



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Matthew 5:38-48

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English Standard Version

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## *“The Justice of the King”*

The 13<sup>th</sup> Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled  
*“The King and His Kingdom!”*

### **Matthew 5:38-48**

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

*<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?<sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us once again to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand Your hard teaching here. It’s hard because it hits so close to home. There are few here this morning who haven’t wrestled with bitterness and resentment over how we may have been mistreated. We hate being taken advantage of by others. We constantly battle anger and wanting vengeance when wronged. And quite frankly,*

*most of us have little or no desire to obey Your Words in this passage.*

*So help us to consider what it means to follow You and not ourselves. By Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: *The Misunderstood Camp Motto***

There is a phrase I heard often growing up because it was the motto of Eagle's Nest Camp in Delaware, N.J. My father was the Camp Director and I spent eight summers there. And the motto of the camp was simply this ... "Go the Second Mile." It was taken from one of the verses in our passage today, **Matthew 5:41**, which says, "***And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.***" And essentially what it **meant**, and what I was **taught**, was to go above and beyond, make the extra effort, be the first to volunteer, be known as one who gives 110% (which is impossible, though commonly said). If you were asked to help out, then you should do more than what was asked. That was going the second mile. And we took it to heart. And though there were many hard things at that camp, it did succeed in building a close knit community. I could call any of my friends from that camp **today**, (and its' Facebook group has 165 members, so it's not a small community), and though it's been almost 40 years since I was there, I think I could ask any of them about going the second mile and they would **instantly** know what I was talking about, and most of them would **immediately** ask, not even knowing what the specific need was, "How can I help?"

And that's a wonderful thing. But there's a problem. And the problem is ... we got the meaning of the phrase ... **wrong**. When Jesus said, "***And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles,***" He wasn't talking simply about doing **more** than was asked. He was talking about demonstrating grace in the face of persecution and oppression. And if you don't understand that, then you won't really understand this verse. When I teach at Reformed Theological Seminary, I take one class to go over the basic rules of Biblical Interpretation. I tell my students that if you're going to preach, then it would be helpful to interpret the Bible correctly. And Rule Number One is ... **Context is King**.

You must understand the context of the passage in order to understand that passage. And so we have to ask, here in the Sermon on the Mount, here where Jesus is telling us that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, that we must obey the spirit of the Law and not just the letter of the Law ... How does **knowing the context** shape our understanding of what Jesus is telling us here at the end of Matthew 5? And the context is all about ...

### **CONTEXT: *Persecution, Enemies, and Evil*** <sup>1</sup>

We've been studying the Sermon on the Mount for the past few weeks, and we've seen Christ applying the principles of the kingdom, calling His people to true righteousness, and trying to raise the awareness of those caught up in the web of self-righteousness of **just how**

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**1 The Context and Exposition of the text are adapted from the books, "Preaching the Word: The Sermon on the Mount" by Dr. R. Kent Hughes, pages 131-137, "The Message of the Sermon on the Mount" by Dr. John R.W. Stott, pages 103-124; And the Sermons, "God's Law vs Human Tradition #5" and "God's Law vs Human Tradition #6" by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 6/8/97 and 6/15/97, [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org); "Righting Wrongs" by Dr. Phil Newton, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 8/25/02, [www.southwoodsbc.org](http://www.southwoodsbc.org); and "Love Your Enemies" by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, 12/3/89, [sermons.redeemer.com](http://sermons.redeemer.com).**

**demanding the Law** is. Throughout these passages, Jesus is contrasting His teaching to the Pharisees. Why? Well, first of all, because the Pharisees were wrong. In each of these passages Jesus does three things. **First**, He tells you the **wrong** teaching of the Pharisees. **Second**, He gives you the **right** understanding of the law. And **third**, He **applies** that law to **human relationships**. In other words, He says, you can see something of a person's heart for God, or not for God, by the way they live in relation to one another.

The way people respond to the second table of law is a reflection of how seriously they take the first table of the Law. What that means is that when it comes to the Ten Commandments, how well you obey Commandments 5-10 (which are about loving others) is a **reflection** of how well you obey Commandments 1-4 (which are about loving God). In other words, how you relate to one another, the Lord Jesus is saying, is a **reflection** of your relationship with the living God. And so Christ intends to do two things: For people who are **self-righteous**, for people who are **Pharisees**, He wants them to understand how impossible it is for them to **justify themselves** by the keeping of the Law. Because the law can't be kept just by keeping a few external rules. It extends to the heart. And we sin and break that law daily. On the other hand, He wants to show His disciples how comprehensive is the call to righteousness which has just been given to them by their Savior.

At this point in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we come to another example of how the righteousness that Jesus demands exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. This example has to do with the proper response when one is **personally wronged**. How is a person who has the surpassing righteousness of Christ supposed to react to **personal offenses**? Here, as before, Jesus' teaching can only be described as **revolutionary**. In fact, if it weren't coming from Jesus, we'd be prone to dismiss it as coming from some out-of-touch visionary who didn't really understand human nature. But the teaching is from the lips of our Lord ... and Jesus knew more about human nature than anyone else. His words are immensely important today because we're continually inundated with opposing teachings and examples. Retaliation is not only considered **normative** but **indispensable** to leadership. Moreover, we all know that beneath our gentle façade's is an apparently **inexhaustible** capacity for **anger and vengeance**.

Now you have to understand that in these verses Jesus mentions the one who is **evil**, the one who is **forcing** you to do something, and the one who your **enemy** and who is **persecuting** you. And they're doing all that because you're a follower of Jesus Christ. They act **wicked** towards you because you're a Christian, they **hate** you because you love Jesus, they **hurt** you because they have the power to oppress you. **That's The Context!**

He's not talking about how you should react and respond to the person sitting next to you ... unless the person sitting next to you is **evil**, and is your **enemy**, and is **persecuting** you. Marriage squabbles and sibling rivalry don't count. And so how do we apply this hard teaching of Jesus? Well, it starts by demonstrating grace through ...

#### v. 38-42: **PASSIVE LOVE**

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.<sup>41</sup> And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.<sup>42</sup> Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."*

Jesus began by presenting the traditional Old Testament teaching in verse 38, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'" That's an exact quotation from **three**

Old Testament passages ... **Leviticus 24:19-20**, “*If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him,*”<sup>20</sup> *fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.*” It’s also found in **Exodus 21** and **Deuteronomy 19**.

It represents the oldest law in the world — the law of retaliation, technically known as **Lex Talionis** — **Lex** (Law), **Talionis** (retaliation). Far from being savage, it was intrinsically merciful because **it limited vengeance**. The typical primitive blood feud knew nothing of equity. A small infraction by one tribe against another — for instance, trespassing — was met with a beating, which was returned by homicide, which was then countered by genocide. **Lex Talionis** did away with this — on paper at least.

Today we recognize **Lex Talionis** as **foundational** to all justice. The whole system of civil, penal, and international law is based on the idea of compensation and equity that has its roots in **Lex Talionis**. As it exists in the Bible, **Lex Talionis** was given to the judges of Israel as a basis for the adjudication of legal matters. Individuals were **NOT** permitted to use this law to settle personal disputes with others. **Only the courts** were permitted to do so. Moreover, it was not literally carried out by the Jewish legal system because they correctly saw that in some cases to do so would result in injustice. For instance, a good tooth might be removed for a bad tooth! Thus they assessed damages just as we do in our courts today. So we have the traditional Old Testament teaching regarding one's response to personal wrong in the principle of **exact retribution**. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with that, apart from man's manipulation of it. It brought equity and stability to human relations.

Now comes Jesus' revolutionary new teaching in verse 39, “***But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.***” What does Jesus mean? The fact is, Jesus’ statement — “***Do not resist the one who is evil***” — cannot be interpreted as an absolute prohibition of the use of all force, such as the police and court system, unless the Bible contradicts itself. **Romans 13** teaches that the state is a divine institution that has the power to punish wrongdoers. This is impossible without force. The problem comes when we isolate Jesus' words without giving due attention to the context. Jesus goes on to explain what He means by providing four one-sentence illustrations of what it means to “***not resist the one who is evil***” Each of the illustrations is culturally specific, but they give us general principles for today's living. The principles are not for everyone, but only for those who follow Christ. And the first principle is ...

- **Forgiveness — Christ’s Answer to Revenge**

In verse 39, Jesus says, “***But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.***” What is Jesus describing here? Contrary to what we might think, He’s not describing a random physical attack, but rather a very traditional, calculated insult. Notice that Jesus specifically mentions “the right cheek,” which tells us He’s describing a backhanded slap (, this is surely what Jesus had in mind since most people are right-handed and the left hand was used for personal hygiene). According to rabbinic law, to hit someone with the back of the hand was **twice** as insulting as hitting him with the flat of the hand. The back of the hand meant **calculated contempt**. Not only was it a **calculated insult**, but it was a slap specifically given because of your faith in Christ.

When Jesus spoke of being slapped, He was describing an insult that comes **because of one's faith**. It was an insult for which a Jew could seek legal satisfaction according to the law of **Lex Talionis**. That is, he could seek damages. But Jesus says, don’t do it! “If you are dishonored as a heretic, says Jesus, you should not go to court about it; rather you should show yourselves to be truly My disciples by the way in which you bear the hatred and the insult,

overcome the evil and forgive the injustice.” In short, you’re to lovingly **absorb** the insult.

What this means for us is that when we’re insulted for Christ’s sake (whatever form that insult may take), we’re not to respond **by getting even**, by getting our legal pound of flesh according to *Lex Talionis*, but must turn the other cheek. Jesus calls us to swallow our pride and give up our “rights” to compensation and fairness. That’s the basic, essential interpretation.

But there’s another level of application that really gets down to where we live: We are to set aside our petty ways of getting even — the kind of living that punishes others by returning their sins to them. For example, if your spouse is messy, you leave things messy in return. If your friend is late, next time you’ll be late. In effect Jesus asks us, in turning the other cheek, to focus on the other person and his or her well-being. We think of them and adjust our actions according to what we think **will point them to Christ**. And when we really do this, we begin to affect them spiritual, so they become more open to Christ. Jesus teaches us how a righteous person should respond to personal wrong with **forgiveness**. This first illustration shows us how to respond to personal insult. The second principle is one of ...

- **Sacrifice — Christ’s Answer to Self-Protection**

In verse 40, Jesus says, *“And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.”* It was possible in that day to sue others for the very shirt on their backs. However, no one could take another’s cloak for a permanent, twenty-four-hour-a-day possession. The Law was clear on this matter, **Exodus 22:26-27**, *“If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down,<sup>27</sup> for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.”* A cloak or outer robe was indispensable for living in Palestine. So even if you lost your shirt (or tunic) in court, and your opponent asked for your cloak and won it, he had to return it every evening for you to sleep in. That was the law. So what was the situation here? Evidently Jesus was giving advice to the poor among His followers — those who had been reduced to the garments on their backs because of persecution for their faith. His teaching is simply this, “As they sue you (no doubt falsely) for your shirt and win it, give them your cloak too, even though they cannot legally take it.” This is really sacrificial, and it’s meant to point one’s persecutors to Christ.

**Romans 12:17-21** describes the same call and potential effect, *“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* This is the radical call of those who are suffering persecution for Christ. It’s extreme advice for extreme circumstances.

We should note here that our Lord is not referring to the average lawsuit characteristic of our litigation-happy society. Wrongly applied, this would do away with the possibility of legal remedy. Rather, it’s advice for the righteous who are pushed against the wall for the name of Christ. We should listen well, because someday we may need it! Jesus is teaching us how a righteous person should respond to unjust treatment with **sacrifice**. This second illustration shows us how to respond to being ripped off. The third principle is one of ...

- **Service — Christ’s Answer to Imposition** <sup>2</sup>

In verse 41, Jesus says, “*And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*” The indignity that Jesus described here is referring to Roman Oppression. Whenever a Roman official or soldier asked anyone within the Empire to carry a burden, usually his military pack, for a mile (technically one thousand steps), that person, **BY LAW**, had to do it regardless of who he was or what the circumstances were. Almost all Jews had been subject to this and they hated the very mention of it.

As in the previous examples, this form of persecution fell upon a believer because of his identification with Christ. Some think that may be why Simon of Cyrene was made to carry Christ's cross. The Roman soldiers knew he loved Jesus, it is assumed, so **Matthew 27:32**, “*As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry His cross.*”

What Jesus was saying here was that there needs to be a willing cheerfulness on the part of His followers who come under this form of persecution. There are two ways to do any task. You can carry out obligations begrudgingly or gratefully. You can mow the lawn with complaining or you can mow it with joy that you’re outside. When you wash dishes, you can water them with your tears or you can sing hymns. Jesus calls for a revolutionary response in a difficult situation — **cheerful service**. The kind that would cause a hardened soldier to say, “What's with him? This person has something I neither have nor understand.” Ridiculous? Impractical? Immature? I don’t think so! This is how Rome was won!

Watching righteous people in possession of revolutionary joy ... even when treated unfairly ... serves to draw everyone's hearts towards the Lord. When imposed upon ... the Christian is to show a servant heart. Sinclair Ferguson writes that “He does the unexpected because grace makes him or her seek to win others by love rather than retaliate on the basis of 'rights'.”

Jesus teaches us how a righteous person should respond to being imposed upon with **cheerful service**. This third illustration shows us how to respond to being forced to do something. The fourth principle Jesus gives us is one of ...

- **Generosity — Christ’s Answer to Selfishness**

In verse 42, Jesus says, “*Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*” Now we have the matter of the believer being persecuted through others’ borrowing. The Lord's advice is simply “Give.” Does this mean we are to give to every freeloader and panhandler who comes our way? I don’t think so. Jesus is not recommending that His followers give to every open hand, though, of course, He does call us to deep generosity.

What then does He mean? He means that the righteous are to give to those who are attempting to **hurt them** through borrowing and begging. Luke refers to this kind of persecution when he says, **Luke 6:34-35**, “*And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.* <sup>35</sup> *But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*”

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Sinclair Ferguson quote comes from his book, “*The Sermon on the Mount*” (previously published as “*Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*”), page 101.

We must realize that Jesus' advice is for a specific situation in which a believer is being taken advantage of by his enemies. Moreover, Jesus does not say how many times one is to loan to his persecutors. Nor does he mention the restraint that love will impose on one's generosity. As the great Scottish preacher Alexander Maclaren wisely said, "If turning the cheek would make the assaulter more angry, or if yielding the cloak would make the legal robber more greedy, or going the second mile would but make the press gang more severe and exacting, resistance becomes a form of love and duty for the sake of the wrongdoer."

Jesus' advice is not a set of mechanical rules, but principles for meeting the personal wrongs that come to those who follow Him. In the matter of loaning money, the Lord wants His followers to reject a tightfisted, penny-pinching attitude that says, "This is mine and I'm not sharing it!"

Consider just how this new teaching of Jesus exceeded all previous standards of righteousness. Under the Law, the believer thought in terms of *Lex Talionis* and its idea of exact retribution. But then Jesus came and changed everything. We no longer to consider it our duty to get even. An "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth" is fine for the court, but not for our relationships with others — including **even our enemies**. Thanks to Jesus, we have let go of our legalistic obsession with fairness. We are glad that Jesus wasn't fair with us, for if we were to get what was coming to us, it wouldn't be good.

As Jesus' followers we give ourselves to the welfare of others, even if they're our enemies. We put up with the sins and insults of others for Christ's sake and theirs. Though hurt many times before, we refuse to withdraw. We don't run from pain. We appear weak, but we're strong, for only the most powerful can live a life like this. But the power is not ours, but Christ's. Everything comes from Christ. Jesus' sayings are hard — in fact, impossible! I'm glad that the Sermon on the Mount is impossible because once we realize that, then we have to depend on Jesus. But it doesn't end there. Jesus says we must not only passively love the evil person, but we must also demonstrate grace to them through ...

#### v. 43-47: **ACTIVE LOVE**

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same"*

In verse 43, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" This was the traditional teaching as the religious establishment understood it and as the man on the street was taught. But that's not what the Law actually said. The sole Old Testament quotation is from **Leviticus 19:18**, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

The phrase, "and hate your enemy" is not found in the Old Testament. It was added. Why did the Israelites make such an addition? Primarily because they were convinced that the Law confines the definition of neighbor **to a fellow Israelite**, and so they wouldn't tolerate the extension of the term to anyone else. Moreover, they felt that God's direction of their historic relations with other peoples, such as his command to exterminate the Canaanites, supported this hatred of others. What they failed to take into account was the fact that those and similar

commands, including the imprecatory Psalms, were **judicial** — never **individual**.

Another reason, I think, that they added “*and hate your enemy*” is the natural human perversity that tends to counter a strong positive statement with a negative counterpart. That is, the positive statement, “*You shall love your neighbor*” invites a negative corollary — “*and hate your enemy*.” In adopting this teaching, they had to set aside the implications of other Old Testament passages that taught kindness toward one's enemies — passages such as **Exodus 23:4-5**, “*If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. <sup>5</sup> If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.*”

By Jesus' time, this hatred of foreigners was so institutionalized that the Jews thought they were honoring God by despising anyone who wasn't Jewish. The standard love in Jesus' day was a very limited love. “I will love only my neighbor [fellow Israelite], and I will hate everyone else. It's my duty.” But then Jesus says, verse 44, “***But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.***” The fact that the text mentions “enemies” (plural) suggests that Jesus means personal enemies who are doing us harm. This is amazing! To the man on the street, the mere idea of loving his enemies is absurd and offensive and beyond his capability. It offends his natural sense of right and wrong. To those under the Law, the idea of loving one's enemies was completely contrary to their view of God's Law, which they thought required hatred of enemies.

Jesus commanded a love without limits, which loves everyone regardless of what they say or do to us. This is revolutionary, whatever one's culture. So why did Jesus order us to love like this? He gives us two reasons. The first, recorded in verse 45, is that **it makes us like God**. In other words, if you impartially show love to your enemies as well as to friends, you will be like God, who shows the impartiality of His love by sending the sun and rain on both the righteous and unrighteous. The second reason for such love is that **it distinguishes us from the world**. Our Lord gave a negative example to make his point, verse 46, “***For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?***” No one could miss the point of Jesus' example. Tax gatherers were rich crooks who were hated by everyone — especially the Jews, because the collectors were employees of the Romans. Jesus' point is that even those double-crossing tax collectors loved their own tax-gathering buddies! So if a person loves only his friends, he's no better than a swindling tax collector.

But this is so hard to do! There's a great story about the well-known Southern Presbyterian minister, John Lafayette Girardeau. He was a POW during the Civil War. After the war He came back to South Carolina to take up his ministry and he preached a passionate sermon on this passage. His youngest son heard that sermon and asked his dad questions all the way home, and continued to ask him annoying questions around the dinner table. He kept asking him specifics about how that sermon might apply to his own experience: “Dad, does this mean that I have to love the bully who beats me up at school?” “Yes, son.” “Dad, does this mean that we have to love people who have taken advantage of our family?” “Yes, son.” “Dad, does this mean we have to love Yankees?” “Be quiet, son, and eat your dinner.” **It's hard for us** to love as God calls us to love.

This active love just doesn't seem possible. Isn't Jesus asking too much? Yes ... yes He is. In fact, He's asking for ...

#### **v. 48: PERFECT LOVE**

Jesus finishes this impossible passage by telling us, verse 48, “*You therefore must be*

*perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* But as you’ve figured out by now, it can’t be done. Not in our own strength. Not by our own power. Perfection only comes by the righteousness freely given to us in Christ. As the Apostle Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**, *“But He [the Lord] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

And Jesus doesn’t merely tell us to be like this, He modeled it. In His last days we read in all of the Gospels how the Jewish authorities spit on Him, blindfolded Him, and struck Him in the face, **Matthew 26:67**, *“Then they spit in His face and struck Him. And some slapped Him.”* And then the Roman soldiers followed suit. They crowned Him with thorns, clothed Him in the imperial purple, invested Him with a sceptre of reeds, jeered at Him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews,’ mockingly knelt before Him, spat in His face and struck Him with their hands. And Jesus, with the infinite dignity of self-control and love, held His peace. He demonstrated His total refusal to retaliate by allowing them to continue their cruel mockery until they had finished. The Apostle Peter said it this way, **1 Peter 2:21-23**, *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.<sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth.<sup>23</sup> When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to Him who judges justly.”*

But that doesn’t apply to us, you might say. No one’s trying to hurt me and I don’t have any enemies. How do I apply this? Well, maybe you don’t ... but we do. And by we, I mean the church ... Christians ... people who love Jesus.

**CONCLUSION: “They really do hate people like me.”<sup>3</sup>**

Rod Dreher is a conservative columnist and well-known as an evangelical Christian. In a recent article, he responded to the last column in *The Washington Post* by their Ombudsman. An Ombudsman is one who takes the side of the customer, who feels that they were somehow wronged by the institution, in this case, an article in the newspaper. Now *The Washington Post* has eliminated this position, probably due to declining revenues. However, in this, his last article, the Ombudsman took the position of defending the paper against the customer, and in this case, against a reader who opposes gay marriage.

In response, Rod Dreher writes, “In a nutshell, when it comes to reporting on the debate and events around the same-sex marriage issue, the *Post* feels it has no responsibility to report fairly and accurately on people who oppose same-sex marriage, because **they are morally wrong**.” But what really got to me wasn’t the various arguments pro and con, but how Mr. Dreher ended this long article. He ended it by writing, “I love journalism, and consider it important. But when it comes to reporting on the culture war, my profession is deeply corrupt, and profoundly self-righteous. The contempt with which so many within newsrooms hold social conservatives and traditional Christians is real. Stories like this one temper my sorrow over the demise of my profession. **They really do hate people like me**, and consider us not worthy of the basic fairness they would use in approaching their reporting on criminals and terrorists.”

Pretty sobering words. However, in order not to get indignant over such nonsense, we

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<sup>3</sup> Part of the conclusion was adapted from the article, “*WaPo: ‘Error Has No Rights’*” by Rod Dreher, 2/25/13, [www.theamericanconservative.com](http://www.theamericanconservative.com).

have to remember a few things. One, Paul tells us, **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**, “*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*”

We were once the bad guys, the evil people, the persecutors, and the enemies! And how did Jesus treat us? Did we get what we deserve? No, we got mercy and grace, and so **Romans 5:10-11** reminds us “*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.<sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*” Each of Jesus’ examples illustrates the unexpected. Kingdom citizens are not to do the expected — following the typical patterns of selfish living. But the unexpected — the forgiving, sacrificial, serving, generous behavior of those whose lives have been redeemed by the blood of Christ are to rise above the dark selfishness of the world, and display the glory of Christ.

Now, friends, the gospel is a very simple thing. Jesus Christ came to earth as a man. He has come and looked into your heart. He’s not only seen a lot of things ... There are things in your heart you wouldn’t want anybody else in this room to ever know. The scary thing is He saw a thousand things worse than that, worse than you’ve ever seen, and He still loves you. He gave Himself for you. If you receive Him as your Lord and Savior, all of those things can be wiped away.

At the table, we experienced the grace of God through fellowship with Jesus; at the table we hear the words over the bread and cup and find reconciliation. Jesus was completely convinced that we’re called to love all people, and He took the radical step of dying for us, who were once His enemies, so that we might not just be neighbors, but His friends and family. And He invites us to His table, where we find His grace and mercy to help us live the unexpected Christian life.

Think about that ... You need to pray.  
Take a moment to do that, and then I’ll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. Father, how wonderful it is that You have turned us from enemies into your family and friends. How great to have fellowship at Your table. How wonderful to have fellowship with so many brothers and sisters. Lord, let us not be so self-absorbed that we don’t reach out to others. Lord, help us to be so forgiving, so sacrificial, so serving, and so generous that people wonder what’s happened to us. And so, O Lord, if there is anyone among us this day, who comes here not trusting in Christ, we would ask that by Your Spirit that You would draw that person to Yourself — by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone — that they might embrace the beloved Son. Help us to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.*

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