

Going The Extra Mile

"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.

Matthew 5:38-42

Let us take a look at these verses to get some context and hopefully find the heart of what Jesus is requiring from us. Three examples:

Physical Law

Jesus spoke about what was written in the Law (Exodus 21:24) about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This was not written for someone to get revenge but to administer justice. We, at times, have a revengeful heart that wants to inflict even more pain on others than we receive. I remember when someone beat up my father and broke his nose and some ribs. I did not want only to break the assailant's nose and ribs but to bash his head with a baseball bat and break every bone in his body! So the eye for an eye law was to ensure we would not act out of revenge but that justice can still be administered. Jesus says to turn the other cheek, which speaks to not acting out of revenge when hurt but extending mercy to those who hurt us.

Judicial Law

"And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well." A judge was not allowed to take a cloak from a person since the poor used it as a blanket to sleep with. Again, Jesus is exhorting us to go beyond what the Law allows by considering more than our own personal needs. It involves personal sacrifice to give above what was required.

Law of Servitude

"*And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*" The people of the day knew exactly what Jesus was saying. During the time of the Roman occupation it was legal for a Roman soldier to demand a citizen be put into his service to carry some of his gear but only up to one mile. You could legally refuse to carry it any further. We all remember Simon of Cyrene who was forced by the Roman soldiers to help carry the cross of Jesus.

Merriam-Webster.com defines "go the extra mile" as "to do more than one is required to do." Although this is a good generalized definition, it does not support the full meaning of what Jesus was stating. The Romans and the Jews were enemies during the time when Jesus gave this command. He was telling them and us to go the extra mile even for our enemies. Two verses later Jesus states:

"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. Matthew 5:43-48

To capture the spirit of the Law, we must adjust our hearts to accept any personal sacrifice that will enable us to fulfill the Law of Christ. As we have seen, the Law of Christ far exceeds the written law since it deals with the heart of man and not only his words or actions. It is not about the work required to go the extra mile but the heart behind wanting to express the mercy of Christ to others. The Law says to go one mile, the Spirit says, to have a heart of mercy, even for your enemies, and go beyond what is required.

I know it is difficult getting to the place of loving your enemies. It almost appears impossible but since Jesus is exhorting us to respond in this way to our enemies, we must believe that it is attainable.

This foundational series started with Salvation as we learned to **receive the love** of Christ into our hearts and to be born again. We end the series with learning how to **give that same love** we received to others, even those who have hurt and disappointed us, even to the extent of those we consider to be our enemies. This is the high call of being a disciple of Jesus. Remember, we were once enemies of Christ ourselves but in His mercy He saved us. Let us pour out that mercy on others, even our enemies as our hearts and minds are being transformed into the image of Christ. May the love of Christ lead you into all truth and keep your heart pure before Him as we wait expectantly for the day He returns. Amen.