. It's a biblical spirit, isn't it? It's a spirit of Abraham, who rushed to rescue Lot who had so cheated him. It's the spirit of Joseph, who generously forgave his brothers and tearfully loved them, brothers who had sold him to slavery. It's the spirit of David who, after being chased all over by an angry, evil Saul, to slaughter him, spared his life on two occasions. It's the spirit of Stephen, who, lying crushed beneath the bloody stones, asks that the sin of stoning him not be laid to the charge of those who did it. It is the spirit of Paul, who, after his conversion, writes of love and forgiveness in Romans and Corinthians. It's the spirit of Jesus, who said, "Father, forgive them."

Antony, according to Roman history, wanted Cicero dead because he was a political enemy. So he said to his men, "Go and kill Cicero. I want his head." Cicero was the golden-mouthed orator, who had such power because of his great ability to speak. Off went the soldiers, and they returned not

long after with the head of Cicero. With glee, Antony took the head to his wife, Fulvia, and said, "Look, we have at last the head of our enemy." The biographers say that she took the head and placed it in her lap, and stared into its face and laughed. She pulled the tongue out, put a dagger through the tongue, turned it and had it thus nailed to the door of the very place where he had so many times given great speeches.

Oh, the ugliness of revenge. We can't imagine anyone doing that, and yet the smallest taint of that within our hearts is the same ugliness that God sees in a deed that heinous. It should be said of us, as Tennyson said of Archbishop Cranmer, "To do him wrong was to beget a kindness from him, for his heart was rich. Of such fine mold that if you sewed therein the seed of hate, it always blossomed love." Let's pray together.

Father, instead of fighting for our rights, may we live for what is right before you. The spirit of humility, gentleness, forgiveness, and love to those who are set against us, that we may truly be the sons of our Father. That people may see in us the wondrous, forgiving love of Jesus Christ.

It grieves our hearts to know that so often we preach a God of forgiveness, a Christ of forgiveness, and then live unforgiving lives which must literally destroy the validity of our testimony. May we, as Paul said to Titus, adorn the doctrine of God. May our living match our message, that people may see in us that forgiving Christ, that forgiving God, as we, even though the rights of dignity, security, liberty, and property be taken away, may we never retaliate with less than love. Bring to them a certain amount of shame that they may know they are missing a dimension of life that we possess, and in so knowing, seek the only One who can give it, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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