

Temptations to Avoid: Retaliation and Inactive Love (Mat. 5:38–48)

I. INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW TO AVOIDING SIX TEMPTATIONS

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement about our role in cooperating with grace. We need faith teaching to equip us to experience grace to walk in the ***8 Beatitudes***. The promise of being blessed includes living with a vibrant heart by the Spirit's activity in us.
- B. Jesus identifies six temptations to avoid: ***anger*** (spirit of murder, Mt. 5:21–26), ***adultery*** (spirit of immorality, Mt. 5:27–30), ***disregarding the sanctity of marriage*** (disloyalty in relationships, Mt. 5:31–32), ***false commitments*** (spirit of manipulation for self-promotion, Mt. 5:33–37), ***retaliation*** for personal inconveniences (spirit of revenge Mt. 5:38–42), and ***inactivity*** when mistreated (refusing active love, Mt. 5:43–47).
- C. Allowing these temptations growth, poisons our hearts (1 Pet. 2:11), keeps us from enjoying our life in the Kingdom and hinders us from reaping internal, external and eternal rewards. In each of these temptations Jesus references the Law of Moses, teaching God's original intent meant to liberate the human heart in obedience.

II. TEMPTATION #5 - RETALIATION AND DEFENSIVENESS

- A. We do not retaliate with defensive towards those who insult or take advantage of us (5:38–42).
³⁸You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹But I tell you not to resist [retaliate against] an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. ⁴¹And whoever compels [forces, NAS] you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Mat. 5:38-42)
- B. Jesus gave four illustrations of the kingdom principle of refusing retaliation and defensiveness. Each of the four examples describes one who ***takes advantage*** or ***insults us in small ways***.
- C. The Pharisees taught *two errors*—that the Law commanded revenge and that people could administrate it personally outside of the court system. Moses taught the people to not take the law into their own hands, but to resist an evil man by using the court system. The Pharisees empowered people to act in wrong ways and in a wrong spirit in their conflicts.
- D. Common misconceptions:
 - 1. We should ***not*** apply these four examples ***rigidly*** or ***representative*** of every situation, but to provide us principles we can apply in life. These situations represent hundreds of other situations.
 - 2. Not referring to situations that would ruin our families or businesses - yet situations that cost us more of our pride and propensity to be “right”.

3. Jesus was *not* referring to *legal defense* in a court room where our livelihoods or reputation is at stake.
4. Jesus is *not* referring to *pacifism*, preventing force of any kind for any situation. He is not speaking against the police, military or legal courts. We are to defend ourselves and our families when attacked by evil people and not allow them to assault us. We are to defend the physically weak or disadvantaged.
- E. Jesus is teaching us *how we can liberate our hearts* from revenge, defensiveness and entitlement and it is by moving in the opposite spirit when small inconveniences or insults occur with whom we relate. Many people live in constant inner-turmoil, consumed if they were mistreated, misused, misrepresented so that they always attempt to win an argument or be “right” in life situations.
- F. Jesus addresses the person troubling us in all four situations as *an evil person*, someone with evil goals and motives. This is a key part of the context that affects the way we interpret the four examples that Jesus gave us. Jesus teaches us to respond graciously to them mostly for our sake, not theirs.

G. ***Situation One - Turning the Other Cheek***

³⁹Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (Mat. 5:39)

1. This speaks of verbal injury and insulting, *not* accepting physical abuse or harm. This could be from a colleague at work, someone in your family, a neighbor, including someone on social media or in person.
2. We are to not respond to insults or retaliate, but endure them graciously, knowing God sees us and will reward us in time if we suffer because of righteousness (1 Pet. 2:23; Mat. 5:11–12), deepening our understanding of God’s sovereignty and their inability to enforce their threats as well as making a lasting impression on those who witness our response (Rom. 12:14-21)

²³When He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously... (1 Pet. 2:23)

H. ***Situation Two - Being Sued for Your Shirt***

⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic [shirt, NAS], let him have your cloak also. (Mat. 5:40)

1. We should not use the legal system to fight back for small injustices or issues we can afford. Jesus is not talking about defending your family or business from someone seeking to take your livelihood.
2. The point is that whoever is going to the small claims court against you is more offended at your than they are wanting the small possession. Jesus says to give it to them. Offer it to them willingly. While this may offend your pride, it will liberate your heart.
3. Jesus is teaching us to deny our personal rights and rest in the Lord.

I. ***Situation Three - Being Forced to Go One Mile***

⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (Mat. 5:41)

1. Background: Roman soldiers had the legal authority to require a man to carry the soldier's gear for a mile. People despised this legal requirement because it was inconvenient, annoying, and even humiliating. Thus, most obeyed this legal requirement, but with a wrong spirit.
2. Walking a mile only takes 15 minutes. This speaks of small inconveniences from our government to our time and energy but that can easily get us upset and disconnected from the Lord. They can be related to any type of policy or regulation that costs us something but it doesn't rob from us a day of work, just some time.
3. Jesus says to not only do it, but *go beyond what is required* so that your heart can be liberated. He attacks our propensity to do things grudgingly, half-heartedly, or even avoiding our duty when no one is watching.
4. This could apply to anything regarding the government, like registration, taxes, the police, jury duty, etc... This could also refer to our boss at work, landlord, neighborhood community or leader at church.

J. ***Situation Four- Let People Borrow From You***

⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Mat. 5:42)

1. We are to exercise a generous spirit and lend to the evil person if they ask of us.
2. Jesus is not saying that in all circumstances we are to give our money to anyone who asks. He is referring here to our attitude in resisting with bitterness and defensiveness the evil man who troubles us. We are not to resist him, but to see his request as God's opportunity to show grace.
3. We need to take this situation in context with Scripture. It is not our responsibility to enable the professional beggar to continue to not work or to pay for the drug or alcohol habits that destroy a person's life who is asking us for money. (2 Thes. 3:10)

III. TEMPTATION #6 - INACTIVE LOVE TOWARDS OUR ENEMIES

- A. Jesus now reaches the high point of the sermon - *to not just refuse to retaliate to our enemies but to actively love them*. Many people think they are victorious by resisting retaliation, but they will miss out on many opportunities to encounter God in their family, work and church if they neglect actively loving their enemies.

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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,** ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father...for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good..." (Mt. 5:43-45)*

- B. Jesus wants us to address the issues of bitterness and fear in our hearts if we only avoid or passively respond to our enemies. What Jesus teaches us is not natural and requires our diligent study, commitment and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

- C. **Our enemies** are those who block your progress, attack you or want to see you fail. They mean the worse for you and want you to fail. By actively loving our enemies, this allows us to overcome evil (Rom. 12:14-21).
- D. The call to **actively love** our enemies includes *our words* (bless), *actions* (do good), and *prayers* (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the highest summit of love and is much more than sentiment it has practical actions. It is an act of our will that transcends negative feelings. As we obey this, our feelings will change. Loving people who hate us makes the greatest impact at the deepest level in us and around us (especially martyrdom). Embracing this lifestyle opens the supernatural realm to us. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

⁴Love suffers long and is kind...⁵is not provoked, thinks no evil...⁷endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

1. **Bless those who curse you**: We speak words of blessing by affirming their virtues in prayer to God and to others. It can be a fierce struggle to speak words of blessing, but it will dynamically change and liberate us. We are to ask God, “Let me see what you see and feel what you feel about them.” Naturally we are prone to speak consequences over them and complaints about them but this only deepens the bitterness in our hearts.
 2. **Do good to those who hate you**: We are to look for practical ways to do good for them.
 3. **Pray for those who use or persecute you**: By praying for an enemy, we stand in the gap before God for them. This increases our love. It is impossible to pray for someone without loving them. Jesus prayed for His enemies as they were killing Him (Lk. 23:34).
- E. By actively loving our enemies, we begin to operate in the nature of our Father. This provides to whoever is witnessing that God exists. This reveals the motivation, model and empowerment to love like this—only our Father who loves mercy, reconciliation and constantly sends good things to the wicked (Mat. 5:45)

⁴⁵...that you may be sons of your Father 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. (Mt. 5:45)

- F. Three truths help us overcome the storm of persecution and agree with the Lord in this way.
1. **Entrusting ourselves to God**: We know that God will vindicate us intimate when we commit ourselves to Him instead of embracing retaliation (1 Pet. 2:23). No one has the authority to stop our God ordained destiny. No Saul can stop David from his destiny. Only David could stop David.
²³...when He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously... (1 Pet. 2:23)
 2. **Seeing the big picture**: Joseph spoke kindly to his brothers by perceiving the big picture of God’s purpose. We speak kindly to our enemies as we realize God speaks kindly to us.
²⁰...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. ²¹Now therefore, do not be afraid...He spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:20-21)
 3. **Eternal friends**: Our greatest adversaries in the Body of Christ will be dear and cherished friends for billions of years in the age to come.