

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Saviour and Jesus Christ. I just want to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for praying for me and my family as I attended the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) meetings in Cambridge over the last 10 days.

We continue on with our meditation this morning on the theme, "Our love for others should be without any limit, like the love of God." Under normal circumstances we tend to love those who love us and hate those whom we do not like. If we do have enemies then we always seek retaliation which is filled with hate and anger. However, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us a new ethic which goes against the grain of common understanding. Jesus teaches his disciples to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them. The hate against the community can be both from members within the community and those who are outside the community of faith. This morning we will look at how this non-retaliatory ethic can be practiced in our lives.

Jesus tells his disciples, "You have heard it was said, 'Eye for Eye and Tooth for Tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them the other cheek also."

The phrase 'Eye for an Eye' is a quotation taken from Exodus 21:23-27, in which a person who has taken the eye of another in a fight is instructed to give his own eye in compensation. At the root of the non-biblical form of this principle is the need to provide equitable retaliation for an offended party. It defined and restricted the extent of retaliation. The punishment or retaliation would never exceed the intensity of the crime.

The Scribes and Pharisees extended the principle of just retribution from the law courts to where it belongs, to the realm of personal relationships, where it does not belong. In fact, the law clearly states: "You shall not take revenge or bear grudge against the sons of your own people." (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus however goes beyond that. He calls us to a non-retaliatory ethic of turning the other cheek when someone slaps us. In Jewish culture anyone who is slapped by the back hand was meant to be doubly insulted. Jesus call to this kind of behaviour is not easy to follow. We all get angry when someone hits us or does something to us. It is against the grain of our human nature to follow this non retaliatory ethic. This is the challenge before us.

Jesus then goes on to tell them not to resist when somebody wants to sue and take their tunic. He tells them to give their cloak as well. Moreover, the Jews were under Roman rule and sometimes soldiers made them carry equipment and baggage for a mile. They were allowed to do this. However, Jesus tells them to go two miles instead of one, thereby going beyond the call of duty. By doing this Jesus was telling them to reflect something of the love of God which would be a love without limit.

Jesus then goes on to teach saying that they had heard about loving their neighbour and hating their enemy. But Jesus tells them, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons and daughters of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Jesus was teaching his disciples something which the rabbis had conveniently forgotten. They were to love their neighbours as themselves. They distorted this teaching by claiming that neighbours only meant their fellow Israelites and therefore deduced they should hate their enemies. Revenge and retaliation carries on the cycle of violence. In the midst of this Jesus is calling us to absorb all that is thrown at us and not to retaliate. This may be when people attack us with their words and slander us or when they attack us physically as under persecution. Christ teaches us to pray for those who persecute us and to love them. Stephen the first martyr prayed for those who were to stoning him to death. Similarly, James the brother of Jesus who was also beaten to death prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies. The world teaches us to get even with our enemies but Christ teaches us not to take revenge but to love them.

If we only love those who love us then how are we different from anybody else? We are called to be distinct. Our love for others should be without any limit and reflect the love of God. May God truly fill us with his love that we may be able to love others without any limits.