

Essentials
Radical Reactions
Matthew 5:38-42

July 9, 2017 am

HDBC

The Count of Monte Cristo tells the story of Edmond Dantes who is unjustly accused and sentenced to life in France's most dreaded prison. After 13 years he escapes, becomes wealthy, and then seeks revenge on those who ruined his life. Throughout the movie Dantes struggles deeply with his belief in God, moving from a simple faith to a loss of faith, and finally to a mature faith.

During his years in prison, Dantes' became friends with a priest, whose godly influence had a huge impact on his spiritual understanding. Together they dug a tunnel to escape, but just before it's completed, a cave-in injures the priest. As he lies dying on the floor of his cell, the priest gives Dantes a map to a treasure that would make him wealthy.

The priest says concerning the treasure, ***use it for good***. Dantes replies, ***I will surely use it for my revenge***. But the priest's final words stick with Dantes forever.

The rest of the movie shows the struggle Dantes has with how to respond to the injustices done to him. The natural reaction is to retaliate, to get revenge.

We live in mean, vicious world. Bullies of every age are found in every culture in every generation. All of us find ourselves tempted to lash out and sting others. And when we are hurt, we are prone to want to strike back and exact our revenge. We cannot avoid the inevitable attacks that come. Question is, **"How will you respond?"**

A mother ran into the bedroom when she heard her seven-year-old son scream. She found his two-year-old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said to the boy, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts." He nodded his acknowledgement, and she left the room.

As she started down the hall the little girl screamed. Rushing back in, she asked, "What happened?" The little boy replied, "She knows now."

This morning we are discovering the essential expectation that Christ has for His followers when we are wronged. A call to a **Radical Reaction** when wronged.

Once again we are confronted with the call of Christ to live our lives in a radically different way. As with His previous statements in this sermon, this one can truly be described as revolutionary.

Read Matthew 5:38-42

1. The Old Law (38)

Two statements characterize the old testament law on this subject:

A. Judicial response was permitted

Exact quotation of 3 O.T. passages. (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

This represents the oldest law in the world, *the law of retaliation*, technically known as ***Lex Talionis***. It is found in the Code of Hammurabi. Far from being savage legislation, it was intrinsically merciful because it limited vengeance.

It is not natural to limit one's response to evil with equal evil. One small infraction by one tribe against another leads to a response larger than the infraction.

Trespassing by one leads to a response of beating, which led to a response of murder which led to a response of genocide. This law was to limit the response.

In practical use as far as the Old Testament was concerned, this law was given to the judges and civil authorities. Only the courts were permitted to carry it out. And it was never carried out in a literal way. A tooth was not literally knocked out in response a tooth being knocked out. However, damages were awarded that would be equal to such a response. We do the same in our courts today.

B. Personal revenge was forbidden (Leviticus 19:18)

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Even Moses condemned private and personal revenge. This was not something to be done out of hatred or for personal pleasure. It was done to provide a negative incentive for infringing upon rights of others.

2. The New Calling (39-42)

Once again, Jesus makes it clear that our responsibility is to rise above the law. We are to live under a different set of principles. He offers a **direct command**, and then provides four illustrations of how it is used in practical situations.

But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.

Some have taken this statement to mean absolute nonresistance under any circumstances. **Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist**, took it this way. He came to believe no Christian should be in the army, police force or to serve in a court of law. He believed this teaching was absolute and unconditional.

Others have taken this in a more balanced view. They believe resistance is just and necessary for police and courts but do not believe it allows for killing or for war.

I do not believe this phrase is to be taken in either of those ways. This is not a prohibition from resisting evil in general or even the evil one, meaning Satan. It speaks of not resisting an evil person. This passage has nothing to do with being a pacifist, but of how we are to respond to direct attacks because of our faith in Christ.

This statement cannot be seen as an absolute prohibition against the use of force in restraining evil for that would prohibit armies, police and court systems. All of these are designed to restrain evil and to provide stability in society. Romans 13:1-7.

Jesus clarified what He meant by offering four one sentence illustrations.

A. Insults (39)

Troubling verse. Is Jesus saying we are never allowed to defend ourselves? No.

Jesus is not describing a physical attack, but a traditional, calculated insult.

Note that Jesus specifically mentions the **right cheek**, which means he is speaking of a back-handed slap, since most people are right-handed. According to rabbinic law, to hit someone with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as hitting him with the front of the hand. This was intended to communicate calculated contempt, or extreme disdain.

He is clearly describing the kind of insult that comes because of one's faith. This was an insult from which believers could legally seek damages through the courts. However, Jesus says, *don't do it*. By turning the other cheek, Jesus is calling upon us to **lovingly absorb the insult**. We are called to swallow our pride and give up our rights to get satisfaction. The point of the illustration is not that of physical abuse, but of personal insult.

B. Mistreatment (40)

Law said a person could sue you and take your shirt, but not your coat, for that doubled as your blanket, or bedroll at night. Even if another person was able to win your coat or outer garment in a court of law, he had to give it back to you each night for it was what kept you warm for sleeping. This was a protection for the poor, who existed with only the clothing on their backs.

Jesus says, if they take your shirt, go ahead and give them the coat. This was a supremely radical statement. Why Jesus ask this of His disciples?

It would demonstrate their faith in God to meet their needs and their love for others. Trust God to restore and provide what you need. Go beyond the requirement. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that it would be better to be defrauded than to go to court before heathen judges.

Again, this is in a context of suffering for faith in Christ. The presumption is that this is being done because of their faith.

C. Harassment (41)

What about when the authorities place unreasonable demands upon you? What if you are being taken advantage of? Jesus answer: Give them more than they ask!

In Jesus' day a Roman soldier could force a Jew to carry his pack and gear for one mile, but no further. It was not only a way of getting their gear from one place to another, but it was a form of insult. Jews hated it. Walk it off carefully and not take one extra step. Throw gear down in disgust! Imagine if at the end of mile, the Jew said, "I'll take it an extra mile for you."

D. Sharing (42)

The situation was of being taken advantage of through loans to others. Lending to others who were refusing to pay it back.

Doesn't say you have to give all you have. The principle is to be willing to share what you have with others. Be careful not to violate other principles, like giving to someone who is lazy in order to help keep them lazy. This is a call for compassion and sharing.

All of these were designed to illustrate the love of Jesus and to provide opportunities to share the gospel. Each one would shock those who had initiated the persecution.

Practical Helps:

1. Start each day choosing to respond properly to offenses.
2. See the offender as someone who needs the love of Christ.
3. Every offense is an opportunity for witness and ministry.
4. Every offense is opportunity to join in suffering of Christ.
5. Look to the cross and see how you have offended Christ and received forgiveness.