

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

Kingdom Ethics

Villa Rica 11/02/03

Matthew 5:38-48

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 an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40" If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41" Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42" Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to 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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46" For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47" If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48" Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matt. 5:38-48 (NASB)

The Sermon on the Mount is Christ the King setting forth the character qualities of citizens of the Kingdom of God. It would be a mistake to use the Sermon on the Mount as a rule of life for men who have not experienced the new birth and who do not belong to the Kingdom of God.

I. Spiritual Principles Apply To Spiritual Men

Let me say at the outset that the Sermon on the Mount is not a code of ethics that sets aside the Mosaic law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Men who have tried to do that have grievously erred.

Count Leo Tolstoi 1829-1910, who entered the army and fought in the Crimean war, retired from the army to devote himself to writing and study. He had a spiritual experience that led him to renounce the Russian Orthodox Church and evolve a new form of Christianity whose central creed was non-resistance to evil. His text was the scripture we have read today, which Christ taught. **Do not resist him who is evil.** He would not qualify that in any way.

Now policemen resist evil, so Tolstoi would do away with policemen. He would do away with soldiers. There should be no punishment for crime. Taken to its ultimate conclusion his teaching would do away with governments administering justice to evildoers.

One thing we must always keep in mind when studying the scripture is that scripture never contradicts scripture. Scripture interprets scripture. Obviously Tolstoi did not do this, nor do those who advocate pacifism and taking the sword out of the hand of the magistrate. Christ does not rescind His word in Genesis 9:6 **Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man.**

In this fallen world we must always have law enforced by magisterial power. The principle of equity given in the Mosaic law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was to be determined by judges

appointed for that purpose. It was within the frame-work of a just judicial system that that code was to be imposed. This was never meant to be one on one revenge taking. The Law of Moses did not justify anyone taking the law into his own hands. But the law was to be impartial and fair and equitable for all. The punishment should fit the crime.

But well-meaning people have misinterpreted the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and have tried to apply what he said to all men in a fallen world and to governments and nations. Christ never intended that the Sermon on the Mount was to be a new code of ethics for all men. He is speaking to beatitudinal man as a private individual. This same beatitudinal man in his public office as a magistrate or policeman or a judge or soldier must still apply the principles of the Mosaic Law in his official capacity. We can save ourselves a lot of misunderstanding if we simply let Christ's teaching apply strictly to spiritual man as a private citizen. He holds citizenship in two separate and distinct realms. The Christian is a citizen of this world and subject to the laws in effect for all men in a fallen world, but he is also a citizen of the Kingdom of God and in his private dealings he must be regulated by a spiritual principle which is stated by our Lord in these words, **if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.** (Matt. 16: 24)

Let me state at this point that there is clearly a difference between the natural man and the spiritual man. We can almost say that the spiritual man is a complete opposite from the natural man. Man in his fallen, unregenerate state is self-centered and revengeful. He is of the spirit of Cain and his grandson mentioned in Genesis 4, Lamech who told his wives that he had killed a man for wounding him, and a boy for striking him. This spirit of revenge and retaliation got so bad that God had to send a flood to let mankind start all over again and to inaugurate human government to check this natural tendency in unregenerate man to take the law into his own hands and avenge himself.

The natural man lacks the humility and temperament to fulfill the spiritual principle called for in this teaching of Christ. Only the regenerate, born again man who has begun to manifest the character of the beatitudinal man can deny himself and take up his cross and follow Christ in this kingdom teaching.

The spiritual man who is walking by faith is able to accept and believe what the Lord says about vengeance, **Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.** God has set in force a spiritual law of recompense. Jeremiah wrote of the destruction of Babylon. Her mighty men were to be captured and their weapons of war shattered. **For the Lord is a God of recompense, he will fully repay.** (Jer. 51:56). That punishment may not come in this world and this life. But certainly at the day of the Lord's coming all shall be recompensed. **For the Day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head** (Obadiah 15).

At the day of Judgment God promises that men will be paid back double for all their sins. The ungodly are referred to as a wicked woman, as Babylon the Great, and she is destined to have plagues and misery and woe and torment and mourning. **God says, pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup that she has mixed, mix twice as much for her** - Rev. 17:6

The musical comedy *Chicago* lampoons revenge taking and sets it to music and dance.

II. Four Examples Of Humility and Accommodation

Our Lord gives four examples of how the beatitudinal man, the spiritual man, is to respond to others on a one-on-one basis. The evil spoken of here is not flagrant or life threatening. But the natural man is inclined to display an evil temperament and the old man in all of us would be inclined to respond in kind. The natural instinct is to not let anyone get the best of you. The first example would be in the area of your

personal feelings when you are criticized, put down or insulted. Our Lord puts it this way, **whoever slaps you on the right cheek; turn to him the other also.**

That slap on the cheek might be a hurt done to your ego, your self-esteem or your dignity. Have you ever had someone get on your case because you kept him or her waiting? Or because you made a mistake in your driving, or have you been blamed for something you didn't do? Have you ever been late for an appointment and then been scolded for it even though you were providentially hindered? It probably has happened to most of us. Did you come away feeling low? Did you offer an excuse, a rebuttal, a get-even comeback? That would be the natural response to criticism or rebuke. But the spiritual person accepts it. He turns the other cheek. One Christian commentator wrote: *"Never allow yourself to answer back when you are blamed. Never defend yourself. Let them reprehend you, in private or in public, as much as they please. Let the righteous smite you; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove you, it shall be excellent oil."*

Alexander Whyte had this to say about being insulted: *"It is a mark of the deepest and truest humility to see ourselves condemned without cause, and to be silent under it. To be silent under insult and wrong is a very noble imitation of our Lord."*

"O my Lord, when I remember in how many ways Thou didst suffer, who in no way deserved it, I know not where my senses are when I am in such a haste to defend and excuse myself. Is it possible I should desire anyone to speak any good of me, or to think it, when so many ill things were thought and spoken of thee! What about being blamed by all men, if only we stand at last blameless before Thee!"

The second example of evil being responded to is the other person wanting to take your shirt. He is going to sue you to get what he feels is his rightful due. You may feel that his claim is unjust. This is the kind of case that in California they can take to People's Court and have the judge settle it one way or the other. But the spiritual person is willing to suffer the loss, even saying, "Listen, if you think I have defrauded you I will give you even more than you are asking. You would rather err on the side of losing something that you believe is rightfully yours but which your brother thinks belongs to him by giving it to him and even sweetening the pot to let your neighbor know that you are willing to bend over backwards to do the right thing than to lose your witness with him.

For the spiritual man it is more important that your complainant remember a Christian spirit of largesse and honesty than for you to lose a few dollars. Please notice that it is not someone else's property that is in question. This is your personal business and personal property that you have a right to dispose of as you wish. The natural man will not allow himself to be put upon like that. He will insist on getting what is his. But the spiritual man is meek and humble and willing to deny himself. He knows God can make it up to him anyway. So he yields to this other person knowing that God looks on the heart and that what you are doing is approved of Christ. You would rather please Christ than self.

The third case is when someone imposes on your time and inconveniences you. We have all had those experiences. **Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.** This fellow doesn't even ask for your help, he demands it. He imposes on your time. He has no consideration for your schedule, your time, and your priorities. We all get phone calls from people who begin to take our time and usually call at the worst possible time. The natural tendency is to give them a short answer and hang up. But our Lord says, Hear them out and be open to help if you can. And if you can't at least leave them courteously, politely. The point is, the Christian man is willing to be imposed upon. He is willing to be inconvenienced. He does not think so highly of himself that he can't take time for those who intrude on his time and his schedule.

Lastly, he gives the example of the requests for personal help that come to all of us. We are not to adopt a hard-hearted attitude. We ought to be willing to be imposed on financially or materially if it is in our power to respond. And most of us are. Again, the Christian is spiritual and is more concerned with the spiritual response than the material response. We are taught by our Lord to even be willing to be taken

advantage of. Not all requests for help are from an honest heart. We recognize that there are charlatans and drifters who live off of others. So we may err on the side of sometimes being taken advantage of, but we should be glad that we are able to serve God in this way; God will use us as channels of his blessing if we let him. The spiritual man knows that God is the ultimate Provider and that he can replenish our own larder when we give out to others. The miserly way of the natural man is avoided as we let ourselves be stewards of his resources that he has placed in our hands.

The spiritual man can follow these teachings of Christ because he has the Spirit of Christ and has acknowledged his own need of the grace of God. He has learned humility and self-denial. He has taken up his cross in order to follow Christ. He is motivated by a love for Christ and a love for others. He is now able to overcome evil by doing good. He does not try and impose these standards and principles on others.

He does this voluntarily and willingly. They are not requirements to gain salvation but the outflow of the surrendered life.

Then lastly he speaks of loving our enemies, blessing those who curse us. God sends the rain on the just and the unjust. His goodness extends to all and we are to imitate Him. The world loves those who love them. That is not difficult to do. But to love the unlovely, to do good to those who ill deserve it, to care about those who desire our hurt, that is what our Lord teaches as Kingdom ethics. Only those in the kingdom are willing and empowered to put into practice his ethical teaching. What about you? Are you in the Kingdom of God? Are you putting into practice the ethical code and values taught by the king himself in the Sermon on the Mount? If not, ask him to come into your heart and empower you to live as a citizen of his kingdom.

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