

“Patiently Bear the Injustices of Others”
(Matthew 5:38-42)

Introduction: Last week, when we were looking at this passage, I paused at what Jesus said in verse 38 -- “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” --, for several reasons. First, I wanted you to understand that Jesus was not contradicting His Father, or setting aside His holy Law. So many churches today teach that Jesus, when He came, set aside the whole Law, so that it no longer applies to the Christian, or to anyone else. But as we have seen, this is just not the case, and to believe or teach that it has, is very dangerous. Secondly, I wanted you to understand what God’s Law does teach us about justice. There is so little justice in our society today, and I fear that it is in danger of disappearing altogether. And the more that it fades, the more it exposes us, as a nation, to the wrath of God. I am also afraid that as a church, we might forget what justice is. But I want us to see that we can’t afford to do this, for the Lord whom we love, the God whom we serve, delights in justice. The psalmist writes, “For the word of the Lord is upright; and all His work is *done* in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord (Ps. 33:4-5). Justice and righteousness is what pleases Him. We must remember that even though our society may neglect the justice of God, we may not. He still expects us to be just, even if no one else in the world is. And brethren, I wanted us to understand these things for the sake of Christ’s church. For the sake of our brethren in this nation and for the sake of our children, we should be praying that the Lord would restore true justice to our nation. This restoration of justice and the preaching and witnessing of the Gospel are the only things that I know which will stall God’s judgment, and may, with His blessing, restore this nation.

But the third reason I paused at this verse was so that you might have a better understanding of what Jesus is commanding us to do in this passage. He is not teaching us that justice is no longer important, rather He is teaching us that

As individual Christians, we must never take justice into our own hands. Instead, we should always show patience and love, even toward those who seek to do us wrong.

I. First, Jesus says, we should never retaliate, or seek revenge, when someone wrongs us in some way.

- A. Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”
 - 1. It is very common these days for people to want to fight back and hurt others when they have hurt them.
 - a. Perhaps you’ve heard the slogan, “Don’t get mad, get even.” This is what most people do today when they are offended by others. But why is it that they want to get even? Isn’t it because they are angry? And doesn’t this anger come from the sin in their hearts?
 - b. If someone hits them, they hit back. If someone slanders them, they retaliate

with slander.

- c. Even in the church this is all too common.
 - (i) In the days Jesus lived, the teachers of the Law were telling the people that they should do to others, what they do to them. If someone hurt them, they could hurt them back, if someone hit them in the mouth and knocked out one of their teeth, they could knock out one of theirs. “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” was what they were taught they could exact.
 - (ii) Today, things haven’t really changed very much. This misunderstanding still exists in the church. The church doesn’t seem to understand that they are to be different than the world. *They don’t seem to understand that if it feels right, it still might not be right.* In just about every age, the church has always been only about one generation behind the culture in its ethics, in the things that it will or will not allow. And in every age of the church, there are so very few who will take Jesus seriously enough actually to do what He commands, especially when it comes to loving one another.
 - (iii) It’s very sad. The church is supposed to be a body of people united in the bond of love and fellowship. We are supposed to demonstrate to the world that Jesus lives *by our love for one another*. But the problem is that very few in the church seem to have the kind of supernatural love which God says will be in the heart of every true Christian. We simply aren’t loving one another the way Christ told us we should. What we mainly do is complain and backbite because we are not living up to each other’s expectations. At best, most Christians only tolerate each other.
 - (iv) But brethren, these things ought not to be so. Jesus calls us to love one another, not just to tolerate each other. We are to love one another in a supernatural way. God wants us to reflect His holy character. He wants us to be like His Son, Jesus Christ. This is what He predestined us to in the first place.
 - (v) And so we need to pray that the Lord would forgive our sins and work that work of grace in our souls. And we need to pray that He would open our hearts to receive His Word which is able to instruct us as to how we can love as Christ loved.

2. Jesus tells us this morning one of the ways in which we can do this. He says that if someone does something wrong to us, if he is a brother or sister in the Lord, or especially if he is an evil man, that we must not do anything wrong to him in return.
 - a. He says if someone slaps you on the right cheek, you are to turn to him the other cheek as well.
 - b. Now you’ve heard the phrase before, “Turn the other cheek.” Hopefully it’s something that your parents taught you when you were growing up.
 - c. But what does it mean?
 - (i) First, you need to understand that Jesus does not mean this literally. If someone hits you on the right cheek, you should not offer him the left. This would be asking the man who sinned against you to do so again. You never want to encourage anyone to do what is wrong.

- (ii) Jesus is speaking figuratively. What He means is that if someone does something wrong to you, don't strike back at him. Don't seek your own revenge. Instead, He says, brace yourself for another injury, *if that is what he is going to do*.
- (iii) Secondly, you need to understand that Jesus is not telling us that we do not have the right to defend ourselves or our families or friends. Some believe that the Lord calls us here to be punching bags for wicked men. But this is not the case. We may defend ourselves, within the bounds of God's Law, and we may defend others. But our defense must be righteous. We must never fight back out of hatred or out of a desire for revenge.
- (iv) We must not forget that there is One who will avenge all the injuries which we have received unjustly, and who will right all the wrongs which men have done to us. Paul writes, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).
- (v) And so if you have been wronged in some way, slandered, cheated or injured by anyone, even if it was in the church, you may safely leave your case with God. He will repay those who have injured you unjustly. He may do it through the civil magistrate to whom He has given the right to execute justice. Or He may repay in some other way, in this life, or in the life to come.
- (vi) Calvin writes, "The amount of the whole admonition is, that believers should learn to forget the wrongs that have been done them,—that they should not, when injured, break out into hatred or ill-will, or wish to commit an injury on their part,—but that, the more the obstinacy and rage of wicked men [is] excited and inflamed, they should be the more fully disposed to exercise patience" (*Harmony Sage* 1:253).
- (vii) Paul reminds us that Christian love, "Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). God allows these things to happen so that we might learn the godly virtue of patience.

B. Secondly, Jesus tells us that this law of non-retaliation also applies to law-suits. He says in verse 40, "And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also."

1. This principle is so appropriate for today.
 - a. People are suing at the drop of a hat, for physical injuries, stress injuries, emotional-related injuries, almost any kind of injury you can imagine.
 - b. Now not all of these lawsuits are unjust. Some of them are. When a person has been injured by another, as I mentioned last week, justice requires the one who injured him to make restitution, to make sure that he is restored to health, and that his lost wages are provided for him.
 - c. But many sue today because they're greedy. People want the pleasures of the world, not the pleasures of heaven. They want the things that Moses gave up when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, not the things he gained. If they realized for one moment how precious the things of heaven

really are, if they for one moment understood the joys of a world full of love, they would see how worthless the things they seek after really are, and they wouldn't be so concerned about whether or not they had them.

2. Christians do understand these things, and so we are to live them.
 - a. To do what is right in the eyes of our Lord Jesus, to be holy and to live godly because we love Him, is far more precious than what we might gain or lose in this world.
 - b. We need to remember that we are the stewards of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever we have, or ever will have, belongs to Him. Sometimes He gives us just what we need to live on, and other times He gives us more so that we can share. And still other times, He allows someone to come and take some of it away, so that He can teach us patience and love. When this happens, Jesus says here, we need to bear up under it, again without retaliation.
 - c. Our Lord says that if anyone wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat also. The shirt was the inner garment, or the less valuable piece of clothing, which the Israelite wore. The coat, or cloak, was the outer, or more valuable garment. What Jesus is saying is that if a wicked man wants to sue you unjustly for something of little value, you must bear up under it patiently. And if he takes you to court again, this time to take something more valuable, you must bear this patiently as well. The same principle applies here as with turning the other cheek.
 - d. Now again, understand what Jesus is not saying. He is not saying that you must allow anyone to take anything away from you anytime that they please. This would encourage men to sin, rather than to do what is right.
 - e. But what He is saying is if a man takes you to court, and sues you, and he wins in an unjust decision, you must endure it. And you must prepare for the second blow, if he takes you to court again, to take away that which is more valuable to you. You must be willing again to turn the other cheek, without taking vengeance into your own hands.
 - f. But again understand that Jesus is not saying that you cannot defend yourself. What He is saying is if you make a just defense and the decision of the judge is against you and in favor of your opponent, then you must meekly surrender your property, without seeking revenge.
 - g. Nor do I believe that the Lord here is forbidding us to sue someone else. If we can take someone to court in a spirit of fairness and meekness, seeking only for what is good and right, or to clear our own name, then I believe that the Lord will allow us to. But if we do so in a vindictive or revengeful spirit, then we are sinning.
 - h. Let me just note briefly that Paul gives special instructions for a dispute between two believers. He says first that they should be ashamed if they ever wrongs their brother. But if they do, then the case should be brought before the church, and not before unbelievers. However, in some cases, the best thing to do is simply to forget the offense. I believe that this would depend on the nature of the crime. But in any case, we should always stand ready to forgive one another.

II. Now very briefly, Jesus gives us two more examples here. These also deal with the principle of non-retaliation.

- A. Jesus says, “And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.”
1. This has to do with the practice of the Romans and some Eastern nations.
 - a. When they had messages that needed to be delivered, a citizen might be called upon not only to provide horses and carriages to help the messenger, but they might also be called upon to help personally, even if it meant that they would be greatly inconvenienced.
 - b. Jesus is saying here that they should not only be ready to submit to their unreasonable demands, but also be ready to give more. Rather than submit with an angry spirit to going one mile, be ready to go two, if by so doing you can avoid further trouble through a spirit of meekness.
 2. For the Christian, this means again that we are to give what is asked of us, when it is required by lawful authority and not be afraid to go the extra mile.
 - a. If what we are asked to do does not violate any principle of Scripture, we should be willing to do it.
 - b. This also assumes that we don’t sacrifice anything else which is more important by doing what is asked.
 - c. For example, if the state calls us to serve on jury duty, we should serve without becoming angry. And if one day should turn into a week, we should do it without a vindictive spirit. But if they require a year long service, at the possible loss of your employment and house, you should refuse.
- B. Lastly, Jesus says, “Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”
1. Jesus tells us here that He wants us to have a generous spirit in our giving.
 - a. He wants us to give to those who ask. And to lend to those who want to borrow. He also doesn’t place any limit on how many we help either.
 - b. And He wants us to do so without expecting anything in return. He says in Luke 6:35 that we should even give to our enemies. He says, “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.” Some people give only to receive back their money with interest, some, expecting only their money back. But Christ says to give without expecting anything in return.
 2. But He expects us to give wisely, and within reason.
 - a. If you gave to everyone who asked you for something at all times, you would have so many people coming to your door, that you could not help them all. You would also be helping people who really may not even need your help.
 - b. Also, if you gave to everyone who asked of you, you would soon run out of money. Then you couldn’t even support your own family.
 - c. There must therefore be a limit to what you give. You cannot give everything you have away. But you should be able to give something. I

think the point of what Jesus says is that we should be ready to share what God has given to us with those who are truly in need, within our means, and sometimes, as Paul reminds us, beyond our means, or until it hurts (2 Cor. 8:3).

- d. And don't forget, the Lord also promises that He will reward us for our giving. Paul writes, "Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). He will reward us here, and He will graciously reward us forever in heaven.
- e. People of God, may these words of our Lord Jesus be an encouragement to each of us this morning to be of a meek and kind disposition. May they encourage us to bear up under the injustices which we suffer from those in the world and from one another. And may they also remind us of the generosity which He calls us too, we who have received His infinite riches in Christ Jesus. But most of all may they show us how much we need Christ Jesus and His grace to fulfill these commands. We all fall short in these areas. We all fall short in every area of our duty. But God stands ready to forgive us when we come to Him through Christ, and He stands ready to strengthen us and to give us the help we need to grow in these areas. Let us come to Him then in prayer, and seek for His mercies which are so full and free in Christ.