

Study 5

The Love for enemies
JESUS
commanded

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matthew 5:44

We have seen that Christ taught a higher “law” than the Old Covenant Law. Christ’s Law is the *Law of Love*. Many religious teachers had taught that people should love, but the most outstanding characteristic of Christ’s teaching, which makes His teaching unique, is how He commanded enemies to be loved. Not only did Christ teach this, He lived it.

EYE FOR AN EYE

The Law of Moses (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21) regarding an “*eye for an eye*” was intended to be a warning *not* to hurt someone else. It challenged the Israelites to be considerate of others and to know that if they carelessly hurt someone, they deserved to be hurt in a similar way. But over time, the Pharisees

had interpreted these passages as *a right to take revenge*. That's why Jesus said, "You have heard that it was *said...*"

1. How did Jesus interpret correctly the original Law of Moses in Matthew 5:38-39, and then lift it to a higher standard? Choose the correct answer-
 - a) By teaching that we are not to be door-mats for people to walk over us and we are therefore right to take revenge on those who hurt us.
 - b) By teaching that revenge could only be carried out in His Name after pronouncing the wrath of God upon our enemies.
 - c) By teaching that we should not seek to harm anyone, even if they have deliberately harmed us.

 2. How would a reading of Leviticus 19:18 have showed the Pharisees that even the Law of Moses did not agree with their interpretation of "*an eye for an eye*"?
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Perhaps the first and most natural response we feel when ever someone hurts us, is to hurt them. Very shortly after I became a Christian, in my high school years, I was confronted in the school yard with someone who had heard that I had become a Christian. This person had a reputation as the school bully. He had come to test my new found religion. He did this by mocking my commitment to Christianity, to the supporting jeers of those watching. He then pushed me and drew no response. Then with a clenched fist he punched my face, knocking me to the ground. As I lay on the asphalt looking around at the laughter of my 'friends', I looked up at the little bully who had just struck me. I felt no desire for revenge or even malice toward him. In fact, I was struck by a great sense of pity and

sorrow for this lost soul. What struck me so hard was the thought that in all my school days no one had ever dared to hit me (due to my size and physique I was never a target for bullies) and that if this had happened just days before I probably would have responded by thumping the living daylights out of this kid. But something had changed. I was different. My heart had changed.

3. The Old Covenant seemed to depend upon the written law to make people good. It failed. But it looked forward to the day when the Christ would come. Based on Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:37-41; Ezekiel 36:26, what did the Bible say would happen to those who would accept Christ?

4. Consider what Christ said in Matthew 5:39 and note the list of humiliating acts that Paul lists in 2Corinthians 11:20. What is common to both verses?



For a right-handed person to strike a person on their right-cheek requires that they use the back of their hand. This was incredibly insulting. To publicly slap a person with the back of your hand was to grossly humiliate them. Thus, Christ is saying far more than just “don’t hit back”.

5. What could He have meant when He taught us to “turn the other cheek”?
- a) Even if someone humiliates us as they hurt us, we are not to do the same to them.
 - b) Even though we could hurt someone and justify it with “Well they started it!”, we should not.
 - c) We should relinquish our right to revenge, and demonstrate that we will not be vengeful.
 - d) All of the above.

DO NOT RESIST THE ONE WHO IS EVIL

I was having a coffee with a minister some time ago when he opened up and shared about a deep hurt he had been carrying for nearly all of his life which led him into prolonged battles with depression and nagging thoughts of inferiority. As a teenage Christian in new High School he had been brought up in a home which stressed the need to obey the Bible and be a good witness. Mindful of Christ’s words in Matthew 5:38-39, this person had never retaliated to any aggravation that had come his way. But this was sorely taken advantage of when he began to be bullied and severely physically abused every day of his 7th grade year at High School. I asked him why he didn’t tell his parents or his teachers what had happened. He said that he felt that this would have been a violation of what Christ taught in Matthew 5:38-39. The result was that some forty years later he was still deeply traumatised and somewhat socially dysfunctional.

6. When Jesus said not to resist the one who does evil (Matthew 5:39) did He say that we should not *defend* either ourselves, or others, against injustice?
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If an offence is a crime, or an act of injustice, the Scriptures do not apply the teaching of Christ to *turn the other cheek* to mean that injustice should be encouraged or not dealt with.

7. What does Romans 13:4 teach about God's expectation for those who promote injustice?
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If you are being victimised by another, Scripture forbids us taking matters into our own hands to seek vengeance. Instead, we should cast all our cares onto the Lord (Psalm 43:1; 1Peter 5:7), report any illegal activity to the relevant authorities (Rom. 13:1-4), and work toward defending the oppressed (Psalm 72:4; Prov. 31:9; and perhaps, James 1:27).

Jesus modelled what He taught about not seeking revenge and enduring humiliation.

8. Read the prophecy about Christ in Isaiah 50:6 and record what it predicted about how Christ would respond to His enemies-
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9. Have you ever applied the *principle* of Matthew 5:40? If so, describe-
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In the days that Jesus spoke these words, Roman soldiers frequently forced civilians to carry their gear (their cloak and any other items). This generally would have produced hatred from the Jews towards the Romans. But Christ's teaching about loving your enemies rather than despising them really hit home when He told His Jewish audience to not only cooperate with their Roman oppressors, but to *willingly* cooperate - and then demonstrate that loving willingness by doing more than asked!

10. Select the option that best fits what Christ is saying in Matthew 5:41-
- a) if someone we don't like asks us for a favour we are allowed to refuse them.
 - b) if someone who has been unkind to us asks us to help them we can remind them in Jesus' Name that they were unkind to us and now they would reap what they've have sown and not help them.
 - c) if someone with some authority over us (employer, parent, teacher, police, government) demands something of us we comply with their request to the letter of the law and no more.
 - d) if someone we like asks us to help them we should do all we can to help as long as it doesn't inconvenience us.
 - e) none of the above.
11. Consider Matthew 5:42. Speculate how our society would regard Christians if we all applied that verse-

12. Read Matthew 5:43-47. If you were to apply these verses to your life, how would you have to change from the way you behave now?

It seems that Matthew 5:48 is a statement by Christ about good you have to be to be perfect: *as good as God!* Of course this is impossible for any person to be that perfect. But, at the very least Christ has given all who would follow Him an understanding of what the goal looks like: *to be like God.* May God grant us the heart, the will, and the ability to become all He wants us to be and to completely obey Him in the process.

Amen.