



NON-RETALIATION

and Love

Study Six
Matthew 5:38-48

Introduction

In Matthew 5:38-48, Jesus speaks on the topics of non-retaliation and love for others. These are the last 2 sections in which Jesus uses the pattern of “it was said... but I say to you.” The Law in the Old Testament provided guidance of how to live and Jesus is expounding on the full meaning of the Law. This is a challenging passage of Scripture since it touches on the Christian response to large topics of sin, evil, love and justice.

This guide is broken into 2 parts to reflect the 2 topics that Jesus speaks on. Due to the complexity of these topics, this study will be a bit long, so consider studying one of the topics at a time. Jesus calls His disciples to imitate Him even in difficult life situations, so may our response be carefully executed with both Godly wisdom and discernment.

Group Study

1. Read aloud Matthew 5:38-48 and prayerfully consider what Jesus is saying to His disciples. What questions do you have about this passage? What do you find challenging?

PART 1

2. In Matthew 5:38, Jesus quotes from Exodus 21:23-25 “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.” In this passage, the offender is to suffer the same injury that was committed, but no more. In the case of a weaker party vs. a stronger party, this law limits the amount of revenge that was reciprocated. How do you see injury and retaliation being played out in the world today?
3. In Matthew 5:39 (NASB), Jesus says “But I say to you, do not show opposition against an evil person...” In context, this means repaying “eye for eye, and tooth

for tooth.” How is this counter-cultural? Jesus then gives four practical situations (Matthew 5:39-42) of not showing opposition to an evil person: (a) turning the other cheek, (b) giving your cloak also, (c) walking two miles, (d) giving to those who ask of you. How is this passage to be understood? Is Jesus justifying continued abuse by an evil person?

4. When reading Matthew 5:39-42 closely, is Jesus advocating for being completely passive and doing nothing when facing evil? What is the ultimate intent of turning the other cheek, giving your cloak, etc...? Read John 8. How did Jesus respond to His opponents? Read Acts 9:17-25. How did Paul respond to his opponents? Read Luke 23:33-34. When captured and faced with crucifixion on the cross, how did Jesus respond? Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister and leader of the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. He was inspired by Jesus' life and encouraged his protesters to partake in active nonviolent resistance to evil. What type of behavior is Jesus looking for from His disciples? How to find the right balance in actively dealing with sin and evil?
5. We know that God's character is both love and justice. To limit sin, God has instituted laws and courts to protect people from harm and injury, but is true justice ever achieved? Read Revelation 6:9-11 and Romans 12:19. How to find the right balance in actively seeking justice and leaving room for God?

PART 2

6. In Matthew 5:43, it was said “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” “Love your neighbor” is found in Leviticus 19:18 while “hate your enemy” is not explicitly commanded in the Old Testament. How does loving your neighbor and hating your enemy fit in with the culture today?
7. According to Jesus in Matthew 5:44, God's true intention for the law is to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Read Luke 23:34 and Romans 5:7-10. How did Jesus demonstrate this type of love on the cross?
8. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus says that loving your enemies shows that we are children of God. There is a connection with the Beatitudes where Matthew 5:9 says “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” How is loving your enemies connecting with peacemaking? Matthew 5:10 says “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” How is loving your enemies connecting with those who are persecuted because of righteousness? Question #4 has an invitation to read

John 8, Acts 9:17-25, Luke 23:33-34 and consider the life of Martin Luther King Jr. Are there further connections between not showing opposition against an evil person and loving your enemies?

9. Jesus continues in Matthew 5:45 with giving the example of how God sends the sun and the rain upon those who are just and unjust. In Matthew 5:46-47, Jesus gives examples of loving and greeting others. How are Jesus' disciples to love like God loves?
10. Recall that in Matthew 5:20, Jesus begins this large section with "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." After Jesus uses the pattern of "it was said... but I say to you" 6 times from Matthew 5:21-47, Jesus concludes in Matthew 5:48 by saying that you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. The word "perfect" is connected with *telos* in Greek which means end or goal. In context, "perfect" means the standard of righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus expects from His disciples. Jesus expounded on this perfection in Matthew 5:21-47. What thoughts come to mind when reflecting on this standard of perfection? How are followers of Jesus to love perfectly?

Personal Reflection

1. What is your view of sin and evil in this world? How do you engage with it? How has Jesus' words challenged your worldview?
2. Are there situations in your life where you are looking for justice? How can others pray for you?
3. Are there difficult people that you need to actively try to win over? How can you be a peacemaker?
4. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus says to "pray for those who persecute you." Are there scenarios where you feel persecuted? Who are the people that you will pray for?

Prayer

