

Text: Romans 12:14-21 & Matthew 5:38-48<sup>1</sup>

Series: Right Living – God’s Righteousness Transforming Our Lives

Title: Part 20 -- Tough Love

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Everything that Paul wrote is rooted in the story of the life, death, resurrection and the teaching of Jesus Christ. But there are times as you read Paul’s letters when the echo of the very words of Jesus can be heard more clearly than at others and today’s passage is one of those moments. This morning I want us to read the words of Jesus from Matthew’s Gospel that I believe underlie the words of Paul. We’re going to read a portion of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” as it is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. I want us to read aloud Matthew chapter 5, verses 38 to 48 and then I’m going to read Romans chapter 12, verses 14 to 21 for you. As I read, listen for the echoes of Jesus.

Let’s read together what Jesus said...

**Matthew 5:38** “**You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’**<sup>39</sup> **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.**<sup>40</sup> **And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.**<sup>41</sup> **And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.**<sup>42</sup> **Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.**

**Matthew 5:43** “**You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’**<sup>44</sup> **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**<sup>45</sup> **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.**<sup>46</sup> **For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?**<sup>47</sup> **And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?**<sup>48</sup> **You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**

Now, sit back and listen for the echoes as I read from Paul’s letter to the Romans...

**Romans 12:14** **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.**<sup>15</sup> **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**<sup>16</sup> **Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.**

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**Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

Did you hear the echoes? Paul had clearly internalized the life and teaching of Jesus and as he wrote to the Romans, the Spirit of Jesus and the words of Jesus are the heart of his teaching. And they are tough words. Paul is still unfolding the significance of what he wrote in Romans 12, verse 9...

### **“Let love be genuine.” Romans 12:9**

In verses 9 to 13, Paul explained what love means in relationships with those in our family of faith, our brothers and sisters in Christ. He focused on the nature of “brother affection.” (v.10) But in these verse, Paul shifts his focus to the nature of love for those who are our antagonists, especially those who are opposed to the Gospel of Jesus. He tells us what it means to love those who “persecute” us; to love those who wrong us; to love those who do evil to us; to love someone who is our “enemy”. This is **tough love!** If you thought it was hard to love those within the family of God, well love just got elevated another notch to its highest level. Jesus had raised the bar on love and Paul is faithful to Jesus. Remember, Jesus said...

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....” Matthew 5:43-44**

This morning I’m going to focus on Jesus’ words that underlie the teaching of Paul. I’m going to root what I say in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and I’ll touch on Romans as needed. This morning, I want us to come face to face with the challenging teaching of Jesus that Paul had internalized because we need to internalize it, too. Paul’s teaching in Romans 12 is “core” teaching of what it means to be a Christian because it is rooted in the core teaching of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount.

As you read Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, you find again and again that he raises the bar on living a life that is pleasing to God. It’s a tough challenge and believers down through the ages have been stretched and challenged by Jesus’ words. The Christian writer C.S. Lewis was once criticized by another Christian leader for not “caring much” for the Sermon on the Mount.

Lewis responded to the critique in this way:

**“As to ‘caring for’ the Sermon on the Mount, if ‘caring for’ here means ‘liking’ or ‘enjoying,’ I suppose no one ‘cares for’ it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledgehammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of a man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure.”**

And let me warn you – the passage we read from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount contains the biggest sledgehammer of them! Watch out – here it comes!

**“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”  
Matthew 5:48**

Notice that phrase, **“your heavenly Father”** with me for a moment. I want to point out that Jesus’ words are directed to people who are members of God’s family – they are people who have become children of God through faith in Jesus. In Jesus’ day, as today, many people choose to reject Jesus but the Apostle John tells us what happened to those who believed in Jesus, and what happens today to those who accept him:

**“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” John 1:12**

Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* is not a road map to help us find our way to heaven, it is a manual for children of God who are heading home telling them what to expect and how to respond along the way. One day, when we see Jesus, we are going to be “perfect” people: people of “perfect” peace, “perfect” faithfulness and “perfect” love because God is going to changes us completely.

- No more murderous rages                      Matthew 5:21f
- No more adulterous desires                      5:27f
- No more broken marriages                      5:31f
- No more broken promises                      5:33f
- No more selfish revenge                      5:38f
- No more half-hearted love                      5:43f

I’ve just given you an outline of the first portion of Jesus’ Sermon. While we travel the road toward the day of “perfect” transformation, the Holy Spirit is at work in those who are children of God through faith in Jesus, changing us to be more and more like Jesus. In these words of Jesus, we see the goal, the ideal, the perfection toward which the Spirit of God is drawing us. It’s the perfection of Jesus.

If you aren’t a member of God’s family yet, I want you to know two things:

First, those of us who claim to be children of the heavenly Father don't pretend to be perfect. We haven't arrived at what God wants us to be – Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount have a way showing us how far we have to go to become all that God wants us to be! The goal we are moving toward is much higher than we can claim to reach. But that's where we want to be and we apologize to you for our lack of progress towards it. We aren't always the best examples of what a child of the Father should be. Forgive us.

Second, I want you to know that you can become a part of God's family today if you want to join us.

If you long for a life that has an end that is worth all the struggle;  
 If you're tired of being driven around by your passions of anger or lust;  
 If you're sick of broken relationships and broken promises;  
 If you want a heart of peace and love –  
 God wants to work in you to make you new. Will you let Him begin His work in you today?

If you sincerely want Him to change you, what you need to do is to tell him something like this from your heart:

***“Father, I am a sinner. I have sinned against You and I'm sorry.***

***I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son who died for my sins on the Cross. And right now I invite Him to come into my heart and into my life. I want to become your child, today.***

***I surrender my life to Jesus. I want Him to guide me and direct me through life and I want to live for Him from this day forward.***

***In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.”***

At the moment you speak these words from your heart to the heart of God, at that very moment the Spirit of God moves in to your life and makes you a child of God. From that moment on, God becomes “your heavenly Father.” And from that moment on the Spirit of God begins the work of changing you to become more like Jesus. As you study God's Word, the Bible, the Spirit of God takes that truth and uses it to change your thoughts and attitudes and actions

If you prayed that prayer with me, we have some resources that can help you connect with God's Word. Pastor Norm offers a Sunday AM class called “The Enquirer's Class” that helps you get your Christian life established with some basic spiritual truth. I lead a weeknight night study called, “Christianity Explored” that helps you get to know who Jesus is, why he came to earth and what it means to follow him. I have a great little book entitled, “Big Questions Real Answers” that can help you establish a relationship with Jesus Christ. Just ask

me for a copy after the service. Our prayer team would like to pray with you after the service to ask God's blessing on your life. Talk to any of the pastors and we'll direct you to resources to help you grow in your relationship with God, your heavenly Father.

And now, back to the sledgehammer! Jesus said...

**"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 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 5:38-39**

Paul captures the spirit of Jesus with his teaching...

**"Repay no one evil for evil ... Beloved, never avenge yourselves" Romans 12:17, 19**

Jesus quotes here from several Old Testament passages. For example, Leviticus 24:19-20 says this:

**"If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him." Leviticus 24:19-20**

This sounds like a law of retaliation but it isn't. In fact, it's a law designed to limit vengeance. It demands that punishment always fit the crime. It was designed to stop escalating violence between feuding families. And it's a principle for courts of law, not for personal lawmaking.

By Jesus' day, the Pharisees had been using this Scripture to justify taking personal vengeance against someone who wronged them. And we need to see that **Jesus isn't condemning justice in the courts or between nations – he's forbidding personal vengeance in the streets.**

Some people have taken this passage to mean that a Christian should never resist anyone who is perpetrating evil. For example, they would say that Christ is forbidding a Christian from acting as a police officer, in the military or even as a judge and prosecutor because that would entail "**resisting**" an evil person.

But for this interpretation to hold true, Scripture would have to be guilty of contradicting itself.

In **Romans 13:1-4**, the Bible clearly teaches that God has placed the civil authorities in positions of power so that they can reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. In Romans 13, verse 2, Paul uses the same word, "**resist**," and tells us that those who "**resist**" authorities are "resisting" those

whom God has put into leadership to carry out God's wrath against those who do wrong. (Romans 13:4)

And in **Galatians 2:11**, Paul tells us that he "**resisted**" Peter when he tried to lead the church astray. Paul resisted Peter for Peter's own good – to bring him back to behavior that agreed with the truth of God's Word.

Well, then, what is Jesus talking about when he tells us not to "resist an evil person"?

Let's think about hockey. I was watching a game recently. It was a close checking game. There were the usual numbers of fights and near fights – a lot of tripping, smashing and grabbing – the usual hockey stuff. But there were also the great, good, hard body checks that make the game exciting! It's a rough game and you'd think that there isn't a lot that hockey could provide as illustration for this teaching of Jesus.

Except for this. What Jesus is saying is basically this: **No retaliation!** When someone strikes you, don't retaliate. As I've watched hockey over the years and listened to commentary between periods, I heard something like this: If you want to be sure that you get called for a penalty, go ahead and retaliate. But if you really want to get back at the opposition, go out and play the game hard and by the rules! **Ignore the personal affront and get on with the game! The interest of the team is more important than your personal honour.**

And for members of the Kingdom of God, we have a job to do that is more important than our personal honour or interest or rights. It's proclaiming the message about Jesus by our words and in our lives.

***Jesus said that as His disciples, we have surrendered self interest for the purpose of the Gospel***

Jesus uses four illustrations of his "no self interest" principle.

**First, we are to reject self interest in regards to our honour** in response to insults. (Matthew 5:39) We're going to look at this more closely in a moment.

**Second, we are to reject self interest in regards to our property.** (v.40) The cloak was the poor man's sleeping bag. According to the Old Testament law (Ex. 22:26) the cloak had to be returned at nightfall so that a man could sleep. Jesus' disciples couldn't even claim this right.

**Third, we are to reject self interest in regards to our time.** (v.41) The term Jesus uses here refers to the right that a Roman official had to "force" a person to carry a burden for at least a mile. Simon of Cyrene was "forced" in this manner to carry the cross for Jesus (Matthew 27:32). Not only do we submit to

the request, we “go the extra mile” to help the person. Their needs outweigh our own.

And **fourth, we are to reject self interest in regards to our money** (v.42). Those who are in real need have a claim on our money. This isn't about panhandlers skimming cash for booze – in those cases, I simply follow Nancy Reagan's old anti-drug slogan, “Just say, No!” But when we see a person in real need, Jesus calls us to “open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be” without looking for repayment (Deuteronomy 15:8; Luke 6:35)

Everything we have can be called on to serve God's purposes in the world.

We don't have time to look at each illustration in detail, but let's look at the first, **the principle of “no retaliation.”**

**Someone strikes you and Jesus says, don't hit back.** That's tough! Notice which cheek the person hits – it's the right cheek. Now, if you're facing someone and we assume that they are right handed, how are they going to hit you on the right cheek? Go ahead, do some research on the person next to you – just tell them that it's all in the interest of the search for Biblical truth!

They will hit you with the back of their right hand. In Jesus' day, and in our own day, that was one of the highest insults you could give a person. It was a calculated insult and it was given most often to blasphemers and heretics.

The only other time this word is used in the Bible, we find it in **Matthew 26:67** where the people in the High Priests court were slapping Jesus during his trial and mocking him. “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” they said. But Jesus didn't strike back with his hands, in fact, he didn't even strike back with words. Instead, he left us an example that we should follow. As Peter, an eyewitness to Jesus trial, puts it in 1 Peter 2:20-23:

**“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” 1 Peter 2:20-23**

Paul's words reflect the fact that he had internalized the example of Jesus. He wrote...

**“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Romans 12:19**

We are to entrust our vindication to God and we can be confident that one day he will bring justice. Some years ago I was doing historical research in the papers of a prominent Canadian Baptist leader. He was a man of great gift and great courage who spoke out in defense of the Gospel and against false teaching at a time when others remained silent and tolerant. As a leader during a time of controversy, he took a great many personal “shots for the team.” Sadly, he got caught in a web of self-defense, defending himself from one attack after another. His great gift to proclaim the Gospel was blunted and his leadership was nullified. Years ago an experienced pastor gave me some good advice about responding to malicious critics: “Don’t.” Silence is often misinterpreted but never misquoted. Behave honourably and entrust your honour to God.

Why would Jesus instruct his disciples about how to respond when they’re struck? In the opening words of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set the tone for the entire teaching. Jesus said...

**“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” Matthew 5:11**

The hits were coming because they were followers of Jesus. If you and I are part of Jesus’ team, the shots we get in the corners are only part of being part of Jesus’ team. Our goal & purpose is to picture Jesus for the world by what we say and what we do and to put aside our personal interests for His sake.

Jesus endured personal insult for us – and we are to endure it for Him. He surrendered Himself for us – and we are to surrender our rights for Him.

William Barclay said it well: **“The Christian thinks not of his rights but of his duties; not of his privileges but of his responsibilities. The Christian man has forgotten that he has any rights at all; and the man who will fight to the legal death for his rights, inside or outside the Church, is far from the Christian way.”**

And now we reach the anvil upon which the hammer is pounding. This is the core of the core...

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour 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.”  
Matthew 5:43-45**

***Jesus said that as His disciples, there is no limit on our love for the purpose of the Gospel***

Paul teaches us...

**“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” Romans 12:14**

“Love your neighbor and hate your enemy” – does the Old Testament say that? Yes and No. Yes, it does command us to love our neighbor. Leviticus 19:18 says...

**“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” Leviticus 19:18**

But **nowhere does the Bible tell us to “hate your enemy.”** In fact, Exodus 23:4-5 commanded God’s people us to assist their enemy. If they saw their enemy struggling with his donkey, they were to “rescue it with him.” And as one Bible scholar said: “From ‘assist your enemy’ to ‘love him’ was but a step. And Jesus took that step.”

Tragically, however, the Pharisees of Jesus’ day didn’t take that step. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 reveals the narrowness of their definition. They limited “neighbor” to only those who were like them. Their spirits was captured in the poem:

**“Believe as I believe, no more, no less;  
That I am right, and no one else, confess;  
Feel as I feel, think only as I think;  
Eat what I eat, and drink but what I drink;  
Look as I look, do always as I do;  
Then, and only then, will I fellowship with you.”**

Luke, in his record of the Sermon on the Mount, records a fuller statement by Jesus about loving our enemies that amplifies what loving them really means. Jesus said...

**“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” Luke 6:27-28**

And in the same Spirit, Paul wrote...

**“if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink....” Romans 12:20**

First, it isn't a matter of feeling love for our enemies; it's a matter of doing good for them. Can you help your enemy "rescue" his donkey? Can you push his car out of a snow bank when it's stuck? Can you shovel his walk way when he can't? Can you pick up her spilled shopping in the grocery store? Can you do that? Then you can love your enemy.

Second, it's a matter of speaking good about them and to them – blessing them. Can you do that? Blessing them means to call down God's good upon them, not his wrath.

And third, it's a matter of praying for them. When we pray for our enemies, we stand with them in spirit before the throne of God and invite God's goodness to come upon them. We pray for them to come to know the love of God in Jesus Christ. We pray for their anger to be stilled; for the pain to be healed; for their guilt to be removed; for their emptiness to be filled. Can you do that?

And why do we do that? Jesus gives us two reasons.

**First**, we "love our enemies" so that we "may be sons of [our] Father who is in heaven." (v.45) Loving enemies is God-like behavior. Loving our enemies doesn't make us children of the Father; loving our enemies makes us look like our Father. Loving enemies is simply what God's children do.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans 5:10...

**"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." Romans 5:10**

God loves his enemies so much that He died for them to make them His friends. We love our enemies because we, too, were once enemies of God. We know what it's like to be transformed by God's love for us.

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a message on Matthew 5:43-45 entitled "Loving Your Enemies." In it he wrote, "**love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.**" He wrote those words sitting in a Georgia jail, put there by the enemies that he chose to love.

Someone once said: "**To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine.**" (Alfred Plummer)

**Second**, we "love our enemies" because our love needs to go beyond what is natural to reflect the supernatural.

It's natural to love those who love us. It's natural to love members of our own family. But Jesus asks of us, "what more are you doing than others?" (v.47)

That word, “more,” holds the key. It’s “more” that can only come because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:5)

And when we love our enemies -- listen to Jesus’ words – **“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)**

What? Come on! Perfect?!

What does “perfect” mean? It’s the Greek word *teleios*. It carries the meaning of “complete,” or “mature.” It means that we have fulfilled our purpose & potential. Why did God create us? Why did God create you? Genesis 1:26 tells us why. God’s Word says that we were created in “the image of God.” Our purpose is to reflect His character in the world.

The Apostle John applies this teaching of Jesus to our love for one another. He wrote...

**“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” 1 John 4:12**

When we love with God’s love, people see God at work. We display His image for the world to see.

We’ll never reach sinless “perfection” in this life. Jesus’ instruction in the Lord’s Prayer that we are to regularly pray “Forgive us our debts” (Matthew 6:12) tells us that. But we can head towards that goal as God’s Spirit helps us along.

That was the Apostle Paul’s goal in life. He wrote...

**“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”  
Philippians 3:12**

Kent Hughes tells the story of a friend of his. He and his wife had just returned from the mission field and had rented a nice little townhouse. His wife was very creative and had nicely decorated their home. But there was only one thing wrong – the neighbors who moved in next door. They turned the front yard into a desert, broke the windows out of their house, were always using foul language, urinated in the front yard and cause trouble all over the neighborhood. The final straw was when one of the boys climbed into their yard and threw a whole can of orange paint over the patio walls.

The woman was very angry. She did not like her neighbors. She was not happy with the Lord for putting her where he had put her. Realizing that her heart was not right, she got down on her knees and said, “Lord, you know that I do not like these people at all. God, help me to love them.”

She did not feel any different, but she resolved to exercise love. She baked her neighbors a pie and took it to them, beginning a caring relationship. Those neighbors did not change, but she did. She had begun to love them.

And when they moved away, she wept.

What had she done? She had demonstrated the power of love to transform enemies into friends. She had done what Paul tells us to do...

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

Let's pray:

**Lord Jesus, We acknowledge that as your disciples, we have no rights to ourselves. Take us and use us for your glory.**

**And Lord Jesus, make us perfect in love so that the world might see Your love made perfect in us.**

**In your name, we ask it. Amen.**

- Invitation to Prayer Ministry
- Final Song: The King of Love
- Benediction