

Doctors take an oath “To do no harm.” Coaches tell their players not to retaliate because the second player is almost always the one who gets caught. If you ever played sports you know that is a whole lot easier said than done. Jesus challenges us when He tells us, **“You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.”** (vs. 36)

Do we listen to Jesus and take His words to heart? Or do we want to get even? Do we believe the old saying is true that says “revenge is sweet?” We’ve certainly have made revenge a big part of our entertainment industry. There was a TV series called “Revenge” a few years ago. There are a lot of other TV series with revenge as one of their major plot lines like Alias, Lost, 24 and a lot of others that I’ve never watched. There have been a whole series of Revenge of the Nerds movies. One of the Star Wars movies is called Revenge of the Sith. There are a whole variety of websites that will help you figure out how to get revenge, although I don’t recommend you go there. It seems that our society thinks that revenge is not only justified, but necessary.

We usually want to take our revenge out on an enemy, on someone who has hurt or offended us. But Jesus says, **“Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.”** (vss 27-28) This is counter culture. This is the call to live a totally different life than the people around us.

But this is nothing new. It was part of the faith of ancient Israel. Listen to this command from God in Leviticus 19:18, **“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself.”** Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? We are also told in Leviticus 19

“Do not steal.

“Do not deceive or cheat one another.

“Do not defraud or rob your neighbor.

“Do not twist justice in legal matters. Always judge people fairly.

“Do not spread slanderous gossip.

“Do not nurse hatred in your heart.

Jesus gave us very similar advice when he said, **“If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back.”** (vss. 29-30) Jesus didn’t seek revenge against His enemies. When James and John wanted to call for fire to fall from heaven on a village in Samaria that didn’t welcome Him, Jesus reprimanded the disciples. After Peter drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane when the crowd came to arrest Him, Jesus commanded Peter to put away his sword. Jesus didn’t seek to revenge. He came to forgive. He commands us to forgive others too.

It was in the context of teaching people how to respond to those who would hurt us, insult us, demand things from us that Jesus said, **“Do to others as you would like them to do to you.”** (vs.

31) This is known as the ‘Golden Rule.’ Treat others the way you want to be treated. Can you imagine how different our society would be if everyone tried to do this? We can’t expect everyone to try to live by the Golden Rule. But we certainly should try to follow this advice if we call ourselves Jesus followers.

Jesus set the example for us to follow. He touched people with leprosy, a violation of the ceremonial laws of His day, and cured them. He intentionally stopped at a well in Samaria to talk with a woman there who was a social outcast because she had been married five times and was living with a sixth. He washed the disciples feet on the night of the Last Supper. Jesus helped the helpless, welcomed the outcast and served those under Him. He tells us to do the same.

Jesus gives us a list of does and don’t, things to do and other things to avoid. Jesus tells us:

- Love your enemies. Don’t hate them.
- Do good to those who hate you. Don’t look to harm them.
- Bless those who curse you. Don’t curse them back.
- Pray for those who hurt you. Don’t look for a way to get even with them.
- Turn the other cheek when slapped in the face. Don’t hit back
- Give to others in need. Don’t demand repayment.
- Forgive others. Don’t judge or condemn them.
- Give to others. Don’t be stingy.

We are told to follow the example of Jesus. The word Christian means “little Christ.” If we are really Jesus’ followers, we should try to imitate His life. We can’t do that on our own. We need the help and guidance of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. We need the encouragement and the support of our fellow Christians.

Many people in our nation today have turned away from the church and from the Christian faith because they don’t see Jesus followers trying to live like Him. They see us as “church people” but not as “Jesus followers.” That is our fault when deny the Gospel message by the way we live. That is our fault when make the rules and rituals of our religion more important than relationships. That is our fault when we look down on others with a judgmental attitude instead of reaching out to them in love.

Our lives as Jesus followers should be different from those around us who make up their own standards, who have left God out of their lives. If we want to reach the people around us for Jesus, we can’t just bring them the message, we need to try to live the message because it is not so much what we say but what we do that counts. We need to live a counter culture life that displays God’s nature and character to the world. Our lives should give glory to God. Peter, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples wrote, **“Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.”** (1 Peter 2:12 NLT)