

Session 10 Refusing Retaliation and Defensiveness (Mt. 5:38-42)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In this session, we cover the fifth temptation that must be resisted—the temptation to retaliate and be defensive towards those who insult us or take advantage of us. So much good is lost in our relationship with God, our family, and with others by this mindset which is so natural to us.
- B. We must understand this rightly or we will not even attempt to walk this out. If we will conclude that it is just idealism that is not really possible to walk out, then we end up ignoring this truth.

II. REFUSING A SPIRIT OF RETALIATION AND DEFENSIVENESS (MT. 5:38-42)

- A. We do not retaliate with defensive towards those who insult or take advantage of us (5:38-42).
³⁸You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹But I tell you not to resist [retaliate against] an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. ⁴¹And whoever compels [forces, NAS] you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Mt. 5:38-42)
- B. Jesus gave four illustrations of the kingdom principle of refusing retaliation and defensiveness. Each of the four examples describes one who insults or takes advantage of us in small ways. Jesus could have given us 100 other examples. He did not give precise rules or a complete list for every circumstance, but gave us examples that we would apply the principles to other situations. The Sermon was not written as a code of conduct giving details for each situation, but to show us the spirit of the Law. Thus, we are not to apply these teachings in a mechanical and rigid way.
- C. The Pharisees taught two errors—that the Law commanded revenge and that people could administrate it personally outside of the court system. Moses taught the people to not take the law into their own hands, but to resist an evil man by using the court system. The Pharisees empowered people to act in wrong ways and in a wrong spirit in their conflicts.
- D. ***Eye for an eye***: The principle here is that the punishment must fit the crime (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). It was not to be too lenient or too severe. This law defined justice, restrained revenge, protected the innocent from evil doers, protected evil doers from judges with a wrong spirit who were too severe in their penalties, and kept the people from taking the law into their hands outside the court system. If someone poked an eye out, they would not kill the person. There is no record of anyone mutilating someone, but rather making a monetary payment.
- E. The law of Moses did not command revenge, but to love one another without bearing a grudge. The people were to live free from the spirit of revenge (vengeance) and defensiveness (grudge).
¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge...but love your neighbor... (Lev. 19:18)

- F. ***Do not resist:*** The Greek verb (anthistimi) here translated *resist* means to *oppose* or *withstand* someone or to *fight back*. In other words, we are not to retaliate or seek to pay back people who do evil against us by insulting us or troubling us in small ways. Jesus was speaking about our attitude toward people who infringe on our personal rights or who cause us inconveniences. Jesus was not teaching against the principle of just retribution in the legal court system.
- G. Jesus called us to respond to evil men in the ***right way*** (not taking the law into our own hands), in the ***right spirit*** (with gracious humility), and in ***the right measure*** (we accept small injustices). This passage has been often misapplied in a way that contradicts the plain and obvious teaching of other Scriptures. Scripture must always be compared with Scripture to gain the right meaning.
- H. ***Pacifism:*** This is one of the most debated passages in the Bible related to pacifism (forbidding the use of all force). Some interpret this passage (without any qualification) as teaching against soldiers, police, or judges. Jesus was not advocating the rejection of all force against evil men (legal courts, military, or police). Civil leaders are God's servants to resist evil (Rom. 13:1-7). War, police, and prisons are a part of God's order in a fallen world. We are to defend ourselves and others from evil men. The abuse of a wife or child is always to be resisted as evil.
- I. Jesus told His disciples to carry a sword to defend themselves (Lk. 22:36), taught us how to resist one who sins against us (Mt. 18:15-17), resisted the officer who struck Him (Jn. 18:22-23), and cleansed the temple with a whip (Jn. 2:14-16). Peter resisted the evil actions of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Paul spoke of resisting brothers in the right way (1 Cor. 5:1-11; 6:1-8). Paul resisted Peter for hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14) and appealed to the government (Acts 16:37).
- J. ***An evil person:*** Jesus describes the people pursuing you as having evil goals and motives. This is a key part of the context that affects the way we interpret the four examples that Jesus gave us.
- K. Jesus calls us to live with a liberated heart that is free from the spirit of revenge, defensiveness, and entitlement and their continual petty complaints against those they relate to. People protest saying, "It is not the money, but the principle." Yes, the issue is who will walk out this kingdom principle? We can only do this if we see the big picture of receiving Jesus' love and mercy. This makes us grateful so we can respond with a servant spirit that allows others to get their way in small issues. This is not the same as yielding out of the fear of man (which results in bitterness).
- L. Many people live consumed with many small things that bother them. They live in continual turmoil about people not saying the right things or treating them with the honor they deserve. They live in continual turmoil until they win their argument. In conflicts, both people can operate in kingdom principles or remain stuck in their petty demands for honor, to be treated right or to not be inconvenienced, or they can let go because God has been so gracious to them. When two people are entrenched in this, they end up with a broken relationship and bitterness.

⁴⁰*Martha was distracted with much serving and...said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."* ⁴¹*Jesus...said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled [bothered, NAS] about many things. (Lk. 10:40-41)*

III. TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK (MT. 5:39)

- A. Jesus is not speaking of physical injury, but of being insulted. If a person hits someone with their right fists, it strikes their left cheek. The right cheek is hit by a backhand to insult someone not to injure them physically. This speaks of verbal abuse not physical violence. Jesus applies the principle of non-retaliation beyond merely avoiding taking revenge outside the court system.
³⁹Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (Mt. 5:39)
- B. Jesus calls us to not seek revenge when insulted, but to endure the insult graciously knowing that the Lord sees us as precious to Him. He will answer for you in His time and way (1 Pet. 2:23).
²³When He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously... (1 Pet. 2:23)
- C. We endure insults knowing that the one insulting us does not have the power to enforce them. Being insulted without retaliation makes a deep impression on others because it is so unnatural. An insult can be given with words or with looks. Jesus wants us to not be easily offended.
¹⁴Bless and do not curse... ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil... ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves ... ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:14-21)
- D. If people insult you because you stand for righteousness, then Lord will reward you.
¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven... (Mt. 5:11-12)

IV. BEING SUED FOR YOUR SHIRT (MT. 5:40)

- A. We are not to fight against people who attack us by using the legal system to take our small possessions like a shirt. The tunic could be compared to a shirt-like garment and the cloak a coat.
⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic [shirt, NAS], let him have your cloak also. (Mt. 5:40)
- B. The issue is in the smallness of the attack. Who sues someone for a shirt or coat worth \$100? No one sues another person for something as small as a shirt. In other words, the one suing is probably offended with the one that they are suing.
- C. Jesus is not referring to a lawsuit that takes your business or home thus jeopardizing your ability (or your employees) to feed your family. This is about a lawsuit in a small claims court.
- D. If an evil person wants to sue you for a small amount that you can afford, give it to him willingly. It may injure your pride, but it will not affect your ability to feed your family.
- E. Our tendency is to insist on our petty legal rights and to stand on the “principle” of the matter. Our defensiveness can manifest quickly in this sort of situation.

V. BEING FORCED TO GO ONE MILE (MT. 5:41)

- A. Roman soldiers had the legal authority to require a man to carry the soldier's gear for a mile. People despised this legal requirement because it was inconvenient, annoying, and even humiliating. Thus, most obeyed this legal requirement, but with a wrong spirit.

⁴¹*Whoever compels [forces, NAS] you to go one mile, go with him two. (Mt. 5:41)*

- B. This has to do with infringement of our time and personal rights by the government. It takes 15 minutes to walk one mile and thus a total of 30 minutes to walk the extra mile. It is easy to feel insulted when those in positions of power infringe on our schedule with inconvenient demands.
- C. If an evil person uses the law to force you to do something that is inconvenient, do it plus more. It does not really affect our ability to fulfill our job, but rather it injures our pride. The passage addresses our natural resentment at the small demands of the government or those in authority. We try to get out of things without getting caught. That is the attitude Jesus condemns. There are occasions when we are pressed into the service of the State. We are to serve cheerfully.
- D. When those in authority require more than is necessary in small matters, it is easy to feel resentment, but we are to patiently bear the injustice. Examples of this are governmental requirements from the IRS or the police, etc. The point is not to resist them by seeking loopholes. We are to cooperate with their request and not ignore it. Jesus is not calling us to become indentured servants to the government, but to bear with small inconveniences.

VI. LET PEOPLE BORROW FROM YOU (MT. 5:42)

- A. We are to allow the evil man to borrow from us and to give with a generous spirit. If someone is in need and asks to borrow something, let them use it. This is not only about people asking for our money, but for our help by allowing them to borrow our things which can help them.

⁴²*Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Mt. 5:42)*

- B. Jesus is not saying that in all circumstances we are to give our money to anyone who asks. He is referring here to our attitude in resisting with bitterness and defensiveness the evil man who troubles us. We are not to resist him, but to see his request as God's opportunity to show grace.
- C. The application of this principle is qualified by the context and by comparing it with other Scriptures. For example, Scripture commands us to not allow the lazy to eat (2 Thes. 3:10) and warns us of the difficulties of co-signing (Prov. 11:15; 17:18; 22:26). It is not our responsibility to enable the professional beggar to continue to not work or to pay for the drug or alcohol habits that destroy a person's life who is asking us for money.

¹⁰*We commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. (2 Thes. 3:10)*

- D. Walking out the kingdom principle of refusing retaliation and defensiveness is an important aspect of walking out the Sermon on the Mount and in being salt and light to society (Mt. 5:13).