

**ON BEING THE CHILDREN OF OUR FATHER**

Matthew 5:38-48

**Intro:** This has been one of the passages in the Bible which has had the greatest number of interpretations, and most of them have been wrong. Pacifists, anti-war people, and those of like mind have been quick to take this passage and say that the Lord Jesus was a pacifist, and that He never would support a war. But people like that are not taking the whole Bible into consideration when they come to their conclusion. Of course there are people who think that God is what we make Him to be, and that as people's ideas got more refined, their ideas of God changed from what He was in OT times to a more gentle God in NT times. This reveals how little people understand about God Who is immutable, unchanging. What He is now, He always has been, and always will be. The God of the OT is the same God Who is the God of the NT. No one likes war, but man being what he is, a sinner by nature, there are always going to be wars and rumors of wars. And how anyone can say that people today are more refined than they used to be, I don't know. This sex crazy day in which we live has people behaving in a way that would make animals ashamed of themselves. I don't see any evidence of evolution, and I never have, but I see plenty of evidence today of devolution, a word that indicates that things are getting worse, not better. We see plenty of evidence of degeneration, but what we need to see is more evidence of regeneration, which is what we see when people turn to Christ and are saved.

The verse that is the key to this section is verse 45. The Lord was teaching His disciples that there are major differences between the life of a Christian as compared with the life of a person in the world. It ties in with exactly with verse 20. (Read.) And both of these verses, 20 and 45, emphasize with the exhortation of verse 16. Basically how do you identify a Christian? Is it that he goes to church? Well, a Christian surely should go to a church where he can be taught the Scriptures and enter into fellowship with others who are trusting in Christ for their salvation. But mere church-going does not tell us that a person is a Christian. There are thousands of people who go to church every Sunday, but you probably would be shocked if you knew how they lived during the week. The Pharisees were very religious in many ways. They were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the people, but the Lord condemned them as hypocrites, men who were only acting like they knew God.

How do you identify a person who is truly a child of God, or a son of

God? It is by the way he seeks to live in obedience to God. Now let me be clear on this point. We do not become a child of God by what we do. We have to be born into God's family to be a child of God. It is God Who makes us His children. John 1:11-13 states very clearly how we are born into God's family. (Quote.) So we are born of God, or as our Lord explained it to Nicodemus, we need to be born from above. The KJ translation is, "born again."

But how can other people tell that we have really been saved? *It is by the way we live!* You see, the way a child of God lives is so different from the way the people of the world live, and those of us who know the Lord seek to live by the Bible, and such a life is totally impossible unless a person has been "born again." Just as when I was conceived in the womb of my mother, I had the life of my mother and my father in me, so when I was born of God, God gave me eternal life, divine life, so that I can live the way He wants me to live. So when you put verses 44 and 45 together, the Lord's words become clear. Only a person who has been changed inwardly by God Himself can treat his enemy, or enemies, the way the Lord said that they should be treated. The Lord was not speaking here about how our nation should react when we are attacked by terrorists or by some other nation. He was speaking about how an individual Christian is to behave when he is mistreated by his enemies. Then the world can see by a Christian's behavior that he is a child of God, or more literally, a son of God.

But now let's go back to the beginning of our text for today, to verse 38. There we see the Lord referring to:

### **I. ANOTHER OLD COMMANDMENT (Matt. 5:38).**

And by an "old commandment," I mean a commandment that was given to the people of Israel when God gave the Law to Moses. The Lord has been clarifying the real meaning of several of those OT commandments, and actually correcting the way the Pharisees and scribes had been applying them to the people of Israel.

During these days that Lucille has been so sick, I got behind in my Bible reading. And so in the last few days I have been trying to get back on schedule. Yesterday I made it. So I have been reading large sections of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. And just on Friday I came to the very verse in Deuteronomy that the Lord was speaking about

here in Matt. 5:38. Actually it appeared before that in Exodus 21:24. The Deuteronomy passage is chapter 19, verse 21. Let us take the time to read both of those passages so we can see what the issue was in each case.

If you care to, you can turn to Exodus 21 and follow me as I read verses 22 through 25. (Read.)

This is a very serious situation. Two men get into a fight, and in the process the wife of one of them who is expecting a child gets involved, and she loses her baby. Obviously the husband of the wife who lost the baby now has complete control of the situation. He can either take all of the money that the other man had, or he can even demand that the man be put to death – “life for life.” This does not involve the nation. Instead we have two Jewish men fighting, the Jewish wife of one is injured in some way so that a Jewish baby is lost. We know nothing about how the fight got started, or what it was over, just the final situation.

Now when we turn to Deuteronomy 19 we have an entirely different situation. I will read Deut. 19:16-21. (Read.)

Here again we have two Jewish men. One brings a false charge against the other, and after the judges have made a thorough investigation, they find that the one Jewish man has actually made a false charge against the other, and it must have been a very serious charge by which the death penalty could be applied. And the charge brought against the innocent man is now to be applied to the one who brought such a false charge.

Now we are not told what the false charge was. What we are told is that such action is going to have a very solemnizing effect on the people who watch the proceedings, and even upon those who hear about this later. The object is to keep others from doing the same thing. So sometimes very harsh measures were taken, even death for the false accuser.

Now let us go back to our text and see:

## **II. THE LORD’S EXPLANATION OF THE COMMAND (Matt. 5:39-42).**

Before we look at these words I want you to remember what the Lord had said previously about persecution. You find it in Matt. 5:10-12. (Read.) Now the situation here in Matthew 5 seems to speak of persecution.

There is physical injury. There is possible injustice. There are unreasonable demands. Again, the Lord did not specify the particular conditions, but he was pointing out what could happen to His disciples and how they should handle these injustices when legally they had a right to take action against these who are called in verse 39 *evil ones*.

The Lord was describing how bad situations could get, and what the disciples should do, or what they could do, in the light of what the Law of God had declared.

Now since verses 43 and 44 deal with the same kind of a situation, let us move on to see what the Lord said there.

### **III. STILL ANOTHER COMMAND (Matt. 5:43).**

Such a command is not found in the OT, but most of the commentators say that the Jews inferred from the fact that they were to love their neighbors, they were also to hate their enemies. But it seems from what the Lord said that both of these commands would find support in the OT. And when we think of what God actually did to the Egyptians when they refused to let the children of Israel go, with the many plagues that the Lord brought upon them, and then His command to destroy utterly the Canaanite nations when they went in to possess the land, plus other illustrations found in the OT, it seems that the Lord had been teaching hatred by His commands. The command to love their neighbors was said by our Lord to be the second most important commandment in all of the Law.

What did the Lord have to say about these commandments in the OT?

### **IV. THE LORD'S EXPLANATION (Matt. 5:44-48).**

An examination of the Gospels will show that hatred rather than love was exercised by the Pharisees not only toward their own people, but especially toward any Samaritan or any Gentile, and finally against the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Really the only kind of love that they demonstrated was self-love. The Lord wanted His disciples to be different. By way of contrast, remember from your reading of the Gospels how different the Lord was from the Pharisees. What the Lord was teaching His disciples here is a lesson that we as the Lord's people need to learn. Our influence upon this ungodly world in which we live will not be by the way we try to make ourselves like them, but by the way

we demonstrate how we live, not to please ourselves, but to please the Lord.

I doubt if there has ever been a true Christian in any generation who has not wished that he, or she, could make a difference in the direction that people in the world have always taken. Today sin rages like an epidemic of contagious disease. There seems to be no way to stop it. Christians get a lot of advice, but much of it does not have its roots in the Bible. In this first chapter of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, He was teaching His disciples how He wanted them to live, and the traits of holy character and living which would make them a mighty force in the world. One child of God who lives to please the Lord and to do the Lord's work in His way, is, or can be, a mighty instrument under the blessing of God. As our Lord pointed out in verse 45, we can learn a very important lesson from the way the Lord uses the sun and the rain. And if we only love those who love us, how are we different from the publicans. People in the world live like that every day. But when you talk about loving our enemies, not on a national basis, but on a personal basis, that is language that the world does not understand.

**Concl:** The Apostle Paul referred to a situation in the church at Corinth which needs to be brought to what the Lord was saying to His disciples in the verses we have been considering this morning. I am thinking about 1 Cor. 6 where Paul was referring to the fact that believers were going to law against each other, and letting unbelieving judges decide who was right and who was wrong. Listen to what Paul had to say to them in 1 Corinthians 6:6-8:

6 But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.

7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.

What were they doing? They were acting to make sure that they were not being deprived of any of their rights.

The Apostle Paul touched on this subject in his letter to the church at Rome, which shows, it seems to me, that this was a great problem in the days of the early church. This is what he told the Roman believers:

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

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18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21).

We are not to be overcome with evil, but that is what we are doing when we fight our battles with the world in ungodly ways. The Apostle Paul, directed by the Holy Spirit, told the believers in Rome (and today it is God's message to us) that we do not win by avenging ourselves. The Lord has given His promise that He will repay. That is His business, not ours. But the way we overcome evil is by doing that which is good in the sight of God.

A man who used to attend our Tuesday Bible Class got mad at me and quit coming to the class because I would not join him and some others from his church by going downtown and blocking the entrance to an abortion clinic. That is not what we are called to do. The Lord will take care of the wrongdoers. What a surprise billions of people are going to have when they find themselves standing before the God of heaven and earth to face the judgment that the Lord will sentence them to. We don't overcome evil by doing more evil, but we overcome evil with good – not with what men call good, but what God calls good. If we want the blessing of the Lord, we must live in obedience to God's Word.

Before we leave this chapter I must call your attention to the last verse. Here our Lord gave His disciples the goal of our relationship with God, and, actually, with Himself. Why has the Lord saved us? He saved us to deliver us from the penalty of our sins. He saved us that we might be delivered from the power of indwelling sin. He saved us that we might be with Him in heaven some day. But the ultimate goal of our salvation, as amazing as it is, and as impossible as it may now appear to us to be, *is that we might be like Him, perfect as He is, with His glory upon us.*

The moment you and I were saved, the Father began working on this ultimate objective that He has for all of us. And every day since then this has been His purpose in all of His ways with us. This is the reason for

our trials and testings. God is working, working, working in us, and for us, that we might be like Him, that more and more as we live in this world, even unbelievers might see in us more of God, more of Christ, and more of the Holy Spirit, more of the resemblance that we carry of that heavenly family to which we belong.

Whenever I go back to my home church in Tacoma, some of the old timers who knew my folks and knew me as I was growing up, usually say to me, "Dwight, you are looking more and more like your Dad." If you had known my Dad, you would know that that is a great compliment. But when people say that, I always hope that I am not just like my Dad outwardly in my physical appearance, but that I am also like my Dad the way he was in his heart.

We all belong to two families, our family here on earth (father, mother, brothers, sisters). But we also belong now to the family in heaven. God is our heavenly Father because Jesus Christ is our Savior. May it be true that we bear the likeness to our heavenly Father, that our goal in life is to be perfect, even as our Father Who is in heaven is perfect. I am not there yet, and neither are you. But we are on the way, and someday soon His work in us will be complete. As we await that day, may our prayer be that we may be submissive to all that God is doing in our lives to make us like He is, and also like His Son. The Apostle Peter said it this way:

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Cf. Lev. 11:44.