

**Matt 5:33-48**

Clint Le Page

Main Point – Distinctive love – promise-keeping, no retaliating, and enemy-loving, to be like God who loves you.

Outline & transcript at [bpc.org.au/live](http://bpc.org.au/live)

Dealing with difficult people at work or school is an experience all of us can identify with. There's the lazy co-worker who takes credit for our work, or lazy student who just wants to copy other's answers.

The nightmare boss who blames you for their mistakes and rarely acknowledges your contributions.

There's the childish person, or the sleazy person who is unpleasant to be around, that infuriating client who seems impossible to satisfy, that thoughtless and selfish person who puts others down to make themselves feel good.

How do we respond?

As **Andrew Laird in his book, (SLIDE) Under Pressure**-How the Gospel helps us handle the pressures of work says, We can 1. Move away and avoid them, as much as possible. 2, we can move towards them and attack; get mad or get even.

Or 3, we can love our enemies, and lean in with love.

And that is really different, really distinctive.-----

So come with me as we look at Jesus' teaching on how we love others distinctively; in our promise-keeping, not retaliating, and enemy loving.-----

In the Sermon on the Mount we've been considering what the distinctive life for Jesus' followers looks like.

We've seen it means being salt and light, and a source of good in other's lives.

We've been summoned to display righteousness.

And we don't get righteous by rule keeping, but relying on Jesus.----

Yet our righteousness by faith in Christ is expressed, from the heart in living rightly and loving others.

Even when it comes to things that make us angry or tempt us sexually.-----

Today we see, righteous living includes a distinctive love; a love for God and others which includes, keeping our promises.-----

**Our First point, Promise-keeping.(SLIDE)**-----

It's hard to keep our word, when our own happiness matters most, and it costs us.

It's hard to keep our word when we're waiting for a better offer.

It's hard to keep our promises in marriage, when 80% of couples don't even make public promises before moving-in together, and when over 30% of marriages end in divorce.-----

But in v33-37 Jesus calls us to be people who Keep our word.-----

His reference to not breaking oaths, in **v33**, is not a direct OT quote, but comes from various Scriptures.

There's links to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Commandments, and **Numbers 30v2** speak about how vows and oaths must not be broken.-----

**An oath is** a serious pledge or promise to do something.

You solemnly swear something is true, and you invoke the name of something supreme and sacred; to give credibility to what's said, and confirm it is true.-----

**Lev 19:12** said, "You shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God."-----

In Jesus' day people swore oaths very easily, and it seems some started thinking that they could swear falsely and lie, if they avoided using God's name.-----

A bit like kids thinking, if I cross my fingers a promise doesn't count.-----

Jews would swear by heaven, or earth, or even their head.

But Jesus says, all of creation is God's.

Don't think you can swear by earth or heaven & leave God out, or think he doesn't hear.-----

In the words of one writer [**William Barclay**](SLIDE)

Don't think God is involved in certain compartments of our lives and not others – so we have a certain kind of language and behaviour for church, and another kind in the shipyard, or the factory or the office [or school]. God does not need to be invited into certain departments of our lives and kept out of others.

He is everywhere, all through life, in every activity.

He doesn't just hear all the words spoken in his name, he hears all the words.-----

We'll regard all promises as sacred if we remember all promises are made in God's presence.-----

Does something need to change in your life?-----

Jesus calls his people to be honest, tell the truth, and keep our promises.-----

If you say Yes, **v37**, let it mean yes; if you say No, let it mean No.-----

From **v34** there have been Christians in the past and today who've refused to take oaths, like swear on-oath in a courtroom.

But in **Matt 26**, the High Priest asks Jesus, "by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

And Jesus answers, "Yes, it is as you say".

There's others references from Paul in the outline-----

So Jesus is not forbidding us taking oaths if required by authorities; He's against abusing oaths.

Jesus is saying it should never be necessary to swear an oath.

Our word should always be reliable.-----

So Do you keep your promises?-----

When I preached on this passage 2 ½ years ago I confessed to failing to always do what I told my wife Kirsti I would do.

And while I feel I've made some progress, I still fall short, and fail to do what Jesus asks me to do here.

I don't know about you?-----

But out of love for the Lord and for the other person, my Yes must mean Yes.-----

Are you someone who says Yes then makes excuses?-----

Or who deceives, tells white lies; exaggerates, even on social media?-----

Jesus says, my people are honest and Promise Keepers.-----

But as well as loving people by keeping our word we also love them by **not retaliating** when they hurt us.-----

I do enjoy watching movies for some downtime, and a big theme in many movies is revenge. Whether it's (SLIDE) Jennifer Gardner in Peppermint, James Bond in Quantum of Solace, or Darth Sidius in Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith; wanting to take revenge, n' get even comes naturally to us, doesn't it?-----

We can so easily want to pay people back and retaliate when they hurt us.-----

**Our second point is, No retaliating.**(SLIDE)-----

Now we should long for justice.

Seeking justice is a good thing. Our God is just.

The trouble comes when we take matters into our own hands.

And I've heard many religious and non-religious people quote Jesus' words here in **v38** – 'eye for an eye', as a justification to get even.-----

One place it's found is in **Lev 24:19 (SLIDE)**-----

Two things must be remembered about this.

First, however prescriptive it was, it was also **restrictive**.

Suppose someone cuts off your brother's hand, and you go and knock the guy's head off.

Immediately the violence has escalated, and the man's family may feel honor-bound to butcher both you and your family.----- Where will it end?-----

But if instead, the initial act of violence is met with a punishment that fits the crime, **eye for an eye, life for life**, that's the end of the matter.-----

Secondly, the law was given to the Jews as a nation.

It was not deigned to be discharged by individuals swept up in personal vendettas, taking the law into their own hands.---

It was meant to be acted on by judges and courts.-----

But people were using this Scripture to justify getting even; taking others to court, and all fostering bitterness, vengeance, and hatred.-----

The Lord Jesus responds with sweeping authority:

“But I tell you, Do **not resist** the one who is evil.”-----

Jesus is not asserting global pacifism, the abolition of police forces, or the wrongs of war. He is not talking about the responsibilities of governments at all.

The Bible says the State ought to punish the wrong-doer.-----

He’s talking about private and personal retaliation.-----

He’s addressing the, “So-and-so cheated me/ hurt me; just wait till I get even.”-----

Jesus gives 4 examples, 4 illustrations of enduring love:

He says firstly, **v39**, if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.----

Famous words.

This probably refers to a sharp back-handed slap used to insult you.-----

It’s more an insult than assault.-----

In other words Jesus is saying, Be willing to endure repeated insults and don’t retaliate.

That’s God’s job not ours.-----

God is saying, give up the right to retaliation; don’t think of your rights, follow Christ’s example.-----

In your family, when you don’t pay back your brother, sister or spouse, even verbally, but seek their good, your love and commitment to Christ will stand out.---

But what if you’re suffering persistent **bullying** at school, or **abuse** from a parent, a spouse or another?-----

Jesus says, don’t retaliate, or hit back.-----

But please do, Run to safety and get help.

Talk to someone, tell someone in authority.-----

And as **John MacArthur** says,(**SLIDE**) ‘to report a crime is an act of compassion, righteousness, and godly obedience, where you seek the offender’s good and repentance.

To belittle, excuse or hide the wrongdoing of others is not an act of love but wickedness’.-----

And if we’re witnessing an attack or abuse, Jesus is not commanding we don’t protect or arrest a third party.

I am not to attack an evil person attacking me, yet out of love for my neighbour, we’d argue it is loving to resist and stop an evil person attacking someone else.

Jesus is not forbidding us defending our families, or bringing wrongdoers to justice.-----

The principle is, don’t retaliate out of personal vengeance;----- respond with love.-----

**V40’s** about a **lawsuit** where a person is likely to lose their clothes.

And Jesus says if you’re sued for your shirt, give your coat as well. (**SLIDE**)-----

And most people then only had one coat.---

**Ex 22** says the poorest person has the right to keep their cloak, yet Jesus radically says, voluntarily surrender it.----- Wow!

The principle is, even those things we regard as our rights, we must be prepared to give up.-

So Jesus’ calls us to more than just no retaliating, he goes further and calls us to be giving.-- Same in **v41**.

This refers to a **Roman soldier** commanding a civilian, to carry his bags, or be his guide.

Jesus’ followers are not to feel hard-done-by or angry, but to double the distance n’ accept the imposition; Cheerfully!-----

When we are robbed of some freedom we are to surrender even more, rather than retaliate.-

Then in **v42** Jesus says, ‘Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.’-----

Verses 39-42 are not justifying abuse by any tyrant, beggar or thug; yet it **demands giving and lending** that is cheerful and willing; because we love.-----

The trouble is we dislike giving up things which belong to us, don't we?

We think of our money as Ours;---- Mine!-----

Even as Christians we can forget that all we have has been given by God and we're only stewards of it.

So even the right to use our money as we wish should be placed on the altar of obedience to Christ.-----

It doesn't mean we must always give money to a professional beggar, or family member who wastes it, then keeps asking for more.

But we should ask, how can I love them in action?-----

For God commands that we work to provide for ourselves, our relatives, the church & Gospel ministry; but we're also to provide for the poor.

So don't explain away Jesus' call to love generously, let it challenge you, and change you.---

This is hard and confronting, for me too, because it's about giving up our rights;

not giving pay backs, but generous love instead.-----

Will you pray for such a heart and desire?-----

And what might you do practically to obey Jesus?-----

So distinctive Christian love includes promise keeping, not retaliating but giving, and **now thirdly, Enemy Loving.(SLIDE)**

**V43**, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'.-----

Now **Leviticus 19** commanded a love for neighbour, but some Jewish teachers had limited that to fellow God-fearing Jews.-----

Yet in the Parable of Good Samaritan in **Luke 10**, Jesus says our neighbour is anyone we come across in need, and we're in a position to help.-----

And here Jesus ratchets it up further – love even your enemies.-----

The word for love, agape in Greek, describes giving yourself for the good of another, whether they deserve it or not ----

And when we do this, won't we stand out, distinctively?-----

A love for your enemies in the **workplace** can be powerful, but also really hard.

Many of us know the experience of being insulted at work – the nasty remark, which still gets back to you. The hurtful words said in your hearing, when your work is demeaned before others, credit's given to someone else, or Christian views are despised.-----

And Tim Keller says, turning the other cheek is the mark of the person who is hoping for a relationship; hoping this difficult relationship might change for the good.-----

So instead of avoiding that difficult colleague when you arrive in the morning make a beeline for them; you lean in with love, offering a smile, a question about their day ahead.

[Andrew Laird, Under Pressure]

We might offer to help a difficult colleague with something, or offer a positive word about what they do.-----

To return evil for evil is normal.

And sinners return good for good, as Jesus says in **v46-47**.

But to return good in the face of evil – that is the way of godly love.-----

I'm realizing that I don't know how hard it is for you to live Christ-like lives in today's world, school and workplace. Things have changed a lot in 20 years.-----

I realise in Australia sexuality and gender, is at the heart of many people's identity, and the LGBTI agenda is pushing a different Gospel to us, and your Christian views are likely to be insulted or shut down.

Christians can and will be left ostracized, unemployed or defriended.

Yet we love our enemies by continuing to speak of Jesus, and forgiveness, and of how God's purposes are good.-----

A book I'm still reading, with the Bundy staff and elders is, (SLIDE) **Being the Bad Guys: How to live for Jesus in a world that says you shouldn't**, by Steve McAlpine.

McAlpine encourages us to be like Daniel, Fearless, as you live a life of faithfulness and faultlessness.-----

Fearless, faithful, faultless before our enemies.-----

And I share this quote: (SLIDE)

If you are the conflict resolution woman in the office; if you are known to deflect the boss' praise to others; if you help colleagues when they're struggling with workloads; if you are slow to gossip and quick to point out people's strengths; if you constantly offer support (and perhaps prayer) to the troubled or grieving;

if you share meals and conversation with everyone from the janitor to manager, and are as quick to go out for lunch with the gay couple from marketing as you are to nip off to the office prayer meeting – then when you fall into deficit over hard cultural matters [like the HR department wanting you to promote n' support the LGBTI agenda or Rainbow Day; when such things happen and you resist, then] the "king" [your manager] will be conflicted over whether to punish you, just as Darius was over Daniel.-----

What would you showing prayerful love look like in your workplace?-----

Yet, having been told, don't retaliate but give and love; **We can't do it.**(SLIDE)

If you're like me, reading Matt 5 just convicts you of your sins n' shortcomings.----

I mean look at **v48**, 'be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'-----

That's summing up Jesus' teaching in v21-47, and has love at the heart of it.

And our God is sinless, gracious, generous, loving.; and so often I am Not.-----

But there is one human being who was; and one who came to save us.-----

You see... **Christ did it.**

Christ was perfect, as his Heavenly father is perfect.

**1 Peter 2:22 from NIV says,(SLIDE)** "“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”<sup>23</sup>When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate;

[remember when the Jewish police spat on him, struck him, and the Roman soldiers followed suit, he didn't retaliate]

when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.'----

Jesus did it. He lived a perfect sinless life, in our place.

Then on that cross, the penalty for our sins was placed on him.

**v24,(SLIDE)** 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.'-----

If you've believed and trusted in Jesus then all your sins have been forgiven.

And as saved people who are now God's children, his plan is that we would, 'die to sins and live for righteousness'.----

God has saved us so that we would live for him; and be like him.-----

Back in Matt 5.45 Jesus gave us a reason and motivation to love our enemies.

For he makes his **sun rise on** the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.'

God loves all people. He shows common grace to all rebellious sinners.

He gives good gifts; food n' water, and God is asking us to love our enemies like he does.-----

In fact God loves the sinners of the world so much that he sent his only Son, didn't he?-----

And God's love is shown to us Christ's people even more.

**My favourite passage in the Bible in Rom 5 says,(SLIDE)** 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son'.-----

God the Father, and God the Son, loved their enemies, and we've been saved and set free to be like God.-----

So now WHY obey what Jesus says, and love those who are hard to love?-----

Because we are loved. Because you are loved Christian.-----

I might have hairy arms and legs like my father, and my kids hate that I've passed that on, but I'm meant to be like my heavenly Father; as are you, & love generously.--

Brothers and sisters, our Father says, "Be like me."-----

As I close I acknowledge that so often the enemy can be someone close to us, in our school, our family, our home.

And to our enemy words can just tumble out, hurling criticism or hostility, which sting like killer bees, and that can be sealed forever in the memory bank.-----

As **James Dobson says(SLIDE)** Love could begin with us choosing to hold our tongue and remove ourselves from a provoking situation.

He says to parents, communicate kindness to your oppressed and harassed child, even to those who are sullen and depressed.-----

I'll be facilitating a **Paul Tripp** Marriage course at the end of April and Parenting Course in August, Lord willing, and Tripp says many helpful things.

Like in **Age of Opportunity** regarding our teenage children: 'Cutting, hurtful words will come flying out of their mouths. Laziness and irresponsibility will be revealed. They will respond in selfishness rather than love, and each of these experiences is an opportunity to bring our children to the one place of hope and help, the Lord Jesus Christ.... But so often, we get caught up in our own hurt and anger. Instead of words of hope and grace, we lash out with angry words.-----

Whether you're a parent, a youth or not, let's hear what Jesus has said to us today.

All of us in all our relationships we need to not retaliate, but reflect, and pray, that we'd respond in love.-----

Our Lord who loves us has called us to promise-keeping, not retaliating and loving even our enemies.-----

Let's pray we'll do that.