

When Love Seems Impossible

March 12, 2006

Matthew 5:38-48

"[These verses] bring us to the highest point of the Sermon on the Mount, for which it is both most admired and most resented.... Nowhere is the challenge of the Sermon greater.... Nowhere is our need of the power of the Holy Spirit (whose first fruit is love) more compelling." John Stott

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? The Sermon on the Mount paints a portrait of such a follower. In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus makes six radical statements about these followers. Today we will look at the last two of these "counter-cultural" statements.

Statement # 4: Do Not Resist an Evil Person

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Matthew 5:38-42

What is Jesus refuting? To answer this, we need some historical background:

"And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so shall it be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Leviticus 24:19-20

Lex talionis = the law of exact retribution

1. Why was it given?
2. To whom was it given?

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.... For he (the one in authority) is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." Romans 13:1, 4

Jesus gives us a new way of responding to evil: Should I be passive or active?

Statement # 5: Love Your Enemies

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those you persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:43-45

Again we ask, what is Jesus refuting? Not the Old Testament.

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Prov. 25:21-22 (Romans 12:19-21)

Who is my neighbor? Who is my enemy? (Luke 10:29-37)

How can I love my enemy? The Greek word "agape" = love by decision, love through action.

How should we respond when we are wronged?

1. Pray — for yourself and for your offender. (Matthew 5:44, Matt. 22:39-44)
2. Speak and act in love. (Romans 12:20)
3. Forgive your offender. (Luke 17:3-4, Luke 23:34)
4. Leave the results to God. (1 Peter 2:21-23)

The ultimate example: Jesus Himself.