

Matthew 5

“Resisting evil?”

Context:

The Messiah defines the true nature of Kingdom life: The sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)

- a. **The character of Kingdom people (5:1-12)**
 - 1. Attitude toward self: humble hunger for righteousness (5:1-6)
 - 2. Attitude toward others: passion for peace (5:7-9)
 - 3. Attitude toward enemies: joy in face of persecution (5:10-12)
- b. **The calling of Kingdom people (5:13-16)**
 - 1. Salt: “I have been crucified with Christ” (5:13)
 - 2. Light: “Christ liveth in me” (5:14-16)
- c. **The conduct of Kingdom people (5:17-7:27))**
 - 1. In respect to moral purity (5:17-48)
 - a. The letter of the law. (5:17-20)
 - b. The spirit of the law. (5:21-48)
 - 1. with respect to how we treat others (5:21-26)
 - 2. with respect to how we treat marriage (5:27-32)
 - 3. with respect to how we treat oaths (5:33-37)
 - 4. with respect to how we treat evil doers (5:38-42)

38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

A. Other teachings of the NT are similar to Jesus' teaching.

- **Rom.12:17,21** “repay no one with evil . . . but overcome evil with good”
- **Rom.13:10** “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of he law”
- **1 Pet.2:21** “For this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps” The example of the cross where Jesus suffered rather than demanding justice. (3:8-11,13-17)
- **Rom.12:2** “Do not be conformed to this world” Jn.15:19; 17:16)
- **Matt.5:20; 7:13-14; Jn.3:3,5;18:36; Col.1:3; Heb.11:8-16** The church and state are two separate kingdoms. Christians are to be strangers in this world.

- **Jn.18:36** The weapons of the two kingdoms are different. One is physical the other spiritual.
- **2 Cor.10:3-4** remind us that our weapons are spiritual and not physical.
- **Heb.10:32-34** bears witness to Christians who did not resist evil and suffered loss.

B. Should Matt.5:38-48 be taken literally and applied universally?

1. Much of Jesus' teaching is not to be taken literally as seen in:
 - **Lk.14:26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." (**1 Tim5:8** "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.")
 - **Matt.5:29** "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you: for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." (As far as we know, this has never been practiced.)
 - **Jn.18:22-23** After being arrested, Jesus was struck by one of the high priest's officers. Jesus did not literally turn the other cheek but rather challenged the injustice of the act: "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong" (Acts 23:1-5 is a similar example from Paul's life)
 - There is evidence that Jesus did not follow the command "to not resist evil" when he threw the money changers from the temple (**Matt.21:12-13**).
 - In **2 Thess.3:10** Paul prescribes discipline for those who mooch off of others.
2. The cross is an example of more than suffering. It is also an **example of justice**.
3. We also must recognize the **difference between private and public duties**. The texts above refer to private or personal relationships. They do not address the responsibility of the community or the state.
Rom.13:1-7
4. **The realities of a fallen world** put a person in a situation where they may be forced to use force to prevent harm to those under their charge (family | Tim.5:8). Pacifism will only work if everyone agrees to it.

C. A pacifist is someone who is against violence physical and hence against war.

1. Varieties of Pacifism -
 - **Universal Pacifism** - Killing or violence is viewed as always wrong in any form and at any time. (Schweitzer, Gandhi, Tolstoy)
 - **Christian Pacifism** - Christians are never allowed to use killing or violence, but unbelievers may justly resort to killing and violence in certain instances.

- **Private Pacifism** - Personal violence is always wrong, but a nation may at times be justified in using force. (Augustine)
 - **Antiwar Pacifism** - Individuals may be justified in some cases in defense of one's rights, use violence but war is never morally justified.
 - **Nonresistance Pacifism** - Believers are to band together and not resist injustice with the effect that injustice cannot succeed. The Norwegians posture toward German occupation during WWII might be an example.
2. Other arguments for Pacifism
 - a. **Sacredness of life** - only God has the right to take a life.
 - b. **Immorality of killing** - all humans have a right to life. Liberal-humanism wants to believe that humanity has or is evolving to a place where rational dialogue must replace physical force. War is viewed as regressive and therefore embarrassing in the evolutionary story of human moral development.
 - c. **Moral exemplar argument** - when we kill we set a bad example as humans.
 - d. **Scaring the soul** - when a person harms another, his or her own soul is damaged. (Gandhi)
 - e. Just peacemaking theory
 - Take direct action but without violence.
 - Take the initiative (unilaterally) to reduce threat.
 - Take a cooperative posture in resolving conflict.
 - Acknowledge any responsibility for conflict and injustice by seeking forgiveness and making reparations.
 - Promote democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
 - Foster economic development that is just and sustainable.
 - Work for cooperative involvement of all international elements that may be affected.
 - Strengthen international organizations (like the UN) in their work to foster cooperation and human rights.
 - Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
 - Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations, especially churches.
 - f. A frequent criticism of pacifism is that it amounts to surrender to aggression, and the evil which results could be much worse than the evil of a war. Another criticism is that pacifism is utopian, and pacifists unfairly reap the benefits of freedom earned by those willing to sacrifice their lives in war. However, pacifists reply that pacifism does not mean being passive; it is active peacemaking

through nonviolent means. They point to the success of nonviolent resistance movements such as the Swedish and Danish resistance to Nazism in World War II, Gandhi's independence movement in India, the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King in the United States, and the Solidarity labor movement in Poland. Many pacifists see nonviolence as the only way to alleviate the vicious cycles of oppression, hatred, war and revenge that have dominated human history.

7. Why was war in the OT sanctioned by God?
 - a. Judgment by God is a part of the overall plan of getting people's attention so that they can repent. Ps.83:16-18
 - b. God viewed Israel's enemies as His enemies. Ps.139:19-22
 - c. War was a means of purifying Israel's environment. Ps.106:34-39
 - d. Repentance was often offered to those on whom war was waged. Ex.23:27-33
 - e. Judgment for sin can come in this life.
 - f. The wrath of God is not always understood or explained.
 - g. The spiritual and eternal life of man is more important than his physical life.
 - h. War in the OT was waged by special revelation, something that cannot be claimed in this age.
 - i. Revelation is progressive. A higher and more sophisticated ethic is revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus.
8. **Matt.5:21** is often rendered, “You shall not kill.” The Greek word translated “kill” in this passage is a form of the verb *phoneuo*. This verb was always used as the equivalent of the Hebrew verb *ra·TSAH* in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. *Ra·TSAH* is the word used in the sixth commandment in both Exodus 20:13 and its parallel, Deuteronomy 5:17. It seems quite certain that in Matthew 5:21 Jesus was quoting the sixth commandment. The words *phoneuo*; and *ra·TSAH* are both ambiguous and can mean either “kill” or “murder,” depending upon the context. However, God himself commanded capital punishment for such crimes as deliberate murder (Exod.21:12–15), rape (Deut.22:25–26), kidnapping (Exod.21:16), adultery (Lev.20:10; Deut.22:22), sorcery (Exod.22:18), and many other crimes. The sixth commandment, therefore, must be a prohibition against murder, not killing as such.
9. There is evidence that suggests that Jesus saw conflict as unavoidable. **Matt.10:34** “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” In this context is addressing the conflict that will result as families are divided over Him.
10. Jesus was not the radical pacifist that some would have us believe. Jesus knew that the sword had a role in a fallen world. Jesus instructed His

disciples to sell their coat to buy a sword, **Lk.22:36** “let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one.” His teaching concerning the non-resistance of evil (Matt.5:39) must be understood in a narrow context of not taking personal revenge. He was not suggesting that violence was not a part of the plan of God in a fallen world. He was not hypocritical in resisting the money changers in the temple (Matt.21:12). Nor was He suggesting that there should be a dismantling of a police force by the state. He was not suggesting that parents should not use force to protect their children from abuse. Personal non-resistance in seeking justice for oneself was not to be extended to the responsibility of the state to keep order in a fallen world, (Rom.13:4 “for it (*government*) is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.”). If force was to be used it must be used only by those who have authority to do so. God alone has that authority but He mediates some of it through human government, etc. **Matt.26:52** “Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.” Jesus recognized that the sword has two edges in that those who take it up without authorization will feel its pain. Jesus recognized that violence is an arena that involves casualties of both sides. While there is a place for physical force it should not be used quickly or from a heart of vengeance, hatred, or narrow self-interest. There are those who have divine authorization to use force in certain spheres of life. Those boundaries of authority need to be respected.

C. Just War Theory - Matt.22:37-40 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
Ecclesiastes 3:1,8 “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven...A time of war, And a time of peace”

1. Assumptions

- a. No aspect of the human condition falls outside the purview of moral reasoning and judgment - including politics.
- b. No aspect of the human condition falls outside the negative effects of Adam’s fall from grace. We live in a fallen world that is corrupted by evil and self-serving defensiveness at every turn.
- c. The fallen world will always be in a condition of “wars or rumors of wars.” We are either fighting or getting ready to. The utopian idea of a world of perfect peace awaits the new heaven and earth. Real lasting peace is not a part of our present age nor will it be.
- d. Armed force can be used for good or evil, depending on who is using it, why, to what ends, and how.
- e. There is a difference between the responsibility of the individual and the state with respect to the use of force.

2. Just war theory starts with a mandate to love one’s neighbor.

- a. It does not start with a presumption of non-violence, which is a question of means.
 - b. Rightly constituted public authority is under a strict moral obligation to defend the security of those for whom it has assumed responsibility, even if this puts the magistrate's own life in jeopardy.
 - c. **Psalm 82:3-4** “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.”
3. **Peace is the “tranquility of order.”**
 - a. Just war theory sees armed force as an extension of establishing and maintaining an orderly and just society. It is not justified outside the broader mandate to establish and maintain civil order as an expression of love for one's fellow man.
 - b. Protecting America's international interests is justified when they are defined as:
 - Preserving internal order and peace both in the present and for the future.
 - Promoting justice and peace abroad through the furthering of human rights and civil liberties for all people. The American ideal is worth protecting.
 4. **There must be a distinction between “the individual as a part of God's covenant community” and “a secular state”.**
 - a. The principles of moral conduct that apply to the individual within the Covenant community and to those that apply to a pluralistic state may differ at points. Example: It is forbidden to teach a false gospel within the Covenant community while it is permitted in a pluralistic state.
 - b. While pacifism may be appropriate for the individual Christian in their dealings with other individuals, it may not apply to the state's responsibilities.
 - c. The state may have need and authority to exercise force in ways that the Covenant community (in its relationship to Christ) may not.
 5. **Basic tenants of Just War theory** (Arthur F. Holmes “The Just War,” in *War: Four Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse, IV press)
 - a. **Just cause** - All aggression is condemned; only defensive war is legitimate.
 - b. **Just intention** - The only legitimate intention is to secure a just peace for all involved. Neither revenge nor conquest nor economic gain nor ideological supremacy are justified.
 - 1) **Defense against aggression.** (In recent times, this has been seen as the only just cause.) It is argued that “rogue states” (states that openly disrespect the global community of humanity and constitute a material threat to that global community by their declared

intentions and actions) that possess weapons of mass destruction constitute aggression waiting to happen.

2) **Recovery of something wrongfully taken.**

3) **Punishment of evil.**

- In 1971, civil war broke out in **Pakistan**, which was then made up of two ethnically and geographically separate areas. A million people died and ten million fled into India. Faced with an overwhelming refugee crisis, India invaded East Pakistan, which became independent as Bangladesh.
- Madman **Idi Amin** brutalized **Uganda** for eight years, killing perhaps 300,000 people, before Tanzanian troops and Ugandan rebels invaded and expelled him in 1979. It should have happened much sooner.
- The **Khmer Rouge** regime of Cambodia killed at least a million people before being driven from power by a Vietnamese invasion in 1979. Most of the American pacifists who opposed the Vietnam War so loudly remained strangely silent while the Khmer Rouge atrocities were being committed (Joan Baez being the one honorable exception). But the U.S. government, still smarting from its loss in Vietnam, shamefully condemned the Vietnamese.
- While Idi Amin was grabbing headlines in Africa, **Jean-Bedel Bokassa** held power in the Central African Republic, which he renamed the Central African Empire. He killed perhaps 100,000 people. In 1979, France engineered a coup that overthrew Bokassa.

- c. **Formal declaration** – After WWII this was no longer a part of International convention. At the present time, a nation need not declare war to initiate hostilities.
- d. **Limited objectives** - If the purpose is peace, then unconditional surrender or the destruction of a nation's economic or political institutions is an unwarranted objective.
- e. **Proportionate means** - The weaponry and the force used should be limited to what is needed to repel the aggression and deter future attacks, that is to say, to secure a just peace. Total or unlimited war is ruled out.
- f. **Noncombatant immunity** - Since war is an official act of government, only those who are officially agents of government may fight, and individuals not actively contributing to the conflict (including POW's and casualties as well as civilian nonparticipants) should be immune from attack.

- g. **Last resort** - Because of the severe nature of war we should exhaust every reasonable means to avoid it.
 - 1) While we can never be certain that every possible alternative has been exhausted, we must go great lengths within what common sense at the time would dictate.
 - 2) The principle of loving discipline within the covenant community laid down in Matt.18:15-20 is a helpful guide. Drastic measures are used only when other appeals have been exhausted.
- 6. **Competent Authority must make the call.**
 - a. The Scripture sanctions certain systems and gives them authority to act on behalf of those over whom they bear responsibility. Rom.13:1-7, I Pet.2:13
 - b. The State's legitimate, but limited role.
 - 1) Promoting **justice and peace**
 - a) St Augustine (4th cent.) in "The City of God" taught that shalom (peace) is "the tranquillity produced by order" (tranquillitas ordinis).
 - b) The primary role of the state is not to chase down criminals after the fact but to nurture the tranquillitas ordinis, using its unique powers of coercion to that end.
 - 2) Protecting **freedom and opportunity** (majority rule, minority rights)
 - 3) Providing **security and order**
 - c. "In the mystery of God's providence, many or indeed most of the institutional bearers of governmental authority are unworthy of it, often flagrantly so, themselves stained with crime. But this does not make it any less the vocation of government to protect the innocent and punish evildoers. A government which refused to safeguard citizens and exercise judgment on wrong out of a sense of the guilt of past crime would only add and further the crime of dereliction of duty to its catalog of offenses." David Yeago, *Pro Ecclesia Journal*
- 7. **Chivalry** (this is not a part of Just War Theory but it has a place in a Christian understanding of Just War.)
 - a. C.S. Lewis spoke of chivalry as the Christian alternative to pacifism.
 - b. Chivalry is, properly speaking, the character that enables human beings to be "fierce to the *n*th degree and meek to the *n*th degree." This is the Spirit of God in Christ and in His church.
 - c. This unnatural combination of attributes is the work of the Spirit of Christ in a human life.

- d. If we cannot produce chivalrous persons, then we end up with people who are useful in battle but useless in peace, or who are useful in peace but useless in battle.
- e. Just War must be fought by noble soldiers who understand and own chivalry.
- f. Lewis argues for war-as-tournament. This implies that soldiers bring a certain joy to their soldiering and a healthy respect for the humanity of the enemy. These characteristics are foreign to liberal-humanist thought which may see war as a sad, necessary, evil that is to be fought against a demonized enemy.

D. Jas.4:1-2 “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.” **The cause of war.**

1. Some have argued that religion in general and Christianity in particular is a principle cause of war. The logic flows as follows: Religion = dogma = intolerance = conflict.
2. While it is true that many wars and violent conflicts have been waged in the name of religion, this does not prove that religion was the causative influence.
 - a. Wars are most often motivated by many and complex forces.
 - b. It should not be surprising that religion would be used to bolster the “just cause” of passionate combatants.
3. “Wars and rumors of wars” are always with us as an expression of human lust. Christian faith (rightly understood) not only stands against violent conflict but offers a solution in the gospel. This does not mean however that violent conflict can always be avoided or that it is not a part of a necessary response to loving my brother and enemy.
4. Certainty in matters of Christian faith does not necessarily lead to conflict unless that certainty is mixed with insecurity, self-centeredness, and intolerance. “There are few things worse than bad religion (religion wrongly used) and few thing better than good religion (rightly applied).”
5. For the pacifist to be consistent with his or her own position (the total renunciation of lethal force as immoral), all use of force *within* states must be condemned along with force *between* states. Police forces, judges, and politicians are all involved, directly or indirectly, in the maintenance of public safety. All states preserve order and stability by means of coercion and, if necessary, lethal force (the shooting of madmen holding hostages, riot control, prison sentences, etc.). Many pacifists do not wish to deny these societal institutions. Of course, total pacifism has even more dreadful results, especially the closer it hits home, for it would require

standing by and doing nothing while a close relative, spouse, good friend, or child (God forbid) was being tortured and killed. This is why pacifism in the Church has always been a minority view.