



What about My Rights?

Matthew 5:38-42

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We're going to return to an ongoing series that I have been doing during my months here in the pulpit of GraceLife from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. And I'm thrilled, quite frankly, to be able to come back to this passage and to the particular text that the Lord has for us this morning. Because in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is explaining what spiritual life in His kingdom looks like. He is explaining what a person who is born again – how that person lives out his life.

As I have said many times and I want to take the opportunity to repeat here and to re-establish here, when Jesus Christ preaches this sermon, He is assuming that the person He describes has already repented of their sins; He is assuming that you have been born again; He is assuming that you are pursuing a life of righteousness. And as you study this sermon, as you study the Bible, as you examine the life of Christ, you come to the stark realization that the Christian life is not a life of self-exaltation. The Christian life is not about asserting yourself, it is not about self-promotion.

No, the Christian life, true Christianity – contrary to all of the frauds that abound in our day – true Christianity is about self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation. And when you understand that principle, you realize that the implications of that run throughout every area of your life, every attitude toward your time, your possessions, your money, and toward yourself.

We're going to see that laid out for us with stunning clarity in this passage that is before us this morning – which is Matthew 5:38-42 – remembering that the Christian life is a life of self-denial. Look at verse 38 with me, and I'll read down to verse 42, where Jesus said:

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 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 your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

Now, as Jesus addresses these words, perhaps some of the most famous words in all of the Sermon on the Mount, words that unbelievers have praised and examined and tried to take as an entire philosophy of life – as we come to these words, it is particularly

important to us to remember whom it is that Jesus is speaking to. When He started this sermon in chapter 5, verse 3, He said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In chapter 5, verse 14, He said: “You are the light of the world.” In chapter 5, verse 20, He said: “I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” In chapter 7, verse 21 – a text that at the current rate that we are going to we’ll get to in the year 2012, I don’t know – but in chapter 7, verse 21, He said: “Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

So Jesus is speaking to a subset of the total world population here. He is speaking to those who truly belong to Christ, those who belong to the kingdom of heaven, those who are separate from the world and therefore are a testimony to it, those who truly do the will of the Father as opposed to those who merely give lip service to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He is speaking to true disciples and that’s a very important point here because these words that are laid out before us here in Matthew 5:38-42 are not for an unsaved man. An unsaved man cannot live this way. In fact, to tell an unsaved man to live this way, to suggest that it is possible for an unsaved man to live this way, is nothing short of absolute heresy because it tells a man who belongs to Satan that he can live the holy life of God – that he can imitate the Lord Jesus Christ with his life.

Beloved, let me tell you, without fear of biblical contradiction, that people who are not born again cannot live out the passage that is in front of us here today. But for those of you that are here and name the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, you must live this way. You must live out this kind of self-denying, self-sacrificing life that Jesus describes because it is the very kind of life that Christ Himself lived out when He was here on earth. And as the disciple of the majestic Lord, your life has to line up like His did. This is not optional stuff for the Christian; this is a divine mandate for the way that every day of your life is to be lived out.

Let me just quickly reset the context for you here in this overall passage. And I’m bound and determined to get through the entire passage this morning, so settle in and enjoy.

In speaking to His disciples in this sermon, Jesus, as I’ve already read in 5:20, He told them that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if they wanted to enter the kingdom of heaven. The scribes and Pharisees were the religious leaders, the spiritual elites. And so to tell those first century disciples that their lives needed to exceed in spiritual quality that of the Pharisees seemed to be an impossible task.

But in the verses that followed in this passage that we’ve been studying for a long time, verses 21-48, Jesus shows that the spirituality of the Pharisees was a total sham, it was a false spirituality, it was total hypocrisy, it was something that went against the entirety of what even the Old Testament taught about true spiritual living.

In those verses that followed, and as we looked at in the past, Jesus taught His disciples that they were not only to avoid physical acts of murder and adultery, obvious egregious

sins, but for the true Christian, the true member of the kingdom of heaven, anger and lust were equally sinful. It goes to the desires of the heart, not just the actions of the body. Jesus taught them to regard marriage with respect and commitment. He told them to be truthful in all their words and not try to deceive others with clever semantics as the Pharisees had a practice of doing.

Everything that we have seen, in verses 21-37 so far and throughout the rest of this chapter – beloved, you have got to understand this – everything in this is a penetrating presentation of true spiritual righteousness. Everything in this chapter is absolutely heart-searching to the very core. Jesus takes out a spiritual scalpel and splits open the human heart and exposes it for all that it is, all that it is supposed to be. And if we are at all honest, if we have at all any of the Spirit of God within us, and we examine ourselves in light of this searching spiritual standard, we find that we fall short of the glory of God. We fall short of what Jesus Christ requires here because perfect righteousness is the standard for every moment of our lives.

And the effect of that kind of teaching from the lips of our Lord is to utterly humble us and utterly expose before us our need of a savior, our need of a perfect Savior who can take away our sins and give us a righteousness that is outside of us, the righteousness of Christ Himself. This sermon shows us our need for salvation and at the same time sets forth the standard for, once we are saved, how we are to live and what our heart is to be like. That’s what we’ve been seeing up until this point.

I want to emphasize that because it is important for you to understand that that searching, penetrating searchlight of God’s true righteousness is no different when we come to verses 38-42. God has this monumental spiritual spotlight that is shining in every corner of your life, every corner of your heart, as we come to this passage. Jesus is continuing this searching presentation of righteousness here. And I need to emphasize that because in a casual reading of this passage, you might think that He has suddenly slipped back and is just talking about external physical things: when someone slaps you, when someone sues you, when someone forces you to go a mile, and when someone asks something from you; and you say, “These are just talking about individual acts that I have to respond to now.” No, no, Jesus is searching your heart far more deeply than you could ever imagine when He spoke these words, and we see that when we understand the full context of the passage. Jesus is still teaching us in these words how your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

And in this passage, I’m going to give you a summary point to kind of give you something to digest everything that follows in this message: *Jesus’ main point in this passage is this, speaking to Christians, when others harm or threaten you, the true Christian responds in grace not retaliation.* When others harm or threaten you for some manner of loss, the true Christian responds in grace, not in retaliation, not in outward action, but from first heart impulse.

And as soon as you go and start putting your finger on the button of retaliation – I know that I’m touching every one of you right where you live, because that desire for self

defense, that impulse to retaliate, that impulse to strike back when someone hurts you, is inherent in the very nature of fallen man – Jesus says you can't be like that, you can't be a retaliator, you can't be one that strikes back, and it goes to the very core of your heart with what He is saying here.

Now, just to make sure that we are all talking about the same thing – actually there is only one of us talking here, but to make sure we are all *thinking* about the same thing – when I use the word “retaliate,” I’m talking about *a response to harm that returns evil for evil*. “You hurt me, I’ll hurt you back.” “You ignore me, I’ll give you the silent treatment too.” “Go after what’s mine and I’ll fight you for it.” See, retaliation continues to fight, it heats up the argument, it prolongs the conflict. Jesus condemns all of that in our personal relationships in this passage.

What I need to show forth to you is three basic things from this passage. First of all, to give you an idea of the original law in its God-inspired purity that Jesus describes here in chapter 5, verse 38:

1. The Original Limit on Retaliation

This comes from the Old Testament. Look at verse 38 with me again. There are two things that are going on in this verse. Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

That quotation there that is in probably most of your Bibles in all capital letters, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH,” is a quotation from at least three different Old Testament passages found in Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, and Deuteronomy 19. I won't take the time to turn to all of those passages, but in the Old Testament, and frankly in other ancient cultures even before the time of the Old Testament, this principle of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” was intended to be a judicial matter of resolving disputes.

The principle was designed to be a matter for judges to use in deciding cases that were brought before them, and in the Old Testament, what judges were to use to resolve disputes between Jews – it was a civil matter. And the idea was to lay out this principle that would guide judges as they dispensed justice. The principle was designed to promote justice by giving a ready formula for punishment. It would limit retaliation; it would limit the penalty that was imposed upon the offender – the penalty that was imposed upon him would be limited to the extent of the injury that he had caused to someone else. It is frankly very simple, a genius in its simplicity.

But that need for restraint was very important to avoid an escalation of violence. You know how it goes in our world. Somebody gets hit with the fist and gets a bloody nose. That injured guy turns around and goes after someone with a ball bat and breaks a bone. Well, then the original guy goes back with a gun and commits murder, and the violence continues to escalate. We see it being lived out before us even in the country of Iraq as

this continual escalation of violence goes on and on and on. If everything was governed in public in accordance to God’s law, that wouldn’t happen – that kind of escalation wouldn’t happen. God gave to Israel a law which was designed to restrict the penalty to the severity of the original injury. It was a judicial code – get this – it was a judicial code committed to the state for implementation; it was entrusted to impartial judges with the intent that it would defuse conflict by putting restitution and remedy into the hands of an impartial judge. As a matter of the state policy, it is brilliant and ensures social order if it is followed properly.

But the Pharisees came along in the first century-and-a-half before the time of Christ, and by the time Christ arrived, they had perfected this principle into something that was never intended to do. They had taken this principle and perverted it; they had turned it into something different. That which was to restrain retaliation became in their hands something perverse. Second point:

2. The Pharisees’ Love for Retaliation

We had the original limit on retaliation – it is committed to the state, this principle of “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”; the Pharisees, however, loved retaliation, and they perverted what was originally good.

What Jesus does here in verse 38 is, He says, “You have heard that it was said,” and just like He has done in the prior four illustrations that we looked at in this passage, He is referring to and He is calling to the mind of His hearers the prevailing teaching of the Pharisees that His listeners would have been familiar with. And what the Pharisees had done with this in a very subtle way, in a very insidious way – they had taken a good judicial code intended for the state and turned it into a matter for their private use. Follow me on this: If a Pharisee was personally wronged in a relationship, he would go to this passage, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” and he would use that to justify his desire and execution of his desire for retribution and retaliation. They took what was intended to be a restraint on sin and turned it in to a right for them to demand, “I demand the eye for the eye, I demand the tooth for the tooth. I’m going to take matters in to my own hand with this so-called biblical justification and I’m going to teach him a lesson. He’ll regret having done that.”

Now, as point in fact, the Mosaic Law actually forbade that kind of private vengeance. In Leviticus 19:18 it says:

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

And so on the one hand, the Mosaic Law set up this law for society, for public administration of justice, and on the other hand, it said “You can’t do this; you can’t take the law in to your own hands. In fact you can’t even bear grudges in your heart against your countrymen.” The Pharisees conveniently ignored Leviticus 19; they conveniently

looked passed that and said, “I’m going to take this judicial standard and use it to justify my own revenge.”

And so they had taken a law designed to restrain evil and had turned it in to their personal tool of wickedness, all the while proudly proclaiming that they were the keepers and upholders of the law – totally perverse because their hearts were full of bitterness and vengeance. They were doing the exact opposite of what the law was trying to accomplish. They used this good law to inflame and escalate conflict to their own advantage.

But Jesus – this perfection of righteousness, this perfection of spiritual purity, this omniscient One who sees the hearts of all men, this defender of the law of God – comes along and in this section of the Sermon on the Mount exposes their perversion of it. And in the process – get this because this is personal to you, this is no longer about a first century conflict when the living God brings His word to bear upon your conscience – He exposes to you what the true righteousness of His kingdom requires. This is how Jesus Christ tells you as His disciple to live. That leads us to point number three, where we will spend most of our time here this morning. I will title it this way:

3. The Christian’s Death to Retaliation

Jesus is describing how you must die to that retaliatory spirit, how you must die to vengeance – you must die to grudges, you must die to bitterness and resentment. And God give us grace to take these things to heart. God give us grace to allow the Holy Spirit to search us out and bring us to repentance where that is needed.

Keeping in mind, beloved, that as God brings His word to you as a believer in Christ, He intends your blessing. He intends only good for you as He brings these things to mind and as He deals with these things. And so we need to come with a humble spirit that says, “Lord, teach me, deal with me, and I will repent of anything that You put Your finger on in the next half-hour.” What a blessed place for us to be – in the hands of a loving God who has revealed His truth in His word, and in His word He says, “You must die to vengeance, you must die to retaliation, you must die to your grudges.” So let’s take a look at it.

Jesus here is teaching His disciples what the true moral force of the eye for eye legislation is – the *Lex Talionis* as it is called. He says the true moral force of this – when God is trying to restrain retaliation through public enactments, what you need to do is think and say, “What is it that God is getting at here?” What He is getting at is He wants to get rid of retaliation altogether. With sinful men who can’t live this out, we can’t just appeal to them and say, “Hey, don’t retaliate.” We need the law of society to restrain them from that and to punish evil doers.

What Jesus is doing here is He is taking His disciples in hand and is teaching them, here’s how this works out –get this – in your personal relationships. He is not telling us how government should function here; He is not talking to the government. He is talking to

people who belong to the kingdom of heaven. And He comes and He says this is how this works out in your personal relationships. And in essence He says, “The anger and the bitterness and the resentment that provokes a retaliatory response when someone does wrong to you – that anger and bitterness and resentment has to be banished from your heart so that the impulse to that retaliatory response is not even there.”

Look at verse 39 with me, and here is His main point. He says, “You have heard about this retaliation and how the Pharisees have perverted it. But let me clear the air for you: ‘But I say to you...’” – speaking on His own authority, emphatically saying, “But I, the One who is here in your midst, I the living Son of God – this is what I say on My own authority to you – you who are My disciples, you who claim My lordship, you who claim to be My followers – this is how I say you must live.” And the overarching principle that He lays down here is: do not resist an evil person. That’s His main point: *do not resist an evil person.*

What follows in verses 39-42 reveals four pictures of how that works out, four different areas of life where that works out. What follows are illustrations of the bigger point about not being a resister, not being a retaliator in your life. The first example that He gives in verse 39 teaches you is this. Write this point down – it’s kind of a sub-point of the third overall point – what death to retaliation looks like:

A. Extend grace instead of protecting your dignity

In this first example He is telling you to extend grace instead of protecting your dignity. You can use the word “pride” there instead of protecting your dignity. Look at verse 39 again, He says:

But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

The slap was the idea of backhanded slap across the face. It would be a painful blow, but the physical aspect of it really wasn’t the important part to the Jew. A backhanded slap across the face was a gross insult; it was totally demeaning. And so think about this in terms of the insult that is conveyed if someone comes up and just slaps you across the face, maybe in front of a group of people. It is the insult that is the greater damage than the momentary sting to the cheek, and that’s what Jesus is going after here.

What would the Pharisees have done? They would have said, “An eye for an eye. You slapped me, I’ll slap you right back.” Jesus says, “You can’t do that at all. You cannot even have that impulse to retaliate like that in your heart.” He says you must have such self-control, you must be so dead to pride and self, that if you are attacked like that, if you are insulted like that, your preference is to let them do it again rather than to retaliate, rather than to respond in kind. Jesus says you don’t retaliate, you don’t demand the equivalent or greater inflection of pain and punishment on the person who did it to you – just yield. You let your response to that insult be gracious.

You say, “That’s ridiculous. I would never let such an insult go unresponded to. I have my rights.” Listen, you don’t want to go to that line of argument at all. That is the last way that you want to think. No, you want to say, “Yes, I do want to respond graciously even to that kind of flagrant insult because I understand something really important as a believer in Christ. I understand that my sin is a far greater insult against the Father of heaven, against the God of the universe. When I sin against Him, it is an insult against total sovereignty. And what has His response been to me in my sin? Has He smacked me back? No, the Father has been gracious; the Father has forgiven my sins in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father has extended such grace and mercy to me that I don’t even confess all of my sins, because I’m so spiritually indifferent and so spiritually cold, I don’t even realize how many times I have sinned against Him, and yet, He continues to be gracious to me.”

Listen beloved, *get* this: God does not deal with you as a believer in Christ in a tit-for-tat manner. He doesn’t flick you, He doesn’t smack you, when you sin against Him. He is gracious, He has been gracious in Christ, the blood of Jesus His Son continually cleanses us from all sin, and you say, “I stand as a Christian in the light of that mercy and I stand in the flow of that river of blood that continually cleanses me from all sin. God, thank You for Your grace.”

If that is what you say your spiritual position is, beloved, even when you insult God with your sin against Him, there is only one way you can respond when people sin against you – “I want to be gracious, I’m going to let it go; I’m not going to fight back because, God, where would I be if You had fought back against me in my sin?”

So, recognizing your position in Christ, you say, “I’m going to extend grace instead of protecting my dignity. I’d rather take an insult, take a blow as it were, instead of reacting in a way that I don’t want God to react to me in.”

So what Jesus is saying here is that when someone assaults your dignity or insults you, you cannot respond with the similar attack. Your attitude must be, “I’ll take another insult instead of taking vindication in to my own hands.” And in the process you are saying, “God, I’m going to commit my cause to You. In the midst of these insults, in the midst of these attacks against me, I’m just going to commit my cause to You, O God, knowing that You see all things. I’m going to trust You rather than taking matters in to my own hands and act in a way that is different from the way that You have dealt with me.”

That’s what Jesus is teaching here; it’s the death of the Christian to retaliation. He gives a second example in verse 40. We can describe this example this way:

B. Extend grace instead of protecting your things

Look at verse 40 with me. Jesus says, and again He is saying:

Do not resist an evil person, but...

If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

The English word “shirt” here refers to the Jewish tunic, a garment that was worn next to the body. The coat that Jesus describes here refers to the Jewish cloak, which was an outer garment used to keep warm. Under Old Testament law in Exodus 22:26, the owner of the cloak had a legal right to have it returned to him at the end of the day if he had given it to someone as collateral or something like that. No one had the right to take your outer coat – it was the only way that you could keep warm, it was a fundamental means of protection.

Jesus comes along here and says, “If someone sued you for that which they could take, your shirt, your inner garment – someone sues you, your impulse is to resent that, your impulse is to say, ‘that’s not fair,’” – He says, “Your mindset as one of My followers, your mindset as one of My disciples should be so far the other direction that you are willing to surrender even that which is legally yours and no one can touch with legal right.” You should be so devoid of the spirit of retaliation that you would be happy to give them that which they had no legal right to.

That attitude of self-surrender, beloved, is the mark of the true righteousness of the kingdom of heaven. It goes so far that you say, “I’m not going to fight back, I’m not going to retaliate. I’m so dead to my self that if you want to take my shirt, I’ll give you my coat also.” He is talking about heart attitudes here. You say, “No, no, that’s just taking it too far. This is totally unrealistic.” No, it’s not.

God forbid that there would be any one in this room or any one that would ever hear this message that would say, “I’m going to draw the line right there.” You know why? Because Jesus didn’t draw the line there. Jesus, born in to this world, lived a perfect life, and led as it were by sinful men up to the cross, punished for crimes that He did not commit, punished for your crimes and your sins – He didn’t raise any objections about whether this was fair or not. He didn’t raise any objections – “No, this is far enough, this is going to violate My space, I haven’t done anything wrong here, you can’t do this.” Total surrender to the will of God in His life – no hint of retaliation anywhere in His character.

And if the Lord of Glory lives that way, you as His disciple, you who are dependent upon Him for every breath, you who are depended upon Him for the eternal state of your soul, you can’t raise objection against this kind of demand on your life. This is the Christian life of self-denial. This is the Christian life of self-surrender. You are so indifferent to your things that you yield them even when you don’t have to for the sake of denying yourself—searching, utterly searching.

But Jesus wasn’t done yet, He gives us a third example for this kind of self-denial, this death to retaliation. In verse 41 we see the third example that He gives, and the principle here is this:

C. Extend grace instead of protecting your time

He said that you extend grace instead of protecting your dignity, protecting your things, now it's extending grace instead of protecting your time. Look at verse 41 with me; He says:

Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

It might sound a little strange – what's He talking about here? Even today, it's part of our language, you know, "He'll go the second mile for you." What's Jesus really referring to here? What this verse is talking about is the ancient practice of a government having the authority to be able to commandeer private citizens to do work on behalf of the government. And then this played out in many different ways. They might take your horse to help deliver mail. Perhaps they would take someone working in the field and say, a soldier would come up to him and say, "I need you to work for me." You had to go and do it even though it was a great personal disruption, a great personal interruption. The government could come and tell you what to do with your time and you had to respond.

You see an example of this in Matthew 27:32. Jesus was carrying His cross toward the execution site, and the Bible says, as they were coming out, they – meaning the soldiers – they found a man of Cyrene named Simon whom they pressed in to service to bear His cross. I don't know what Simon was doing at the time, but they come along and say, "Simon, carry this cross," and Simon had to pick up and go.

Now you can imagine that that would not be something that would be real popular. You are in the middle of doing your work or pursuing whatever the daily needs of life were, and you get this interruption from a foreign dominator who says, "You have to do it my way now." No doubt this practice was abused; no doubt this practice was used arbitrarily; no doubt it was a real irritation to Jews on a daily basis as they lived under the domination of Rome: "I've got my life to live, and now I've got to go do what this guy tells me to do." Jesus calls that situation to mind. What you have here is someone with authority, telling someone who is under that authority to do something that they don't want to do – let's really simplify this: *someone with authority telling someone under that authority to do something that they don't want to do*. Jesus calls that situation to mind and says, "Rather than being bitter about it, rather than complaining and resisting, here's the standard for My kingdom: you do more than is required and you do it with the cheerful spirit – that's the standard of My kingdom. A kind of resentment has no place in My disciple."

Now, the implication of that for us today is really pretty clear, pretty obvious. Someone in authority comes to you – a boss, a leader, a family member – and places demands on you that you didn't choose. Maybe it's the demands, not of authority, but the demands of need – the needs of children rising up to the young mothers who had other plans for their day. It's really practical, beloved. The true Christian looks at that, understands it, and doesn't resist it with bitterness, but responds with cooperation and cheerfulness and says,

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“My time is not my own; I don’t belong to me, I belong to Christ and Christ says this is how I am to live; because He saved my soul I’m happy to do it the way He says. I’ll set aside my time without complaint, without bitterness, and I’ll extend grace, I’ll respond with cheerfulness even though it wasn’t what I planned, even though it’s inconvenient, even though someone might say it’s unfair, that’s not what I’m living by. I’m going to extend grace and mercy here.”

There is a fourth example in verse 42 and it is this:

D. Extend grace instead of protecting your money

Look at verse 42:

Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

What Jesus is saying here, this fourth illustration of not resisting, of not retaliating, is the whole matter of giving and borrowing. Basically what Jesus is calling forth here is *a generous spirit that gladly responds to legitimate needs without selfishness*. What He is saying here – He says, “Give to him who asks of you; do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you” – you know exactly what He is saying here. And don’t go and say, “He is telling me that I’ve got to give every time I see a drunk under the overpass.” That’s not the point at all; it’s not that remote and that distant. It’s going to a fundamental way that you view your money and possessions and how you deal with them. He is saying that you cannot be tight-fisted with your money when you become aware of a need. He says you just give it away without regard to what’s in it for you.

S. Louis Johnson said about this passage: “This points to the fact that we do not own our money, it belongs to God.” When you see a legitimate need, the impulse of your heart should be, “How can I meet it? Let me help.” You extend grace instead of trying to clutch, because all that God has given to you – your so-called dignity, your things, your money, your time – these things are only for you to oversee, only things for you to steward as you live your life; they are not for you to clutch and keep to yourself – Jesus says that’s the standard.

Beloved, I want to tell you, as we have gone through these things so quickly, what Jesus is describing here in this passage is supernatural living. There is a spiritual component to this kind of life that can only be attained by those who have repented of their sins and put their faith in Christ and His work on the cross. It is only someone who has been born again by the spirit of God that can live this way, that can live out this kind of self-sacrifice with a joyful heart.

But beloved, you have to see the obligation of this, the imperative of this. You say, “This just isn’t fair. Do you know if I really lived that out – it’s hard telling what would happen in my life.” Yeah, you’re right, it probably is. But listen to what 1 Peter chapter 2 says in the context of submitting to employers. In verse 21 he says:

You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.

Did you get that?

Leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, “who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.”

Get this, in verse 23.

And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed.

Here in this passage in Matthew 5:38-42, He is giving you another illustration of what it means to die to sin and live to righteousness. This is not natural living. Unsaved people do not do this. And that’s where the beauty of this is a testimony to the gospel comes in. As you live this way, the power of the risen Christ is seen in your life.

Couple of quick things that I need to say. I’m going to go just a minute or two long here. You have to ask yourself these kinds of questions: “How do I respond when a spouse, a family member, roommate, a neighbor or a coworker treats me poorly?” Do you retaliate with silence, with angry words because you are not treated right, or do you extend love and grace and forgiveness even when you don’t get that back in return? Beloved, that’s the standard of kingdom living.

It’s easy to misapply this passage and turn it in to something that Jesus never intended. It’s very important to think about this passage in light of the whole counsel of God. I want to answer a couple of questions that always come up when anyone talks about this passage. Let me ask and answer a couple of quick questions:

(1) In this passage, does Jesus mean that we should absolutely never confront evil no matter what? Is this an absolute prohibition that evil should never be resisted in any way, shape, or form? Answer to that question is: *absolutely not*. When you take the whole counsel of scripture to bear on this, you realize that Jesus tells us to confront sin in Matthew 18. He says that government is an avenger on those who practice evil – Romans 13. And so there are legitimate channels for sin and evil to be resisted – I’m only giving a couple of examples. This passage does not teach passivism or prohibit war; that’s not what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about His disciples in the midst of their personal relationships.

(2) Secondly, Can I ever assert my legal rights? If you take the whole counsel of God on this, the answer to that is yes, you can. Paul asserted his legal rights in Acts 25:11, when he said, “These men are trying to do wrong to me, I appeal to Caesar.” The accusers were about to do wrong to him, but he used his legal rights to defend himself. So when

you compare scripture to scripture, you get a better idea of exactly what Jesus was saying here.

(3) Final question I would ask about this just by way of application because it always comes up: Should we always give to beggars, whoever asks? A guy comes up, you can tell he is half-drunk and he tugs on your leg and says “give me a couple of bucks” – should we always give to people like that? I think the clear biblical answer is no. The apostle Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12:

We give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either... Such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

So when we take all of these together – and I know I rushed through those last three things – when you take all of these together, beloved, here is where you come out: *You extend grace to people when they wrong you in your personal relationships but you don't allow subtle wrongdoers or slackers to operate at will.* But with all of that said, here clearly the Lord's main point in this passage: *You must put to death that spirit of self-defense when you feel threatened.* And in its place, you must put a preference to extend grace when you have been wronged because you understand the grace of God that has been extended to you in Christ. Having received grace, you extend grace as the first impulse of your heart.

Let's pray:

Father, we need Your grace to discern these things as they come up in our lives. We need Your grace to deny ourselves and to follow after Christ. Give us the grace that was manifested throughout the life of Christ, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, Father, who endured their insults, endured their slaps, endured their spittle, endured the crown of thorns, endured even the cross without retaliation, but prayed with nails in His feet and nails in His hands, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Lord, our desire and our responsibility is to emulate the life of Christ now that we have received His life and the grace of salvation, and we have got to have Your help to do that, Father. So give us that grace to see it and then to live it out in a way that bring honor to our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.