

Learning to Show Restraint

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Date: 11 June 2017

[0 : 00] Have you ever heard someone use the phrase, I don't get mad, I just get even? Now normally, if you hear somebody say that, they're just joking, right?

Because I've said that to some of you. Some of you have got the best of me with some kind of smart-aleck comment or some kind of practical joke. I've just looked at you and told you, I don't get mad, I get even.

Sometimes I try to get ahead even. If we say those things to someone, everybody knows you're just, you know, having fun, going on.

But there's many people in this world, they may not say that, but they think that, and they do that. There are many people that the slightest offense they're going to get revenge.

They're going to plot some way to retaliate because they don't take anything off anyone. Now I don't think many of us in this room, at least lately, have actually tried to do bodily harm to someone out of revenge.

[1 : 28] but I wonder, have any of us, by what we said, tried to retaliate or get revenge, by what we said to them or about them, that was designed to pay them back.

You know, Jesus knew that we all have a tendency to be overly concerned with my rights. Jesus knew that we could be easily offended and want to pay people back.

So He addressed this issue in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, beginning in verse 38. I want you to turn with me this morning. This is actually a follow-up message from what we saw two weeks ago in Romans chapter 12.

Now if you were not here last week, I wasn't here last week. Jeff preached last week. Somebody told me in the early service that he did a real good job. And I said, well, I'm going to get the tape and listen to it.

They said, well, it wasn't that good. Don't worry about it. Nah, nah. I'm going to get it. I'm going to listen to it. But two weeks ago, last time I was here, we looked at Romans chapter 12, verses 17 through 21.

[3 : 05] And what we read, what we looked at, it's just hard to do. And so we need to come back this morning and see that what we read last week from Paul's letter actually came from the teaching of Jesus.

So let's read what we saw last week just to refresh our memories. We're two weeks ago. Romans 12, verses 17 through 21. Look at it. It'll be on the screen. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable or right in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God.

For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[4 : 23] What Paul wrote is based on what Jesus taught about revenge and retaliation in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 38 through verse 42.

And what Jesus said on further in chapter 5 of Matthew, verses 43 through 48.

We're going to look at what Jesus said about seeking revenge and not retaliating this morning. Next week, we're going to look at how God allows us at times to seek justice for ourselves, to protect our family, to even protect ourselves through in lawful ways, through law enforcement, government-ordained law enforcement.

We're going to even look at the subject next week of self-defense and concealed weapons permits. We're going to look at a Christian perspective on that.

Now, for some of you who know me, a lot of you who know me, I want you to understand. We are not next week going to come and find all kinds of reasons why we ought to be armed to the teeth and find justification to just not take anything off anyone.

[6 : 03] That is not what we're going to do. In fact, the reason we're looking at what we're looking at today, two reasons. What we're looking at today is really helping us to understand what we saw two weeks ago, that the Lord Jesus Himself taught us do not have this mentality of I don't take anything off anyone.

I'm going to always get even. That's totally wrong. We're going to come back in two weeks and look at Matthew chapter 5, verses 43 through the end of the chapter where Jesus talks about loving your enemies.

You hear what I'm saying? Loving your enemies in two weeks. Don't retaliate. Don't have this vengeful mindset today. But Christians can protect themselves.

That's what we'll look at next week. We'll take it all together to get a true understanding of what the Bible teaches about how we live in this world and act and interact with people who don't like us, with people who might even want to hurt us, with people who are just plain evil, period, and people who just want to persecute us because we're Christians.

They're not always the same group, not always the same person. So, a big subject that was introduced two weeks ago that we just read from Romans 12.

[7 : 46] Keep that in mind. Let's look now at what Jesus says in Matthew 5, verse 38 in talking about revenge and retaliation.

Verse 38. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil.

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Jesus is talking about doing some hard things here. He's talking about there are times when we need to give up our rights. There's times when we just need to take an insult.

[8 : 54] Not try to pay someone back. Not try to do to people what they do to us. Jesus is calling us, his followers, to live according to a higher standard than people who are not Christians.

The idea is we are to treat people better than they treat us. We are to learn to trust God to take care of us.

But as we're going to see next week, the way God may take care of us is through law enforcement, is through some form of self-defense, through the carrying or even use of a weapon.

But for now, the focus is on we need to learn to exercise restraint. We are not prepared as Christians to talk about defending ourselves until we first understand the importance of exercising restraint.

So let's look. Number one, the law of God has always required his people to show restraint. Look in verse 38. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

[10 : 17] Jesus is referring to a famous law in verse 38 there. The law of retaliation or the law of retribution it's called. The Latin phrase *lex talionis* is found in Exodus chapter 21, Leviticus chapter 24, and Deuteronomy chapter 19.

Two things need to be understood about this law of retribution. Number one, it is prescriptive. It describes punishment or retaliation when offended.

It prescribes what a person can do and in so doing what you cannot do. Number two, it is also restrictive. It restricts or limits the punishment or the retaliation.

This law is intended to prohibit severe or over punishment. In the ancient world, it would prevent a family feud perhaps or even a war between tribes or clans.

For an example, say John gets in a fight with your brother and in the fight he breaks your brother's arm.

[11 : 36] in the ancient world what that was saying is you can retaliate but if you retaliate against John, against John's family, all you can do is break his arm.

You can't hurt him more. You can't take it out on his family. That was designed to help the situation. It was not designed to teach us tit for tat.

It was never designed to say, alright, somebody did this to you, now you go and do it to them. It was designed to teach if that person did something to you, you've got to limit what you do to them to something of an equal measure.

the law was given also to the Jewish people as a nation. It was to be enforced by their judicial system. It was not designed to be carried out by individuals.

So we need to understand the law of God has always required his people to show restraint. This is talking about ancient people. Restraint among God's people has always been the norm Let's look on.

[13 : 04] Jesus responds to this get-even attitude by giving us now four examples of how his followers should deal with personal violations. Look at it in verses 39 through 42 God's people should demonstrate loving restraint.

Before we get into that I want to clarify something. Jesus did not teach teach. Paul did not teach in Romans 12 or anywhere else that God's people are not ever to punish evil.

God's people are not taught to just let evil and wrong and injustice go. We're going to look in detail at that next week. But verse 39 is not teaching that Christians can never defend themselves or their family or be a policeman or in the military or use the police or military.

God has established laws and principles that actually require us as people to oppose evil and to see that evildoers are restrained and punished and sometimes that may be the ultimate punishment or exercise of force slash restraint.

I think it's important that we look at the context of what we're reading this morning. We're in Matthew chapter 5. We're in the Sermon on the Mount and in Matthew chapter 5 beginning in verse 12 rather excuse me verse 17 Jesus starts talking about the Old Testament law.

[14 : 54] He says do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. And then beginning in verse 21 he starts in his teaching pointing out some of the things that the Old Testament taught or some of the things that the people thought that the Old Testament taught.

And so Jesus talked in verse 21 there about anger. You have heard that it was said to those of old you shall not murder and so forth. Look in verse 27.

You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery but I say to you that everyone who looks to you who looks to you fulfilling the Old Testament law.

He is either showing a deeper understanding of it or he's correcting a misunderstanding by some of those Jewish leaders of the day who were leading people astray.

And so for an example in verse 27 he says you've heard that it said you shall not commit adultery but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[16:13] Look at the next verse. If your right eye causes you to sin tear it out and throw it away for it is better that you lose one of your members than your whole body be thrown into hell.

Same thing about your hand. Your hand causes you to sin cut it off. I think everyone in this room understands Jesus is using hyperbole intended exaggeration to make his point.

Jesus is trying to teach adultery is more than just a physical act. Before adultery ever takes place in a bed it takes place in someone's mind in their thoughts.

And so he says it would be better for you to gouge out your eye if it's causing you to lust is the implication. But is that what he really means?

Every man in here knows you can gouge out both eyes you can still lust. It's in your mind it's in your heart it's not in your eye. Jesus is using an exaggerated statement to make the point lust or any sin is so serious you need to take extreme measures to make sure you don't give in to the temptation.

[17:33] You need to do whatever is necessary. Radical action to avoid sin. Disobeying God's word.

That's what he's talking about. If you carry that over through everything else he says here in Matthew chapter 5 he begins Matthew 5 talks about the law verse 17 then in verse 21 for the rest of the chapter he says you have heard that it was said but I say to you or something like that.

When we get to what we've read here back in verse 30 now 39 but I say to you do not resist the one who is evil that is not a blanket statement that Christians are to be the doormat for every evil person who wants to do them harm in the world.

You understand the rationale here. We'll talk about it more next week. Now with this clarification let's see how we need to develop loving restraint in situations involving people who oppose us in some way.

First verse 39 the last part. We need to show restraint when responding to insult. Look at the last part of verse 39. 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.

[19:15] What Jesus is describing here to the first century audience who heard him say this they understood he's talking about a personal insult.

to be struck on the he's not talking about being hit with a fist upside the head Jesus is describing somebody said their right cheek somebody standing looking this way for me to hit that person on the right cheek most people are right handed to hit the person on the right cheek you got to hit them with the back of your hand Jesus is describing what people in that day understood as a form of insult by slapping someone in the face with the back of your hand it's not intended to injure physically it's intended to injure psychologically to make you angry it's intended to insult us Jesus is describing here what somebody does to just provoke you and the point is we're not to slap back we're not to let it bother us we're not to retaliate or try to get even with people who are just trying to hurt us hurt our feelings insult us

Winston Churchill was reportedly good at insults while prime minister he had a strained relationship with Lady Astor neither one liked the other it is actually reported that on one occasion Churchill was drunk in a hotel elevator with her and it said that with a condescending insult she snipped Sir Winston you are drunk he replied my lady you are ugly and tomorrow I will be sober I don't think Jesus is condemning good natured joking around but it's questionable how good natured that was we need to be careful that we don't get caught up in this always pay them back get even for every little thing that happens and you need to make sure you don't teach your children to always be getting back always don't take anything off any one kind of attitude

Jesus tells us otherwise number two second example Jesus uses is about how we should respond when our rights are violated verse 40 we need to show restraint when responding to lawsuits look at it and if anyone would sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well a tunic was like a shirt a cloak was like an overcoat it also served as a blanket at night the old testament law required that any kind of dealings that were happening between two people this cloak this overcoat had to be returned to its owner before the sun set because that was the owner's only way to cover himself at night only way to stay warm you can read about that in Exodus chapter 22 Exodus 22 beginning in verse 26 Jesus is talking to you about being sued for your shirt and the natural response would be you don't let it happen you fight back you do whatever it takes to keep it

Jesus is saying here don't be so concerned with your rights in fact go a step further if they sue you for your shirt let them have your coat they can't sue you for that you are taking the initiative there now again understand this is not a blanket statement Jesus is not teaching us that we should let every unethical person that comes along sue us and take everything you have in fact you can only do that one time couldn't you one person comes sues you takes everything you have well you don't have anything else that's not what he's talking about Jesus is trying to make the point throughout this whole section that our rights our personal comfort must not be the consuming force of our life everything can't be about me and mine that's not the idea that's not the mentality of a follower of Jesus he's telling us we can see that a little bit clearer in the next example look at verse 41 we need to show restraint when responding to oppression he says in verse 41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile go with him two miles in those days a Roman soldier could require a citizen to make him carry his backpack for one mile and then that was it you couldn't require the second mile

[24 : 54] Jesus says when that happens don't just go one mile go two don't just do the minimum do more Jesus is saying let's try to apply this at your work are you known as someone who only does the minimum in order to keep your job are you always the last one to get there and always the first one to leave do you always insist on taking your break or lunch at the exact minute that it's scheduled even if it inconveniences your co-workers who are doing something with you let me give you an example many years ago Lisa worked with a lady they worked together and when break time came let's say it was 10 a.m.

no matter what was going on no matter how urgent it was no matter how many other people were involved when break time came this person stopped and went on break same thing about lunch this person was only concerned about themselves this person didn't care about their work didn't care about their co-workers that's what Jesus is talking about here does your employer do your co-workers see that you as a Christian member of this church or some other church that they see that by just observing you at work that you really do care about your job and you are willing to go the second mile in order to do a good job and let's just think for a moment we're supposed to do everything we do as a Christian for the glory of God Paul even says in the book of Colossians in third chapter that we're supposed to do our work as employees as if we're doing it for the Lord himself the people that you work with or the person you work for they see that you as a Christian you really do care about the people that you work for or the people that you work with and you are willing to go the extra mile for them you know such acts of self-giving that'll get people's attention on it that is a great way to witness in the first century and today for us too

Jesus provides us with one more example of how we should respond when our rights are violated look at verse 42 we need to show restraint when responding to the needy look at it give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you the attitude here is we need to be willing to give even sacrifice to help people who are truly in need the idea Jesus is talking about here is we can't be just selfish self-centered people and we're just concerned about ourselves and our stuff we can't be hoarders this would also mean that we've got Jesus is concerned that we as Christians we don't fail to notice people around us who have legitimate needs that we could meet if we noticed them and cared enough about them to want to help them now this shouldn't need to be said but I'm going to say it this is obviously not a call to give away everything that you have you can do that one time and we know we've studied it on other occasions scripture in multiple places

Old and New Testament teaches us don't give to people who are in need because they brought it on themselves because they're just lazy or they won't work or they won't practice sound financial money management principles the idea here is help people who are in need because we really do love people because we care by the way it is not an act of love to reward laziness it's not an act of love on a governmental level on a church level or a family level to reward laziness you know where I'm going next parents don't hand your children everything just because they're your children don't enable them to be lazy to be bum like to expect everything to be just given to them just because they're your children teach them the word no teach them the phrase we can't afford it teach them you can't afford it but then teach them how to work how to save how to manage their money so that they have resources so that they understand the difference between working and having something saving and having something the Bible nowhere teaches us to help people who refuse to help themselves because they just won't manage their money they won't work or things of this nature but don't remember that part is the main part of this sermon

I know see I can be real jaded I'll be honest with you I can be real jaded about bums who do not want to work do not want to save do not want to take care of themselves in any way and expect the handout I have no patience with that but I can be so jaded that I don't want to help people who are in real need and that's wrong that's sinful so don't go away from here today saying yep it's right you don't help those who don't work forget that you know that what we all need just about all of us need to remember as we leave here today is open our eyes there's people around us they're struggling and they can't help it they've not had the opportunities we've had they've not had the training the parents the help we've had they don't have the mind that we have they don't have the skills or ability to do the job that we have there's some people are just in need and it's always been this way since the foundation of the world just about and there's much in the

[32 : 09] Old and New Testament about Christians noticing and helping the truly poor needy it's our responsibility and most of us we need to be better at fulfilling this responsibility this passage does not prevent us from ever taking a stand for our rights at times it is not it's not telling us you can never stand up for the rights of others as we'll see next week let's don't make any mistake Jesus is calling us to make some difficult choices that will require us to change some attitudes maybe some parts of our lifestyle but the fact is we can't do this on our own we've been in a series on Romans chapter 12 where we've looked at what Paul was writing about how we ought to live in this world as Christians in relationship to other people and a lot of that stuff is just plain hard to do in fact we can't do it on our own but if we're

Christians as I've said just about every week the spirit of God lives within us and the spirit of God living within us will enable us to live like a Christian even in these hard ways if we want to and we're willing to make the decisions and choices to actually live it out there's three keys to live this kind of life number one we've got to trust God we've got to learn to trust God depend upon him depend upon him to make some wrongs right number two we've got to love people we've got to love even evil people people who are out to get us remember how Jesus prayed as he was being nailed to the cross father forgive them for they do not know what they're doing you think well that's

Jesus I can't do that nobody can do that well they can read in the book of Acts chapter 7 chapter 7 and 8 talking about Stephen he was actually literally stoned to death for what all the good things he was saying about Jesus basically preaching the gospel and as he was being pounded as he was dying he prayed that very same prayer for the people who were killing him he did that because he was filled with the spirit of God he was a person human being just like us number three we need to die to self that's what Jesus calls us to do he did it on several occasions here's one of the best clearest most succinct statements Luke 9 then he said to them all if anyone will come after me he must deny himself take up his cross daily and follow me that's the only way that we can be non-defensive non-vengeful not carry a grudge have spite in our heart to die to self to my way to my will live our life in such a way that we want Jesus to be honored and Lord and seen you know we all need to ask God if you think about it look at this we need to ask God to help us to trust him more to learn to love others and to die to self every day if you're not a

Christian this won't make sense to you if you're not a Christian the only thing you can do is to admit to God your need for salvation and I encourage you if you're not a Christian right now admit to God I am a sinner in need of this Savior repent of your sin turn from your sin change your mind about the way you're living put your faith in Jesus that when he died on the cross he actually took your punishment paid the penalty for the sins that you should suffer for call upon him to save you the Bible says whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved this is a message for Christians but the only way that we can ever actually do it live it out is to be dependent upon the spirit of God day by day even hour by hour and make the choice to obey him and deny ourselves

I encourage you as a Christian ask God to help you to want to do this ask God to help you to do this day by day let's pray together Father show us how we should respond every one of us then help us to respond this way and in an attitude of prayer let's just be still and quiet before the Lord if I could pray with you I'll be here at the front glad to do that but you just listen to the Lord and you respond as he speaks to you during this time