

Matthew 5:38-42 (NKJV)

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, '*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*'

³⁹ **But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**

⁴⁰ **If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.**

⁴¹ **And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

⁴² **Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**

Let's do a quick review of this text before we continue in it.

First, the sermon on the mount is being addressed to **Christians**. It is not being addressed to civil governments or social groups of any kind. It is a **marching order** for the person with the beatitude heart.

Second, Jesus was not changing the law in the sermon on the mount. Many people think that Jesus was changing all the rules, that he was coming up with a brand new beautiful ethic. But he was **not**. He was telling us what the spirit of the law was all along. He was telling us how **Jesus applied the law** in His **own** life.

So whatever interpretation we make of this text, it has to comply to those two principles.

Jesus is not changing what **the standard of justice is** and He is certainly not changing the authority that the Old Testament provided to civil governments. We discussed that there are evidences in other Old Testament and New Testament texts that **what Jesus was commanding here** was not addressed to **every situation** a human could find him or herself in.

There are times when the civil government was **appealed to** by believers in order to **obtain justice**. So the concept of Justice is not the problem that Christ is addressing. Christ told his disciples to buy swords that were clearly intended to be used in self defense. So **all** force against evil men is **not** what is forbidden. Christ and the disciples emphasized the need for **protecting the weak**, and **physical force** is required to **protect** from **physical force**.

We are not **stretching** the context of scripture to say that the **rest of scripture** not only does not support an **absolute application** of not resisting an evil man but it stands **in contrast** to it.

So, as in everything else, we need to find out **what context** Jesus was applying this scripture. Jesus meant exactly what He said about not resisting an evil

man. The goal for us this morning is to examine the text to see what **He DID mean.**

Ok, have you noticed **something in common** in all of the examples that Christ uses? Do you see any harm being threatened to another human being? No. It is all about what happens to the **individual** Christian. No one else is in danger. So Christ does not use a single example regarding **protection of someone else.** That is **VERY** important for us to notice. Pacifism says that we cannot use physical force to protect another human being. Yet none of the examples that Jesus gives us to **apply** what He is saying is in a context of protecting another human being.

Notice too, how much physical danger is the person in in the four examples Christ gives? I think we will see that the person in the examples Christ gives is not yet in any real **physical imminent peril.**

So this is not even addressing true **self defense** when someone is endangering your life simply because they have the power to do so. That is what swords would be for. We must see what Christ says in the context of what **Christ** says, and in the greater context of what the **rest of scripture** says.

Let's look at the examples one by one.

But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Notice that this does not say, whoever gives you a right hook, when you gain consciousness, stand up and let him give you a left cross. If that were the situation a believer was in, Christ may have given different guidance.

Have you ever been slapped?

Was it life threatening?

The kids and I used to play a slap battle game. They would try to slap my face and I would try to quickly touch their faces with my hand. The only time I ever felt like I was in any real physical danger was when I played with Ashley. I never knew where those hands would come from. I am not sure **she knew** either. You might be thinking, so that why those kids turned out like they did....

But my point is that a slap won't kill you. In fact, unless you have braces it probably won't even do you harm. It just hurts. And it is usually intended as an insult of some sort. It is often given by someone who feels they have been insulted or someone who wants to demean you.

It is likely that the crowd would have assumed something about a slap to your right cheek. Most people are right handed. So a slap to the right cheek would

be a backhanded slap. That would include the sting of the knuckles. So this would be a nasty slap. It would hurt.

The issue here is really not about violence. It is about dignity. I think I have the **right** not to be stricken by you. And if I, in any way, think myself superior to you that is **doubly** true.

When you strike me it ignites a passion in my flesh. I do not have to consider it. I don't have to ponder it. If you strike me, I am likely to be instantly angry. Unless I see it coming and believe there is a good reason to take it.

I was watching a Zoro movie where Zoro without the mask was slapped twice by an evil man. Inside of me, I wanted Zoro to show the evil man what he could do. But he didn't retaliate because he had a greater goal. And that is something like what we must do.

When people insult our dignity, we want to lash out at them. We want an **eye for an eye**, or if possible, something better. You see it in the eye of a child. Mike used to say something like if a baby could wield a baseball bat no mother would survive their infancy.

What button do you have that instantly infuriates you. What insult can a person give you that you will **immediately respond** by **making them pay**? Keep in mind it is not always violence. We all use our favorite tools. Sulking counts. Harsh words count. Distancing counts. How do we inflict pain? That is what Christ is addressing here.

What do you do when someone wounds your dignity with words or actions. Suppose they pat you on the head in a condescending way? Suppose they look at you in a dismissive way that implies you have no idea what you are talking about. What do you do?

There are two options here. Flesh or Spirit. Self expression or self control. Love for self. Or love for God and people.

What Jesus is appealing here is **other worldly**. He is not saying, now you should not instantly feel like reacting to this person. He is not addressing what you **feel**. He is addressing what you **decide**.

You will either **react**. And that is almost certain to be a fleshly response. Or you will **act**, and that, in a Christian is likely to be a **Spirit** response. The fruit of the Spirit is self control after all.

Do you see the issue here? This is not the isolated hypothetical case that is not likely to happen to us, of someone breaking in our house and wanting to do our family harm. No, this is the **every day** occurrence of our dignity being offended. This is far harder to apply than the extreme application of physical non violence. This is something we must practice every day.

When is the last time that someone said something that offended you? Think about that. What happened? Did you **slap back**, or did you **grace** that person? That is really what we are talking about here.

What Jesus is describing is taking that sting that was even intended to harm us, and stopping right in our tracks. And we say, **what does Jesus want me to do in this situation?** What is the **right thing** to do here? What is the **loving** thing to do here? Can I do something to **diffuse** this unnecessary war. What can I **afford to do** here to make an effect **for eternity**. And then do it.

Ultimately we ask, "**what price should I pay to grace that person?**".

When the only threat you are experiencing is insult, Jesus is saying that is not enough to start a war for. Don't react in self. Act in love. That is really what this is about.

Are we getting this? This is addressing our relationships in our marriages, in our families, in our church, in our world.

Let's go on to the next illustration.

40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

This was the situation. If you got yourself in a bad place financially, someone could sue you for the last thing you have of value. Your tunic would have been your most common garment that covered you. It was normally a thin fabric, like linen, that would be similar in our minds to a dress. And then there was the outer garment that would be multi purpose. It would be made much like a poncho, often square. And one would use it as a blanket at night.

The law was such that a person could sue you for your tunic, but no one could take your cloak past nightfall. It was seen as something you need to survive.

Now the first thing we have to see here is that **someone is suing us**. This means they probably have a legal right to it. We have **done them wrong** in some way. Maybe it was a business deal that did not work out right. Maybe it was a sin on our part where we simply did them wrong. The implication is that they have the right to sue us.

Well the suer may have a legal right to our tunic, but they **do not** have a legal right to our cloak. Jesus is saying, that is ok. Even if they have not got the right to take it, if that is what they want, give it to them.

This would have been a big deal to those listening to Christ. The cloak would have been a source of security. They would have depended upon that cloak for protection and warmth. To give up one's cloak would have been a hardship.

But the reasons for giving it up are more important than the reasons to protect it.

We cannot know for sure **why** Christ would have us give up the cloak. If the person suing us had a legitimate complaint against us, maybe we would be showing that person our sincere desire to **make things right**. We will even go **beyond** what the law allows to make this thing right with someone we have wronged. Maybe it is to make an impression on the other person's soul. But the point is clear here that when someone threatens your security, that is not a reason to push your **legal rights** for **your advantage**.

The attitude in scripture is always that people are more important than things. And if we can **spend things** to **gain people**, that is a wise trade. In this example we could cling to justice to get us off the hook of giving up our security, but we shouldn't. We do not need to use the justice provided for our protection when it is only **property** that we are giving up.

What thing of security would you never give up for the good of another person? Where do you fiercely cling to your property rights, even when someone else has need of them or it is rightly theirs? When you find yourself where your **security is threatened** because of some challenge from outside, you can find out just how much you really trust God.

After I sold the ambulance business, a question came up about the way I paid my employees for being **on call** to take phone calls. I paid them for the phone calls they took and for the time that they were able to take calls. Technically it may have violated the minimum wage law. If the government would have demanded it, I could have owed \$500,000 in back wages.

I didn't really have any choice in it, so it isn't so much like Jesus's example, but at that point I had a chance to see if I really do trust God with my security. I knew that I would lose everything. How will we do if **losing our security** is imminent? Will we see that it is **not worth fretting about**? Will we see that **relationships and ministry** are more important than **property**?

Now again, would this have been different if these were resources that our family needed? Jesus's example described accepting a personal discomfort. But should we factor in other principles when what is being demanded of us would **harm others** that depend upon us. Again, I don't think Christ gave these examples as some kinds of absolutes or laws. He is describing how the Beatitudes person is empowered to live.

⁴¹ **And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

Evidently it was a common rule for civil governments to have the right to demand a citizen to carry a load for about a mile. They could do this at their whim. If they saw you, a Roman soldier could say, here is my pack. Carry it from here to there.

Mike used to say that you will best know if you have a servant's heart when someone treats you like you are a servant and commands you to do something. When you have plans for what you are going to do, and when you have responsibilities you must meet, who here wants someone to **arbitrarily command** you to do something? We don't always handle that real well in our own families. How will we do when the civil authority commands us to do something?

When is the last time you positively responded to someone arbitrarily giving a command to you? Not a question. Not asking if you have time. Just someone saying, "Do this now".

Have you ever considered that your response is an indication of your spirituality? If the person has the right to make the demand, what should your response be?

Now I am not asking what your **first reaction** might be. All of us have a case of, "**I am and there is none besides**". That is the flesh's **go-to** response. "You have no right to tell me what to do. You are not being considerate of me. It is offensive to me and if you loved me you would never do such a thing." We can go on and on and continue to dodge the point. Most people do not like **being told what to do**, even by those who have the **right** to do the telling.

I remember how mad I used to get when my mom would tell me, at a moment's notice, that I had to do something. And I used to wrestle with it because I knew **she had that right**. I knew that ultimately **I** was the problem. Oh there are methods that she could learn that would make it easier for me to submit. But ultimately, she was the authority and my flesh simply did not like being told what to do.

Well Christ is giving a **test case** here that is way harder for us to say "**yes**" to than saying "**yes**" to the people in authority over us. These Jewish people Jesus was speaking to hated the Roman oppression. And they even had **spiritual** reasons they could use for their hatred, like they were obeying God to hate the Romans.

Now how would a Jew react, in their flesh, to being told that right now they needed to drop everything and carry a pack for a mile for their **political oppressor**? And a Gentile on top of that?

It is not hard to imagine. They would think, "Who do you think you are? You have no right to tell me what to do. The only reason I will do this is because I do not want to die today. But I will let you know what I think of you and your Roman oppression by how I treat you."

How do we respond to demands of our government? I wonder if sometimes we hide our dislike of being told what to do under our political principles. I

wonder if we might not mask our fleshly attitudes under noble principles?
That is what Christ's Jewish audience would have been doing.
Now what does Christ say the Beatitudes person **should** do?
He asks for the impossible.

He asks for His child to **trust God in everything**. He asks him to trust that **God put this person in authority over him**. He asks him to trust that **God arranged at this moment for this arbitrary command to be issued**. He asks him to trust that **what is being asked is now God's will** for the next few minutes. And, as such, this task can be performed with the complete assurance that **nothing else of importance is being missed**.

Do you see how hard that is? **Wives**, what commands have you been given by your husbands that you responded that way? And your husbands, to some degree love you. **Kids**, what commands have you been given by your parents that you responded that way. And your parents to some degree love you. **Employees**, how often do we respond that way to our bosses? At least our bosses often have a **selfish** reason to be somewhat fair to us.

Jesus is talking about taking a command from an **absolute enemy**. Are we getting this yet? And what does Jesus say? Grudgingly do what you are told knowing you can get back to the important things soon? **Nope**. Wait until this person treats you fair and then respond positively? **Nope**. Wait until this person treats you right and only then do you need to willingly comply? **Nope**. He says when you are done going that first mile, go the second. **What?** Is He crazy? Why on earth would we do that? Well that is just the point. There is **no reason on earth** to do so. The hardened soldiers were used to anger and hostility. The best they could hope for was grudging compliance. But what about a person who was actually **concerned about their soul**? That would take them completely off guard. What about a person that did not march by the flesh's marching orders? How is a soldier supposed to respond to that? The Pharisees were absorbed with their rights. They clung to them tenaciously because they are the **rules of flesh**. Jesus is saying, **give them up**. You have it all wrong. **Justice is good**. But **love** is better. Justice is good. But people's souls are at stake. Appeal to justice when you need to. But let the law of love be the law you live by.

OK let's look at the last example.

⁴² **Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**

Now suppose you lived in the city? We are not normally confronted by beggars and street people. But suppose we are continually approached by

people asking for money. Is Jesus saying you must give money to every beggar?

It is interesting to talk to people who minister to beggars and street people in the city. One of the first things they will tell you is DO NOT give those people money. You are only enabling their habits. Give them food if you like. Take them somewhere to eat if you like. Buy them a night's stay somewhere if you like. But do not give them what they ask for because it is not looking after their real needs. It is harming them, not helping them.

So how do we square this? How do we **decide** what to do? Are those ministers who are telling us **not to give beggars money** disobeying Christ's direct command here?

I don't believe so. What is the greatest command? To **love God** and then to **love people**. What does love do? It reaches out to **meet the need** without regard for personal expense because of the love we have for God.

So we should give to him who asks you, only as it is **submitted to the law of love**, the law of what is in the **other person's** best interest.

Given that Jesus could not have possibly contradicted Himself, we have to know that His intention here was **one of love**. It was looking after the **real needs** of another person.

So what is Christ saying? Essentially we need to view **stuff** the way **stuff** is. First off, **stuff** is **not ours** to begin with. We are stewards. It was put into our hands but it should never find its way to our hearts. Stuff is tools.

Needs demand our stuff.

James 2:14-16 (NKJV)

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

When we see needs in others, it should move us to **action**. Moving us to **intention** doesn't count. Only **action** proves anything.

I believe that is what Jesus is saying. If you have something and someone else has need of it and you can afford to give it, give it. Do not cling to your property rights. There is no need to get huffy and say you have no right to my property. We can't always have the attitude that says "Go earn your own."

But at the same time, we know right off the bat that this command does not fit every situation. Look at what Paul told the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 (NKJV)

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Here Paul tells people to **NOT** give to those who ask. Here is an excellent example that proves what we have been saying all along. These things Jesus is saying are meant to be taken **in the context** He is saying them. They should not be **universalized**. They are not true of all situations everywhere all the time. Sometimes we should resist an evil man. Sometimes we should defend ourselves physically, sometimes we should defend ourselves in court, sometimes we should resist arbitrary commands, and sometimes we should not give our stuff to those who ask. What Jesus is talking about is those places where we **should** but **our flesh** pushes back. Our flesh says, **NO! All I care about is my rights.**

Where Jesus says ⁴² **Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.**

I think Jesus is just saying what He says other places. Love is the **highest goal** of the law. Love is the **intent** of the law. Love is what we should **always** do. And the law will guide us on **what love is**. And Christ's **example** will guide us in **what love does**.

In our text we see what **the evil man does**.

He may **insult our dignity**. We grace him and do not escalate the conflict.

He may **demand more than he legally has a right to**. We give it if we can give it without harming others.

He may **demand we drop everything** and do what he says. We do it if we at all can and we even exceed those demands with extra grace, extra love.

He may **request our property that he has done nothing to earn** or merit.

And we give that which we think will do him good, even though we do not have to.

I want to mention again that love is the highest thing. In the church we do not treat people like they are evil men. We do demand, for their sake, that they submit to King Jesus. We will not give them a free ride when they are able to work. We will not allow them to do people violence because King Jesus says not to. We will tell them what scripture says about taking people to court. We

will let them know that they are not to act as rulers, but as servants to those under them. And we will gladly give to them when they truly have needs. Now what is the point behind all of what Jesus is saying about justice and rights?

I think it is this.

It is quoted from Martyn Lloyd Jones:

A statement which the great George Müller once made about himself seems to illustrate this very clearly. He writes like this: 'There was a day when I died, utterly died, died to George Müller and his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of even my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.'

I believe this is exactly what Jesus was describing in our text. It is a **death to selfish interest** to the point that it only allows the **Lord's interests** and the **eternal interests of others** to have the utmost control. What happens to **me** is still important, but it is **not as important** as these other concerns.

I was trying to come up with a way to encapsulate what Jesus was saying. I think it would be something like this.

Christ frees us to respond to the **requests and demands of evil people** by giving **anything we can give** with a good conscience. We do not need to allow their **actions** to determine our **reactions**. We can act **completely contrary** to how they expect. And by so doing we display a life that is different than this world can create.

We would do well to look at our lives. How willing are we, **really**, to abandon ourselves to the Lord's will?

Are you willing to allow no attack on your dignity to cause you to react in any way. You will chose only **love** that one who has **harmed you**.

Are you willing to allow no resistance to the one who demands your security. You will only do that which is **most likely to win over** that party.

Are you willing to completely submit to commands given by authorities that **only seek to use you** when it is **not wrong** to submit. And not only that, will you go above and beyond what they ask so you have a chance **to minister to them?**

And are you willing to hold your possessions loosely in the palm of your hand to be **disbursed to** anyone having a need or having an opportunity for your possessions to turn into ministry opportunities.

For this to happen, someone has to die. And that someone is us.

We need to think about this.

What would happen if I died to my **selfish fleshly interests**? What would happen if in every relationship, if in every interaction I only cared about one thing. What my Master is best served by.

My dignity is insulted. What best serves Jesus.

My security is threatened. What best serves Jesus.

My freedom is curtailed. What best serves Jesus.

My property is demanded. What best serves Jesus?

Can you imagine what effect that could have in our families, in our church, in our workplaces, in our world?

That is the picture Christ was painting. It had nothing to do with no more military service. It had more to do with no more **service to self**.

Do not resist an evil person. And that is terribly hard to do. Because flesh always wants its rights.