

Above & Beyond (Matthew 5:38-48)

THE WAY

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Threefold pattern:

TRADITIONAL TEACHING

VICIOUS CYCLE

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE

Murder/Anger (vv.21-26)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "You shall not murder" (v.21)

VICIOUS CYCLE: unchecked anger itself is a vicious cycle that can lead to insults, land you in court, cause divisions, etc. (v.22)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: go and be reconciled (v.24) and settled matters quickly (v.25)

Adultery (vv.27-30)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: do not commit adultery (v.27)

VICIOUS CYCLE: lust and seeking out opportunities for lust causes issues and is actually in fact adultery itself or is a slippery slope toward adultery (v.28)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: remove yourself from temptation (v.29-30)

Divorce (vv.31-32)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: when initiating a divorce, do it lawfully (v.31)

VICIOUS CYCLE: when done unlawfully and without good reason but also when seen as a common and an easy option, involves people in adultery, mistreats women, and moves us further away from God's vision for marriage (v.32)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: be reconciled with one another (v.24); remove ourselves from temptations or cycles of lust (vv.29-30).



Oaths (vv.33-37)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: do not make false oaths or swear falsely or bear false witness (v.33)

VICIOUS CYCLE: swearing by anything involves you in a false claim and makes you someone others might distrust (escalating scale of oaths/oath breaking) (v.34-36)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: let your yes be yes and your no be no – be people of truth and honesty (v.37)



Retaliation (5:38-42)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.'" (v.28)

"law of retaliation" or *lex talionis* in Latin, where punishments are to be equal to the crime



Retaliation (5:38-42)

Exodus 21:23-25: But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.



Retaliation (5:38-42)

Leviticus 24:19-20: Anyone who injures their neighbour is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury.

Jesus edits out "life for a life"



Retaliation (5:38-42)

VICIOUS CYCLE:

V.39: "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person."

"Resist" - passive or active?

Stassen and Gushee's: "Do not retaliate revengefully by evil means."

NT Wright, KNT: "Don't use violence to resist evil!"

Violence with more violence



Retaliation (5:38-42)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE:

Jesus gives four statements: Turn the other cheek, give your tunic and cloak, go the second mile, give to the beggar and borrower

Often misused/misapplied statements

Actually acts of nonviolent resistance



Retaliation (5:38-42)

"if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek" (v.39)

Struck on the right cheek: a backhanded slap - an insult, affront to one's dignity

To turn the left cheek - challenge the aggressor to slap with the palm - treat as equal

Demonstrate one's humanity and equality



Retaliation (5:38-42)

"And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well." (v.40)

Outer garment used as a blanket/cover, prohibited to take another person's outer garment

Addressing the way the court system is abusing poor people

Malicious compliance: complying while showing flaws and injustice



Retaliation (5:38-42)

"if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles." (v.41)

Roman soldiers were allowed to force someone to carry loads for them for up to a Roman mile

Two miles - the soldier gets in trouble



Retaliation (5:38-42)

"give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." (v.42)

No repayment or interest, just generosity

Loans and legal systems often oppressed the most vulnerable



Retaliation (5:38-42)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: generosity and acts of nonviolent resistance

Romans 12:17-21: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God... If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink... Do not overcome evil by evil means, but overcome evil with good."



Retaliation (5:38-42)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: generosity and acts of nonviolent resistance

Proverbs 25:21-22: If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.



Retaliation (5:38-42)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' (v.28), the "law of retaliation" where punishments are to be equal to the crime.

VICIOUS CYCLE: retaliating violently causes more violence (and more violence, and more violence)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: give generously and engage in acts of nonviolent resistance



Enemies (5:42-48)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING:

v.43: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'

Leviticus 19:18: "love your neighbour as yourself"

"Hate your enemy" - common Hebrew saying



Enemies (5:42-48)

VICIOUS CYCLE:

vv.46-47: "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

It's easy to love your neighbour

Loving only neighbour creates division



Enemies (5:42-48)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE:

v.44: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"

Luke 10: Love God; love your neighbour

"Who is my neighbour?"

The Good Samaritan: my enemy is my neighbour



Enemies (5:42-48)

TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE:

View our enemies as people not to be conquered and subdued, but neighbours to be loved

Pray for enemies - see them as God sees them



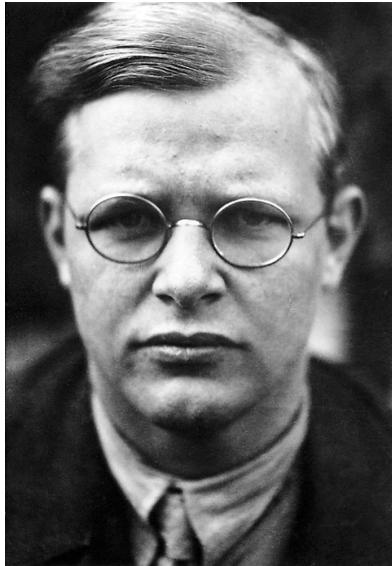
Enemies (5:42-48)

TRADITIONAL TEACHING: You have heard it said: Love neighbour and hate enemy

VICIOUS CYCLE: loving only our neighbours creates divisions; hating enemies only stirs up greater hate

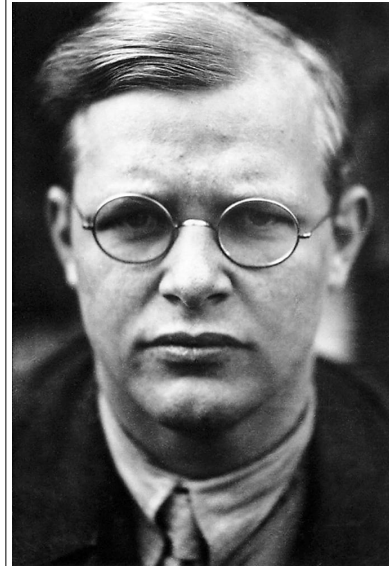
TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE: Love and pray for enemies





Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

"The command, "You shall not kill," the word that says "Love your enemies," is given to us simply to be obeyed. For Christians, any military service, except in the ambulance corps, and any preparation for war is forbidden."



Sermon on the Mount:
"radical discipleship"

Takeaways

First Transforming Initiative: give generously and engage in acts of nonviolent resistance

Second Transforming Initiative: Love and pray for enemies

