

Love Your Enemies

Opening Discussion: Can you tell about a situation where someone took revenge and it caused anger and bitterness to grow? Did the problem continue on and get worse?

Read Matthew 5:38–48.

These verses are perhaps some of the hardest verses of Jesus' teachings. None of us find these words easy to obey!

Culture Note: Look again at verse 38. The expression: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” was taken from Leviticus 24:19-20. “If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.” This was used to help the courts of Israel make just decisions. The punishment was to be equal to the crime. It taught judges to make decisions fairly and equally. God’s Holy Word teaches that it is the state’s responsibility to punish evildoers, but that judges must treat all people the same.

But some people in Jesus’ day were using this law to justify taking revenge when they were wronged.

1. In verses 39-42, what does Jesus say should be our response to someone who does wrong to us? How would you summarize Jesus’ words?
2. Some people think these verses mean that if someone hits us, we should just stand there and let them keep hitting us. Do you think this is the true meaning of Jesus’ words here? What do you think He means?

What should our heart attitude be toward someone who wrongs us? (See the first part of verse 39.)

3. Read verses 43-48 again. How are Jesus’ instructions to us in verse 44 the opposite of what is usually said (verse 43)?
4. How does God treat both evil people and good people (verse 45)?

If we love our enemies, how does that make us true sons of our heavenly Father?

5. Read verses 46-48. How is Jesus challenging us to be different from the tax collectors and pagans? Who is our example (verse 48)?

Read Romans 12:17-21.

6. If someone does evil to us, does that give us the right to do evil to them? According to verse 17, should followers of Jesus ever do evil?

7. Read verse 18 again. What is our responsibility as peacemakers?

8. Read verse 19 again. Whose responsibility is it to repay someone who has done evil to us? Why is it important that we not take revenge ourselves, but leave it to God to do?

Think about it: As humans, is it possible that we are not seeing the event clearly? Can we know the motives of the other person's heart?

When you take revenge, what does the other person do in response? How can it ever end?

Do you believe that God is just and that He will eventually make all things right?

9. Look at verses 20-21. Instead of taking revenge, what are we to do?

If we take revenge, which one wins—evil or good? How do we overcome evil?

10. When someone hurts or offends you, do you allow a desire for revenge to live in your heart?

Look back at Jesus' instructions in Matthew 5:43-48. How would society change if people obeyed Jesus' teachings?

Take time now to pray. Do you have any "enemies"—people who have wronged you? Ask Jesus to help you to choose to love and forgive them instead of desiring revenge.