

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Matthew 5:40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

Matthew 5:41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

Matthew 5:42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

The eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth principle is found in Exodus 21:24 Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. It was given as a rule to regulate the decisions of judges. They were to take **eye for eye**, and **tooth for tooth**, and to inflict burning for burning.

Rabbis in Jesus' day taught that the **eye for eye** law meant you were obligated to avenge yourself of a personal insult or attack brought against you. Jesus rightly disallows the application of this law in our personal relationships; it was a law intended to guide the judges in the law courts of Israel, not to guide our personal relationships.

This law was meant to be a check to our desire to revenge, not a license for revenge. Our tendency is to want to do *more* to the offending party than what they have done to us. But we cannot punish from a motive of revenge, only from a motive of justice.

"Far from encouraging vengeance it limits vengeance and stands as a guide for a judge as he fixes a penalty suited to the crime. The principle was thus not license or vengeance, but a guarantee of justice." (Thompson)

Jesus quotes this passage in His teaching on the true interpretation of the law. He does not say that the **eye for eye** principle is wrong; rather, He simply condemns the use of it to make it an *obligation* to exact revenge against someone who has *personally* offended me.

Having put the law back into perspective, the Lord then discusses how we ought to treat those who personally offend us. The first case is a general one:

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person...

Resist means to *stand against*. Jesus might have in mind our general attitude when we are being mistreated. While a first response might be to react against it and somehow defend ourselves, we might want to consider the greater opportunity for reflecting the Gospel in our patience in bearing the mistreatment. Often our circumstances give us the chance to show the difference Jesus Christ makes in our lives.

Jesus goes on to give specific situations:

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

The Lord Himself would be slapped on the cheek but patiently bear it (John 18:23). He was not suggesting you never defend yourself or your loved ones. This isn't a teaching about pacifism.

A real (physical) slap in the face is usually not a severe blow. It is to make a point.

We use the phrase, a slap in the face, to describe personal insults. That is what Jesus has in mind. We can take a slap in the face; we can absorb insults. There is a greater good to promote – the Gospel.

Matthew 5:40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

The ordinary outfit of a Jew consisted of the inner garment, the outer garment, the girdle (belt), and the sandals. The inner garment, here called the tunic, was made commonly of linen, and encircled the whole body, extending down to the knees. The coat, or tunic, was

extended to the neck and had long or short sleeves. Over this was commonly worn an outer garment, here called cloak. It was made commonly nearly square, of different sizes, 5 or 6 cubits long and as many broad, and was wrapped around the body, and was thrown off when labor was performed.

Now, it was a normal thing for the extra tunic of a person to be given as collateral or bond during a court proceeding. Sometimes, in a serious offense, a person's cloak was even required by the courts to be given to the party bringing a lawsuit. However, God had laid down rules regarding this practice:

Exodus 22:26 If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.

Exodus 22:27 For that *is* his only covering, it *is* his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I *am* gracious.

A person had a right to get his cloak back before sundown. A person's right was that his cloak could not be taken away from him permanently.

So, the picture, through this illustration, that Jesus is giving is simply this: As a Christian, even though you have rights, don't demand that you receive them.

- being changed to bring change -

William Barclay makes an insightful application of this in his commentary on this verse:

Churches are tragically full of people (who demand their rights), officials whose territory has been invaded, office-bearers who have not been accorded their proper place, courts which do business with a manual of practice and procedure on the table all the time, lest anyone's rights should be invaded. People like that have not even begun to see what Christianity is. The Christian thinks not of his rights, but of his duties; not of his privileges, but of his responsibilities.

Matthew 5:41 *And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.*

It was a common practice for a Roman soldier to force or compel a Jew to supply food, or to provide lodging, or to carry his baggage. Sometimes this was done in a kind way. But most often it was done

in a demeaning way, that was met by disgust, anger and grudging service, on the part of the Jewish person.

There is an example of this in the Good Friday account, where Simon of Cyrene was compelled or forced to carry Jesus' cross by the Roman soldiers, after Jesus collapsed under its weight.

Suppose a Roman soldier comes to you, when you're minding your own business, you're tired, and you've had a bad day at the office or in the classroom. And that soldier forces you to carry his suitcase one mile. Jesus is saying, don't be bitter; don't be resentful; and don't pout. Instead, do it with cheerfulness, and offer to carry it an extra mile, if the soldier needs your help.

The principle is this: Don't be thinking about your liberty, your freedom, your convenience, or what you would rather do. Instead, be thinking about your duty and the privilege to be of service to others, and show the love of Jesus Christ through what you can do.

Matthew 5:42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

During every seventh year, all debts were to be canceled that were owed to a fellow Jew. This was how God watched over the poor of His chosen people.

Out fear of losing what was rightfully theirs, the Pharisees of Jesus day were making a practice not to loan any money, or to lend any financial help to any of their fellow Jews during the sixth or seventh year - because they were afraid of not getting back what they perceived was rightfully theirs.

Your rights to being a shrewd business person pales in importance when compared to the vital principle of giving up your rights in order to advance His Kingdom.

You have the right to be wronged and thus represent Jesus to those who are mistreating you or taking advantage of you.