

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'¹ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evildoer (Orthodox Jewish Bible – "Do not stand against), (NIRV – Do not fight against). If someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you to take away your shirt, give him your coat too. 41 Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor¹ and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 Indeed if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even tax collectors do that, don't they? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the unbelievers do that? 48 So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
(Matthew 5:38-48 EHV)

Resurrection Completion

Spoiler alert! Walking Dead fans, if you haven't seen the season finale yet, plug your ears. Rick Grimes, our defacto hero for 7 seasons wants to be the good guy, but he has been faced with increasing challenges to that goodness. At the end of last season Neegan brutally killed two of Rick's friends in retaliation for something Rick had done. (Advance slide) Rick has been hell bent on revenge to end Neegan. When he finally had the opportunity, and we were all thinking, finally, it's over, (Advance slide) he said "my mercy has overcome my wrath." His mercy for the enemy

was not met with cheers by his side, nor by the entire audience. He had vowed to end Neegan, and he withheld his hand and showed mercy. Arrrrgh! How can you do that to us? We want blood! Eye for eye! Tooth for tooth! And a nagging thought, "you'll be sorry."

Because we know mercy doesn't work. We know that people don't change. We know that the only way to stop a bad person with a gun is a good person with a gun. Force must be met with force, violence with violence. Either that or you had better start running. Fight or flight, it's the only way.

It certainly seems to me that today the preferred choice between those two is to fight. The number of people getting concealed carry permits continues to increase at record pace. There are people seriously considering to permit or who have permitted teachers to have guns in the classroom. I've heard reports of pastors carrying guns in the pulpit. I have a friend, a fellow Christian, who owns a handgun. He has stated to me that if someone broke into his house, he would "empty the clip into him." (He has admitted to driving through the city with the gun on the dashboard. He commented on a Facebook meme of a black person reaching through a window to open a door, "TERMINATE, CENTRAL MASS".) And I find myself wondering, which God are you following?

Today, having recently celebrated the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, we live in the "it is finished" times. Jesus died, Jesus rose. Jesus completed his mission of redemption. Heaven is ours. Jesus has broken the grip of fear on us through his love. It is finished! But Jesus is not satisfied with that. He wants us to be finished as well. (Advance slide) He wants us to **Be Complete Resurrection People of God**, not only loving those who love us

back, but even loving our enemies. We will learn how Jesus teaches us to **(Advance slide) Resist** becoming like our enemies and how to **Assist** our enemies to experience the love of Jesus.

(Advance slide) Our text ends with the verse, ***"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*** We often use this verse to set up the hook for our evangelism efforts. But I do not see this as a demand placed upon us as a condition of getting into heaven, but as a desire on God's part that we be completely transformed, that we become completed, finished, human beings.

The first step in this process is to recognize that there is another way to deal with our fears and insecurities other than fight or flight. Jesus presents his way, a third way, the way of love and nonviolence.

He begins by overturning the status quo. **(Advance slide) "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evildoer (Orthodox Jewish Bible – "Do not stand against), (NIRV – Do not fight against).** One of the first objections to Jesus' way is "I'll just be a victim now. People will just take advantage of me. That doesn't work in the real world." While the objections might prove true, the fact is that Jesus' way changes things. Remember, it takes two to have a fight. By not responding in kind, by not rising to the bait, the cycle of violence ends. There is no escalation, no continuing threat, no endless cycle of revenge. That's the whole idea behind forgiveness. Through forgiveness I choose to break the cycle of violence.

So no fighting, that only leaves flight right? Jesus is quick to point out that even though he has taken fight off the table, we are not helpless in the face of the evil doer. Since we won't play the evil

doer's game of violence, the evil one turns to oppression and shame. Evil will work to grind us down through a process of humiliation and dehumanization. But Jesus has an answer for that in his illustrations of turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile, and giving up the coat as well as your shirt. In each of these, we have someone in power, whether as master, military oppressor, or rich, who is trying to emphasize their power over another, and in each case Jesus invites the oppressed to take a stand. In each of these cases, through non-violent means, the superior one has been rendered impotent to instill shame in a subordinate. He has been stripped of his power to dehumanized the other. (Advance slide) Jesus is teaching us to Resist cooperating with anything humiliating. Resist shame, and resist shaming others.

Jesus now directs us from reaction to action, from a "resist" posture to an "assist" posture. (Advance slide) ***But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.***

(Advance slide) Jesus wants us to assist our enemies to experience the love of God. Love is an action word. How will you actively love your enemies? How do you love those who want to hurt you or shame you? (Advance slide) One place to look for advice would be to the fruit of the spirit. ***Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.*** If our actions and attitudes follow in line with the fruit of the spirit, we will be the hope of this world.

As we pursue the fruit of the Spirit, we become a light that attracts people to our peace and joy. In that way we become peacemakers. We make a difference in the world like ripples in a pond as we determine to live as peacemakers, as we live in patience and kindness. Every interaction, every contact with

another person is an opportunity for them to be touched by the love of God. Until and unless Christ is experienced as a living relationship between people, the Gospel remains largely an abstraction. What joy can be ours as we realize that our little acts of kindness, that our gentleness and kindness will bring the Gospel to light and will change lives.

Advance slide

Be Complete Resurrection Christians resist the enemy by not participating in the culture of shame and humiliation and violence, and assist those who would be our enemies to experience the love and compassion of God.