

WEEK 6 – REVENGE AND RECONCILIATION

Much of the content for the devotions during this week was sourced from *The message of the Sermon on the Mount – Christian counter-culture* by John R. W. Stott; Intersity Press, 1988.

MONDAY – Passive non-retaliation and active love



Matthew 5: 39 NIV *But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

Matthew 5:44 NIV *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

The first part of the Sermon on the Mount, as found in Matthew 5, contains six antitheses, or contrasting/opposite statements, as Jesus uses scripture to teach on what it really means to follow God. In his above-mentioned book John Stott says that one can only really understand the “love your enemies” section (Matthew 5: 43-48) once you also read with it the “Eye for Eye” section that precedes it (Matthew 5: 38-42). The contrasting statements in these passages are amongst the most admired but also the most resented in the Sermon on the Mount.

When reading the three texts above, which all fall in our scripture passage – Matthew 5: 38-48 – it would be easy to ask

“What do these texts even mean?” Does it mean, for instance, that by turning the other cheek, one condones evil actions? No, it does not. During this week we will explore the various dimensions associated with our relationship with our “enemies” – is it love or is it justice.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: 13 “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Reflection: Reflecting on all my interactions with others during the past week, are there maybe conversations where I have to go back and correct the wrong impression I created with my words and actions?



Prayer: Holy Spirit, guide me to always follow the example set by Jesus. AMEN

TUESDAY – Know the Scriptures



Matthew 5: 43-44 *You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

Leviticus 19: 18 *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD"*

Matthew 7: 1 & 2 *Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

In Matthew 5: 38-48 Jesus quotes straight out of the Law of Moses, which contains both civil and moral codes, with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) being a distillation of the moral laws. In Exodus 21 to 23 on the other hand, the Ten Commandments are applied to situations in everyday life at the time of Moses. This application, or case law, as Stott calls it, amongst others is based on the principle of exact retribution – an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But at the heart of this principle lies two foundational principles, namely that it defines justice while it at the same time restrains revenge. In His teaching Jesus did not contradict retribution and justice, in fact, in

Matthew 7: 1-2 Jesus says 'judge not or you too will be judged'.

Perhaps the Pharisees interpreted the mosaic laws from a perspective that it was only written for the Hebrew nation, and that all others were their enemies, and hence the quote in Matthew 5: 43. Jesus basically in this passage of the Sermon on the Mount says that "love my neighbour" provides no justification to "hate my enemy". We should take that to heart.

Reflection: Take time to read the Old Testament Scriptures to better understand the teachings in the New Testament.



Prayer: Holy Spirit, open my spiritual eyes and ears so that I can truly understand Scripture. AMEN

WEDNESDAY – Personal relationships are based on love – not justice



Matthew 5: 43-44 *You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

Matthew 7: 1 & 2 *Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

Matthew 5: 48 *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

When one is struck on the one cheek, it requires a complete rejection of the notion of revenge in order to be able to turn the other cheek as well. What does this ask of you and me as a believer? It asks us to control ourselves; to seek to return good for evil and to have a powerful divine love for others. Divine love is non-discriminating, shown equally to persons good and bad. Even the highest form of human love is contaminated by some element of self-interest.

The antithesis concerning the scripture in Matthew 5: 38-48 hints at a choice between justice and love. However, in the way that Jesus pulls it together, it becomes clear that one has to distinguish between the role of the individual

and the role of the community (country, church, town, etc.). Scripture dictates that the individual should not repay evil with evil, but should rather overcome evil with good (Matthew 5: 44). The community has to bring evildoers to account, that is, has to ensure that justice is done, the so-called principle of retribution.

Reflection: Reminding ourselves that every person is in essence both an individual and a member of the community, what are the tensions that you and I experience in dealing with situations? Do you, upon reflection, feel comfortable that you are always following Scripture in your responses?



Prayer: Loving Abba Father, help me to not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. AMEN

THURSDAY – Our love becomes visible through our deeds, words and prayer



Matthew 5: 44 & 45a *But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*

Luke 10:30, 33 *In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.
³³But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.*

In his *Message of the Sermon on the Mount – Christian Counter-culture*, John Stott links the message in Matthew 5: 44 with the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this way Jesus shows us that divine love transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries.

True, divine love is not a sentiment but service – practical, humble and sacrificial service. In Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount he equates the unconditional love which Jesus describes; and which He

embodied in His every action while here on earth; to one's deeds, words and prayer. In other words, your actions, words and prayers give away who you really are.

Reflection: Do we speak positively about every person and encounter; do we pray for those who persecute us; and do we love our enemies and do good to them? Or are there times when we have let hate multiply hate, rather than to meet hate with love? If there are, consider what will be required of us to set this right?



Prayer: Holy Spirit, help me to know when my deeds, words and prayers do not reflect Your divine love in me, and guide me to correct my wrongs. We ask this in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. AMEN

FRIDAY – How to really love our enemies



Matthew 5: 46-47 *If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

Romans 12: 21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

In Matthew 5: 38-48 Jesus is not advocating that there should not be an administration of justice after an evil deed, but rather that we should not take the law into our own hands. Easier said than done – right?

In his book *Message of the Sermon on the Mount – Christian Counter-culture* John Stott uses the example of Martin Luther King, the American preacher and civil rights leader, to make this point. He quotes Dr Benjamin Mays saying that if any man knew the meaning of suffering injustice, it was King. His house was bombed; he lived for thirteen years with constant threats of death; jailed more than twenty times; he suffered numerous malicious accusations bereft of any truth; to

try to discredit his character; as well as betrayals by some of his closest friends – and yet he never housed any bitterness in his heart. There was no rancour in his soul, he housed no revenge in his mind; and he preached all over the world, advocating non-violence and the redemptive power of love. One of King's most moving sermons, based on Matthew 5: 43–45, was entitled 'Loving your enemies' and was rewritten and fine-tuned while King was in jail in July 1962.

Reflection: If anybody were to write a memoir of your life, what would they say about your personal relationships – did your deeds and words reflect your love for all – loved ones and enemies alike?



Prayer: Loving Father, infuse my soul with Your divine love so that I can share that abundantly with all those that cross my path. AMEN