

Introduction

When I was practicing law years ago, I told people how to respond legally to personal injuries. Today, I'm going to tell you something far more important than that – how to respond spiritually and morally to personal injuries. **"Kill 'em with goodness,"** Jesus taught, and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Personal Injuries

Matthew chapters 5-7 record what we call **"the Sermon on the Mount."** In this sermon of His, Jesus addresses a variety of **"rubber meets the road"** issues.

One of those is found in 5:38-42. Notice what is described here.

Verse 39: Someone slaps us. **Verse 40:** Someone sues us frivolously.

Verse 41: Someone forces us to do something we don't want to do.

Verse 42: Someone asks us for something to which they have no claim. It's clear what these verses are about. Leo Tolstoy and other activists interpreted them in terms of institutional and social evils, but they were misreading the text in doing so. It isn't about institutional and social evils. It's about personal injuries instead.

We all know what personal injuries are because we're routinely on the receiving end of them. Someone intentionally or unintentionally harms us. He or she purposely or negligently acts against our well-being and joy. So, someone backs into my car in the parking lot. Or my boss gives me an unfair performance evaluation. Or an automobile dealer sells me a lemon. Or my parents punish me out for something I didn't do. And on it goes. A professor, for instance, arbitrarily gave my wife a B+ grade even though she earned far more than enough points for an A. His absurd explanation was that he even though she did well on tests, he thought she didn't know the material.

It's a fact of life for us all. We've been personally injured and will routinely continue to be until the day we die. There's no escaping it.

Retaliation

But how should we respond when we're injured? That's a compelling question that Jesus answers in our text.

Notice the opening words of verse 38, "**You have heard that it was said.**" Jesus is referring to the teaching of the Pharisees. Exodus 21:25; Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21 articulated the "**eye for an eye**" principle, which governed the judicial process. It meant that the punishment in legal cases must fit the crime. The Pharisees, however, misapplied it to personal relationships.

They taught and practiced "**equalization of injury.**" Redress injury by equivalent injury and then stop. You break my nose, for instance. So, I break your nose, not your nose and a finger. There is then no more injury or counter-injury. We can harm others *as much as*, but *not more than* they harm us. Equal retaliation is right. Excessive retaliation is wrong.

A young wife, who was observably irascible at her mother's birthday party, told her friend: "**It serves her right. I'm just giving her a dose of her own medicine.**" That's the accepted way of life in the human order isn't it? We give those who injure us a dose of their own medicine. As the old maxim says it, "**I don't get mad; I get even.**" We get even by inflicting the same harm that's been inflicted on us. There's really nothing wrong with that, most people think.

Goodness

It is that way in the human order. It isn't that way in the kingdom of God. Jesus reveals its way in verses 39-42. **Verse 39:** We allow ourselves to be injured by those who would injure us rather than injure them. **Verse 40:** We give those who sue us and win a monetary judgment more if they need it and we can. **Verse 41:** We go the extra mile and do more for people than we're obligated to do. **Verse 42:** We gladly give to people who have no claim or right to that for which they ask us.

Those verses teach us how to respond to personal injuries. There's

a common thread that runs through each one, goodness. We don't make the injurers suffer or pay for what they did to us. We bring goodness to them instead. We don't get even with them. We act to bestow benefit and blessing on them – to pursue their well-being and joy - instead.

A Christian's greedy brother took part of her share of their father's estate when he died. When she invited his wife and him to Thanksgiving dinner, as she always did, her husband objected. **"He's a thief,"** he said. **"Yes, he is"**, she replied, **"But I still love him and want him here for Thanksgiving."** He gave her badness. She gave him goodness in return.

She illustrates the kind of response Jesus pictures in verses 39-42. We don't get even with those who injure us. We bestow goodness (benefit and blessing) on them instead.

We do that appropriately of course. Verses 39-42 are not hard and fast rules that place all the responsibility on Jesus who gives them. On the contrary, He gives us the responsibility to make decisions in them. Consider verse 42, for instance, **"Give to him who asks of you."** Suppose you ask me for \$400 and I owe my mechanic \$400 for an automobile repair he's already done. Also suppose I can't pay him if I give to you. Then I won't give to you. Or consider verse 39, **"Turn the other cheek."** Suppose I will be dead or my wife raped if I do. Then I won't turn the other cheek. You get the idea. We bring goodness to those who injure us appropriately, that is, always seeking the greater good of God, others, the injurers, and ourselves.

Goodness Kills

Ironically, it kills them when we do. Look at this t-shirt for sale on eBay. It pictures a sweet little cherub whispering into a woman's ear, **"Why kill them with kindness when you can use an ax."** The answer is that kindness or goodness is a far better approach to injurers than an ax is. Make no mistake. It does kill them - metaphorically.

Let me explain. Injurers normally **"count on our resistance and**

anger to support their continuation of the evil that is in them,” to quote Dallas Willard. They rely on our resistance and anger when they injure us, in other words, to stay in control. First, our resistance and anger feed their anger and keep it alive in them. Second, our resistance and anger allow them to justify harming us. It’s okay, they think, because our resistance and anger show we deserved it. It really is true. Injurers need both our resistance and our anger to maintain their posture of harm toward us.

Responding with goodness, therefore, transforms our interactions with them. First, it starves their anger to death. Their anger, not having our resistance and anger to feed on, withers or even dies. Second, it pulls them off their stance. They’re no longer able to justify harming us. That in turn compels them to reevaluate themselves, **“What kind of a person am I, doing something bad to someone so good?”**

Goodness, in other words, is powerfully transforming. Normal injurers can’t resist it. It makes them sense that they aren’t playing the game they thought they were, that they’re no longer in control. Their attitudes and behaviors then often change as a result. But even if they don’t change, goodness lets loose the forces of God’s kingdom into the situation. That in turn redeems it as much as it can be redeemed. God is pleased, we are blessed, and the injurers are witnessed to.

The true story is told of an enemy who slandered and generally wronged an old deacon. He kept it up until the deacon vowed that he would kill him. The more he slandered and wronged him, the better the deacon treated him. Until one day, as **“fate”** or I should say **“God”** would have it, the deacon rescued his enemy’s drowning wife. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back and the deacon’s enemy became his friend. **“You’ve done what you said you would,”** his enemy said, **“You’ve killed me – or at least killed the man I was.”**

That story is instructive. You’ve all heard the expression, **“Kill ‘em with kindness.”** I’d change it to, **“Kill ‘em with goodness”** because that’s what goodness does. It transforms the dynamics of our

interactions with injurers – and often even the injurers themselves.

How to Kill 'Em with Goodness

That then is what Jesus calls us to do in our text. Kill those who injure us with goodness. If there's one text in the Bible that frustrates Christians, that makes them throw up their arms in despair, it's this one. Nothing is more contrary to human nature than being good to those who are being bad to us. So, how do we do it?

Jesus tells us in verse 48, which climaxes verses 21-47. It's that we **"be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** Notice I emphasized the word **"be."** The means to *doing* something, kill 'em with goodness, is *being* something – a person who is perfect as Father God is.

That is a profound insight. What it teaches us is this – and please grasp the treasure this teaching is. In verses 21-47 generally and our text, verses 39-42, specifically, Jesus is not imposing more laws of behavior upon us. It's often said, for instance, **"I'll turn the other cheek, and then knock your head off."** If verse 39 is just another law, then people who do that have kept it. That absurdity demonstrates that verses 39-42 aren't just laws of behavior.

Well, what are they then? They're illustrations of what a certain kind of person will typically do in the situations they address.

Let's go back to verse 48. The word **"be"** reveals to what Jesus is referring. It's our inner nature, the state of our mental, emotional, and volitional processes and our bodily habits. The word **"perfect"** is better translated **"functional"** or **"whole."** Jesus says in that regard that we should and can be functional or whole as Father God is.

Verse 48 helps us understand what verses 39-42 are. They're illustrations. They picture how people whose inner nature is as Father God's is will behave. Jesus addresses anger, malice, contempt, and absorbing desire in verses 21-37. That relates to verses 39-42. It's those inner realities that compel people to do what they shouldn't – give injurers a dose of their own medicine. But those inner realities have

been dealt with in people who are functional or whole as Father God is. Don't get me wrong. They aren't perfect and those realities may occasionally test them. But they don't control them. So they're able to do what they intend to do when they're injured. Kill 'em with goodness.

That raises the million dollar question of course. How do we become functional or whole as Father God is? You all know the answer to that by now. We apprentice ourselves to Jesus. That means something quite specific. We make the decision to learn and do all that He *said* and *did*. We then arrange all of our affairs around carrying out that decision. We make and carry out that decision in a social context of others who are doing the same. Some of those can hopefully give us the instruction we need in that regard and so we eagerly receive it.

Jesus *said*, for instance, that we should love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Because I'm His apprentice, I learned that He said that and learned and intend to do whatever is necessary to achieve it. I learned, for instance, that whatever is necessary includes building a purposeful and thorough vision of God and so, I did that.

Or consider what Jesus *did*. He routinely withdrew from the noises and activities of His life and spent time alone, in solitude, with Father God. He also routinely fasted. Because I'm His apprentice, I learned that He did those things and so, I do them as well.

You get the idea. We apprentice ourselves to Jesus, which enables the Holy Spirit to make us increasingly functional as Father God is. We're then eventually able to kill 'em (injurers) with goodness and do.

Conclusion

All of us are going to leave church soon and go back into the routines of our everyday lives. One thing's for sure as we do. Between the time that we leave here today and the time we return next week, someone is going to injure us. Answer the call of Jesus when they do. Knock 'em dead, kill 'em, with goodness.