

What About My Rights?

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Bible Verse: Matthew 5:38-42
Preached on: Tuesday, July 16, 2024

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Well, tonight I invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 5 verses 38 to 42 in just a moment. And I wanted to just make a preliminary statement, kind of prompted by some different things going on in my mind. The purpose of ministry, New Testament, local church ministry, is really expressed well in Colossians 1, verse 28, when it says, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." The goal of ministry is to produce mature disciples of Jesus Christ. That's in keeping with the Great Commission at the end of Matthew 28, when Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The goal is to produce disciples, and, beloved, I'm about to say something very important that I should probably spend a couple of Sundays expounding on regarding a philosophy of ministry for the local church; for now, I'm just going to make a very simple comment. It is not, it should not be the goal of any church, and it is not the goal of Truth Community Church simply to have a lot of activities in order to keep you busy and to just provide a social gathering point multiple times a week, as if that were the goal of ministry. The goal of ministry is not to keep you busy, and that would be a shocking statement in some places. No, the goal of ministry is to help you grow in righteousness, to help you grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ, and it is a serious mistake, a common serious mistake, for churches to equate busyness with growing in Christlikeness. And those two things are not equivalent matters whatsoever and the sooner that we make a divergence in our thinking along those lines, the better.

You know, there needs to be time at church in my humble judgment, my humble opinion, or at least my opinion, anyway, we won't debate about how humble it is, in my opinion, a church should build its life, its philosophy, structure its schedule in order to allow men and women who are serious about knowing Christ and growing in sound doctrine to have the time to structure, to build into their lives private times of reading Scripture, reading good, solid books, growing in doctrine, and devoting themselves to that. If you're just running around all the time from one meeting to the next, from vacation Bible school to the next community outreach event, and you're just doing that week after week, it's like a hamster on one of those circle wheels, you're just running, running, running, running, and never getting anywhere. And I think that tonight's passage from Matthew chapter 5 will show why that's true because in Matthew chapter 5, as we've seen many times, Jesus is

teaching what true righteousness looks like and he's focusing on matters of the heart, matters of anger, lust, marriage and divorce, a proper taking of those, meaning more specifically, being honest and direct and trustworthy in our communication. You can be really, really busy doing all kinds of outwardly church stuff, I won't even call it Christian stuff, you can be busy with all kinds of church stuff and be an angry, lustful person, be somebody whose word can't be trusted. The two are not equivalent. And it would be revolutionary if, you know, the church, broadly speaking, embraced that and understood it and what we're going to see here tonight, beginning in verse 38, is another aspect of this. Jesus is teaching what true righteousness looks like in Matthew chapter 5, and it has nothing to do with just being a busy body and a busy person, a busy-body worrying about the latest gossip from different people and families and all of that. Yeah, I'm happy to let that sink in a bit.

We need to focus on true righteousness, and that's what Jesus is teaching us in Matthew chapter 5 and so we read verses 38 to 42 in what is a profoundly searching, profoundly challenging section of Scripture. The righteous one, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, says in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 38,

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

The operative starting point in this text is what Jesus says in verse 38, "You have heard that it was said," meaning, and as we've said so many times, I won't try to reinforce it yet again tonight, he's just simply quoting something that was an element of the teaching of the Pharisees at the time, which was also rooted in Old Testament Scripture. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, we've all heard that phrase. That's one of those biblical phrases that's embedded itself deeply into, certainly American culture to one level or another. And what the Pharisees did is that they used that principle in a very wrong and bad way, and I'm getting ahead of myself in my notes, but that's okay, we'll just go with the flow here. The Pharisees, the first century religious leaders, used that principle in an entirely perverse, wrong-headed way that was contrary to everything that God intended when he gave that principle in Scripture. You can read about this. In fact, let's turn back just to see it in Exodus chapter 21, just to see the Old Testament basis for what we're talking about; this is repeated in Leviticus 24, Deuteronomy 19, we won't turn to all those passages. But just to see it in Scripture, Exodus chapter 21, verse 23 we read, "But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." And the idea is that when there is an injury, the extent of the recompense, the extent of the penalty, shall correspond to the nature of the original injury. That was the principle. And beloved, this is so vital to understand right now what I'm about to say. That principle was given as a judicial code for those with appointed authority, think about the state, the magistrate

today. It was a judicial code for the state to implement and to apply in civil and criminal matters and what it did was this, and the purpose of God was this, it gave a formula that limited the escalation of violence. It entrusted conflict to the hands of an impartial judge and gave guidance to how decisions would be made, how penalties would be assessed so that if someone struck somebody and a guy lost an eye, then the other guy would lose his eye but he wouldn't suffer the death penalty for it, for example. There was to be a correspondence between the injury suffered originally and the punishment on the one who was guilty, and this was a judicial matter for the state to implement, for those who had judicial authority to implement. It was a guiding principle in legal matters.

Now, it will surprise you to realize how much it has to teach us and how challenging this all gets. The Pharisees utterly perverted that principle and turned it into something different altogether and so we're going to look at, we're going to divide this as we so often do into three sections, tonight's message into three sections, and we want to start, first of all, by considering the Pharisees' love for retaliation. This is a passage in which Jesus is teaching his disciples to mortify, to put to death that intrinsic desire for retaliation that we all carry about us, "If you hurt me, I'm going to hurt you back," and the resentment that people cultivate. Jesus is teaching against that in a very sanctifying way and it is teaching like this applied to our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, that has a transforming impact that turns us more into disciples of Christ and reflecting his image. Not busyness and just being involved in every ministry that comes along in a church that's got far too full of a calendar. You can be busy with a church calendar and not ever pay any heed to these matters that are going on inside your heart and the priority to Christ are the things that are going on in your heart. It's a waste of time to do the other stuff without paying attention to the heart matters that Jesus says is at the very heart of those who truly belong to the kingdom of heaven. You know, Jesus said, you know, we started in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven." Not the busy folks, people that are poor in spirit. One of the things that we need to see while we're alluding to the Beatitudes is just for you to look at chapter 5, verse 9 for a moment, where Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." And so there is an element of peacemaking that is at the very heart of a true disciple and that is being expanded upon here in what Jesus says in verses 38 to 42. I trust that you're able to follow me with what I've said so far.

The Pharisees were not peacemakers, and thus they were under the condemnation of God, and so the first section to tonight's message, I just want to talk about the Pharisees' love for retaliation and so look at verse 38 again. Jesus is quoting the Pharisees and alluding to the way that they handled this portion of the Old Testament Scriptures. It says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'" How did the Pharisees go wrong handling a Scripture like that? Here's what they did, beloved, the Pharisees turned that judicial code for public matters being handled according to process, and that was specifically designed to restrain retaliation, they turned that into something for private use, and they used the principle to justify personal retribution against someone that had offended them. They turned it into a tool for revenge, so that if someone wronged them, "You hit me, I'm going to hit you back," is the idea. And so they misused this law from the law of God, the word of God, designed for judicial use, and they turned

it into a personal entitlement to strike back when someone had hurt them or offended them or anything like that, and the whole spirit of it is, "I can do this, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," so that they use this to engender and to provoke and to perpetuate conflict rather than being a peacemaker. Complete reversal of what God intended, a complete contradiction that the kingdom of God is filled with those who are peacemakers. They weren't interested in that at all and in so doing, they conveniently ignored other parts of Scripture that would have immediately exposed their sinful attitudes. So, for example, you can just write down this verse reference, Leviticus 19, verse 18. Moses said, expressing the word of God, said, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." And so the Pharisees take this judicial principle and use it as a vindication for personal vengeance in private matters, utterly contrary to what Scripture said, "Don't be a person who takes vengeance and seeks revenge. Don't bear grudges against your neighbor. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord," all of that being so clearly set forth.

Now, with that in mind, just turn over to Matthew 6, and let's remember other portions of the Sermon on the Mount itself. This, what we're talking about here is central to real prayer, to true prayer. An absence of the Spirit that Jesus is cultivating in Matthew 5 is a barrier to answered prayer. It is a barrier to intimacy with God. It is a barrier to growing in Christ's likeness, which is the goal of ministry. So that Jesus teaches, central to the nature of true prayer, he says in verse 12 of chapter 6, he says, "You're to pray like this. You ask God, 'Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'" And he goes on and says in verse 14, "if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." So that here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is coming and saying, "Discipleship to me, life under my lordship, is a life of peacemaking. It is a life of forgiving others, of loving your enemies," as we'll see next time on Sunday. Not this matter of having a hair trigger for vengeance and revenge when someone has wronged you. Not being someone who carries long-term grudges, long-term resentment because of a wrong that was done to you. So yeah, I'm very happy to stop and pause and let that settle in. You know, like you're watering a plant, you can just pour on so much water that it all runs off and nothing sinks in to actually refresh the plant. You just patiently water, let it sink in, water some more, let it sink in. That's what we're doing right now, is letting this sink in, because this is endemic to the human condition to have that desire to retaliate, to revenge, to punch back, to, you know, a guy cuts you off on the road, you want to speed up and let him know you didn't appreciate that, and just that instant reflex reaction, "You offended me, now I'm going to get you back." And I have no doubt whatsoever that I'm directly confronting a number of different hearts in the room and over the live stream; just for those of you joining in, we think of you as we preach as well.

And so this love for retaliation, this sullen resentment, this grudging spirit, this attitude that says, "You don't mess with me," is exactly the opposite of what belongs to the kingdom of God and someone that... and look, look, you and I know, you and I know it's one thing to struggle with these kinds of impulses, you and I know that there are people

that glory in being someone exactly like that. "You don't mess with me. Don't you know who I am? You don't mess with me. You know who my family is? You know our position in the community? You don't mess with me. You don't cross me." And all of that, all of that is not consistent with who Christ is and who he commands us to be.

And so Jesus here is addressing this in what we are seeing now. He's highlighted the Pharisees' love for retaliation in a very condensed, shorthand form, and now he is going to address all of it in what follows in verses 39 through 42, and so I want to go to the second section in tonight's message, and we can just call it Christ's end of retaliation. Christ's end of retaliation, and what Jesus is doing here is he's, again, he's showing the moral force of the law of God, he is showing what God intended by the moral law, and what he is going to show us and what the overarching principle that we see in verses 39 through 42 is this, this is the money line in tonight's message, to just understand what's going on in these five verses, the money line, the money principle here in all of this is that Jesus is telling you as his disciple, he's speaking to his disciples, not to the world in the Sermon on the Mount, he's telling his disciples, not only are you not to retaliate, you are not even to desire to retaliate against those who wrong you.

So we pause, we just let the hose run on the dry ground and let that sink in a bit. You're not even to desire to be like that, let alone to actually do it. The Pharisees were teaching, not only do you do it, you're justified in doing it. This is, again, a direct head-on collision of massive proportions between the teaching of Christ and the false teaching of the Pharisees and what Jesus does here in this section is he proceeds to use four pictures to show how it works out, and so this is kind of there's four examples under the heading here of Christ's end of retaliation. The end of retaliation. You could say the end of a vengeful spirit. You could say an arrow in the heart of resentment. You could come up with all kinds of other pictures, I guess. But this is a most profound addressing of the human heart at its most fundamental level and frankly, you know, we could say at the ugliest level that we can exist at, and this addresses the ugliness of our hearts in ways that only the Son of God could do. The law of God, the moral law of God, addresses the heart. The purpose of ministry is for us to grow in Christ-likeness.

And let me just remind you as we go into this, who is it that's teaching this? It's the Lord Jesus. And what did the Lord Jesus manifest? Scripture says that when he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When they plucked his beard, when they spat upon his face, when they struck him, he, as the eternal, holy Son of God, did not retaliate when it happened. That's who our Lord is. That is the model of godliness par excellence. This is the highest moral authority having manifested in his own life, now addressing us from his word and saying, "You are mine. You are my disciple. I called you to myself. I redeemed you with my own blood. And this is how I am telling you, you must be. You must be like I was in my earthly life." And as Christ did not retaliate and strike back, so also you, not only are you not to retaliate and strike back, you're not even to have that desire for that in your heart. This is completely contrary to the spirit of our age and the spirit of our political environment, as you so well know.

So let's just walk through these examples quickly, simply. We're seeing four different ones, one per verse, 39, 40, 41, and 42, and the first example that Jesus gives, you could say this, is yield your dignity. Yield your dignity. Don't be so concerned to protect your reputation, so concerned to justify your dignity, I guess, going back to the same word. That's what he's saying, yield your dignity rather than to retaliate. So in verse 39, Jesus says, "But I say to you," notice that language. "But," in contrast to what you've been taught by the Pharisees, in our day, in contrast to everything that you see in the world around you which glories in revenge, glories in entertainment that highlights retaliation, and the whole spirit of all of that, Jesus says, "in contrast to that, I say to you," Jesus declaring on his own authority, interpreting the meaning and the application of the word of God to us and what it means to us as his disciples, "But I say to you, you who are listening to me, you who are my disciple, you who are poor in spirit, you who are in the kingdom of heaven." This isn't to the whole world, this is for those of us that claim to be disciples of Christ. This is a separating of the sheep from the goats. "I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." I'm going to deal with some practical matters about not resisting the one who is evil at the end of the message. We'll come back to that. Here, I just want to focus on, he says if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Now, in that day, as well as in ours, a slap in the face was not only a physical blow, it was a great insult; you know, there's a sense in which our face is the presentation of ourselves. We are known through our face, you could say, in many ways, and so to slap a person's face is to inflict upon them a great insult saying, "I slap and reject your very face," and what the Pharisees would do, you know, if they got slapped, they'd slap back. "You slap me, I'll slap you." And what Jesus says is, when your dignity is assaulted like that, don't retaliate. He bans that sense of retaliation. He says endure the insult instead of fighting against it. Instead of escalating it, instead of responding, simply endure it. Sacrifice your dignity to the glory of Christ. And what he says is, when someone assaults your dignity, don't you respond in kind. Just let it go. Really what this does, what this particular thing on dignity does, is it exposes the pride of our heart. "No, you will respect me. I will defend my honor here." You know, going back to the early days of our country when scores were settled, there would be an insult between so-called gentlemen and they'd resolve things with a duel and, "Well, I challenge you to a duel and we'll settle this with violence." Jesus was having none of that.

And beloved, you and I just have to realize that the stimulus in the environment around us and the stimulus in our hearts to defend ourselves, defend our dignity, is utterly contrary to the Spirit of Christ. Christ yielded his dignity. He did not defend his dignity while he was here on earth and what he's calling us to is what he did when he was in the hands of sinners. And beloved, he saved you. If he saved you at all, he has saved you so that he would make you like himself. He did not save you through his humility, he didn't humble himself and bring you into his kingdom so that you could be different and could be someone who, you know, people know not to mess with. He saved you so you could become like him in all things. He saved you so that the Spirit of God would indwell you and have you bring forth the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. Those things are the realm of the kingdom of God. That's what

Jesus is talking about here in terms of how we deal with personal issues. He says, when your pride is offended, when your dignity has been assaulted through some kind of personal insult, he said, let it go. Don't strike back. That is not godly. That is not Christ-like. That is not righteous. The impulse is not revenge. The impulse is forgiveness. These things flow from completely different fountains, completely different sources and so yield your dignity is what he means when he says, "turn to him the other also." He's not teaching about physical violence here. He's teaching about an attitude of the heart and how you respond when you have been offended.

Now, example number two. It said, yield your dignity there in verse 39, verse 40, yield your things. Yield your things. Look at verse 40 with me, "if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." And just a little bit of first century fashion, you might say. The tunic was an inner garment that was worn, the cloak was an outer garment that was that was used and was used to keep you warm. Sometimes the Jews would use a cloak, their cloak as collateral for a loan and in Exodus 22, you were required as a creditor to give that cloak back at the end of each day, it was the only way for them to keep warm. There was a sensitivity to the nature of these things and what Jesus is saying here is if someone sues you for your tunic, that inner garment, don't be resentful about that. Don't be bitter. Let the spirit of retaliation be far away from you in modern terms, in legal terms, and I'm just using this as an illustration, I'm not giving people legal advice in what I'm saying here. I'm just using the legal process that's a little bit familiar to me to illustrate the point. You get sued. Your first impulse of heart is not to immediately file your counterclaim. "I got sued. Now I'm going to sue you back." Jesus says, "I don't want that spirit in you. Let the spirit of retaliation be far from you," so much so that he says, "If they're suing you for one thing, give them that which they have no right to take." It's so searching, so contrary to that spirit of self-defense and self-justification, Jesus says, "Be of such a mind, be of such a peaceful, conciliatory heart that if they sue you for one thing, let them take the other thing also."

Beloved, that is self-denial. That is an entrusting of yourself to the sovereignty and providence of God. You say, "But that ain't right. That ain't fair. You know, I've got a legal case here. They shouldn't do that. I have my rights." Well, what about your rights? And so we just opened a door to an interesting room, and we're going to walk through that door and look at the room that has been revealed to us by what Jesus is saying here, okay? We've opened a door and we're walking in and I've just put my arm around someone who said, "Yeah, but I've got my rights. What about my rights here?" Say, okay, well, let's go into this room, look around at the furniture and the way that the decor is laid out, and let's think about the assertion of rights and self-denial.

What would have happened? What would have happened? I'm asking you, you need to pay attention right now, really, really, really closely, what would have happened to you if Jesus Christ had been one who insisted on his rights? The eternal Son of God in glory, entitled to, you know, the sovereign and the Creator of the universe by right had no responsibility to come to earth. By right, you know, he could have asserted his rights and avoided the cross. He said, "I could call down 10,000 angels and defend myself right now. I have that right. I have that prerogative. I have that authority, but I'm not going to

exercise it." Beloved, your salvation from sin has at its very core, at its very root, a self-denial by the Lord Jesus Christ where he laid down himself, Philippians chapter 2, he laid himself down and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, and if Christ had not been like that, you would be lost in your sin forever. You would have no hope if Christ had not been one of self-denial. And so, beloved, in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in light of the lovely Lord Jesus and his very person, there is no room for us whatsoever to object against something like that and say, "But that's not fair." Look, what was supremely unfair in those terms was Christ being crucified. That was not fair. That was not according to principles of justice because he had done nothing wrong for which to suffer the punishment of a criminal. No, what's at the heart of the gospel is the grace of God, the love of God, the kindness of God, the mercy of God on people who are not deserving of it, by which I mean you and me. At the heart of everything in our salvation is grace, love, mercy, kindness, and in Christ, the ultimate act of self-denial. He said, "No one's taken my life from me. I lay it down on my own accord," John 10, verse 18. Jesus freely gave his life to those who wrongly took it. Jesus freely laid himself down for you when you were a rebel, dead in sin, dominated by the devil, and doomed to suffer the wrath of God. Beloved, listen to me, and listen to me closely: the last thing that you want to do is argue against the principle of self-denial, because it is at the heart of Christian biblical salvation and without self-denial, you, without someone being self-denying, namely Christ, without that, you would be utterly, utterly lost and doomed and judged. But no, in Christ, in undeserved love, in unrequited love, in love that could not be demanded, in grace, in a giving of kindness to one who deserves judgment, Christ denied himself.

And so, beloved, say, "But this isn't fair. What about my rights?" What about your rights? If you're in Christ, there's a glorious sense in which you gladly say, "You know what? I have no rights. I'm under the Lordship of Christ and what my bread is, what my drink is, is to simply be in him, to do his will, and to receive and accept his providence as he dispenses it to me, and to find myself content therein. And that's enough for me. It's enough for me," the disciple says, "it's enough for me to be in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if in his providence, rejection, hardship, unfairness is mediated to me, I can accept that and I don't have to fight back."

Now thirdly, we've seen that you yield your dignity, you yield your things, thirdly, you yield your time. You yield your time. Verse 41, "And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." Very simple, brief verse there. In ancient times, the government could commandeer private citizens for work that needed to be done. So if you remember the crucifixion of Christ, it's in Luke 23, where Simon was pressed into service to carry the cross of Jesus, and he was impressed into service, and he was commandeered into service and to do something. "Hey, you, come over here!" You know, it's a soldier, it's someone with authority. "You come over here, you do this." And of course, that practice was abused, of course, it was a source of resentment. It's something that probably irritated Jews on a daily basis, that they lived under a system that could assert its right on their time without them having anything to say about it, and what Jesus says is, when that happens, don't resist it. He says, in fact, you do even more than what is required, and you do it with a cheerful spirit. Look at it there in verse 41,

someone forces you to go one mile, you go further, you go with him two miles. You give of your time, you respond not with resentment, not with rebellion, you respond with a cooperative, cheerful spirit, and while this goes beyond the immediate context of what Jesus is saying, it certainly informs things that come later in Matthew chapter 6, recognize that the providence of God is in all things and if someone is exercising authority over you, they have that authority because they received it from God himself. And so don't be resentful. "You want me? Oh, okay, sure. That's fine." And you give of your response, you give of your person, you give of your time, even if it's being demanded from you unfairly. This is something that would inform the response of mothers to their constantly needy children a lot, for example.

And so you yield your time. You don't resist that. You don't resent it. See, at the core of all of this is to address that searing chain of resentment that marks so much of our life. "You hit me. I resent that. You're suing me. I want to sue you back. You're making demands on me. I don't like that." And Jesus is, with a broad cleansing cloth, is coming to our souls and just washing all of that away and saying, "That's not what it's like in my kingdom."

There's one more in verse 42. You could say, yield your money. Verse 42, if you look at it there, "Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." And what he's talking about here is he's calling for a generous spirit that responds to legitimate needs. He's saying, "Give. Be generous without regard to what's in it for you. You just be generous without calculating what you're going to get back out of the process."

And so what we've seen here is Jesus saying, yield your dignity, yield your things, yield your time, yield your money, and understand this – oh, this is so fundamental, it is so fundamental is you've got to have the right perspective on why you do all of these things. You are doing this not because it is in keeping with your immediate personal human desires. You are doing this not because it is in keeping with fundamental principles of human fairness. You've got to separate yourself away from that legal way of thinking, and what I mean by legal is that sense of entitlement that animates the way we naturally live. It's not for the sake of the Roman soldier who impresses you into service. It's not for the sake of the person who comes with you and says, "I have a need." It's not for the sake of the one who wrongly sues you or has hatefully stricken you. It's not for their sake at all. It has nothing to do with them. And you say, "Then why would I do this?" It's not even about what's in it for you. You do this because it comes from the Lord. You do this in response to the authority and love of Jesus Christ and he says, "This is what I require from my disciples. You deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." You do it for the sake of Christ and all of these things, beloved, at the core of true discipleship, at the core of true Christianity, at the core of maturity in Christ, and the reason that the church exists, as I was saying at the start, at the core of this is becoming and following after the righteousness of Christ for his sake and for his sake alone, and so every incident that comes that is a temptation to this resentment becomes an opportunity to yield yourself to Christ all over again without regard to who the human instrument is.

And so, you know, I can think of times in years long gone by, situations that do not at all still matter, situations in a job where I felt like my dignity was assaulted, it doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. There's no reason for me to assert myself in that. People seem, maybe you think, "I'm being treated unfairly here. I did for them, but they won't do for me in response." So what? Beloved, honestly, so what? Are we going to be so petty that we respond in kind to ungodly people without regard to the call of Christ on our lives, without regard to how we have benefited from his self-denial and now his call and command to be like him? "But what about my rights?" Beloved, don't you understand? Salvation, this kind of righteousness, is not natural. It's not about your rights at all. This is about having been saved from the kingdom of darkness and transformed, transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son and he says, "This is what I'll have you be like. This is what I call you to be." And the disciple of Christ says, "Of course. Yes, Lord. What a blessing to be in your kingdom. What a blessing to be under your benevolent headship, your benevolent lordship. Nothing you could ask from me could be too great in light of the far infinitely greater price that you paid to save my soul. So I gladly, Lord, I gladly yield my dignity for your sake. I gladly yield my things for your sake. I gladly yield my time, my money for your sake because I, Lord, I have heard your call, that if I want to come after you, I must deny myself, take up my cross, and follow you and I gladly do that for the sake of having you."

Beloved, understand that in light of that, there is no way that the Sermon on the Mount is simply an ethical teaching that anybody can take up and practice. This is utterly beyond the realm of natural man to achieve. We must be delivered, first of all, from our sinful, self-defensive hearts and then we need the power and the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us live and respond this way. And there is no room for a professing Christian to say, "I don't want to be that way. I don't like that. That's too risky. That's too vulnerable." You might as well say, "But I don't want Christ. I won't have that man reign over me like this." Well, in what sense is anyone who has that attitude a true Christian? "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" Let every man examine himself, woman, boy, and girl.

Now, this is why teaching like this from Scripture, what Jesus says, this is why we don't pack your schedule full of stuff because you need time to think through this and sort through what it means for your heart, sort through the private resentments and grudges, the refusal to forgive, the bitterness and all of that, and to filter it all through what Christ has said rather than rehearsing once again the wrong that was done to you. That takes time, it takes space.

Now, third section, just very quickly, some practical points of application. Let's apply this text in light of the full counsel of God, okay? And we come back to verse 39, where Jesus said, "Do not resist the one who is evil." Over the course of church history, there have been those that have said that means that government shouldn't maintain standing armies and we shouldn't do anything to react against an evil world that's within us. Does Jesus mean, first question, did Jesus mean absolutely never to confront evil and that no one anywhere should ever confront evil? No, that's not what he meant at all. That's not what he meant at all. You have to take it in the full context of what he's saying. So, for

example, in Matthew 18, Jesus commands the church to confront sin and establishes a process of what you can call church restoration or church discipline, that when there's sin in the body of Christ, that is to be addressed, confronted, and dealt with, and if there is an unrepentant spirit all the way through, that person is to be put out of the church. Listen, that's confronting sin and evil. In Romans 13, we read about how government has the power of the sword, the power to punish wrongdoing, so that law enforcement and the judicial system is a God-sanctioned means of restraining evil in society. And, of course, it's to be confronted, and it's one of the great travesties of the age that government is increasingly just protecting the criminal over against the victim and restraining law enforcement from even enforcing the laws that are on the book. That is completely wrongheaded and completely anti-biblical and anti-Christ. And so this passage does not teach passivism. It does not prohibit war. In the Old Testament, Israel was sent to war. They were commanded to go to war. They were instruments of judgment of God on sinful nations. And so this is not a teaching that says never to confront evil. This is Jesus teaching his disciples about inner heart righteousness.

Now secondly, is there ever a time to assert my legal rights? Sure there is. Of course there is. Paul, for example, in Acts 25, he appealed to Caesar when his accusers were about to wrong him. He said, "I appeal to Caesar. I have a right. I have a right to appeal to Caesar. I'm exercising my right."

Thirdly, should we always give to beggars? Every time you see someone on the street with their hand out, are you obligated to reach into your wallet, give them a five spot, reach in for the change? No, not at all. Scripture commands us not to allow slackers to operate at will. The Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 3, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." In other words, lazy people are not to be enabled to persist in their sinful irresponsibility. So that's not what Jesus is referring to here when he talks about giving to whoever asks you. You take these things in balance.

Beloved, understand, and that's all of the practical implications that I have for right now. What I want you to see is this, you know, if we reduce this passage to absurdities, saying that there's no place for law enforcement, there's no place for church discipline, there's no place for righteous war, and we just limit the application of the passage to that, if we say that this passage, the first principle, the word to understand is that we're to give to every beggar on the street and we just process the passages like that, and it can sound so hyper-spiritualized when you do that, that's wrong. That is not what Jesus is teaching here. The point Jesus is making in Matthew 5:38 to 42 is far more searching, far more challenging, far more important than such utter trivialities. What Christ is addressing here is the tendency that you and I have deep in our hearts to strike back when we have been offended or when we have been wronged and to justify our unforgiving spirit by saying, "What about my rights?" What Christ is teaching is far more searching than those superficial considerations. Let that sink in. It's far more difficult. You know, it'd be far easier to just throw money at every beggar on the street and let your own sinful heart go unaddressed. Far more difficult, far more challenging, far more searching, far more meaningful to have the core of who we are addressed by the eternal Son of God and said, "This is how I lived, this is how I saved you, thus shall you follow me." That's on an

infinitely different scale than those external trivialities. And so, beloved, as we close, Christ was gracious to you in your sin and the corollary of that is therefore you go and be gracious to men and women who do not deserve it. What we have in this passage is a call to surrender and to entrust ourselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Our gracious Lord, we're so grateful that you voluntarily laid down your life for the sake of sinners. There would be no salvation if you had been one who insisted on your rights and entitlement as the eternal Son of God. No, you humbled yourself. You laid aside the prerogatives of deity, took on the form of a slave, and served your Father and served your people all the way to death without a spirit of retaliation, without striking back, and we thank you because we know we could not be saved apart from that blessed attribute of your holy character. Help us then, Father, to embrace what our Lord has taught us in this passage, to search ourselves, to yield ourselves to Christ in every situation that comes our way. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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