

**The Sermon on the Mount
An Eye for an Eye, Part 3
Matthew 5:38-42**

September 30, 2012

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher

Countryside Bible Church

www.countrysidebible.org

As I thought about the passage we come to this morning, I was reminded this last week that every year in America tens of thousands of civil lawsuits are initiated. Those civil cases involve everything from breach of contract, collection of a debt, personal injury, property damage, family law issues such as divorce. And every year, there are way too many of those thousands and tens of thousands of civil suits that are frankly ludicrous, even ridiculous. It's such a problem that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce started a website that documents some of the more bizarre examples.

For example, in 2011 in one actual lawsuit, a convicted criminal sued a couple that he had kidnapped for not helping him evade the police. Think about that one for a moment. Those honor students you can spot every time, can't you? I think the closest he's ever come to honor is 'Yes, your honor...No, your honor,' but regardless. A man who kidnapped a couple at knifepoint while he was running from the police sued his victims. He claimed that in that time they had promised to hide him in exchange for an unspecified amount of money. So he sued them seeking \$235,000 in damages for "breach of contract." Two young adults sued their mother. The plaintiffs were twenty and twenty-three. They claimed their mother had done some ghastly things like sometimes not including gifts in the cards she sent to her children. She played favorites with her children. She did not send care packages until one of their sixth semester away in college. She changed her surname, thus causing a tension at her daughter's school events, and she refused to pay for her homecoming dress.

In another case, I think this is my personal favorite, a New York mom actually sued a private preschool. Now keep in mind 'preschool' is the operative word here. She sued a private preschool, saying that the school's curriculum had seriously hurt her four-year-old daughter's chances of getting into an Ivy League school. Yes, her academic career was wrecked at four years old. I suppose that instead of learning, you know, typical English words like 'apple,' they were supposed to have been learning Latin words. I'm not sure, but anyway wrecked that Ivy League career.

Now we hear examples like those and of course we groan and we smile and sometimes we laugh, but that's only because we're not the brunt of them. But when someone is trying to take advantage of us and of our property, then it's no laughing matter. In fact, our normal human

response when we are unfairly attacked in such ways is anger and resentment and bitterness and even a spirit of revenge that seeks an opportunity to get even. That's how most people respond. That's how the scribes and Pharisees responded. But our Lord makes it very clear to us in the passage we're examining together that's not how we're to respond.

Just to remind you of the larger context of where we are in the Sermon on the Mount, we're in the second half of chapter 5. And in the second half of Matthew 5, Jesus provides us with six illustrations of how the righteousness of His disciples radically surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. We've already studied four of the six illustrations and we're now in the fifth illustration. And in this fifth illustration, Jesus compares how His disciples respond to personal offenses compared with how the scribes and Pharisees responded and how most people respond.

So let's read it again together. You follow along as I read the paragraph. Matthew 5:38-42:

“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 an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”

Now very important to remember that these are not isolated sayings. Instead, they relate together in a paragraph that has a central theme, a central message. And the point of the paragraph is this: in the spiritual kingdom over which Jesus rules, He will not permit His disciples to either harbor grudges or to pursue personal revenge regardless of what others might do to us.

Now again, just to remind you of where we've been so far, Jesus begins in this paragraph by highlighting the popular misunderstanding of ‘an eye for an eye.’ The Pharisees and the scribes quoted the Old Testament, but they distorted its meaning. So we first went back and looked at what the Old Testament actually taught. Those words do come from the Old Testament. Specifically, they come from three Old Testament passages. And if you look at those three passages in their context as we did, you will find that God never intended this command to be carried out by individuals. You were not the one who was to exact an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth if you were wronged. Instead, this was the standard that Israel's judges were to use when they meted out the proper sentence and penalty for various offenses. And the basic point was frankly the foundation of all just judicial and legal systems and it's this: the punishment should fit the crime. This was a novel idea in the ancient world and this was an expression of God's own just character.

The punishment fits the crime. That's what it was intended to be and to say, but that's not what the scribes and Pharisees taught. They taught instead that the 'lex talionis,' that's Latin for the name of this law, means 'the law of retaliation' – they taught that this law 'an eye for an eye' allowed, even encouraged, personal retaliation and revenge. What God had intended to be a protection against revenge and make sure the penalty actually fit the crime and wasn't an escalating sort of vendetta by the family against the perpetrator of the wrong, they absolutely turned on its head. They made it a biblical justification for holding grudges and for seeking revenge. And Jesus told His disciples: Listen, they've completely missed the point. And then He set His disciples and us straight because in the rest of this paragraph, we have started to find Jesus' revolutionary teaching about personal revenge, verses 39 to 42.

Now again, as we've noted, Jesus begins with a general principle. Look at the beginning of verse 39: "But I say to you (*in contrast to what you heard taught by the scribes and Pharisees about the Old Testament, let me properly interpret for you how you should respond personally*) ...I say to you, do not resist an evil person..." Now again, remember the context here. It's when you have been personally wronged, when you have been sinned against. When that happens, if you're a Christian, you are not to resist. The word means *to set yourself in hostile opposition toward*. It means essentially to declare war. Don't declare war against that person who has wronged you. That's the general principle.

Then Jesus proceeds to give us four specific examples of what this looks like in life. The examples are set in the first century, but the categories extend in a timeless fashion to the twenty-first century. Let me just remind you of the four examples. Number one: how do we respond when there are intentional attacks on our personal dignity? The second example has to do with intentional attacks on our personal property. The third example is governmental attacks on our personal liberty. And the fourth example is intentional attacks on our personal generosity - so attacks on our dignity, on our property, on our liberty and on our generosity.

Now last time, we looked at just the first of these examples. And again, let me just make sure you're up to speed because it's been several weeks since we studied this together – intentional attacks on our personal dignity. Verse 39, the second half of the verse is this first example: "but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Now because this text and the ones that follow are so abused and misused, in each case we've started by making sure we understand what it does not teach, because whatever Jesus means has to synchronize with the rest of the Scripture. Jesus is not contradicting the rest of Scripture. And in fact, back in verse 17 He said, 'I didn't come to abolish, but I came to fulfill' everything else God has said. So what He's teaching here cannot conflict with and contradict other clear teaching of Scripture. So therefore, it cannot mean a couple of things it's made to mean by some well-intentioned Christians. And that is it cannot mean non-resistance or non-violence; that is, that it is never appropriate in any setting for a Christian to use violence even in self-defense or in the defense of someone else's

life. That's not what Jesus is saying because that contradicts other clear passages of Scripture. Nor is it teaching passivism and we looked at that as well. In fact, we discovered, just to remind you, that Scripture allows true believers to be soldiers. Scripture allows true believers to engage in self-defense of their own lives and the life of others. And the Scripture allows Christians to use force as a government official.

So that's what it doesn't mean. What does it mean? Well, as we saw last time, it's a specific cultural event. To be backhanded on the right cheek was not an act of violence as much as it was a gross and intentional insult. That's how it was understood in that culture. It was an intentional violation of your personal dignity and honor. Now we don't have exactly the same expression, at least not often. Sometimes we might be slapped as an insult, but most of the time the insults that you and I encounter are verbal – words intended to carve and cut and maim. So how does Jesus want us to respond to intentional insults? Verse 39: “whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” In other words, don't return insult for insult. That's what He's saying. Don't decide that you need to either return in kind or perhaps even escalate the insult a little bit in order to get even and exercise your will. Jesus says: Look. Better for you to take another insult, be slapped on the other cheek, than for you to return in kind. Don't harbor grudges. Don't pursue revenge when someone violates your personal dignity with insults.

Now today we come to the second example our Lord gives us and that is intentional attacks on our personal property. Look at verse 40: “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.” Now again, it's very important for us to interpret this expression in light of its context as well as the context of the rest of Scripture. So let's begin by looking at what this does not, cannot mean in light of the rest of the teaching of Scripture. Jesus does not mean here that His followers may never seek justice in the legal system when they are wronged. He does not mean that. Now let me give you some arguments to defend that statement. First of all, understand that God Himself established such a legal, judicial system in Israel. A judicial system was not a man-made enterprise. It is a reflection in the end of both the character and command of God.

Let's go back to Deuteronomy 17. As God lays out the laws for the new nation and how things are to be handled among this people, in Deuteronomy 17 he begins the chapter by talking about an idolater who, in that culture with God as king, would be a gross offense against the king. It would be an act of treason, an act of rebellion, and therefore a capital offense. As he talks about this in verse 6, he says, but understand that this idolater can only be stoned “on the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses.” And verse 7: “The hand of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death...” By the way, that gives a lot of insight into that story in John 8 when Jesus says, ‘Who's going to cast the first stone?’ You have to come back and understand it from this text, but that's another message for another time.

Well, what happens then – the idea was God set up in every town, every village, a local court. That court was made up of the elders of the city. It was made up of the older men from the leading homes and families. They were to hear cases that came in that community. But what happens if in the case of this idolater or some other case, they're unable to come to a determination, unable to make a decision? What happens then? Well, look at verse 8: "If any case is too difficult for you to decide (*at the local court level*), between one kind of homicide or another (*whether it's manslaughter or murder*)... between one kind of lawsuit or another (*some kind of a dispute*)... between one kind of assault or another (*any kind of dispute in your courts*)... then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses." Basically, you're to take that undecided case to the central sanctuary - of course, initially in Shiloh, eventually in Jerusalem – and there you are to see it dealt with. Verse 9:

...you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who was in office in those days (*there was a chief presiding justice and then there was a pool of other judges or jury I suppose we could call them made up of the priests*), ...you shall inquire of them and they shall declare to you the verdict in the case. You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the Lord chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or to the left.

In other words, you had a local court. You had an appeal to a kind of Supreme Court. And everyone in the nation was to recognize its authority and jurisdiction. Whatever they decided, they were the men who knew God's law best. Their word was binding. Their verdict was binding and it was to be respected.

So understand then God established a judiciary system in Israel. The fact that we and other countries have a judiciary system, albeit flawed and sinful, is ultimately a reflection of the command of God and even the character of God imprinted on the human soul. It is a reflection of the image of God. Why? Because God is a God of justice. In fact, the Psalm says justice is the foundation of His throne. And so to make sure as best it can be done at a human level that justice is done, God has established human judiciary systems.

In fact, God is even spoken of in the Old Testament as using the judicial system to bring His case against Israel. There are a number of examples. Let me just show you one. Look at Hosea 4:1. The prophet Hosea says:

Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has (*and the Hebrew word here is 'court case'*) a court case against the inhabitants of the land (*here's*

God bringing a court case against Israel), because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing...adultery...violence...

So God not only initiated a judiciary system as a reflection of His own nature, His own pursuit of justice, but God even uses the image of Himself of taking His people to court because of their sin.

God was very concerned, and is very concerned, that justice be done. In fact, a breakdown of justice in the nation Israel was the cause of God's indictment of the people and eventually even of His judgment on the people. Why was Judah carried off into captivity? Well, there are a number of answers to that question, but one of them has to do with this very issue. In Lamentations, which is a little book between Jeremiah and Ezekiel in which Jeremiah laments the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem and listen to one of the reasons God gave. This is Lamentations 3:33. God:

...does not afflict (and notice the marginal note here. I love this: God) does not afflict from His heart (God doesn't find delight in this) or grieve the sons of men. To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the land, (but here's why, here's part of the indictment because there are those who crush prisoners, who) ...deprive a man of justice in the presence of the Most High, (and they were defrauding a man in his lawsuit) ...of these things the Lord does not approve.

Part of the reason, part of the indictment, part of the justification for God's bringing the judgment of the Babylonians on His people was because of their utter abuse of justice in the legal system that He had set up.

Even as New Testament believers, God allows us to have legal redress for the wrongs done to us, to defend ourselves. In fact, in Luke 12, Jesus tells His disciples: Listen. You're going to be falsely accused and you're going to be brought before court. When that happens, I want you to defend yourself in court against those charges. Don't think ahead of what you're going to share; instead it'll be given to you at that moment. But you have the right to defend yourself in that legal system. You're going to be falsely accused. Paul certainly did that in the book of Acts. He uses the Roman court system to defend himself against the false charges of insurrection and rebellion against the empire.

Now, when I say that God has no problem with Christians using the legal system in their defense and the pursuit of justice, the obvious question that comes up is about what passage?

1 Corinthians 6. What about that? What is Paul teaching there? Doesn't that passage forbid Christians from using the legal system? Well, because it's so important to this issue, let's turn

there for a moment. 1 Corinthians 6. Just to remind you, the Corinthian church had all kinds of problems. It was uniquely gifted, but it also was tolerating all kinds of sin – from petty divisions, squabbles, to allowing a man who had committed incest to remain in the church undisciplined, drunken brawls at the love feast and the Lord’s Table, the abuse of tongues. And here in 1 Corinthians 6, they were suing one another in secular courts. Verse 1:

Does any of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? (*In the millennial kingdom, the saints are going to judge the world.*) If the world is judged by you (*if that’s going to happen*) are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? (*And I think here the word judge probably has more to do with the idea of rule, we’re going to rule over angels. They’re ministering spirits for our benefit. Well, if that’s going to happen...*) How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with the matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud (*by initiating these lawsuits*). You do this even to your brethren.

Now there are a couple of very important points to note about this paragraph. First of all, notice that it is not about criminal wrongdoing, but disputes over money, finances and property. Notice verse 7: Why would you not rather be defrauded? That is, lose some financial advantage. If someone has committed a crime, under most circumstances that crime should be reported to the government. According to Romans 13, government exists to punish evildoers. Sadly, sometimes that even includes Christians.

But secondly, I want you to notice what this passage is not teaching. My father-in-law used to say, ‘We need to let the Bible say what it says.’ What does Paul say here? It does not say that when another Christian wrongs you, you must from the start simply suffer wrong. That’s not what this passage says. Instead, Paul demands that disputes among Christians should be settled among Christians in the church. That’s what he’s saying. His admonition assumes that the two disputing believers are in the same church in this case or at least in churches both of whom are willing to deal responsibly with the sin and the problem.

So here’s the point of 1 Corinthians 6. If you have a dispute with another Christian, it should be settled without involving unbelievers. But if that’s not possible, Paul says then it’s better for you

to suffer wrong and to lose money than for two Christians to be suing each other in civil court. But what Paul does not forbid in 1 Corinthians 6 is either A: seeking justice in the church if the person's a professing Christian, or B: using the legal system when it's someone outside the church who has wronged you. In other words, God is still interested that things be brought to a just conclusion. We just can't do it in the way that the Corinthian believers were doing it.

So just to sort of summarize: What are the legitimate legal recourses for a Christian who's been wronged? If you've been wronged, what are the legitimate ways legally for that to be expressed? First of all, if a crime has been committed by a fellow Christian, it ordinarily needs to be reported to the government. Romans 13 – government exists to punish evildoers and we are not to protect people from the consequences of their choices. Among Christians, the most common expression of this unfortunately happens in domestic violence in the home. If you are the recipient of domestic violence, if your spouse is hitting you, is physically violent towards you, don't guard and protect that person from the consequences of his choices. Come see an elder. Let's talk about how to approach the situation. But in the end, if that person begins to be physically violent, call the police and have them arrested. Government exists to punish evildoers. And at that moment, that person is being an evildoer. So that's what we're to do if it's a crime.

But what if it's a dispute between two Christian brothers and they're unable to settle it on their own? You try first obviously to settle it on your own. But if you're unable to do that, in the end, bring it to the church, bring it to the elders. What if you've been harmed or injured by a business, a company, or by an unbeliever? What do you do then? Well, it is biblically appropriate to pursue a just settlement and rightful, just damages through the legal system. Read the Old Testament law. If a person had culpability, they had financial responsibility to the person that was harmed. That's a biblical concept and it's not wrong for a Christian to pursue that in the court system. But, and here's the key, never with a bitter, vindictive spirit. Never with a desire to hurt or carry out revenge on the other person or on that business. It's simply about reflecting the image of God that justice, as God has laid it out, be done.

Now what if you're taken to court by someone else? That happens. You don't initiate it, but you're taken to court. What do you do? The biblical answer is you have every right to defend yourself. We saw that in the case of Jesus' command to His disciples; in the case of Paul. I think John MacArthur puts it very well in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 6. Listen to what he writes: "Sometimes in our society, quarrels between Christians over rights and property cannot help coming before the secular court. When, for instance, a Christian is being divorced by his or her spouse, the law requires a secular court to be involved. Or in the case of child abuse or neglect, a Christian parent may be forced to seek court protection from the professing, backslidden former spouse. But even in those kinds of exceptions, when for some reason a Christian finds himself unavoidably in court with a fellow believer, his purpose should be to glorify God and never to gain selfish advantage."

So what is not a legitimate, legal recourse for a Christian? According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, under normal circumstances a Christian should not pursue a civil suit of another Christian. So, with that background we can say, now that we understand what the Scripture teaches about the judicial system and its proper use, we can say this: Jesus in Matthew 5 does not mean that His followers may never seek justice either in the church if it's a fellow believer, or in the legal system if it's not. So now let's go back to Matthew 5 and see what Jesus does mean.

What does this mean? Verse 40: "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt..." Now in the context, the kind of lawsuit envisioned by Jesus here is a sinful lawsuit brought against you by a person who is sinning. Look back at verse 39: "do not resist an evil person..." Remember, in the general principle, that's the idea. So when either an evil person or a person with evil intent tries to sinfully attack you by attacking your personal property, that's the scenario Jesus is talking about. He wants to sue you and take your shirt.

The Greek word translated *shirt* refers to a specific garment that a Jewish male would've worn in the first century. It was slipped over the head and hung down to about the knees, a loose fitting sort of robe. The fact that Jesus specifically mentions being sued for your inner garment may imply that this believer is a very poor Christian; that is, he's a Christian who is poor and he has nothing else but the shirt on his back. Or it may be that Jesus is using hyperbole. He's saying: Listen. If someone sues you to take the very last thing you own, this is how you ought to respond. But regardless, His point is is that someone with evil intent is suing you to take your personal property. This is essentially theft by legal process.

Now how do we instinctively respond to such attacks? You don't have to think very long about that one. We respond with anger and resentment and bitterness and a vengeful, vindictive spirit. John Broadus, a great American commentator writing around the time of the Civil War, wrote this in his commentary on this passage: "A man who is threatened with an unjust lawsuit will show a peculiar animosity and, if he thinks himself unjustly treated in the sentence, a peculiar rancor and vengefulness declaring that he will make his adversary suffer for it. Rather than feel and act like this, our Lord says it would be better, even voluntarily, to give far more than the aggressor was awarded by the court." Jesus says if you belong to Me, if you're one of My followers, then let me tell you how I expect you to respond when there are intentional attacks against your property.

Verse 40: "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." The coat was the typical outer garment worn over that knee-length shirt. It was the more expensive of the two garments. In fact, in the first century, it would've taken the typical worker about two weeks' pay to buy this coat. Now it raises an interesting question. If the coat was the more valuable of the two garments and it was the outer garment as opposed to the inner garment, why wasn't this

man being sued for the outer garment, for the coat? And the answer is because the Old Testament absolutely forbids it. Listen to Exodus 22:26 – “If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets...” So if you ever do take it, it, it has to be returned to him by the time it’s nighttime. Why? Listen to Deuteronomy 24:13 – “When the sun goes down you shall surely return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it will be righteousness for you before the Lord your God.” For the poorer people, this cloak was not only a source of clothing during the day. It was the blanket at night. And God absolutely forbids the taking of this coat. And so instead, he sues for the shirt. Now when you understand that, you understand what a strong point Jesus is making here. Because Jesus says if someone sues you to take what they can take, your shirt, then you need to have a spirit that’s willing to give them what they could never sue you to get and that is your coat. Wow. That’s counterculture. Jesus’ point is this. He’s not commanding us literally to give away every piece of clothing so that we walk around naked or in loincloths. His point is this: if someone sues you with an evil intent and motive, you must not misuse the ‘eye for an eye’ command like the scribes did as an excuse to harbor a grudge or to pursue personal revenge. William Hendriksen writes: “We have no right to hate the person who tries to deprive us of our possessions. Love even toward him should fill our hearts.”

In fact, listen carefully, if the only alternatives are personal revenge or giving up everything we have, then Jesus says give up everything you have. Why? Well, look at chapter 5, verse 43: “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...” Now that gives whole new meaning to why we give him the coat. You know, some people read that and they say, ‘Yeah, you want to give him the coat because you want to have the moral high ground. You’re showing that you’re more righteous.’ No, it’s none of that. Jesus is demanding something far greater than that. He’s saying you need to so love that person who is sinfully attacking you that, instead of thinking about getting even, you’re thinking about that person’s good. That’s the point. We should be so genuinely interested in that person’s good because we love them that we will do whatever needs to happen, even if it means personal sacrifice.

So, how does this apply to us practically today? What are some of the contemporary attacks on our personal property? This is not an exhaustive list, but unfortunately here are some pretty common ones: frivolous lawsuits brought against us either personally or against the businesses that we own; one spouse trying to take advantage of another in the divorce process in the distribution of the assets; a relative taking advantage of an older family member’s financial prosperity; a contentious neighbor who initiates an over-the-fence battle; an unscrupulous business or workman who takes advantage of you, who asks for money upfront and never completes the project or who gives you subpar work or products; an employer who takes financial advantage of you in some way. Again, in these cases, there may be criminal wrongdoing. Jesus is not saying that you shouldn’t turn them into the authorities and He’s not

saying that you can't seek justice in the church if it's a Christian or in the court system if it's an unbeliever. What He is saying though is this: we must not allow ourselves to harbor a grudge or pursue personal revenge. That can never be a part of any of our response even to financial injustice, even when someone unjustly tries to gain our belongings.

Jesus' primary point in this paragraph is this: we must intentionally do good to those who attack us in return for their evil. That's the point. Give him your coat because you're trying to do good to him. Why? Well, look down at verse 45 – because God does good to those who are His enemies: “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 He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Jesus says: Listen. You're going to be My followers? You're going to be Mine and related to the Father? Then you need to imitate the Father and here's how He is. He loves His enemies. Think about that for a moment. God loves and does good to those who hate Him, those who deny His existence, those who only use His name for a curse. He still does them good. And Jesus says that's how you're to respond to those who set themselves as your enemies.

But that's not all Jesus requires of us when evil people attack us with their evil intentions. Notice back at verse 44. Not only are we to do good to them - that's not enough - but we're to love our enemies and we're to pray for those who persecute us. I want you to think for a moment about the people in your life who have most deeply hurt you, against whom you could be tempted to hold a grudge. Maybe they've insulted you as in the first illustration or maybe they've really diminished your own personal assets and property. What's your response to those people? Is it anger and bitterness and resentment and trying to get even? Or is it what our Lord commands here? Is it a genuine heart of love for them, a desire to do good to them, praying for them even as you're pursuing some measure of reasonable justice? That's what our Lord commands of us.

By the way, how you consistently respond to those who sin against you in this way is a great barometer for whether or not you're in Christ. If you consistently carry around a heart of bitterness and anger and resentment – a list of offenses that have been done against you through the years and you carry those around and you savor those and you enjoy those and you hold those against the people who have wronged you – then, according to Matthew 18 in the parable of the unforgiving slave, it's very unlikely that you have experienced God's forgiveness. Because a person who has come to know God's forgiveness and the great debt they have been forgiven finds it easier, not always easy but easier, to forgive those who sin against us. So let me urge you to examine yourself. If you live in bitterness and anger and resentment over past wrongs, then you may very well not be a follower of Christ at all. Jesus says love them, do good to them, and pray for them so that you may be like your Father in heaven. Let's pray together.

Father, this is so contrary to who we are by nature. Lord, we came into this world as soon as we were self-aware as children, we came in seeking personal revenge when we were insulted or

when something that belonged to us was attacked or taken. And Father, those things still taint every human soul apart from grace. Father, I pray that You would help us who know and love Jesus Christ to live lives of obedience to this command. Lord, give us the grace to love our enemies, to do good to them in return for their evil, not to harbor grudges and bitterness and to seek revenge but to pray for them that they would come to the knowledge of the truth so that we can be like You, Father.

And Father, I pray for the person here today who is eaten up with anger and resentment and bitterness for a litany of past wrongs. Father, may they truly examine themselves before You and may this be the day when they come to experience Your forgiveness so that they then have the capacity by a new heart to extend that forgiveness to others. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.