



Why Not Go the Extra Mile?

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' ³⁹But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Matthew 5:38-42

Thus far, I have resisted devoting an article on what many have already shared a wide spectrum of opinions as to the proper Christian response for the COVID-19 pandemic. (Thus ends my silence.) The best description I've heard to date is a very well-presented sermon providing solid scriptural and historical support that this should be treated as a dress rehearsal for the ultimate fulfillment to come in the final week of years. This was a gem in a sea of the many alternative commentaries on whether or not Christians should wear masks or observe the government ban on groups of ten or more meeting together. This public Christian discussion has led to extreme views accusing each end of the spectrum to be in sin or some kind of spiritual compromise. I'm not sure we've been stellar witnesses to either the saved or the unsaved in many of our Internet postings. However, what I say is, why not go the extra mile?

In the above instruction from Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is giving examples of Christian responses to those who have wronged us, those who are **not** our supporters. The law Jesus quotes (Ex. 24; Lev. 24:20) is even more detailed in Deuteronomy 19:21 for dealing with a false witness:

"Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Many New Testament Christians have not supplanted the New Testament standard to love one's neighbor and continue to operate, "...you shall not show pity". Especially here in the U. S., many of the regular churchgoers seem to be more concerned for their constitutional rights than their neighbor, much less their public witness of Christ. Even when we are wronged by either the local, county, state, or federal government, or just by individuals, we have a biblical mandate to act differently than the world.

In each example given above, we are the aggregated party being unfairly treated by "*an evil person*":

- Someone who slaps us
- Someone who sues us
- Someone who forces us
- Someone who asks something of us
- Someone who wants to borrow

"Why Not Go the Extra Mile?", Page 1 of 5

None of these things guarantee repayment or some kind of compensation in terms of justice in this world. Their behavior and associated demands are rooted in evil, so the best way we can show such a person the work of Christ within us is to relinquish our worldly rights so as to allow them to see something not just different, but authentic. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon the saved to not respond in kind to evil people.

¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Romans 12:17-18

The fact is, it will not always depend on us, but we're obligated to go the extra mile personally to make sure no one can legitimately say that **we** are the stumblingblock.

It Escalates Personally

⁴³You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48

The very next point Jesus makes in the Sermon on the Mount is to go from “*an evil person*” to “*your enemy*”. He specifically calls for a love that completely forsakes the world’s notions of love and calls for the practice of “*agape*” — the unconditional love as practiced by the members of the Godhead. If we are to so radically set aside our personal reactions to those who are our enemy, how much more so for those who are simply acting in an evil manner toward us?

Many Christians have great difficulty with the closing admonition, “*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” Consider the following illuminations from Scripture:

*“Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall **be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.**”*

Leviticus 19:2

*“You shall **be blameless** before the LORD your God.*

Deuteronomy 18:13

*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness in the fear of God.***

2 Corinthians 7:1

*¹²Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but **I press on so that I may lay hold of that** for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴**I press on** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let us therefore, **as many as are perfect, have this attitude**; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;*

Philippians 3:12-15

Paul best illustrates Christian perfection as a pursuit, a chase if you will, to become holy and blameless according to God's standards. Such a pursuit in our personal relationship with God will not only reshape us internally, but become externally visible in our personal relationships with others. Such will become a testimony of His working not just to the evil people we encounter, but our outright enemies.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 6:1

Jesus continues with this caveat because we are not supposed to put on a show, but act sincerely from a transformed, born-again heart. Nothing is more authentically "Christian" than *agape* love.

So even if you don't agree with me, perhaps you can at least see the scriptural basis on which I have chosen to wear a mask and observe the basic rules secular authorities have established where my contact with others is concerned. I can set aside personal preferences and make this particular sacrifice, which is far less serious than the sacrifices Jesus has specified I take with "*an evil person*" or my outright "*enemy*". I would argue the personal impositions of the pandemic are tame compared to the greater biblical standard to which I'm obligated.

The Corporate Response

When it comes to the Body of Christ, there are definite biblical guidelines where earthly governments are concerned. We are normally called to be good citizens (Rom. 13), because ordinarily such authorities administer equal justice under the law. But what happens when they cross the line and directly interfere with our practicing faith in Christ?

The Early Church had to deal with the worst-case scenario in this regard when everyone in the Roman Empire was required to make an annual public confession that the Emperor was the deity above all deities, the god above all gods. They allowed any god a place in their Pantheon as long as it was acknowledged they were subordinate to the Emperor. Christians in Ephesus who refused to acknowledge this were burned alive as streetlamps.

"Why Not Go the Extra Mile?", Page 3 of 5

At the beginning of the pandemic, I was not immediately alarmed that group gatherings (at least here in California) were limited to no more than ten. This was universally applied to everyone and churches were not singled out specifically. According to good old American tradition, it was equally imposed on everyone regardless without naming names. But then as we were undergoing release from the first round of restrictions, and especially now that we seem to be taking steps in reverse, churches have been singled out and treated differently from, say, bars and theaters and secular gatherings. The abandonment of its own rules of protections for religion is without precedent and appears to be but the beginning of something far more ominous. It became particularly alarming when California banned small group Bible studies in our own homes and singing in church. Now it turned personal.

While I will never condone the kind of public violence and vitriol which characterizes other civil movements currently captured daily in the media, I don't believe California Christians, at least, can stand passively by and simply turn the other cheek. Our very worship of the Lord has been challenged. When it comes to how the Body of Christ is being treated, there is not just great cause for concern but a justification to make a public stand. So far, it would seem that those who have attempted to use the legal system to enforce its own earthly standards where freedom of religion is concerned have been met with resistance from the bench as well, more times than not.

Individually, I can accommodate the rules for masks, social distancing, and other personal considerations as they pertain more to the category of how I, as a Christian, treat others; these increasing restrictions imposed on churches, however, I cannot. The former is not infringing on my personal worship of Christ and actually providing an opportunity to witness to others; the latter has crossed the line in an attempt to interfere with my practicing faith in Christ and work toward disbanding the overall practice of church.

The only thing I can say for sure is that it is only going to get worse from here. These government interjections were unthinkable (even in whacky California) just a few months ago. Eschatologically, I agree this is but a dress rehearsal for an unprecedented time of tribulation for the Church in the near future.

*"Then **they** will deliver **you** to **tribulation**, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*

Matthew 24:9

But we have not quite attained to that milestone on the Last Days timeline. There is still enough daylight left before the inevitable nightfall to come.

"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

John 9:4

At a time when professional baseball and basketball are attempting to re-start with no fans in the stands, it is probably going to be quite a stretch of time before "church-as-usual" can be conducted without taking the proper precautions all group gatherings have implemented. We cannot ignore that there *is* a virus and its spread can be mitigated by precautions that may be annoying but are not totally unreasonable, nor only borne by churches and no one else. Let's not overreact and pretend this is all just made up or that Christians are somehow exempt from the possible ill-effects.

"Why Not Go the Extra Mile?", Page 4 of 5

We can still relinquish our personal liberties to be a loving witness to individuals while standing up as the Body of Christ to those who would undermine, pollute, or even outright erode our relationship with Him. On the one hand we can go the extra mile, while on the other our total compliance may have run out of road. We need to prayerfully consider where to draw the line, because trying to passively sit this one out is going to produce multiplied consequences when we *can* all freely meet again.

In Him,

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