Matthew
Holding Grudges, Getting Even (Part 3)
Matthew 5:38-42
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Today, we come to a part of this passage where Jesus deals with lawsuits. Lawsuits are a constant reality in our world. In fact, fifteen-million civil lawsuits are filed every year in the United States, fifteen-million! Of course, some of those are completely outrageous. I'm sure you've heard of some of them. For several years, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce actually had a website that documented some of the most bizarre lawsuits that were filed each year. Here are some of my favorites. There was a man who was running from police, and he kidnapped a couple at knife point. After he was captured, he sued his victims, claiming that during the whole ordeal, they promised to hide him in exchange for money. And so he sued for $235,000, claiming breach of contract. True story!

Then there are the two young adults, ages 20 and 23, who sued their mother. They claimed in the lawsuit that their mother, "Sometimes didn't include gifts and cards sent to her children! (That's a travesty!) Played favorites with her children and did not send care packages until the son's sixth semester away at college. She changed her surname, thus causing attention at her daughter's school events. (And here's the big one.), she refused to buy her daughter a homecoming dress."

But this is my personal favorite. There was a New York mom who sued a private preschool, don't miss that, it was a preschool, saying that their weak curriculum had damaged her four-year-old's chances of getting into an Ivy League university. I'm sure that's what did it. You know, we laugh at those examples, and we should laugh at them, they are ludicrous. But when someone is trying to take advantage of us, of our property, of our business, then it's no laughing

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matter. In fact, the typical human response in that situation is (What?) anger and revenge. But Jesus tells us in the passage we come to today that that is not how He wants us, as His disciples, to respond. Let's read it together, Matthew 5, verses 38 to 42.

> "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 an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Now, as I pointed out to you, the overarching theme of those verses is this, "In His spiritual kingdom, Jesus forbids His disciples from holding grudges or seeking revenge." This paragraph really consists of two instructions. The first instruction that we've already considered together is we are called to "Reject the Popular Misunderstanding of an 'Eye for an Eye.'" We started by looking at "What the Old Testament Really Taught" in that expression, "an eye for eye, and a tooth for tooth." That Old Testament Law is called the *lex talionis*, and its point is that the judicial punishment must fit the crime. In fact, God never intended that command, "an eye for an eye," to be carried out by individuals; it was to be used instead as the sentencing standard for judges. The punishment was called to fit the crime. That's what the Old Testament really taught.

We also considered "What the Scribes and Pharisees Wrongly Taught," because they taught instead that *lex talionis* allowed, even encouraged, personal retaliation. They turned it into a biblical warrant for grudges and revenge. And so, Jesus here sets His Disciples' thinking, and ours, straight.

And that brings us to the second instruction in this paragraph that we have begun to study together, and that is that is we must “Follow Jesus' Revolutionary Teaching About Personal Revenge,” we must follow Jesus' revolutionary teaching about personal revenge. That's what this paragraph is about. Now, our Lord began with “The General Principle,” the first half of verse 39, “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person.” When we are personally wronged, we are not to resist. The word means ‘to become hostile’ toward the one who sinned against us. We are not to respond when we are harmed by harming them as an act of revenge. That's the general principle.

Jesus then follows with “Four Very Specific Examples.” Last time, we studied just the first example, and that is, how we should respond as His followers when there is “An intentional attack on our dignity.” Notice verse 39, “but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” I told the elders, “I feel like I spend as much time in this paragraph explaining what it doesn't teach as I do explaining what it does teach because it has been so badly used and misused.”

So, when we looked at this verse, verse 39, I started with “What It Does Not Teach.” I'm not going to re-preach that sermon, but let me just give you the big points. It does not teach “Complete non-resistance or non-violence.” In other words, it doesn't teach that “physical violence is always wrong in every circumstance.” Nor does it teach “Passivism–that a Christian must never engage in war.” Instead, the Scripture explicitly teaches, as we saw last time, that Christians can be soldiers; they can engage in a ‘just war;’ they can engage in self-defense; and we must always respect and submit to government's authorized use of force against criminals. That's not what this is teaching.

So, “What Does This Passage Teach?” It is how to respond to insults. As we discovered in studying this, in Jesus' day, to backhand someone on the right cheek was a gross insult. It was an “Intentional attack on their dignity.” How does Jesus want us to respond to such insults? In our day, I gave you a list of different ways that we insult one another, others insult us. How do we respond to horrific insults? Verse 39, ‘turn the other cheek to him also.’ Again, He's not saying you can't defend yourself; He's saying, “Don't return insult for insult; don't hold grudges; don't seek revenge when somebody attacks your dignity. If they call you some name, don't respond with a name calling. If they insult you with a religious or racial slur, don't respond in kind.”

Now today we come to Jesus' second example. And here He explains to us how we are to respond to “An intentional attack on our property,” an intentional attack on our property. Notice verse 40, “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.” Now again, let me remind you that we have to interpret this in its immediate context. This is a paragraph about personal revenge, and we have to interpret it in the context of the rest of Scripture.

So again, let me start with making sure we understand “What This Does Not Teach.” Jesus is not teaching here that “Christians may not seek justice, including even in court.” That's not what He's teaching. How do we know that that's not what He's teaching? Because of the rest of what Scripture teaches. When you look elsewhere, you discover that “God Himself uses the language of a lawsuit” to express His complaint with Israel. Again and again, God says, “I have a case against you; I have a lawsuit against you.” For example, Hosea 4:1-2; Micah 6:1-2.

Secondly, we know that's not what it's teaching because “God Himself established the judicial system in Israel” so that individuals could pursue justice. You read Deuteronomy 17:8-11; Deuteronomy 19:16-18, and you'll see that courts were God's idea–they are not a human invention; God established courts so that justice could be done.

Thirdly, “God frequently condemned Israel for the failure of its courts to exercise justice.” Lamentations 3:34-36 is an example where He says, “You have abandoned justice in the courts,” (Summary paraphrase).

And then finally, I would argue that Jesus is not teaching here that we can't seek justice because “God allows New Testament believers to pursue legal justice” in the court system. I've cited three examples here, Luke 12:11; Acts 22:1; Acts 24:10. In each of those, you will find believers defending themselves in a legal setting so that they could be treated justly. Now, as soon as I outline those passages, the passage that I think probably raises a question for many here is 1 Corinthians 6. Maybe you're tempted to say, “Wait a minute, Tom, doesn't Paul forbid Christians from using secular courts in 1 Corinthians 6?” Well, let's look at it.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians, chapter 6. Let me read the paragraph, and then I'll make a couple of comments. 1 Corinthians 6, you follow along.

> Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to *constitute* the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there

> is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, *you do* this even to *your* brethren.

Now, there are a couple of things that are clear here that will correct our misunderstandings. First of all, I want you to notice that this passage is not about criminal offenses, but civil disputes over things like money and finances and property, contracts, etc. How do I know that? Notice verse 7, “Why not rather be defrauded?” That's a word that speaks of having something like money, property, finances taken away. So that's the first thing. This is about civil disputes.

Secondly, notice that this passage does not say that when another Christian wrongs you, you just need to suck it up and suffer wrong. That's not what Paul says here. No, instead, he demands that when there are disputes between Christians, the elders are to act as judges, not secular courts. You see, Paul's admonition here assumes two disputing brothers, believers, either in the same church or perhaps in sister churches, both willing to deal with the problem. Paul's point here is that if you have a dispute with another Christian, make sure that you don't take it to secular courts and have it heard before them, but instead, to seek justice, come and present it to the leaders of the church, to the elders. But if that's impossible, Paul ends this paragraph by saying it's better to suffer wrong and to lose the money than to sue another Christian in civil court before unbelievers. So Paul does not forbid a believer from using the courts when someone outside the church has wronged him.

In fact, let me just hit the pause button here for a moment and make sure we understand the answer to this question. “What are the legitimate, biblical, legal actions that a Christian can take?” This isn't exhaustive, but it's some of the key issues. Number one, “A Christian who commits a crime ordinarily needs to be reported to the police,” preferably by the one who committed it. If they're a Christian, hopefully they are repentant and want to deal with it justly. But if that person refuses, then by the one who has knowledge of the crime. You say, “Why does that need to happen?” Because Romans 13 says the government exists to punish evildoers, and sadly, sometimes that is Christians. So, repentance in a church setting doesn't mean there are no legal consequences. That's Catholic theology, that's not what the Bible teaches.

Secondly, “Christians who can't settle a dispute on their own between themselves are called to take it to the elders to adjudicate.” By the way, let me just say that if the elders do that, and there's one of those people that's in the wrong and church discipline plays out, that person is no longer to be treated as a fellow Christian. And that means if he still refuses to repent, then he may be taken to court because now he's an unbeliever who has refused to settle things through the elders of the church.

Thirdly, “A Christian harmed or injured by a company or an unbeliever is biblically permitted to pursue a just settlement or rightful damages through the legal system.” This is the principle of Old Testament Law. If you failed, for example, you had a flat roof, a lot of events were taken up on roofs, you'd go and sit there in the cool of the day. If you didn't put up proper protection around that roof and someone fell off, if you didn't take legitimate actions to protect others, then they could sue you for the damages, either work missed or other things. That's perfectly legitimate for a Christian to do. But if this happens, it should never be with a vindictive spirit or a desire for revenge or simply a desire to get-rich-quick. In other words, you can't take

advantage of others even if it's their insurance company. You need to act in justice. If you were the one being sued, what would be a just settlement, never with revenge. John Calvin is right when he says, “This must be a set principle for all Christians, that a lawsuit, however just, can never be rightly prosecuted by any man unless he treat his adversary with love and goodwill.” In other words, you have to be just as concerned for justice for the other person as you are for yourself.

And then number four, “A Christian who is sued by someone else, including even a Christian, if they simply refuse to have it heard before the elders, and you are sued, then a Christian who is sued is biblically permitted to defend himself,” including hiring an attorney as is necessary in our system. All of those are true. John MacArthur writes:

> Sometimes, in our society, quarrels between Christians over rights and property cannot help coming before the secular court. When for instance, a Christian is being divorced by his or her spouse, the law requires a secular court to be involved. Or in the case of child abuse or neglect, a Christian parent may be forced to seek court protection from the former spouse. But even in those kinds of exceptions, when for some reason a Christian finds himself unavoidably in court with a fellow believer, his purpose should be to glorify God and never to gain selfish advantage.

Under normal circumstances, 1 Corinthians 6 says a Christian should not pursue a civil lawsuit against another Christian, but Jesus doesn't mean we can't seek justice. We do it with the elders if it's in a church, and we do it with the courts if that is required.

Now, with that understanding, let's go back to Matthew 5. That's what it doesn't teach, but let's consider “What It Does Teach.” And if I had to summarize what Jesus is saying, I would say

this, “It is better to give up your property than to give in to bitterness and revenge.” Let me say that again, “It is better to give up your property than to give in to bitterness and revenge.” Let's look at verse 40, “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt,” stop there for a moment. Let's understand the situation. Here's a lawsuit brought against you by an evil person. How do I know that? Look back in verse 39, “Do not resist an evil person.” So this is how to respond when an evil person or a person with evil intent sinfully attacks your property. In this case, the suit is about a shirt. The Greek word for shirt refers to the undergarment that both Jewish men and women wore in the first century, their tunic. It was a loose-fitting robe that pulled over the head and went down to about the knees. It was under both the men and women's robes of the first century. It was their undergarment. Now the fact that this lawsuit is to take someone's undergarment may imply that this person is, in fact, very poor. Literally, all he has left is the shirt on his back. It's possible that Jesus is even referring to the scenario in James 4 where a wealthy landowner is taking advantage of a poor worker. Regardless, though, the situation is that someone with evil intent has sued you to take away your personal property. This is essentially theft by legal process.

How do you and I, in our own human nature, instinctively respond to such attacks? Well, if you're honest, you respond with anger, with bitterness, resentment, hatred, and even sometimes a determination to seek revenge. Jesus says, “Not if you are my disciple.” In fact, He says, “Here's how I expect My disciple to respond when there is an unjust attack on their property.” Look at verse 40 again, “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt (your undergarment), let him have your coat also.” Now the coat is the cloak; it's the outer garment worn over the shirt, and it was typically the more expensive of the two garments. An outer garment, in the first century, typically took costs about two weeks average wages for the average first century

worker. So, if the coat were more valuable, why not sue for it? Because the Old Testament explicitly forbids taking a person's outer garment for more than a day. Exodus 22:26, “If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets.” Why? Deuteronomy 24:13, “When the sun goes down you shall surely return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it will be righteousness for you before the LORD (YAHWEH) your God.” In other words, this is a necessity of life; you can't sue someone to take the necessities of life.

Jesus, by the way, is making a very strong point here. Think about it; now that you understand the cloak and the tunic, Jesus says even though you can't be sued to take your outer garment, your coat, I want you to be willing to give it up. Now again, don't misunderstand Jesus. Jesus was not commanding us, as His disciples, to give away every piece of clothing and walk around naked or in a loincloth. No! Here's Jesus' point in this paragraph–don't forget context, “If someone sues you with evil intent, don't use the *lex talionis* as an excuse to hold a grudge or to seek revenge like you've been taught to do by the scribes and Pharisees–don't do that!” Hendrickson writes, “We have no right to hate the person who tries to deprive us of our possessions. Love, even toward him, should fill our hearts.” Here's what Jesus is saying, “If there are only two alternatives (Don't miss this.), if there are only two alternatives, one of those alternatives is taking revenge, the other is giving up even more than you were unjustly sued for, then give up more of your property if those are the only alternatives.” In other words, you should be genuinely interested in the good of the other person, even the evil person, even if it means personal sacrifice for you.

Now, as we sit here in 21st century Texas, I don't think any of us have ever been sued for our underclothes. I don't think anybody wants those, alright? They don't even want them at the, you

know, places where you take used clothing. So, what exactly are the contemporary attacks on our personal property that are common today? Let me just give you some examples: A frivolous lawsuit filed against us or our business; a spouse who tries to take unfair advantage in a divorce; a relative exploits a family member's finances or resources; a neighbor instigates an over-the-fence ongoing battle; an unscrupulous business or contractor tries to take unfair advantage of us as a customer; an employer defrauds us of what we are rightfully due and what they agreed to give us. Now, again, if there's criminal wrongdoing, Jesus isn't saying you can't turn them into the authorities. It's okay to seek justice. God is a God of justice. It's okay to seek justice. If it's a believer, take them to the elders. If it's an unbeliever, take them to the courts. He's not forbidding that. What He's saying is that even when someone wrongly attacks your resources, don't hold a grudge; don't seek revenge in response to that financial injustice. Don't say, "'An eye for an eye,' I'm going to get them for what they've done to me." That's Jesus' second example.

Now Jesus' third example concerns "A governmental attack on our liberty," a governmental attack on our liberty. Look at verse 41, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two." Again, because this has been so misunderstood, so misused, let me tell you "What This Passage Does Not Teach." First of all, it is not "Condoning oppression by evil rulers or evil government officials"–that is not okay. In fact, the Old Testament prophets constantly condemn such oppression, and they even promised God's ultimate judgment on it. One great example is Jeremiah 22, verse 17, where the prophet says to the evil king Jehoiakim, "But your eyes and your heart are *intent* only upon your own dishonest gain, and on shedding innocent blood and on practicing oppression and extortion." Oh wow, there's a leader you want! So how does God respond to that kind of oppressive leadership? "Therefore (God says, therefore.) thus says the

LORD (YAHWEH) in regard to Jehoiakim," He's going to die. "And they will not lament for him...He will be buried with a donkey's burial, dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem." That's God's response to an oppressive ruler. And if it doesn't happen in this world as it did with Jehoiakim, it'll happen at the judgment. So this passage is not condoning oppression by evil rulers or government officials.

Secondly, it's not "Forbidding us as believers from using all legal means to change either unjust oppressive laws or treatment." We can use every legal means at our disposal to address these oppressive laws or oppressive treatment. How do I know that? Because Jesus and Paul did it. Jesus called for the law to be followed in his Jewish trial in John 18, verse 22, "When He (Jesus) said this (a particular thing), one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus saying, 'Is that the way You answer the high priest?'" Listen to Jesus' response. "Jesus (He) answered him, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike me?'" What is Jesus doing? Well, under Jewish law, it was forbidden to strike someone who was under trial, someone who was in court. So Jesus is saying, "Follow the law. You have no right to strike me!"

When Paul was wrongly arrested and punished in Philippi, he demanded his legal rights. This is one of my favorites, Acts 16:37:

> But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and they have thrown us into prison (In other words, he's saying, "Listen, they've done it all wrong; this is illegal; this is unjust."); and now, they are sending us away secretly, (They want us just to kind of go away so this doesn't make a mess.). No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out."

You know what Paul was saying. He was saying, “No, they have to make this right. They were wrong. They did it unjustly. They've got to own that. They've got to admit that, and it's got to be a public sort of apology.”

When he was unlawfully threatened with punishment, Paul called for the law to be followed. In Jerusalem, in Acts 22, verse 25, the Roman soldiers were about to beat him. It says, “But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing nearby, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?’” He's saying, “Follow the law. This isn't right. This is unjust.”

Paul also used the judicial system to pursue justice by taking the ultimate step in the 1st century by appealing to Caesar. When he realized he was being railroaded by the local authorities there in Palestine, Acts 25:11, “If then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is *true* of which these men accused me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” So Jesus, in the passage we're studying, is not forbidding us as Christians from speaking out against or from using legitimate legal means to change unjust or oppressive laws or treatment.

Thirdly, it's not “Forbidding us from fleeing unlawful arrest or unjust punishment.” Sometimes that happens. Rogue government officials aren't following the law. It's not forbidding us from fleeing unlawful arrest or unjust punishment. Jesus told the disciples to do this in Matthew 10. And in John 11, Jesus Himself did it. Paul does it in Acts 9. So that's not what He's saying.

Fourthly, it's not “Requiring us to obey laws that are contrary to Scripture.” No, the Scripture is very clear on this. Acts 5:29, “We must obey God rather than men.” If the law of man conflicts with the law of God, it's not even a hard choice–follow the law of God!

And number five, it's not “Revoking the duty of subordinate government officials to respond to government abuses, even by their superiors.” Now, I know there's a lot in that sentence. I just need to throw that in there because if there are government abuses, as individuals, we don't have the right to respond with violence as individuals. However, I believe that the Scriptures do clearly teach that those who are in government positions, when they see the law they swore to uphold being abused, they have a responsibility to address it–even to the ultimate degree, just like in self-defense, “I have a right to take another life to defend myself.” If necessary for the life of the country, they may have a responsibility to enter into armed revolt. Let's say our president were to decide to become a dictator contrary to the Constitution. Those in government authority would have a responsibility to address that at whatever level it's required. So I'm not saying that, the Scriptures do. If you have any question about that issue, by the way, go listen to my first message on Romans 13, where I deal with subordinate government officials. If you're a government official, you have a duty to respond when the law is broken, even if it's by your superior. So that's what's not taught.

So, “What Does This Passage Teach?” Well, Jesus' statement here is about our heart response to government's attack on our liberty. Look again at the verse. The Greek word for ‘force’ literally means ‘to press into service.’ The word for ‘mile’ refers to the ‘Roman mile;’ that's about nine-tenths of our mile. Now this word and this idea ‘to press into service’ and the idea here actually came from the Persians. The Persian royal post gave its couriers authority to conscript anyone or any animal into service so that nothing delayed the delivery of the king's decrees. Well, the Romans liked that, as you might expect, they adopted it, and they broadened it so that in Roman law, every soldier could order anyone to stop what they were doing at any moment and carry their pack or their luggage. And if a soldier conscripted you, you had no recourse.

What's the most famous example of this? It's during the crucifixion of our Lord. In chapter 27, verse 32, “As they (the soldiers) were coming out (of the city of Jerusalem), they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they (Here's our word.) pressed into service (They forced.) to bear His cross.” So, this happened often, and this practice infuriated the Jews, constantly reminding them that they were enslaved under a pagan nation and empire. And what was their response, the Jewish response, to such attacks on their liberty? Well, as you might expect, they were angered by it, they resented it, they hated those who required it, and if they were forced to carry the load, they would drop it at the first available moment, first possible moment, and even while they're carrying it, and you can imagine how this happened, they were looking for ways, even in carrying it, to take subtle small acts of revenge. You know, maybe you poked a hole in the sack, or maybe you dropped it a dozen times in that mile to see if you could break the things that were in it. You look for ways to rebel against what you were being forced to do.

But how were believers to respond to these Roman infringements on their personal liberty? Verse 41, “Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with them two.” Jesus says, “When a Roman soldier demands that you carry his pack for a mile, voluntarily agree to take it twice as far.”

Now, what Jesus teaches here was not only at odds with the first century Jewish zealots, it was also at odds with the average 1st century Jewish patriot. And frankly, brothers and sisters, this is just as radical in 21st century America or 21st century Texas. When government or government officials attack our personal liberty, we must not respond with resentment and anger by holding grudges or getting even. Again, don't forget, we can use all legal means to address it; so it's not like we just have to deal with it. But in terms of our heart and our spirit, we cannot harbor resentment and anger, we can't hold grudges, we can't get even. And we're not just told to do what we're told, but with anger and resentment, we have to obey the law wholeheartedly, being

willing even to go beyond what's demanded of us, even seeking the good of the one who carries out the unjust law.

Now, again, none of us are being commanded or conscripted to carry a soldier's pack in our day. So, what exactly is the application of this to our world? What does Jesus forbid in this example? First of all, He forbids “Passive resistance or civil disobedience toward unjust laws and rulers.” Scripture allows civil disobedience or passive resistance only if government demands that we disobey Scripture, not because it's a law we don't like. Number two, and I'm about to kill a sacred cow here, but Jesus is forbidding “Armed revolution.” During the American Revolution, many argued that we were only required to submit to good government in which we have a voice. That is what the Declaration of Independence states, but that's not what the Bible states. Paul wrote to Roman Christians who were under Nero and under oppressive Roman laws, and he tells them to obey the law. Now, again, don't misunderstand me, if the law of the land is broken, then what the Puritans call lesser magistrates, government officials in other roles have a responsibility to respond to that, but I don't as an individual. I don't have that right. Sadly, today, as we think even about the next election, many defend armed rebellion if the wrong person wins an election. Their approach to government or to its laws is that they don't like, or they don't agree with is, “Listen, I'll stop fighting them when they pry the gun from my cold, dead hand.” That is contrary to what our Lord teaches here; it's contrary to Romans 13. By the way, if you're struggling with this, go listen to the series I did on Romans 13. Paul could not be clearer. Our Lord could not be clearer through the Apostle Paul. Remember, Paul wrote Romans 13 to those under oppressive Roman laws and Nero's despotic rule.

But I think the main thing this passage is addressing is number three, and that is here He is forbidding “Resentment against specific laws or hatred toward individual government officials

who carry it out." You know, we can use the legal processes that our laws allow. We can peacefully protest. We can get involved in the political system. We can vote. We can even try to change unjust laws in the legislature. But what we can never do, beloved, is harbor bitterness about those laws or anger toward those who pass them. We must obey the law for the Lord's sake, as long as it's not contradicting clearly chapter and verse, the Scripture. And we must respect and honor every government official. Lloyd-Jones writes:

> Our Lord says that not only must we not resent these things, we must do them willingly, and we must even be prepared to go beyond what is demanded of us. Any resentment that we may feel against the legitimate, authoritative government of our land is something which our Lord condemns.

So, let me ask you sitting here this morning, "Are there laws that you harbor deep-seated resentment against in our country? Are there officials that you harbor deep-seated anger and resentment against?" Maybe they're the ones you didn't vote for. Listen, that's not okay. That's not Christian. That's what our Lord is teaching us here. Jesus' primary lesson is that when evil people or people with evil intentions attack us, how do we respond? We do them good; we carry the pack a mile further than they ask.

But He also requires two other duties toward those behaving as our enemies. Look down in verse 44, the next paragraph, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Now, why is this so important? Why is it so important that you not harbor grudges against people or government or officials or laws? Why is this important? Why does it matter? I want you to turn with me, just for a second, to John 8. I was going through this in my own personal study this week, and it just jumped out at me. John 8, notice verse 31, "Jesus was saying to those Jews

who had believed in Him (That is, who made a public profession of faith in Him; not all of them were believers, but they all had publicly professed Him. He said.), 'If you continue in My Word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" In other words, Jesus says, "Obedience to my commands is evidence of being My disciple." That's what disciples do; they hear what their Lord teaches, and they do it. So it's important that you do what we've just been studying together, because Jesus demands it of His disciples. And if you refuse to do it, you may very well be evidencing that you're not His disciple at all.

But look down at verse 34. You remember, Jesus says in verse 32, "the truth will make you free." They say, "Hey, we've never been enslaved." And then Jesus makes this statement in verse 34:

> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone (No exceptions!) who commits (is committing as a habit of life) sin is the slave of sin. The slave doesn't remain in the house forever, the son remains forever; (Verse 36) so if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

Listen, if you're here this morning, and you have never repented of your sins, you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, then Jesus says, "You are a slave, you are a slave to your sin." Maybe it's the sins we've been looking at in Matthew 5. Maybe you're just given, eaten up with bitterness and resentment toward so many people in your life who have hurt you, have done you wrong, and you want to get even with them. You're a slave. Maybe your struggle is rebelling against the authorities that God has put in your life, whether it's government or parents or whatever other authority. And you live your life seething with the

desire to be your own lord and not have anybody over you. Maybe it's some other sin. Maybe it's lust. Maybe it's pride. Maybe it's anger. Listen, only Jesus can set you free from both the guilt of sin before God, so that you're forgiven, and from the enslaving power of sin. Only He can do that. And until you believe that you are just going to be a slave, a slave to your sin. And if you doubt you are a slave to your sin, try stopping. Only He can free you from that slavery. And it's my prayer that this morning you will respond in faith and repentance, asking Him to set you free, free from the guilt of your sin through His death and free from the power of sin by giving you His Spirit to live within you.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our time together this morning. Lord, use Your truth in all of our hearts. For us who are followers of Christ, Lord, help us to be true disciples by continuing in His Word, by obeying it.

And Father, for those who've never bowed the knee to Jesus, help them to see that they are already, they've already bowed the knee; they've bowed the knee to Satan and sin because they're slaves. And I pray that today they would cry out to the Son who can make them free. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.