



## Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from May 23 afternoon through May 30 morning

### The Sermon on the Mount, Week 6

#### Matthew 5:38–48

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 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. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Jesus offered two final statements that compare the Mosaic Law to his own teaching. These two (verses 38-42 and verses 43-48) are closely related; the first dealt with retaliating against a person that causes harm and the second dealt with how to treat someone who is considered an enemy. The laws that Jesus referenced in verse 38 were known as *lex talionis*, – the laws of retaliation – and are found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. The purpose of these laws was twofold: to be a deterrent for the infliction of physical harm, and to ensure that consequences for inflicting harm did not go beyond the initial act committed. These laws were not given as an encouragement to seek revenge.

Jesus clearly taught that one who had been wronged should not even seek legal retribution. In fact, he said that ill treatment should be accepted and he offered examples. The first example is that of being slapped on the right cheek. This was a reference to a back-handed blow to the face, which was considered one of highest insults. Instead of retaliating, one who received such a slap was to welcome an identical insult to the other side of the face. In a similar example, if one was sued and forced to give up his "tunic" (an undergarment), he should also volunteer to give up his "cloak" (a more valuable outer garment). The final example calls upon the practice of foreign soldiers to force citizens of occupied lands to carry their gear for them. If forced to carry something one mile, one should volunteer to carry it two miles. Jesus then instructed his audience to give to those who seek to beg or borrow from them.

There exists a tendency to question whether or not these teachings should be taken at face value. A common response is, “Won’t this allow others to simply walk all over us?” In addition, this calls into question how the righteous should respond to those who are evil and seek to harm others. Should evil actions not be stopped, even if force is required? Can it be said that those who have defended themselves or others by using force have violated these teachings of Jesus? This is not necessarily the case. Jesus’ teachings are clear, but must be applied according to leading of the Holy Spirit, who Jesus said guides his followers into all truth (John 16:13). The primary truth that must be understood from this section of the sermon is this: one who follows Jesus must possess an unselfish attitude regarding rights and property.

The final “You have heard ... But I say to you ...” statement is unique. Here, Jesus referenced Leviticus 19:18, but the second portion of his statement which reads “hate your enemy” is not found in the Mosaic Law.

*The neighbour of Leviticus 19:18 was the fellow-Israelite, but a very different attitude was required towards those of a hostile community (Deut. 23:3–6; cf. Ps. 139:21–22), even though a personal enemy was to be treated with consideration (Exod. 23:4–5; 1 Sam. 24:19; Prov. 25:21) and an individual non-Israelite was to be made welcome (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19). Hate your enemy is not a quotation from the Old Testament, and it is hardly fair to regard it as a summary of Old Testament thought on the basis only of such passages as Deuteronomy 23:3–6. But it is an inference which was easily drawn from the clear Old Testament distinction between the attitude required towards fellow-Israelites and towards foreigners ...*

*R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 132–133.*

Jesus rejected this interpretation of the Old Testament and instead commanded those who follow him to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. He taught that this way of life followed the example of God the Father, who is sovereign over all things and causes blessings to take place in the lives of those who are just and those who are unjust. Jesus said that even the tax collectors and the Gentiles practiced loving people who loved them, indicating this was not the correct standard by which to live. Loving one’s enemies, Jesus said, was an indication of maturity in faith (“perfect” here indicates “complete”) and a conformity to the character of God.

#### **Other Scriptures in this week’s reading:**

- Leviticus 19:9-18 (God commands His people to love their neighbors as themselves)
- Psalm 139:17-24 (David expresses his desire for God to destroy those who are evil, but also asks God to search his own heart)
- 1 Peter 2:13-25 (Peter instructs believers to endure suffering and not retaliate, and reminds us that Jesus is our example in this)

- Luke 23:32-38 (Jesus is crucified and mocked by people but refuses to save himself or retaliate)
- Romans 12:14-21 (Paul writes that believers must strive to bless those who persecute them)
- James 1:2-4 (James writes that believers should be joyful in trials and allow these circumstances to bring them to maturity in their faith)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How are you challenged by this week's reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think accounts for the perceived difference between the Mosaic "laws of retaliation" and the teachings of Jesus? Do you see a way that the two fit together? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Can you identify with David in Psalm 139:17-24? If so, how?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Do you think Jesus' teaching in this section of the Sermon on the Mount would prevent a believer from utilizing self-defense or defending others? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What are some biblical truths that can help us love both our neighbors and our enemies?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How can we help each other follow these teachings of Jesus and grow to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)?