

February 19, 2017
Sermon Manuscript

1 Corinthians 13:4-14:1a

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. ^{14:1a} Pursue love...

Matthew 5:38-48

(Jesus said,) ³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But 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. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Clarifying Retaliation & Enemies

This morning we continue with part 7 of our series on the Sermon on the Mount. And as I have throughout this series, I'll be drawing some from Dallas Willard's *Divine Conspiracy*.

Today is the final Sunday for our Winter Session of Life Groups, and we find ourselves arriving at the end of chapter 5. So, even though this is *not* the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, this is a good place for our Life Groups to wrap up. #

Already in his Sermon, Jesus has covered anger & contempt, lust, divorce, and oaths. And now Jesus teaches, ³⁸ *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* ³⁹ *But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.*

Now, I should first clarify that here Jesus is addressing retaliation for personal injury. So, Jesus is not addressing how we should deal with social or institutional evils, nor is he calling us to become pacifists. As Willard points out, when "an eye for an eye" is mentioned in the Old Testament, such as our First Lesson today, it refers only to retaliation for personal injury.

But it's important for us to understand that God intended this law of "an eye for an eye" to be a means of recourse for a personal injury that would equalize a situation, rather than escalate matters. In other words, if you broke someone's arm, this law kept them from breaking both of your arms in return. The idea was that once they broke only one of your arms, everything would then be equal and they could go their merry way while you could go, I guess, to the hospital. However, even though this may *sound* good on paper, it really wasn't all that practical. As you can imagine, it was a pretty tough principle for people to adhere to. I'm sure you'll agree that if some someone broke your arm, it would be hard while you're anguishing in pain to return the favor without hurting the other person *just a little bit more!*

Well, this is why, in our passage, Jesus is introducing an entirely *different* approach. As we read, Jesus, the smartest man who ever lived, the moral and ethical genius, *instead* paints a picture of non-resistance. He says, ³⁸ *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* ³⁹ *But 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.* ⁴⁰ *And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.* ⁴¹ *And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.* ⁴² *Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*

Now, as Willard says, out of the *whole* Sermon on the Mount it is these four statements in verses 39-42 that cause most people to either "throw their hands up in despair or sink into the pit of grinding legalism".

- 1) First you've got "turn the other cheek". We've all heard that one, but would probably rather we hadn't.
- 2) Then: when someone sues you for your tunic, give him the tunic *and* your cloak. The tunic and cloak terminology is a little antiquated, but I this still sounds pretty *ridiculous*.
- 3) Then: if someone forces you to go *one mile*, go *an extra mile*. I think it's the word "forces" here that makes me uncomfortable.

4) And then finally, the **least** favorite verse of anyone who has ever walked down a street in downtown San Francisco: *give to the one who begs from you and don't refuse the one who wants to borrow from you*. Now, I'm not saying I've always had this verse memorized, but whenever I'm confronted with someone in need on the street, this verses *really* haunts me!!!

So, it's at this point in the Sermon on the Mount that I think a lot of people are ready to say, "Alright, Jesus! I've had enough of your crazy talk!"

But Jesus is not even finished!! He continues "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" – which, by the way, is never explicitly said in the Old Testament, but is an attitude David displays all over the psalms. Jesus goes on: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Given the last six weeks, and all the ways we've discussed that the Sermon on the Mount is commonly misinterpreted, you can understand why *by this point* people just write it off as completely unrealistic!

Willard mentions Bertrand Russell, a well-known British philosopher who was raised a Christian but became an outspoken atheist. He commented that "the Christian principle Love your enemies' is good... There is nothing to be said against it except that it is too difficult for most of us to practise sincerely." Now, Russell was, of course, right as he understood it, because he was thinking of himself and others "remaining what they were on the inside and nevertheless trying to love their enemies as occasion arose." Those who knew Russell personally said "he was filled with hatred. (So it's) no wonder he found love difficult." But Russell was making the same mistake **so many do** when it comes to loving their neighbor: by aiming to keep the law rather than setting out to become the kind of person whose deeds would naturally conform to this law. Loving our neighbor is only something that will be possible for us as we live our lives in under God's kingdom power and allow Jesus to transform our hearts!!!! #

Now, as for these other things – turning the other cheek, generosity to the one who sues us, going the extra mile, and giving to the one who begs from us – we need to understand these are not hard and fast laws of things we must do no matter what. Jesus isn't giving law, but rather illustrations of the sorts of things we will find ourselves **wanting** to do the more our hearts are changed.

So let's take a moment to consider these illustration of what a kingdom person might be inclined to do when when they are personally injured or imposed upon.

First, Jesus says, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Now, in the *normal* human order, if someone strikes us, the expectation is that we'll do what?# Return harm for harm. But Jesus is suggesting that when one is fully alive in the

kingdom of God and someone wrongs them, they will turn the other cheek. That is: remaining vulnerable and allowing themselves to be injured rather than responding with harm themselves #

Now, Jesus has already said that the principle of “an eye for an eye” is inadequate to handle, because even though on paper it should prevent further escalation, it rarely does. But the complete genius of turning the other cheek is that it usually **does** prevent further escalation!! Think about it: as Willard points out, if someone literally *slapped* us in the face and we responded by turning the other cheek, what does that person do then? Keep on slapping?# And for how long?# And then what?## Now this does not mean that we don’t look for a way out or alert the authorities. We may even eventually press charges. But \while we are in the situation, Willard’s point is that our tormentors are counting on our “resistance and anger to support their continuation of the evil that is in them. (But) if we respond as Jesus indicates (it) forces them to question what kind of people they are... with our other cheek facing them, slapped already or soon to be slapped, the justification of their anger and evil that they were counting on has been removed, (because) anger feeds on anger, so patient goodness will normally deflate it.” #

But this is not a principle that can always be applied; we always have to consider the larger context. Indeed, there could be a situation where turning the other cheek means “I will then be dead, or that others will suffer great harm.” Furthermore, as Willard points out, “Jesus never suggests that we turn *someone else’s* cheek or make *someone else* vulnerable.” So, for example if someone goes up to my 3-year-old daughter Brooke and hits her, I’m not going to say, “Now Brooke, I want you to keep letting them hit you. C’mon now: give them your other cheek.” No, this is a choice each human being has to make for themselves. And it’s not about choosing to become a doormat, it’s about knowing that God will take care of us no matter what and that we can remain vulnerable because in Him we are ultimately *invulnerable*. ## ##

So, second Jesus says, “if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” And this is similar to something Jesus said back in verse 25 of this chapter. But in the normal human order, if a person has been sued, they would never *think* of doing something kind for the person suing them, right?# But Jesus is suggesting that when one is fully alive in the kingdom of God and yet someone tries to unfairly take something from them, they will still conscientiously try to help that person. Now, as we said (with verse 25) a few weeks ago, **helping** that person may or may not include doing what they want. A great example is when The Episcopal Church sued us for this property. We defended ourselves against their claim because it would not help The Episcopal Church by allowing them to confiscate this property. Not only would we be enabling unethical behavior, but even if they had a congregation to put here, having a church here that doesn’t teach God’s word replace one that does isn’t doing anyone any favors.

However, what if this week I was driving along and saw Presiding Bishop Schori – the woman behind all these lawsuits – on the side of the highway, struggling to fix a flat tire? Well, a person who is not operating in God’s kingdom would do what?# They wouldn’t stop! They’d probably say “Ha! She got what she deserved!” and keep driving, maybe flip her the bird. But for a person who is operating in the kingdom, their heart is going to *be capable of feeling compassion* for her because they’ve already forgiven her. So they’ll probably get out and help her fix the tire. ##

Third, Jesus says, “if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

Now, this one might sound bizarre to us. Some of us are probably imagining some hostage situation or something out of the movies, but that is not what Jesus is describing. Instead, the law in Jesus’ day was that “any Roman soldier could require a Jew to carry a burden for one mile to aid him in his work.” Well, even though this was the Roman law, the presence of Rome was not exactly welcome by the Jews, so you can imagine people probably didn’t have the *best attitude* when a Roman soldier would interrupt their day and ask them to do something like this.

Perhaps a modern equivalent would if a cop were to stop us and confiscate our car to pursue a criminal in a high speed chase. *No, actually, that would be pretty cool.*

How about the attitude we get when we’re summoned for jury duty? Do we grow angry about the prospect of being inconvenienced and all our plans that might mess up, or do we trust that it’s out of our control and asset ourselves to make the best of it, come what may?

In the normal human order, people “only do what legal force requires them to, and not an inch more.” But a person operating in the kingdom will consider the problem of the official or the government as something of *importance to themselves* and, as an expression of their goodwill, will do more than is strictly required of them. #

However, there are *still* situations where going the extra mile with someone would be the wrong thing to do, aren’t there? As Willard says, “If, for example, I am a heart surgeon on the way to do a transplant, I must not go a second mile with someone.” But that shows why interpreting these verses as laws can be so dangerous. ##

Fourth, Jesus says, “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.” Well, in the normal human order, people will typically give to someone they owe a favor to or to a family member. But Jesus is suggesting that when one is fully alive in the kingdom of God they won’t feel compelled to avoid people who may ask for something of them, and when someone who has no claim on them at all makes a request, they’ll feel free to give even to them. #

But again, here, there are definitely circumstances where I should not give to the person who asks me. The example Willard gives is “If I owe money to a shopkeeper whose goods I

have already consumed, I am not at liberty to give that money to “someone who asks of me”—unless, once again, there are very special factors involved.” But that’s not the only exception.

This week is Lydia’s birthday, but let’s say on her twelfth birthday I decide to take her to a Warriors game in the city. I have no doubt that Lydia will be a huge sports fan, right? ☺ But let’s say that on the way from the BART to the arena someone with real needs asks me for a buck and I give it to them, but then another needy person sees that and comes and then another and another, and I end up just making it rain dollar bills for a mass of needy people for the next hour, but at the expense of neglecting and ignoring Lydia and we miss the first half of the game. Would that have been appropriate? Probably not, because unless that needy person is in a life or death situation, my responsibility to consistently meet my daughter’s need for love and care eclipses that needy person’s request.

Even the Good Samaritan had limits to the amount he was willing to help the man he found beat up on the side of the road. He bound up the man’s wounds, put him on his animal, and brought him to an innkeeper. But after leaving the man in the innkeeper’s care and promising to pay the bill, he left the next day. (Luke 10:25-37) ##

So, as Willard says, in each case we “must determine if the gift of my vulnerability, goods, time, and strength is, precisely, appropriate. That is (our) responsibility before God.” ##

Well finally, in the last paragraph, Jesus says, *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

As Willard says, “Few of us manage to go through life without collecting a group of individuals who would not be sorry to learn we have died.” And if you’re having trouble of thinking of any enemies, remember there are at least a few folks over in the Middle East who’d probably prefer you were dead. Has anyone prayed for ISIS lately? Well, as Jesus says, loving those who love us is something even some of the worst humans in the world do. But our Father in heaven makes his sun rise on both the evil and the good; he sends rain on both the just and unjust. And Jesus’ point is that if we are living as sons and daughters of God – that is, if we are living in reliance upon him and surrendered to his will – then we should expect the fruit of this to be hearts are like our heavenly father’s: desiring to love our enemies *even* to the point of praying for them.

Now, for us to ever have hearts like this, we first need to remember the order of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount so far. Before this he has already addressed anger, contempt, and

obsessive desire (or lust), which means that before we can expect to have any capacity to love our enemies, we need to have dealt with these, first. This is not to say we need to be *flawless* in these areas; every one of us will be anger, contempt, and lust on occasion. But if our lives are *being run* by any of these, then love for our enemies will always seem like a bridge too far. ###

But having said that, if we want to know how we can ever attain hearts with the capacity to love our enemies as our heavenly father does, not to mention all of the *other* fruits of righteousness that Jesus has been talking about since verse 20, the answer can be found in our Second Lesson today, from First Corinthians. There Paul says,

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Willard says, “People usually read this, and are taught to read it, as telling them to be patient, kind, free of jealousy, and so on—just as they read (the earlier parts of Jesus’ sermon) as telling them to not call others fools, not look on a woman to lust, not swear, to go the second mile, and so forth. But (look at Paul’s words. He is plainly saying) that it is **love** that does these things, *not us.*” And God is love (1 John 4:8). So if you look at 14:1, what we are to **do** is ‘pursue love’”, pursue God, and as we dwell in Him, we will find ourselves doing these godly actions and behaviors. ## ##

Is it then hard to do the things Jesus and Paul are talking about here? “It is **very** hard indeed if (we) have not been substantially transformed in the depths of your being... in such a way that (we) are permeated with love.” But the more we dwell in him, it is sin that will become hard, and love will become easy.

Amen.

Source used: Dallas Willard’s *Divine Conspiracy*