

Living Charitably
Matthew 5:38-42
Halifax: 21 March 2004

Introduction:

This week we come to Jesus' fifth "You-have-heard-that-it-was-said" in the Sermon on the Mount.

- It is important to remember what Jesus was doing with these statements.
 - He declared plainly that He was **not** in any way altering what God had commanded in the Old Testament...
 - Instead, He was correcting the twisted interpretations, spins, and applications that the men of His generation had put on God's perfect Law.
 - In Matthew 5:19, He insisted that:
 - "anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."
- You must understand...
 - The problem with the Pharisees was not
 - (as it is so often wrongly thought in our day)
 - that they were too careful and scrupulous about keeping the little things...
 - The problem was that they made a great display of keeping certain details...
 - but completely missed the weightier matters!
 - Jesus condemns them,
 - not because they **kept** the least commandments...
 - but because they **did not keep** the greatest commandments!
- The particular problem with our generation is quite different—
 - We like to think that we are not like the Pharisees who were so concerned with the little things...
 - We are a people who are committed to sincerity from the heart!
 - We don't bother with the details because we are focused on the principles!
 - But this is all a big sham!
 - If you have the principle, it will show itself in the details of every day living!
 - If your religion is so deeply spiritual that it doesn't show itself in

- being kind to your children—
- or in the way you talk to your husband or wife...
- or in the way you do your work...
- or in the way you help your neighbour when he has need...
 - Then you simply do not have the right heart principles no matter what you may claim!
 - Right principles will always show up in the details.

In Matthew 5:38-42,

- Jesus brings us face to face with things are useful both for Pharisees and for us...
 - When we consider these things, we all come up short!
 - And remember that this is exactly what Jesus is trying to do!
- He has told us in the Beatitudes at the beginning of His sermon who is blessed...
 - It is not the self-righteous man that is blessed...
 - It is the person who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness!
 - The self-righteous man has set aside God's commandments and not really faced them honestly.
- Jesus is exposing our sin with these words so we will come to Him as Saviour...
 - Don't approach this passage today with your defences up...
 - It will do you no good...
 - Approach it honestly and let it cut you deeply so you will look to your Saviour.
 - That is where blessing comes from.

Let me then urge you to come with this attitude to see what Jesus says in this passage.

I. First of all, see how Jesus presents a good law that had been used badly.

- The law Jesus presents is,
 - "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

A. This was a good law!

1. God gave it to kings and judges and rulers to guide them in the administration of civil justice.
 - a. For example, in Leviticus 24, Moses said:
 - Lev 24:19-22: 'If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him— 'fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he

has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him. 'And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death. 'You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I *am* the LORD your God.'

- b. This principle is often called the *lex talionis* or the **law of retribution**.
 - It requires that the punishment be equal to the crime.
 - 1) A judge was not to cut off someone's head for poking out an eye,
 - or to cut off a person's hand for stealing.
 - 2) The punishment was to be equal to the injury that was inflicted.
2. Problems occur when judges and legislatures set aside this principle...
- a. If they are too severe and harsh,
 - They set aside the *lex talionis* to gain greater control over the people.
 - They take too much authority to themselves...
 - The history of civilisation has no lack of tyrants and oppressive rulers whose subjects lived in dread and terror before them.
 - Those rulers who go beyond the limits that God sets in punishing their subjects will also go beyond the limits in other matters.
 - They will behave the way Samuel warned about when Israel demanded a king:
 - 1 Sam 8:11: And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint *them* for his own chariots and *to be* his horsemen, and *some* will run before his chariots.... He will take your daughters *to be* perfumers, cooks, and bakers. "And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give *them* to his servants.

TRANS> This is what the severe and harsh governors will do...

- but then there is the opposite error as well...
- b. There are those rulers who are too lenient...
 - They set aside the *lex talionis* in an effort to make themselves popular with the people.
 - This is just as much a perversion of justice as being too severe...
 - Soon the land is filled with violence and crime.
 - 1) In Deut 19, God instructed the judges not to fail to punish the wicked.

- Deut 19:18: "And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, *if* the witness *is* a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.
 - And the reasons for this is given:
 - Deut 19:20: And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.
 - Proper punishment of crime by the judges would restrain wickedness in the land.
 - And so the judges are further exhorted:
 - 21 "Your eye shall not pity: life *shall be* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.
- 2) It is especially the weak and those who are not able to defend themselves that suffer when the judges do not punish offenders...
- Such judges are **unjust judges**,
 - like the unjust judge Jesus speaks of in His parable who would not avenge a poor widow because he feared neither God nor man.
 - They do not give the citizens protection.
3. God is the one who appoints judges...
- a. They have no authority but what God has given to them...
 - They are not to act for themselves, but are to act as God's arm of justice...
 - They are His servants to sent to administer His justice.
 - b. Good King Jehoshaphat understood this as we are told in 2 Chron 19:
 - When he was bringing the people back to the LORD God of their fathers, we are told that:
 - 2 Chron 19:4-6: Jehoshaphat...set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who *is* with you in the judgment."
 - This completely contradicts the prevailing notion of our society that the judge is not there for God, but for the people.
 - It is precisely the opposite!
 - "You do not judge for man but for the LORD."
 - The apostle Peter shows that this is even true of pagan kings who do not acknowledge God:

- 1 Pet 2:13-14: Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good.
- They are sent by God and represent Him in their work, whether they know it or not...
 - They must answer to Him if they pervert justice and ignore the law of retribution...
 - It is a good law given by God to guide them in their work.

B. But in Jesus' day, this good law of retribution was being misused!

1. The scribes and Pharisees were taking it as a license to take personal revenge against those who had wronged them!
 - a. If somebody injured them,
 - they took it as God's command that they were supposed to get even!
 - They were to get their revenge!
 - "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," they said!
 - b. This completely ignored the fact that the law of retribution was not given to the individual—
 - It was given to judges!
2. God's word has something entirely different to say to the individual who has been wronged than He says to the judge who administers punishment!
 - a. To the individual, the LORD declares:
 - Le 19:18: You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: *I am* the LORD.
 - Prov 24:29: Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."
 - De 32:35: Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in *due* time;
 - b. You are to leave it to God to avenge wrongs that are done to you.
 - Rom 12:19-20 declares:
 - Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
 - God has two ways of dealing with those who wrong you...

- 1) Through the judges He has appointed who do His work when the punish evil...
- 2) Through His direct action...
 - to a limited extent now...
 - and absolutely and completely at the last day when He comes to judge the earth.
- 3) His word is sure:
 - “Vengeance is mine,” He says, “I will repay!”

TRANS> So you see how the Pharisees and Scribes had taken a perfectly good law and had misused it for their own wicked purposes!

- They had taken what was given to the civil magistrate and applied it to themselves as individuals!
 - There are some today who make the error in exactly the opposite direction...
 - They take the passages that command individuals to take no revenge and apply them to the civil magistrate!
 - That is what Tolstoy does in *War and Peace* and he is just as wrong as the Pharisees were.
 - Those who would take away the power of punishing evil from the civil magistrate are raging against God’s authority—
 - They do what they can to cut off His judgement from the world.
 - We err if we do not pay attention to whom a passage of scripture is written!
 - God’s law for the individual is:
 - “do not retaliate”
 - His law for the judge is
 - “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”
- Jesus goes on to show in a very pointed way that as an individual,
 - You are not called merely to show justice...
 - You are called to charity... to the practical exercise of love.

II. Look now at the four illustrations Jesus uses to steer you away from rigid justice into the exercise of love.

A. First He says, “Whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also.”

1. It was a great insult to slap someone across the face...
 - When this was done with the back of the hand,
 - the penalty exceeded most people's annual income!
 - a. Or course, it doesn't matter just how the insult is given...
 - Jesus is using the slap on the face to illustrate a principle...
 - And that principle is the one He has just stated:
 - "I tell you not to resist an evil person."
 - b. The point is that you are not to try to do something to get even...
 - you are to let it go...
 - 1) You must learn to forget the injuries that are done to you...
 - Don't allow yourself to break out with hatred and ill-will toward another human being...
 - Don't allow bitterness to enter your heart, but pity your adversaries!
 - God will deal with them!
 - Your job is to love them and to pray for their repentance!
 - Don't try to teach them a lesson!
 - 2) This is so hard!
 - We have such a strong urge to get back!
 - We want to even up the score!
 - "At least let me go and tell everybody else about what this wretch did to me!"
 - But Jesus says,
 - "No! Turn the other cheek."
 - c. "But if I don't avenge myself, he will do it again!"
 - Jesus knows that may well be the case!
 - That is why He says,
 - "Turn the other cheek to him also..."
 - He is saying,
 - "I know he will likely try to do it again if you don't retaliate..."
 - So be it—let him do it again...

2. Now I know that there are boneheads out there who are intent on making Jesus say absurd things...
 - a. These boneheads take Jesus to mean that you are not defend to yourself or your property at all...
 - They would argue that if you are physically attacked,
 - Jesus is forbidding you to defend yourself—
 - And that if you see an attack coming,
 - you are not to do all you can to prevent the attack—
 - After all, He says: “Do not resist the evil person!”
 - b. Such boneheads do not really deserve to be answered,
 - but because they lead true disciples with tender consciences astray,
 - I feel constrained to answer them.
- 1) All through the Bible you are called to resist an evil person.
 - You are commanded to discipline your children, even with a rod.
 - You are commanded to go to your brother when he has sinned and show him His fault.
 - You are commanded to resist and oppose false teachers, and to do your part in seeing that they are removed from the church.
 - You are commanded to deliver criminals to the authorities to be punished.
 - You are commanded to defend your property and you life.
- 2) Much of Jesus ministry was about resisting and opposing evil men...
 - He even took up a whip to drive the wicked money changers out of the temple!
 - And He called the corrupt leaders names and spoke with seething sarcasm to them about the way they were living!
- 3) So just what is it that Jesus is opposing here?
 - He is opposing that wicked desire to get even!
 - Personal revenge is not your goal, but love!
 - You are to bear all injuries patiently and without malice.
 - You are to turn the other cheek.

TRANS> Now let's look at the second way you are to exercise love rather than justice in your personal relationships:

B. Jesus says that you are to go beyond strict justice in making restitution.

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

1. Here is a case where you have wronged your neighbour and he is suing you.

a. Let's say you opened your car door and put a little dent in his car door.

- You are called to pay damages to this neighbour.
- It will cost \$700 to fix his car.

b. What is the tendency of the flesh at this point?

1) It is to say, "It was only a little dent."

- "If he had done it to me, I would have let it go."
- "His car is not in that great shape anyway."

2) But Jesus is calling you to think like this:

- "Not only does he have to pay to get the car fixed, but I have inconvenienced him as well."
- "I need to be sure that he is recompensed for all the harm I have caused. I am to owe no man anything."
- Jesus is telling you to go beyond mere justice in making restitution—
 - Go out of your way to make things right!

3) Of course this applies to restitution for other damages as well.

- Suppose you have gossiped about someone,
 - and you are called to account for it by the elders of the church.
- They ask you to go to each person in the church and clear your brother's name...
 - Don't stop there, but go to anyone else you may have spoken to as well who may not be in the church.
 - Make sure you do all you can to restore the wrong you have done.

2. But again, I must say something about the bonehead interpretation...

a. There are other factors that come into play.

- Going out of your way does not always mean paying a double fine.
- It can also mean simply going out of your way to be gracious and kind to the one to whom you have had to pay damages...

- Going out of your way to show that you are not holding a grudge.
- b. Also, Jesus is not saying that you should never contest an absurd sentence at court—
- Suppose a guy is trying to break into your house and he gets injured on the glass he broke...
 - He tries to sue you because of his injuries on your property.
 - You can (and even should) contest the matter, but then you are to submit to what the court decides.
 - Jesus is not saying that you are never to contest an unjust lawsuit that would impoverish your family.
 - But the principle that Jesus teaches here must not be ignored, even when you contest!
 - Whether you must pay or not, you are to find ways to show love to the thief...
 - Go visit him in the hospital and take him a get well card!
 - Take some cookies with you when you go.
 - Show him that you are not bearing a grudge, but are full of the love of God through Jesus Christ.

TRANS> Let's move to the third illustration Jesus gives of going beyond justice.

C. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

1. Everyone knew what Jesus was talking about here!
 - a. The Roman law gave soldiers and other government officials on public business the right to compel anyone to carry their load for them the distance of one mile.
 - a Roman mile was a thousand paces—almost an English mile.
 - b. You could be out working in your field,
 - You have been working hard all week to get the harvest in before the rains...
 - and some Roman comes up and with a less than gracious attitude,
 - commands you to take his gear a mile out of your way.
 - And he is a despised Roman, the nation that has conquered your people.
 - c. What does Jesus tell you to do when this happens?

- After you have finished the mile,
 - cheerfully go another mile with him!
 - Don't just do your duty (even though it was such a distasteful one), but go beyond and do even more!
2. Do you see that kind of attitude Jesus is calling for here?
- a. This says a lot to us about one of our favourite things to complain about at this time of year—paying our taxes!
 - We may argue that they are unjust and unfair—
 - that they are used to pay for abortions and to support all that corruption we have been reading about lately...
 - Jesus says, go the second mile!
 - Do your duty and then some!
 - b. The principle He gives you here applies to all kinds of things!
 - 1) Children, if your mother asks you to vacuum the living room when you were having a wonderful time at play,
 - Jesus is telling you to go ahead and do the bedrooms too—without being asked!
 - Will that really harm you?
 - 2) And you who are employed...
 - This is a call to do more than the bare minimum of what is required of you.
 - You are there to serve others, not just to get by!
3. But once again, let me mention the bonehead application.
- a. This does not mean that a man with three children, a busy wife, and a low income must work exactly twice as long for his employer as he is asked.
 - It does mean he should be cheerful about doing his work,
 - and even go beyond what he is asked to do in a spirit of love.
 - b. But it does not mean he is to ignore all of his other duties to meet the demands of an unreasonable employer...
 - He is still supposed to love his wife.
 - He is still supposed to command his household in the Lord.
 - He is still supposed to keep the Sabbath Day.
 - He is still supposed to visit his widowed mother and minister to her needs.

- c. But you know what the problem usually is!
 - You are reluctant to do anything more than the bare minimum.
 - Instead, your goal ought to be to show love by going the extra mile.

Finally, let us consider the fourth way that Jesus calls us to go beyond mere justice.

D. In verse 42 Jesus says,

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

1. Your heart is displayed right here!

- a. How slow we are to minister to the needs of others—even when we know good and well that they have real needs!
 - As soon as you learn of the need, the excuses start to fly!
 - “But I have too many bills to pay.”
 - “This guy is in this mess because of his own folly, why should I bail him out?”

TRANS> Jesus says,

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

b. The Lord is simply repeating here what He had formerly revealed through Moses:

- De 15:7-9 "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.
- You are called to have a heart that truly identifies with your brother...
 - It is too easy to feel sorry for yourself when hard times come...
 - But it is hard to have the same feeling for your brother when trouble comes to him.
 - Moses calls this letting “your eye be evil against your poor brother” so that you “give him nothing.”

TRANS> These are hard words for us and we need to hear them...

- I almost hesitate to divert by referring to the boneheads again...
 - But it is needful because this is something we are so confused about today.
2. Jesus is clearly **not** suggesting that you give without discrimination.
- a. God's word shows that there are two sorts of people you are not to give to:
- 1) First, those who are not really in need.
 - Parents, you can see that it would be irresponsible to give your little child everything he or she wants!
 - God has given you financial resources to manage, not to squander away.
 - In the same vein,
 - Jesus is not saying that if some Joe comes along and he is spending his money on prostitutes or gambling, or a drug habit,
 - and he asks you for money that you should give it to him...
 - You are not to buy food for him so he can go out and spend his money on these other things.
 - It is right for you to try to minister to him and help him find repentance, but not to throw money at him.
 - Such a person is not really in need, he has the resources to support himself—
 - you are to insist that he do so.
 - It is actually a little shocking for us to see what the Bible actually says about giving in this sort of situation!
 - In 1 Timothy 5, Paul instructs the church to not even support widows who live a life of self-indulgence and do not use their time to minister to others!
 - How much less should a man who gambles or drinks away his resources receive our support?

TRANS> Clearly, those who do not have real need are not to be supported...

- and secondly:
- 2) Those who are in need because they refuse to work are not to be supported.
 - Paul actually rebukes the Thessalonians for giving even those things necessary for life to their brothers in the church who would not work.
 - He insisted that it was better to let your brother starve if he is refusing to work...

- “If a man won’t work, neither shall he eat.”
- b. But it is important to understand why you are not to support those who do not have real needs and those who will not work.
- 1) First of all, because it will be bad for them to support them...
 - It will only serve to support their sinful lifestyle
 - and this is not the purpose for giving...
 - 2) Secondly, it is so that we will have the resources to help those who are really in need!
 - a) If we swallow up our resources helping those who squander their living or who refuse to work,
 - we will have nothing with which to minister to real needs.
 - b) A man who is injured and has a family with a mortgage to pay is to be helped before a man who has no food because he will not work.
 - The danger is that you will look at the lazy man with no food and say,
 - “Now that is a real need”
 - and give him a little to soothe your conscience so you can feel that you have cared for the poor...
 - And walk by the injured man because he has food on the table and is not utterly destitute.
 - But assistance paying the mortgage of the injured man who cannot work is a need you ought to meet instead of assisting the lazy man who has no food.
 - c) The danger is that you will make excuses and refuse to help out when there are needs God wants you to meet...
 - And that you will help those who should not be helped.

TRANS> What a high standard our Lord calls us to in all four of these verses!

III. How can anybody live like this?

- **Well I’ll tell you how...**

A. The first thing you must do if you would live like this is die to yourself.

1. The whole problem lies in the fact that you are still thinking about what you want.
 - That’s why you get offended when someone insults you.

- That's why you aren't very serious about making restitution.
 - That's why you only want to do the bare minimum of what is required by your authorities.
 - That's why you find it so hard to deprive yourself of anything to help out your brother.
2. But do you remember what we looked at recently on Sunday night?
- a. We looked at what it means to die with Christ.
 - This is not to be confused with Christ dying for us...
 - This is about us dying with Him.
 - b. That happens when you come to Him for salvation...
 - You are joined to His great life,
 - You walk away from your old life and walk into new life in Him.
 - This is what is spoken of in 2 Cor 5:14-15:
 - 2 Cor 5:14-15: For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.
 - All who come to Christ die with Him so that they should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again.
 - They join themselves to His life.
 - They become a new creation in Christ.
 - c. Look at the life to which you are joined!
 - It is a life that is given over entirely to the service of God!
 - Jesus tells us that the things He does and the words He speaks are not his own, but the Father's.
 - Everything He does, He does to please the Father.
 - He even left the glories of heaven and came to die on the cross in order to please the Father!
 - This is what true human life really is all about!
 - We were created with this life,
 - but we died when we ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - We were separated from the life of God and joined to ourselves only.

- Jesus came to save us from this desperate condition!
 - He came to crucify us to self so that we might be joined to His great life.
 - This is how you can come to live like Jesus calls you to live!
 - I don't mean that you will be perfect all at once,
 - But if you are in Christ,
 - God has predestined you to be conformed to the image of His Son!
 - And you will be—
 - You will be like Him!
 - It all begins by coming to Christ for salvation.

TRANS> And there is a second thing that helps you live like Jesus commands in our text...

B. That you consider well how God has lavished His grace upon you!

1. Do you know what one of the main things that keeps a Christian from
 - bearing insults without retaliation...
 - from cheerfully making restitution of his wrongs...
 - from going the second mile
 - from giving to those that have need?
2. It is ingratitude!
 - a. If you see yourself as you really are in Jesus Christ—
 - one who has been lavished upon with grace upon grace...
 - you will be liberal and generous!
 - Paul suffered all kinds of insults and abuse and went on loving all the more and serving all the more...
 - because he considered himself a debtor to all men!
 - God had given him so much that it seemed unfair to him for others to be deprived!
 - b. Sadly, many Christians think they have been short-changed!
 - If you think you deserve more, you will obviously not be generous!

- You will be too busy feeling sorry for yourself to care about loving anybody else.
 - You will feel that you have already taken so much abuse that you can't take any more.
 - You will be far from the life that Jesus is talking about in our text.
3. You need to consider what you have in Christ!
- a. You need to meditate on the grace that God has poured out on you!
 - You were on your way to Hell where you would have been miserable forever.
 - God's agenda for you would have been to visit your sins with His curse forever and ever.
 - All because you deserved it.
 - This would have been perfect justice.
 - b. But Jesus came and He took God's curse for you...
 - And in place of that, He gives you an everlasting inheritance in glory!
 - In Christ,
 - God's agenda for you for all eternity will be to display His love and grace upon you!
 - His divine energy will be directed toward blessing you and making you happy for all eternity!
 - Even the chastisement you feel in your life now is to prepare you for all this.
 - c. You must lay hold of these things by faith!
 - If you only go by what you see and what you have now,
 - you will be frustrated and charity will be disappear from your life...
 - But if you truly embrace God's promises in Christ for the future,
 - If you move into the reality of His promised reward and inheritance...
 - Then you will have lots of room to be big-hearted toward others
 - no matter what they do to you.
 - You will find that you are too rich to be hurt by anyone.
 - If this is your attitude,
 - You will find that you have a whole lot to give!