



# DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

LOVING OUR ENEMIES • MATTHEW 5:38-48 • 10/9/2022

## MAIN POINT

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Followers of Jesus respond to wrongs against them with love and grace rather than vengeance.

## INTRODUCTION

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As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What do you hear our culture telling us about the power of self and the need to be self-sufficient? Where are these messages the strongest?**

**Are there any similarities between these messages and Christian principles? What are the differences?**

**In what area of your life are you most likely to be self-sufficient or selfish—family, work, church, friendships? Why do you think that is?**

Jesus taught a radically different way of relating to other people—living for others rather than yourself. Just as in biblical times, this approach runs counter to what our culture values today. Jesus expects us to put others before ourselves at all times. It's not about words but about actions that come from a heart of love. When someone wrongs us, it calls for a response of grace rather than punishment.

## UNDERSTANDING

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Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**READ MATTHEW 5:38-42.**

**What was the original meaning of “eye for eye” and “tooth for tooth” (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:17-20)? How was this law being twisted by the religious teachers of Jesus’ day?**

The command about revenge is in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. Without a law like this, the loss of, say, one tooth, could lead to the revenge of knocking out two teeth, which could then escalate the conflict. The command was to make payback proportional to the damage caused. In its Old Testament form, this law kept legal judgments from being over the top.

**How did Jesus’ interpretation of this law differ from the Pharisees? How did this raise expectations for His followers?**

**What stands out to you about the four examples Jesus gave His followers in verses 39-42? How do these apply to our lives today?**

## **What qualities can replace our desire for revenge when it surfaces?**

In the first century, this law was an excuse for taking personal revenge. Some religious teachers—forgetting the principle of mercy—thought equal payback was always required. Jesus, however, taught a better way for His followers. Those whose hearts He has cleansed have no need to fight back. They don't need to get even. They can give up the right to vengeance, believing that ultimately the Lord will judge all evil. When God's people refuse to retaliate, they show they trust God to judge all things fairly in the end. In verses 39-42, Jesus offered four examples of what it means not to fight back when evil is done. In each instance, the natural tendency to fight back is overcome by a heart changed by Christ.

## **How did Jesus' life display His teaching to go beyond the call of duty?**

## **What do we communicate to God and others when we take Jesus' command in this passage seriously?**

Because we have experienced the love of Christ, Jesus' followers will act with greater kindness and more love than the law requires. Love requires us to resist the tendency to retaliate and instead to work for the good of those seeking to hurt us. Think about ways you could serve others by self-sacrifice. Remember the truth that giving up your rights, possessions, and time shows respect both for God and for others.

**READ MATTHEW 5:43-48.**

Jesus quoted a Scripture His audience knew: "You shall love your neighbor." Here Jesus included an additional part of the saying people knew but was not found in Scripture. The command to hate your enemy was a twisted corollary of the command to love one's neighbors. Yet because we find it easy to hate our enemies, we can understand why religious people of Jesus' day thought it was the right thing to do.

## **What was the main point of the law to love your neighbor and hate your enemy? How did Jesus' teaching differ from the Pharisees'? How did this**

**change what His followers expected?**

**Have someone read Romans 12:17-21. How does God's command in these verses compare with His command in Matthew 5:43-44?**

**How did Jesus' life demonstrate this teaching?**

Jesus' understanding of the command to love your neighbor was to put no limits on who our neighbors are. Neighbors include even our enemies and persecutors. Our Lord Himself is the ultimate model of this. While on the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). He set the ultimate example for us when He showed love to His enemies by forgiving those who crucified Him.

**Why is it so hard for us to love our "enemies"?**

**Read verse 48 again. What does it say about God that He demands perfection from us, and yet when we can't achieve that, He fulfills His own requirements in our place?**

## **APPLICATION**

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Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Have you sought revenge with anyone in your life? If you feel comfortable sharing, what was it that led you to that response? How would Jesus want you to respond differently after hearing the truth of His Word?**

**Which of the qualities we've discussed today do you want to grow most right now? How would your life be different as God helps you to put this quality**

into action?

How does the gospel help you follow Jesus' command to react with grace?

## PRAYER

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Close in prayer, asking God for the Spirit's power to count your enemies as worthy of your own life for Jesus's sake.

## COMMENTARY

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MATTHEW 5:38-48

As many do today, the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day must have taken the "eye for an eye" passages (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21) as a reason for hurting others at least as badly as they had been hurt. The law was not given to call for revenge, but to bring justice. Breaking the law has consequences, but these passages have often been wrongly taken as a guide for fighting back. What Jesus clarified was that they were always intended as a maximum for retaliation, and that mercy was always acceptable.

For the Christ follower, "letting the punishment fit the crime" falls short. We must actually consider blessing the one who has done wrong. Mercy (withholding deserved punishment) and grace (giving undeserved gifts) are the right conduct.

The one mile (5:41) refers to the practice of the Roman soldiers requiring people to carry their burden for one mile. By Roman law, the soldier could require no more than one mile of a single person, but Jesus' kingdom servants (in representing the gracious spirit of their king) are to go beyond what is required of them.

The first part of Jesus' quote in 5:43, "Love your neighbor," is one of the central commands of the Bible (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34-40). But mistaken thinking came with the second portion: "and hate your enemy." Here again, the human desire is revenge, which might seem logical, flowing out of the first statement. But the reality is that "hate your enemy" is far removed from God's intended meaning in "love your neighbor." In the parallel passage in Luke (10:25-37), Jesus explained through the parable of the good Samaritan that every human we have contact with is our neighbor. Therefore, by definition, Christians are to love everyone and hate no one.

Jesus used a different approach to make the same point. He emphasized two principles to urge His followers to love all people. First, He urged them to follow the example of their Father in heaven. The Father gives gifts (sun and rain) to good and evil alike, and so we, as believers, ought to love and pray for our enemies (Luke 23:34; Rom. 5:8). By this we will show ourselves "sons of your Father in heaven." He teaches us to love everyone because God does.

The ultimate expression of this pattern is the command to imitate the Father in 5:48, Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus used *teleios*, a Greek word that means "having reached its end, mature, complete, perfect." The goal for the kingdom servant is to behave like his Father, and so to reach the mature level of transformation.

Second, Jesus urges us to show ourselves to be different from the rest of the world. This is actually the flip side of the first argument, to be like the Father. If we show partiality and if we love only those who love us, we are like unbelievers. If, on the other hand, we show love to all, guided by grace and mercy, then we show ourselves to be different, and we shine before the world (5:14-16), bringing glory to the Father. All six examples are strong, but this one in particular stands out as showing mercy and grace, the supernatural qualities of God's people.