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Non-Retaliation and Love of Enemies (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg explores the concept of non-retaliation and loving one's enemies. Based on Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6, Gregg emphasizes the importance of mercy and kindness towards those who wrong us. He acknowledges that while resistance to evil may be necessary at times, retaliation is not a Christian duty and should be avoided. Additionally, he draws from James to suggest that responding to attack with violence contradicts Christ's teaching of love. Overall, Gregg emphasizes the importance of modeling Christ's love in all aspects of life.

Transcript

Today we take the last portion of Matthew 5 beginning at verse 38. That means we're taking verses 38-48. It follows the same paradigm or pattern as the previous couple of sections have that we have considered.

That is, it consists in Jesus saying, you have heard that it was said, and then he says what it was that they had heard said. And then he says, but I say to you, and he tells them what they have not heard said, which they should have. As I pointed out before we started this section altogether, which we've been, this is our third session in this segment of Matthew 5, what Jesus has to say does not usually nullify what the law said, but usually shows the spiritual side of things and shows that there was far more intended when God gave his law than the Jews had been told by their rabbis.

And therefore Jesus was hoping that they might understand as he illuminated and fulfilled it for them. Now, I've been saying all along that these six times that Jesus says, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you, that these six times are simply examples that Jesus is giving of how love is what God was looking for in the first place from people. And that love, as we deduce from another statement Jesus made elsewhere in Matthew 23, 23, love consists of justice and mercy and faithfulness.

Now, I've never heard any other teacher say what I say on this, so I may be wrong, but I think I'm right. I believe that there are, as I pointed out, two examples of these six that point to God's concern for justice, two that point to his concern for faithfulness, and two

that point to his concern for mercy. There's little doubt about the two that point to the subject of faithfulness, because certainly divorce and oaths, which was in the material we covered last time, both of them have this in common, that they are calling for people to be honest and faithful.

The passage before us, one cannot doubt that mercy is the issue here. So faithfulness and mercy are clearly illustrated in those two segments. Some may have trouble seeing justice as the key thought of the first examples of murder and adultery, but I pointed out my reasons for believing this is so.

And so, if it is the case that Jesus is taking this occasion after saying, I didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, to show how it is fulfilled, we know from other passages of Scripture that it is fulfilled by love, because Paul says, he that loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. So Jesus, in illustrating how the law is fulfilled by him, basically expounds on what it means to be loving. And notice there's not a thing in here about fuzzy feelings or affection or romance.

It's all just the down-to-earth stuff of doing right by your neighbor, treating him justly, treating him mercifully, treating him faithfully. These are the things, the weightier matters of the law, they are all parts of what it means to be a loving person. Now, we'll start reading at verse 38, and we have, as usual, two separate statements that Jesus says, You've heard this, but I say that.

The first of them, in verse 38, You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also.

If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. That you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends his rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. Now, I have said that these two examples are both to talk about the issue of mercy. That can be demonstrated a great number of ways, not the least of which is by comparison of the parallel of this passage with that in Luke.

Now, I have said to you that Luke 6 has a sermon that looks very much like this one, but is much shorter. It is considered, I think, a parallel to Matthew 5 through 7, although Luke 6 contains much less of the sermon than Matthew includes. Or in all likelihood, it is very possible that Luke contains the entire sermon and Matthew has supplemented it with things that Jesus actually said on other occasions.

We do not know which is the case, but in any case, there is certainly a parallel between what we are reading in Matthew 5 through 7, and at least some of it, and the material in Luke 6 from verse 20 on. In Luke 6, we saw that there were beatitudes. The beatitudes were somewhat alike to these and somewhat different to these.

But after the beatitudes in Luke, none of the material we have covered since in Matthew has parallel in Luke. There is no parallel to Jesus saying, You are the salt of the earth or the light of the world in Luke. There is no statement about him coming to fulfill the law rather than destroy it in Luke, not in Luke 6. There is no statement about murder and adultery and divorce and oaths in Luke 6. However, the material we come to now does have a parallel in Luke 6. In fact, right after the beatitudes, Luke 6 goes directly to this material we are looking at today.

I would like to read the parallel for you because it is very helpful. He says, but I say to you, I am looking at Luke 6, 27, right after the beatitudes in Luke 6, verse 27, but I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you, to him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also, and from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back.

And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. That statement actually has its parallel in Matthew 7. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return. And your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the highest.

For he is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Now one thing you can see from this passage we read is it has portions of both sections of the Matthew 5 passage we read.

The Matthew 5 passage definitely has two sections. The section where Jesus is adding to the statement an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. And where he's discussing the statement love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

There are two segments in Matthew 5. The two are kind of mixed and even jumbled together in Luke 6 in the passage we read. Which shows that they are linked inseparably. Matthew has them more neatly categorized.

But Luke obviously shows us that the two are very closely linked. So much so that Luke doesn't even separate them but mixes them together. Furthermore, Matthew's passage ends with the words as we saw in Matthew 5, 48.

Therefore you should be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. But Luke's parallel says in Luke 6, 36. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Now many people have taken the closing verse of Matthew 5 where Jesus said be perfect. And they've developed a doctrine of perfectionism from it. But they have failed to compare the parallel in Luke and see exactly what he was talking about.

What he means is be perfectly merciful. Just as your Father is perfectly merciful. And this is in contrast to doing what tax collectors and sinners do.

What do tax collectors and sinners do? They show good deeds to those who do good deeds to them. They love those who love them. They salute those who salute them.

But Jesus says, so what if you do that? That's not making you any special thing. Even the tax collectors do that. But what does your Father do? Your Father causes his rain to fall on the evil and on the good.

He causes the sun to rise on the just and the unjust. In other words, God sends his blessings. He shows tokens of his love and kindness to people who are not particularly his friends and who don't reciprocate, who don't thank him.

He specifically says in Luke that God does this for the unthankful. In Luke 6.35, the last line, for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Therefore, what we are told to be like him in is this, that he is merciful and kind even to those who are unthankful, who do not reciprocate, who are not kind to him, who do not revere him, who do not in any sense acknowledge him, and who oppose him.

He still does some nice things for them. So he says, if you want to be like your Father, instead of like the tax collectors, then you need to not restrict your loving behavior to those who, in a sense, earn it, or who are lovely, or who do nice things to you. You need to be more like your Father, who does kind things even to his enemies.

In that, your mercy must extend further than does the mercy of the tax collectors and sinners. It must extend as far as God's mercy does. It must be as complete.

That's what the word perfect means in the Greek. Your mercy must be as complete, as indiscriminate, as universal as his is. So that statement that sounds so challenging at the

end of Matthew 5, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, really in the context, it's very plain, especially when you compare it with Luke, he means be completely or perfectly merciful, just as God is.

Perfectly merciful meaning that you don't restrict your mercy to certain classes of people and withhold it from others. God isn't that way. Now, of course, there are certain mercies that God doesn't bestow indiscriminately.

For instance, salvation, he doesn't just give it out to anybody who doesn't repent, for example. But there are tokens of kindness that he does give even to those who will never repent. Most of the healings Jesus did were probably worked upon people who would never become Christians.

We don't know that to be the case, but we know of him healing ten lepers of which only one was thankful. The other nine were healed just as much, but didn't ever show any thanks. Jesus was sorry about that, that they didn't show any thankfulness, but he didn't revoke their healing.

He didn't say, Oh, well, if you're not going to thank me, have your leprosy back. Boom! You know, he is kind even to those who are unthankful and to those who are not good. Now, that the summary statement of this in Luke is be merciful, as your Father in Heaven is merciful, and that Luke mixes these two things that are found in Matthew as separate categories into one, confirms what I'm suggesting, that what we have here is an expansion on the subject of mercy.

What is mercy? Now, there's two ways that Matthew's version renders it. There's two parts of mercy. One is non-retaliation, which means that if somebody does something unkind to you, mercy absorbs it rather than retaliating.

Rather than inflicting a like injury upon them, you don't retaliate. A short way of saying that is that if somebody does something unkind to you, you don't turn around and do the same unkind thing to them. The other part of mercy is that you actually do positive good to them.

You see, it's one thing not to retaliate. It's another thing to actually do something kind to that person. And that's what these two parts of the passage before us are talking about.

First of all, he talks about non-retaliation. Go ahead, give up your rights. Go ahead, absorb the injury.

That's okay. You can do it. It won't kill you.

And if it does, even that's no problem. You die and you're better off anyway. So you can absorb it.

You don't have to resist it. But the other part is do good to those who hurt you. Bless those who persecute you and curse you and so forth.

And you do kind things to these people who do mean things to you. And that's going a step further than just non-retaliation. Both are important.

Both are part of being merciful. When we were talking about character development in a previous series, we defined mercy as surrendering your rights in order to give them to someone else. I used at that time these very passages as illustrations of that.

Whereas justice, I defined as a commitment to honor other people's rights, a commitment to avoid violating somebody else's rights. That's what justice is. If you are a just person, then you are concerned not to trample upon the rights of others.

But mercy goes beyond this. You should never be less than just. But you can be more than just.

You can not only avoid trampling on someone else's rights, you can allow your rights to be trampled on for the benefit of somebody else. You can surrender what are your legitimate rights so that somebody else may have rights that are not theirs legitimately. A good example is turn the other cheek.

Someone hits you on the cheek, you've got a right to hit him back. Well, if their attack on you was unprovoked, and you did nothing to deserve the attack against yourself, well then, now you've been, they fired the first shot, they drew first blood, now you've got the right to hit him back. But instead of taking that right, how about surrender that right and turn the other cheek and give them permission, give them a right that they don't naturally possess.

They don't have the right to hit you again, especially if they didn't have the right to hit you the first time. Now if you hit them back, then they can hit you back because then you've got a fight on your hands. But if you turn the other cheek, you're offering them a right that they don't possess at your own expense.

The right you have is to retaliate. But you surrender that right and say, well, you're obviously a person who has some desperate needs to show how macho you are, far be it for me to deprive you. Here, take this one too.

Let's look at these passages now. Now having said that overview of them, he begins by saying, you have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Now this is said many times in the law.

This is a direct quote. It's only a partial quote. The quote actually goes on in some passages in the Old Testament to say, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, stroke for stroke, burn for burn, stripe for stripe, life for life.

Now, what this is, when it appears in the law, and it's in many places, Exodus 21-24 has this statement. Exodus 21-24. Likewise, Leviticus 24-20.

Deuteronomy also has the statement. Deuteronomy 19-21. And there are more places besides in the Old Testament.

This is a commonly repeated law. It is referred to in Latin as the Lex Talionis, the law of retaliation. Lex, L-E-X, Talionis, which is spelled the way you'd think it would be.

The law of retaliation. And basically, it's a perfect law. It is a law of perfect justice.

And it was a law given for the guidance of those who were charged with the enforcement of justice for the magistrates, the kings, the judges, the ones before whom wrongs were brought, complaints were brought. One citizen was wronged by another citizen and had sustained some injury in some measure. What should be done to right the situation? Well, what was the injury? The injury should be redressed with exact justice.

So if somebody, through their carelessness or through their malice, knocked a tooth out of your head and you brought them to court, the magistrate, upon finding them guilty, would say, okay, I sentence you to have a tooth knocked out of your face. They destroy your eye, they get one of their eyes destroyed. They burn you, they get burned.

They kill you, they get killed. That was exact justice. Now, no one can say that that isn't a good law.

Now, we can say it's not a particularly merciful law, but laws of the land are not supposed to be merciful. God didn't ordain the state to be merciful. He ordained the state, it says in Romans 13, to be an executioner of God's wrath on those who do evil.

The church, on the other hand, is, of course, called to be merciful. But that's the very difference between the roles of the church and the state in society. The church is there to express and to extend God's mercy of reconciliation.

The state is there to handle criminals and to punish them. Now, I do not personally care to get too involved in political questions. I have opinions about many political issues, but it's not a matter of high priority to me to be involved in political questions.

But if I were asked by the nation's legislature, you know, and they said, okay, we're making some laws here. What penalty should be given to people who do such and such a thing? I would direct them back to God's laws on the subject. Now, see, the church isn't running a state and is not supposed to.

And therefore, those civil laws that were directed to the magistrates on how to punish criminals, they would be, I think, applicable in terms of providing a standard of justice for magistrates in terms of secular nations. If they wish to be just, there's nothing more just

than the laws that God gave. He never gave an unjust law to any man, to any nation.

And therefore, whatever God said is just. And if the state would ask me my opinion about how they should punish criminals, I'd say, well, let's look back at what God told the only state government that he ever set up. What was the just thing to do? A person kidnaps someone, you put him to death.

A child curses his father, you put him to death. A person cuts off someone's hand, you cut off their hand. Now, that's not very merciful, and that's why I don't want to be in the position to be making laws like that, and that's why I think God didn't call Christians to be in the position to be making the laws.

But the law has nothing against it. Jesus is not saying that this law, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, is a bad law, or that God has now changed his mind about this, that back when he gave the law of Moses, God thought it was good for there to be an eye required for the loss of an eye, and a tooth required for the loss of a tooth. But now, Jesus is saying, some people think, that wasn't such a good law.

God's changed his mind about that. Really, we ought to just all be nice. We shouldn't punish criminals.

There shouldn't be any penalties. Wrong. That's not what Jesus is saying.

If he was, then Paul got him all wrong. Because the Apostle Paul said that the state is, in fact, there for the punishment of criminals. Peter said the very same thing in 1 Peter 2. I think it's verses 13 and 14.

It might be verses 12 and 13. He basically says, submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of those who do well. Quite obviously, if Jesus was saying that laws of the land should be eliminated, then both Paul and Peter got him way wrong.

Because Paul and Peter felt like God had ordained the laws of the land and the enforcement agencies of the government to keep the peace and maintain justice. But what Jesus is saying here is, just because the law says that if someone knocks your eye out, you have the right to require their eye to be knocked out, it doesn't mean you have to take them to court. It doesn't mean that you have to require that.

You can forgive them, you know. If somebody knocks your tooth out, you have the right under the law to knock their tooth out, but you don't have to do it. You can forgive.

I mean, the state doesn't have to prosecute if you, the plaintiff, don't bring a case before them. You can absorb the injury and say, listen, I've got the right to hurt you, but I won't. I could take you to court and you'd lose your tooth over this, but I'm not going to do that.

Because I wouldn't want that done to me, and I want to do to you what I would have done to me. I don't like having my tooth knocked out, and therefore, since I don't like it, I don't figure you'd like it either, so I won't knock yours out. That is being merciful.

Now, Jesus is not saying that the law of Lex Talionis shouldn't be practiced by governments. I mean, after all, if they scrap that one, what are they going to replace it with? They'll either replace it with penalties that are too strict or penalties that are too lenient. And when governments have forsaken the Scriptures, they always do that.

It's not as if they put no penalties on any kind of behavior. Every government has its laws and its system of penalties. The thing is, if they don't prescribe the penalties that the Bible says, then they necessarily prescribe penalties that are either unreasonably strict or unreasonably lenient, and neither is justice.

And therefore, while Jesus does seek to modify his disciples' understanding of the law on this matter, he's not saying that the government should throw out such a principle, but rather that individual disciples do not have to avail themselves of the retribution that the law would give them in such cases. If someone strikes you, you don't have to strike them. You can, you've got the right to, but the merciful thing to do would be not to do that.

And he extends that like he did these other things. He extends it further down through other examples. Now, let me talk to you about this turning the other cheek.

It's one of the more famous things Jesus said, and much debated as to what it really involves. Of course, those of us who are pacifists often appeal to this and say, well, you know, if your nation's at war and you're under attack, you shouldn't bite back because Jesus said to turn the other cheek. Those who are in favor of war say that's an invalid application because they say Jesus wasn't talking about a situation where your life is in danger.

Jesus was simply talking about if somebody is insulting you by slapping you across the face, which to touch the face of an Easterner is an insult of great magnitude. And so for someone to not only touch your face, but to slap it or spit in it is to seek from you a response of irritation. To seek from you a response of anger.

To provoke you. It is an action calculated to provoke you, not to injure you or kill you. Therefore, it is sometimes said that there is no grounds from this passage to forbid fighting and war, which is an entirely different situation than that which Jesus pictures here.

It's one thing to absorb an insult. It's another thing to just stand there while people are killing you, they say. Now, based on this passage in Matthew, one could say they've got a very valid point.

Now, the New King James says if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, which would seem to support their notion. The King James Version says if anyone smites you, which is a little less explicit. I decided to look this up in the Greek and see if there's any guidance for us there.

And as a matter of fact, the word that's translated slaps here in the New King James is probably correctly translated in this case. It only appears, the Greek word appears one other place in the New Testament and that's also in Matthew. And it's in Matthew chapter 26 and verse 67 where it talks about how Jesus was treated when he was on trial before the Sanhedrin.

Matthew 26, 67 says, Then they spat in his face and beat him, and others struck him with the palms of their hands. Now, struck him with the palms of their hands, the expression with the palms of their hands is not in the Greek. It's borrowed here from the King James Version.

The King James Version has, I think, they smote him with the palms of their hands. It's all one word in the Greek. It's the same word, it just means smote or struck.

But you can see that both the King James and the New King James in expanding on it understood the word to mean a slap with the palm of the hand. And probably that is what it meant. Although they went on to kill Jesus after this, at this point they were just insulting him.

They were just trying to ridicule him and so forth. And so, this is the only other place where the Greek word for strike in Matthew 5, 39 is found. And it's in a context where it almost certainly does mean to slap and to insult and so forth.

There's further evidence that this is the right interpretation in Matthew 5 itself, in Matthew 5, 39, because he says if a person slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. Now, the assumption is that most people are right-handed, which is probably a safe assumption. And if somebody is facing you, their right hand will be toward your left cheek.

And if they strike you with their fist, they are more likely to hit your left cheek, because they're assuming them to be right-handed, which is going to be the case more times than not. If a right-handed person strikes you on the face, your left cheek is that which will probably receive the blow. Therefore, they assume that a right-handed person facing you who strikes you on the right cheek is doing so with the back of his hand, because that's the way he would get to your right cheek.

Because your right cheek is opposite his right hand. That is, not opposite, but he'd have to cross and hit you backhanded. So this is, again, the reference being stricken on your right cheek, if we assume the party who's striking you is right-handed, does suggest a

slap, probably with the back of the hand.

Okay? So, we can say this, that Jesus probably is here describing a situation where a person is not bringing a lethal attack against you, but rather is simply trying to irritate you, provoke you, and insult you, and maybe humiliate you. And whereas the natural ego and pride in man would respond to this with indignation and probably another blow, maybe heavier blows, Jesus says, just don't. Don't be provoked in this situation.

Let him do it again. Now, having said that, I'd like to turn your attention to Luke's parallel, because there's a different Greek word used there. And it is a little bit more I guess there's more that can be said about the Greek word in Luke 6. It's Luke 6, 29.

To him who strikes you on one cheek, he doesn't say the right cheek, offer the other also. Okay? Now, notice, first of all, Luke doesn't say he who strikes you on the right cheek, he just says who strikes you on one cheek. So, the argument in favor of a right-handed person striking the right cheek with the back of his hand is not apparently applicable in this particular statement.

Furthermore, the word strike is a different Greek word, and it happens to occur a number of times in the New Testament. I have a lexicon before me that I'd like to read to you what it said about this Greek word. In Luke 6, 29, the word strike is the word tukto.

And I'll just read what it says. To strike, smite with the hand, stick, or other instrument. To beat, to smite, strike, punish, to hurt, wound, spiritually.

And then derived from it is the word tupos, a stroke, the impression left by striking, a trace or print, etc. And there's references given here for each of these. But this word seems to have a broader range of meaning.

This word is not just restricted to a slap, but to strike with a stick or another instrument, to beat, to strike and smite and punish, and to hurt and wound. Now, quite obviously, the word that is used by Luke is not quite so, I guess, unthreatening. If a man strikes you, and the word can mean with a stick or an instrument, a weapon, obviously with a mind to injure you, to wound you, you still are to turn the other cheek.

Now, what if the person wants to kill you? Well, let's look at James on this because, as I've pointed out on many occasions, and seek to do as often as we turn to it, for these purposes, James uses the Sermon on the Mount as the basis and framework of his epistle, and basically exhorts to obedience to the Sermon on the Mount, quoting a great deal from it. In James chapter 5, verses 5 and 6, which is addressing the rich men who are to be condemned, he says in James 5.5, You have lived on earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous, the just. He does not resist you. Now, here the attack is lethal.

Here there are people attacking the just and murdering them, killing them. What is the response of the just man? He does not resist you. Why? Jesus said, Do not resist him that is evil.

Apparently they took him seriously, even to the point of death. Now, the reason I looked at the NIV before class is because in this verse I knew that it reads differently. I wanted to see exactly how it does read.

The expression at the end of James 5.6, it says, He does not resist you, which explains the response of the righteous to a mortal attack against himself. In the NIV it is rendered, Who were not opposing you? You have condemned and murdered the righteous. Who are the innocent? It says, Who were not opposing you? Now, the difference there is quite remarkable.

Because if the NIV reading is to be favored, then it says nothing about how the righteous respond to an attack. All it says is that the attack was not justified, that the attack was not provoked, that the righteous did not strike first. They were not opposing you, but you have condemned them and killed them anyway.

In other words, you have simply done a great act of injustice because you have attacked people who were no enemies of yours. Well, I mean, fine, if that's the way it's supposed to read. However, every translation other than the NIV says something like, They do not resist you.

In other words, it's not talking about what they were doing before you condemned them and killed them. It's what they do while you are doing it. It's the present tense.

I looked it up also in the Greek today. The word is in what's called the present middle indicative, not the past. It's a present tense verb.

So the King James, the New King James and all other translations except the NIV are in agreement on this. It says, You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous. He does not, present tense.

This is how he responds. He does not resist. The NIV says, who were not opposing you.

It puts it in the past tense in order to change the meaning. Obviously, because the translators of the NIV couldn't stomach the implications of the way it's really written in the Greek. It suggests non-resistance.

A very Mennonite concept. Obviously, Mennonites didn't translate the NIV. I should say a very Sermon on the Mount concept.

Now, having said that, we go back to Matthew 5. And while it may be true that the way it's worded in Matthew 5, it tells us that we should absorb insults against ourselves. Yet

the parallel in Luke and certainly what James has to say about this suggests that it's more than simply insults. But if people attack us even to wound or even to kill us, resistance is not appropriate.

Now, someone would say, well, is there no recourse but just stand there and die? Well, there is recourse. In Matthew 10, Jesus said, when they persecute you in one city, flee to the next. Therefore, flight is an option.

There is not some virtue in just standing there and being pulverized necessarily. It's not the pain that is virtuous. It's the mercy that you show in not retaliating.

If somebody attacks you and instead of retaliating, you run away, then you are still being merciful. That is if your other option was to beat them up or to fight back. To escape, if possible, is no sin.

It might seem shameful. It might seem unmanly. But it is nonetheless what Jesus said, you have the right to do.

And that is why for centuries, well, from Jesus' day on, Christians under persecution have gone underground, they've hidden, they've fled from town to town to escape persecution. There's nothing, I mean, that might seem cowardly, but since fighting back is not an option open to them, flight is the other option that God does allow. Now, there is, of course, resistance of a sort that we can put toward evil.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 5 through 9 is, I tell you, do not resist the evil person. In the context, he specifically means if the person is doing something evil to you, you should not stand up for your rights. Rather, you should mercifully sacrifice what you might have the right to do in retaliation in order to avoid hurting that person, which is what your right would be to do.

Instead of inflicting an injury, you don't do that. You do something else. Now, this does not mean that all forms of resistance of evil are wrong.

There are forms of resistance of evil that are not unmerciful. And in the context, he's mainly concerned about anger and malice and attacking a person and so forth. But that doesn't mean that Christianity isn't here to oppose evil in principle.

And evil people in particular, in so far as we resist the principles of evil, we resist the actions of those people who follow those principles. The methods of resistance are not at all agreeable to all people. There are many Christians who feel that we should resist evil through the ballot box, through politics and so forth.

I do not say that there's no place for that. It isn't one of the ways that Jesus or the disciples sought to do it, but whether they would in our situation, if they lived in democracy, we cannot say. We don't know what they might have done in our

circumstances, and therefore we can't be too critical of people who do something different than we would choose to do in such a case, so long as it is not a compromise of mercy.

I would say this, however, whether one chooses to use politics or not, the Christian certainly has at his disposal and he is obligated to use it, he has the truth. He has the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And he is to oppose untruth.

He is to oppose sin by words. This was done by Jesus himself. This was done by the disciples.

And this has always seemed to be the correct way. Our weapons are our words, the sword of the Spirit. Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Ephesians 6, 17 says. And so, I mean, if we speak against evil, if we speak up against it, that is resisting it. That is resisting its insidious influence in society.

That is seeking to drive it back. But it is not a violation of this command of Jesus where he says, do not resist the evil man. There are ways in which we should resist evil, but not in any way that is, in a sense, motivated by selfishness or anger or being provoked by somebody who has done something wrong to us.

Rather than take our option of retaliation, we are encouraged to do the loving thing, which is to surrender that option and to allow ourselves to be harmed. Now, I said you can run away. But what if you can't run away and someone is trying to kill you? What should you do? Well, actually, in view of what I said earlier, you might think that I have an easy answer.

You just take it. You just die. And I think in most cases that would be the right thing to do.

To figure your life is in God's hands. If he providentially opened the door of escape, he would want you to take it. But if he doesn't open such a door and if he doesn't do something to save you, then your life is in his hands and the day of your death is his decision.

And if providence has said this is the day of your death, then you accept it. There may be times, I can't think of specific cases, but there may be times where somebody else's survival or well-being is immediately dependent upon yours. In which case, for you to seek to save your life for somebody else's sake might make sense.

A woman who's got a little baby or something like that or who has children dependent on her might conceivably and understandably feel that by resisting an attack against herself, she's not doing so necessarily to save herself, but she's got others in mind. Jesus, by the way, does not give an example of a situation where other people are

endangered. The example he gives is when you are endangered.

And quite obviously, there are sometimes different principles involved in the question of self-defense because you are concerned about you, on the one hand, or defense of other parties, including maybe in some circumstances defense of yourself or seeking to survive for the sake of other people. That may be justifiable. I'm not trying to soften what Jesus says or water it down.

And I'm not giving any specific examples. But I don't think that Jesus is imposing a legalism here that would cause us to legalistically stand by and be put to death if there was really something more loving that could be done. All Jesus is doing is illustrating how love is merciful.

And sometimes there may be some mercy in resisting an evil person because not only are they going to go for you, but after they get you, they're going to go for your wife and kids or something else too. And the only way you're going to protect your wife and kids is by staying alive, if possible. Now, even in such cases, I have personally felt that to kill a person is to go further than I would ever feel comfortable doing, I think.

In a crisis, I might do what I don't feel in my conscience comfortable doing. That happens from time to time. I don't know what would happen.

Well, I don't have a handgun or anything like that, so I don't think I could kill somebody who came into my house. But I could certainly see reason to resist them. And I would not see that as a violation of this.

Jesus, again, is not trying to lay down unrealistic or nonsensical principles. It is not nonsensical for him to say, listen, go ahead and die. You can afford it.

You're a Christian. You're going to die someday anyway. Go ahead, rather than hurt somebody else who can't afford to die, go ahead and die if you need to.

But, I mean, that makes sense. But for him to say, prefer the criminal above your own children, doesn't make an awful lot of sense to me. Anyway, I don't understand that to be necessarily implied in what he's saying here.

Now, you might say, I'm saying that because I have children. No doubt it is true. I was considerably more hard-lined on this before I had children.

And therefore, people could say, well, you've modified your position to fit your circumstances. That is very possibly true. But I would say this.

I am determined that having children, I should not compromise my principles simply because I have children. But sometimes new states of life open your eyes to factors that you had not considered previously. You know? You know, you might theoretically say

that a woman who is being raped should just trust God.

And then when your wife gets raped or your daughter gets raped or your mother gets raped, you might begin to rethink that. And say, now, is that really the right thing? Should she just trust God or is there some, you know, am I being too wooden and too inflexible with this principle? Is that really what Jesus is saying here? That a woman should do nothing to defend her chastity or something, you know, against an attacker? Again, I am fully wanting to give Jesus' teaching full force, but I also want to make sure that we understand it doesn't say more than if you are personally in danger, absorb it. That's what it says.

It does not necessarily forbid all forms of resistance. It does not necessarily forbid all forms of violence. What Jesus teaches consistently is that Christian duty is to do the loving thing, period.

He is trying to amplify throughout the Sermon on the Mount several different situations in which love makes a difference in the way you respond. Love makes a difference in the way you decide in certain issues. He doesn't give every particular possibility that may arise.

He is simply trying to illustrate with a variety of ways how love makes a difference in your behavior. Obviously, if you don't love somebody, you'll fight back when they fight you. If you do love somebody, you'll be less inclined to do so.

But there might even be times when love would motivate you to resist an attacker for the sake of somebody else or maybe even for his own sake. We don't have time to go into all the possibilities there. But what I'm saying is I believe that Jesus is teaching something radically new, namely, lay down your life rather than lay down somebody else's life for yours.

But he doesn't give every particular, nor is that his intention. He's not laying down a new decalogue. He's not laying down a new law.

He's simply expounding on what God's heart is. And his heart is for you to be a merciful person and a loving person. Mercy is part of that.

There's three other examples of this before he goes on to the next point. In verse 40, if anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two, and give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

Now, the part about turning out of the cheek suggests that you're willing to inconvenience yourself in terms of your bodily safety or bodily comfort. The idea of going two miles with somebody who compels you to go one means you're willing to inconvenience yourself with reference to your time and your energy. The matter of

giving someone more than they want to sue you for or giving everyone who asks you has to do with you being willing to sacrifice your money, your possessions.

It means that your time and your money and your personal safety are not your priorities, but the well-being of another party become your priority. A merciful person is more concerned about another party's well-being, about their safety, about their prosperity, about their time than about one's own. Now, that might seem very idealistic.

You say, how can anyone ever feel that way? They can't without the Holy Spirit. You can't be merciful even as your father is merciful unless your father's spirit is in you. But, of course, the standard Jesus lays out calls for that.

It calls for radical change of life. Not just a change of lifestyle, but a new life, an exchanged life. The old selfish life surrendered and a new life from God's Spirit given, which is characterized by love.

And when that is the case, then you react differently.