

## God’s Just Character Among His Covenant People (5:38)

<sup>5:38</sup> “You have heard that it was said [in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21], ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’”

- This Law was given that the judges of old covenant Israel would mete out fair justice to those who had been wronged.<sup>1</sup> It had been misinterpreted, however, to endorse private vengeance.
- We cannot understand Jesus’ teaching unless we are clear in the changes that happen to God’s covenant people between the old and new covenants. In the old covenant, God’s people were a single ethnicity comprising a political nation – “Church” and state were one. The Law of 5:38 was guidance for city and tribal judges that would decide cases with an equitable justice. In the new covenant, God’s people are from all ethnicities and dwell in all nations. The Church does not wield civil power; God has given that to the civil authorities (Romans 13:1-7). The context between “an eye for an eye” in the O.T. and how individual believers and churches respond to opposition or being wronged are very different now.
- There is a greater point behind the “eye for an eye” legal principle: the demand for absolute equity in judgment points to God’s eternal and absolute righteousness.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> In Exodus 21:22-25, this principle is in the context of harm done to an unborn child. In, Leviticus 24:10-23, it describes the equality of the Law for both “the stranger as well as the native.” In Deuteronomy 19:15-21, it is again the necessity of “the priests and judges” to maintain impartiality in meting out justice.

<sup>2</sup> God’s righteousness is that “by which He equitably and justly vindicates the righteous and condemns the wicked...this is the pattern for earthly justice, as well – for kings, judges, and every Israelite. YHWH is the true judge.” Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), *Reformed*

Gospel is found in this truth. All violations of God’s Law must be punished by Him, since He is absolutely just. Only Jesus is judged perfectly innocent. At the cross, He took our just punishment and, by faith in Him, His perfect righteousness is credited to us.

**Discipleship Key: God’s commandments cannot be separated from His eternal, unchanging character.**

## Honoring the Lord of Judgment Day (5:39-42)

<sup>5:39</sup> “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. <sup>5:40</sup> If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. <sup>5:41</sup> Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>5:42</sup> Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”

- See Isaiah 50:6. Consider Jesus’ actions at His arrest in Matthew 26:51-53.
- Paul helps us rightly understand this teaching:
  - READ 1 Corinthians 6:7. Believers do not stand for their personal rights above all; we stand for exalting Jesus even when we are wronged.
  - READ Romans 12:14-13:5. There are two relevant principles in this passage. First, we trust God’s vengeance on Judgment Day, and not our own. Second, God has entrusted the “sword” of justice to the civil government.
- Jesus is not speaking of the evil of sin, false doctrines, or the devil – all of these evils must be resisted.

**Discipleship Key: Followers of Jesus have their ultimate hope placed in the Judge of the Kingdom of heaven.**

*Dogmatics*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pg. 180.

## When We Don’t Stick to the Text (5:43)

5:43 “You have heard that it was said [in Leviticus 19:18], ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

- The second half of this statement, “and hate your enemy,” is not found in the O.T., and is not part of God’s Law (the devil knows that the best lie is half truth). As we’ve seen already, Jesus is not opposing God’s Law, but the teaching of it by the scribes and Pharisees.
- For Jesus’ definition of “neighbor,” READ Luke 10:29-37.

**Discipleship Key: When we mix our desires into the Scripture, the result twists Scripture into a lie.**

## As Is the Father, So Are the Children (5:44-48)

5:44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 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. 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 5:48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- As we’ve observed many times before, the biblical view of love is not like the world’s view of love. In the world, love is an uncontrollable force that must be obeyed, no matter what.<sup>3</sup> In the Bible, love is subject to the command of God: the first (Deuteronomy 6:5) and second (Leviticus 19:18) greatest commandment govern love, bringing it under the absolute authority of God alone.

<sup>3</sup> In this view, the phrase “God is love” is understood to mean “love is god.” In reality, “God is love” is defined by the giving of His Son to die for the salvation of sinners (1 John 4:7-5:3) – not our passions and impulses. He is the standard by which we must define love.

- Jesus’ command to “love your enemies” doesn’t take into account how you feel. It’s a command of the Lord.
- The goal of this Kingdom ethic is not pragmatism, but a reflection of the Father’s character. This is, ultimately, an ethic founded upon the graciousness of God in the Gospel: READ Romans 5:10.
  - We do not become “sons” of our “Father Who is in heaven” by doing these things; rather, we are revealed to be children of the Father when we do these things.
  - In 19:16-22, Jesus tells a man seeking “eternal life” to value following Him above the “much property” he owned. Prioritizing Jesus above all and following Him is defined as the path to being “complete” (the same word, τέλειος, translated “perfect” in 5:48).<sup>4</sup>
  - In Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2, we are called on to be holy as the LORD is holy (see also 1 Peter 1:15-16). In Luke 6:36 we are called to be “merciful” as our Father in heaven is merciful.
  - Humanity was created to reflect God; we are re-created in Christ for that ultimate purpose, as well.<sup>5</sup> We exist to show forth the glory of God in all that we do: READ Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31.

**Discipleship Key: God the Father is the standard.**

<sup>4</sup> This word means “mature” in much of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:6; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:15; Colossians 4:12; Hebrews 5:14; James 3:2). The first line of our mission statement, found at the bottom of every page of these notes, is from Colossians 1:28, where the Greek word τέλειος is translated “complete.”

<sup>5</sup> Paul tells us that we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is, in fact, the purpose for all that happens to us in this life (Romans 8:28-29). John also says that we will be like Jesus when we see Him (1 John 3:2).