

## Prayer

All praise be to You for Your care of me, Jesus Christ my Lord.  
Praise for the joy of my salvation and happiness of my soul;  
Praise for the trials of life through which I learn to live for You;  
Praise for all the people I know and love who make my life rich;  
Praise for the work I do which sustains and enriches my life;  
Praise for all leisure, rest and sleep which nourishes my body;  
All praise be to You, Jesus Christ my Lord: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: World Politics

*Pray today for the countries of southern America where vast numbers of people live in either wealth or great poverty. Pray for strong and godly leadership of these great nations.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray about scientific work on the very edges of knowledge*
- *Pray for people who live on the streets within your country*
- *Give thanks for security in your home*

## Meditation

Have not babies always cried and kept their parents awake,  
And yet made them more happy than anyone could ever be?

Have not neighbours and friends always been annoying,  
And yet also been the source of the most wonderful help?

Have not children always resisted the wishes of their parents,  
And yet embraced and flung their arms around them with love?

Have not the aged always wondered why things have turned out 'this way',  
And yet been the source of amazing help and understanding?

Have not people always been sinful and rejected God's ways,  
And yet longed for His companionship, His healing and His love?

Has not God always seen what is happening on His earth, and smiled,  
And sought to draw us near to him for one simple, straightforward reason -

He loves us!

## Bible Study - Matthew 5:38-48

<sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

<sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist an evil person, but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other as well. <sup>40</sup> If anyone takes you to court over your coat, give your cloak as well; <sup>41</sup> and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go the second mile too. <sup>42</sup> Give to everyone who appeals to you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." <sup>44</sup> But I say to you; Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your heavenly Father; for He

*makes His sun rise on both the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your friends, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> Therefore be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

## Review

These are the last two of Jesus' six teachings which illustrate how He fulfils the 'Law and the Prophets' (5:17). Both are well known; the first because of the saying loosely quoted as 'to turn the other cheek' (5:39) and the second because of the saying 'love your enemy' (5:44). Certainly, these are highly memorable phrases, but they encapsulate some very powerful teaching which is not necessarily clear. Certainly, both of them should be read fully and with care if they are to express anything more than pious sentiment.

The first saying begins with a principle of law which is known as the 'Lex Talionis', and it was well known in Jesus' day and is also found in scripture (Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20 and Deut 19:21). It is commonly thought that the 'Lex Talionis' was actually a good and equitable law, a principle which prevented vengeance from getting out of hand. Evil behaviour will often seek far more in revenge than was ever taken in the first place, so many think of the Lex Talionis as a good legal principle, even it was expressed in a somewhat horrific way! Jesus, however, had little interest in this law, because in line with the rest of his teaching in the 'Sermon on the Mount', He sought to identify the deeper spiritual principles by which anger and vengeance could be overcome.

Jesus began his response with the words 'Do not resist an evil person.' This sounds like a clear statement of pacifism, but the examples Jesus proceeds to give indicate that Jesus was talking about far more than pacifism. When we quote Jesus as saying 'turn the other cheek' there is certainly pacifism within what Jesus says, but this does not go to the heart of the matter. To follow Jesus' line of thought, we must explore what it means to give away your coat to someone suing you (5:40), going an extra mile (5:41) having been forced to go one; and be generous (5:42) without thought of repayment. Each of the examples has a specific social setting from which we can learn more about what Jesus meant, but together they indicate one attitude of heart which stands against violence, which is best summarised as 'graciousness of heart'. This is an attitude which is prepared to see the best in others, even someone who brings charges against you (5:40), forces you into submission (5:41), or seeks help from you (5:42). Graciousness of course is not pacifism, and someone who is a pacifist may well not be gracious at all; however, the more we read of the Gospels, it is this graciousness which Jesus showed under all circumstances including His trial, death and resurrection. The graciousness of God in Christ defeats all evil.

'Lex Talionis' has some legal merit, and pacifism is admirable if it does not harbour grievances or wrath; but Jesus goes behind both to point to God's highest standard of personal behaviour which is graciousness, and there is but a short step from graciousness to the subject of Jesus' next saying, which is 'love'.

Jesus begins by quoting the beginning of the famous moral code found in Leviticus 19:18 'love your neighbour ...', but cuts the scripture short and adds '... and hate your enemy'. This was probably a popular saying of Jesus' day which was thought to summarise scripture, and it suits Jesus' purposes well because most would accept that it is easy to love a friend or neighbour; but Jesus knew that God had far more to say about love than that. Jesus taught; 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you!' (5:44). Yes, we are asked to pray for the salvation of those whose behaviour towards us is contrary to what God expects of us towards them!

The reasons given by Jesus for such an attitude of heart are telling. Positively, such an attitude is what God requires of His children simply because it is right. In God's moral universe, we must reflect the moral qualities of the Creator and base our actions on what is right not wrong (5:45). All of us know good and evil, and all are equal in God's sight, so if we show favouritism with our love, then we are not doing what the Lord requires (5:46a). In order to illustrate the need to love all people equally, Jesus gave two examples of people who were hated; tax collectors (5:46) and Gentiles (5:47). He states the obvious that like all people, they are perfectly capable of loving their own kind; so the challenge of God is greater. We must not just love those who love us, but those who do not.

Jesus' whole life was lived by putting this into practice, to the point that He died for on the Cross for the salvation of those who hated Him. This is the supreme example of God's perfect love, and is the reason why Jesus said in a prophetic manner; 'be perfect as Your heavenly father is perfect. It is vital that we do not dismiss this last verse as if it was an impossible counsel of perfection; it is a prophetic glimpse of the truth about the love of Jesus by which all of us are saved. Unless we accept this essential truth which connects the love by which we are saved with the call of God on our lives, then we have lost sight of our true calling as God's people.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Which of the different examples given by Jesus here, speaks most to you about Jesus' highest moral standards?
2. How would you define graciousness? How does Jesus show graciousness in His life and work?
3. What do you think 'perfection' means in this passage? Why do people dislike the idea of 'perfection'?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*These are powerful texts within scripture, and there is a great deal to say in order to explain them. Indeed, I have hardly touched the surface of explaining them. I have a generally positive attitude towards the principles of pacifism, but I have to accept that if it is practiced with the wrong attitudes, then it can be as dangerous as any other 'principle of life'. Jesus shows us the way!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Spend some time reflecting on the people who are most hated within your own society, and ask yourself how the church can show love to such people. This is a tough issue to tackle.
- Fast from a meal a day and pray that you will be blessed by qualities of graciousness that you have so far not displayed in your life.

## Final Prayer

Lord God, make me still before Your majesty.  
Give me time to reflect upon Your great love.  
Give me a heart to live my life graciously;  
Through Jesus Christ my Lord:  
AMEN