
“AN EYE FOR AN EYE, A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH”

George Battey | January 21, 2014

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the major difference between this section (vv38-42) and the next section (vv43-48)?
- 2) According to Dt 19, what did an “*eye for an eye*” imply?
- 3) What does 1 Tim 1:9 mean when it says, “The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless”?
- 4) What is the major difference between the OT kingdom of Israel, and the NT Kingdom of heaven?
- 5) What three types of offences does Jesus address in vv39-41?
- 6) What wicked king was used by God to punish Israel and yet he did not know he was being used?
- 7) How long is a Roman “*mile*”?
- 8) Is Jesus teaching we should give everything asked for to everyone to asks?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5:38-42

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

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.

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

41 “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

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

We find in these verses a very relevant and practical subject. If we could learn and practice the things taught here it would solve a lot of our problems:

- at home
- in the neighborhood
- at school
- at work
- in the church

Sometimes our greatest enemy is not the fellow who slapped us in the face, but our own natural instincts and desires.

POLICE VS. MILITARY

There are two remaining sections in this 5th chapter:

- **vv38-42**
- **vv43-48**

The material in these verses is so similar and related that they are mingled together in Lk 6:27-36. However, each section addresses two distinct items:

vv38-42 — police action

vv43-48 — military action

TEXT (1)

In this lesson we will consider the first section: ***police action***.

Matthew 5:38

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

NOTE: This was *police action* – taken upon citizens within the kingdom. (Read Ex 21:24ff and see the context is regarding citizens within the borders of Israel.)

Military action – taken upon those outside the kingdom – will be covered in the next section.

This “*eye for an eye*” business has been named “***the law of retaliation.***” As far as I can tell, it applied to most, if not ALL cases of personal injury, including murder.

Notice two things about murder (for example) in the Mosaic Law:

1) It required the death penalty (Num 35:30-31)

2) The death penalty was not necessarily to be administered by stoning.

OT never says stone a murderer.

Q: If a murderer was not stoned, how was the death penalty administered?

A: “**Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.**”

In other words, the murderer was to be killed in the same fashion in which he killed his victim. An “*eye for eye, tooth for tooth*” implies:

- if murderer **strangled** his victim, strangle him
- if murderer **stabbed** his victim, stab him
- if murderer **beat** victim to death, beat him to death
- if murderer **shoved** victim off a cliff, shove him off a cliff

This is made more evident when Moses repeated the law in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 19:18-21

18 “And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,

19 “then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

20 “And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

21 “Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

NOTE: “An eye for an eye” (v21) = “do to him as he thought to have done to others” (v19)

The “*law of retaliation*” was not an option. God did not simply permit it — He commanded it.

OT ETHICS

Now ... let’s examine the rationale behind this “*law of retaliation.*”

All Hebrews were members of the Kingdom of Israel because of physical birth (Gen 17:13); they were not all spiritually minded!

Kingdom of Israel

Spiritual nation &
Carnal nation both.

(Church & state combined – theocracy)

- Some men were spiritually minded and could be governed by nothing more than spiritual laws, but
- Some men were carnally minded and understood nothing but force and muscle.

When some of the men in the kingdom are carnally minded and understand nothing but force, there must be present some *carnal laws* designed to restrain these savages.

If everyone in the kingdom were spiritually minded, there would be no need for carnal laws and punishments.

1 Timothy 1:9-10

9 knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,
10 for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine,

Paul did not mean the entire Mosaic Law was made for ungodly and lawless men, but only those carnal laws which imposed physical restraints and punishments.

A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

In contrast to the Nation of Israel, the church of Christ is strictly a spiritual kingdom:

Church

Spiritual (only)

Luke 17:20-21

20 ... "The kingdom of God does not come with observation;
21 "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

John 18:36

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. ...

Philippians 3:20

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, ...

ALL the citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom are spiritual citizens. Only men who have been spiritually born are citizens of the heavenly kingdom:

Hebrews 8:10-11

10 "... I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

11 "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

Jesus is trying to teach us that God's Kingdom of Israel was once governed by "*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*" — *out of necessity!* But when the Heavenly Kingdom arrives, it will no longer be so.

(This is why NT does not have carnal laws with physical punishments — because it's given to a totally spiritual people!)

GOOD POINTS OF THE "LAW OF RETALIATION"

The "*law of retaliation*" had many good points:

1) It was good

Romans 7:12

12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

It was good because it exercised restraint over violent, ungodly men.

Any civil government which tries to operate without some form of the "*law of retaliation*" will soon be at the mercy of savage barbarians.

A civil government cannot be operated by spiritual principles.

Romans 13:4

4 [a ruler] is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

2) It was just

FIRST, it was "just" because the punishment fit the crime:

Hebrews 2:2

2 ... every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

SECOND, it was "just" in the sense that the punishment was administered under the oversight of the proper authorities.

A man could not take the law into his own hands and administer punishment without a due process of law.

Proverbs 20:22

22 Do not say, "I will recompense evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.

Proverbs 24:29

29 Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."

These passages do not negate the "*law of retaliation*," but they oppose a vigilante.

3) It was merciful

Someone says, "You've got to be kidding!"

No. It was merciful in that it restrained revenge. Human nature is seldom satisfied with an "*even settlement*." The "*law of the jungle*" is:

- a leg for an eye
- an arm for a tooth

ILL: On 6/21/00 Ashley Pressley (3 ½ years old) was hit by Ryan Cox. She asked if I would kick him for her, throw him on the ground and stomp on his head.

Men don't stop with revenge until they've outdone their opponent. The Mosaic "*law of retaliation*" allows only an "*even settlement*."

4) It prevented crime

Everyone learned a lesson when a murderer was executed by the same method he used on his victim.

Deuteronomy 19:20

20 "And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

As mentioned earlier, this "*law of retaliation*" was commanded, not just permitted.

God knew that for the good of the society the crime *must* be punished.

ILL: In the Old West the hanging was a public hanging and everyone learned a lesson!

ILL: Michael Faye, Singapore, May 1994 – "*caned*" for spray painting cars. Received 4 "*swats*" from a soldier specially trained to swing a water-soaked bamboo cane. A doctor was on hand to revive Michael when he passed out after the first swat – so he could feel the next three swats. After this beating he was jailed for 4 ½ months. When set free, he wasn't spray painting cars any more!

This is what's wrong with our society today. Our civil government has become too lax in punishing criminals and we are finding ourselves overwhelmed by them now.

- Prison over-crowding
- Violent crimes increasing
- Drugs
- Gangs
- Mafia

One man wrote to Paul Harvey the following letter:

Dear Paul Harvey News,

Judges should not use such harsh courtroom language. When a person's convicted of some deadly crime that sentencing judge is likely to say: "I sentence you to serve certain years in the penitentiary. The judge should be more specific and more precise. What he should say is: "It is the judgment of this court that you be sentenced to three meals a day; comfortable lodging; a warm place to sleep; medicine if you get sick; color television to watch; all within the security of a state operated facility all of which will be free to you thru the generosity of law abiding American tax payers.

He should have included:

- air conditioning
- job training programs
- libraries
- basketball courts
- weight rooms
- professional counseling
- Monday-night football (11/07)

The present day method of punishing crime is teaching no one a lesson! If anything we're teaching that crime pays!

Deuteronomy 19:21

21 “Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

In this way God provided law and order within the Kingdom of Israel which was composed of both spiritual and carnal men.

TEXT (2)

Matthew 5:39

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.

Jesus is now telling us how the Heavenly Kingdom will operate. Because the church is composed only of people who have been born spiritually (Jn 3:5), there will be no need for the “*law of retaliation*” **among His people**.

From now on:

- **Civil authorities** — will handle matters of revenge (Rom 13:4), but
- **God’s people** — will handle only spiritual matters

Israel was a theocracy administering both carnal and spiritual laws. Jesus is separating the “*church and state*.”

This implies that God’s people are not to become involved in the enforcement of civil laws.

Kingdom of Heaven	Kingdoms of World
Church	Civil Government
Administers spiritual laws	Administers carnal laws

- God will use carnal men to administer carnal laws to carnal men, but
- Spiritual men to administer spiritual laws to spiritual men

We do not want civil governments stepping into the church and administering our spiritual laws. Neither should Christians step into civil governments and administer their laws!

THREE OFFENSES

In verses 39-41 Jesus addresses three different offenses which we might suffer:

(v39) slap on cheek — indicating **bodily injury**; how to react when physically attacked.

(v40) take away cloak — **loss of property**; how to react when our property is unjustly confiscated.

(v41) compel thee — **loss of freedom**; how to deal with losses of freedom.

This pretty well covers every area of our physical lives.

“I say to you that ye resist not evil” — that is, the evil man who has wronged us.

(In the OT God’s people would have resisted the criminal and administered physical punishment. Not anymore!)

TEXT (2)

(Continued)

Matthew 5:39

39 “... whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

“slaps you on your right cheek” – not only a case of physical injury, but a common form of insult (cf. 1 Kings 22:24; Lam 3:30). Jesus is telling us how to react to physical abuses.

It is not likely Jesus intended His words to be taken strictly literal. If so, after the second cheek is struck we could then retaliate.

Jesus illustrated how to do this. When He was struck in the face, He did not invite the officer to do it again. He rebuked the officer:

John 18:22-23

22 ... one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?”

23 Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?”

Paul was struck in the face in Acts 23:1-3, but he did not invite the officer to try again. In fact, he rebuked the officer.

What Jesus was teaching in Mt 5:39-42 is that God’s people will no longer be the administrators of physical punishment as in OT times.

Jesus is not saying there will be no punishment for violent criminals. He is only saying that God’s people will not be the ones administering that punishment.

If necessary you will allow one to hit you again, but you shall not administer punishment.

SEEKING PROTECTION

What are Christians to do when threatened by evil men who refuse to be guided by spiritual principles? Well, the Scriptures teach we are to seek protection through the civil government.

Romans 13:4

4 [the ruler] is God’s minister to you for good. ...

God uses violent men for violent jobs. He uses unconverted men to do things which would be wrong for Christians to do.

He is so sovereign – so much in control – that He can use unconverted men to control civil matters.

Isa 10:5-7 is a classic example of God using a heathen to perform a violent job. (Assyria used to punish Israel.)

God has commanded Christians to pay their taxes in compensation for the protection civil governments give us.

Romans 13:6

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing.

We are not taking advantage of the government, because we pay wages (taxes) to those whom God has appointed for law enforcement.

**BODILY INJURY INFLICTED
BY BRETHREN**

We’ll throw this in for what it’s worth: Suppose, now, that a brother in the church inflicts bodily injury upon us. What recourse do we have?

Matthew 18:15-17

15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

16 “But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’

17 “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

If this rebellious brother refuses to be guided by spiritual principles, Jesus said, “Let him be unto thee as a heathen.”

In other words, we now treat him as a heathen who harms us physically — we call on civil authorities if he continues to attack us.

ILL: Wife beating.

ARGUMENT: 1 Cor 6 forbids us from taking brethren to a civil court before unbelievers!

A: 1 Cor 6 does not deal with brethren who have been disfellowshipped. The Corinthians were completely bypassing the church and going immediately to heathen courts.

They were not even giving their erring brethren an opportunity to hear the church and respond to spiritual reasoning.

TEXT (3)

Matthew 5:40

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

coat (KJV) (χιτών) — the tunic worn next to the body; an undershirt

The enemy might take your underwear, but at least you’ve still got your cloak!

cloak (KJV) (ἱμάτιον) — the outer robe

Jesus is dealing with an unjust loss of property and He gives the most severe example.

Imagine not only losing your underwear, but your outer cloak on top of that!!

NOTE: Jesus is not forbidding us to defend ourselves in a court of law. Paul defended himself in court (Acts 26:1-2).

Paul defended himself in court, but here's the point Jesus is driving home in Mt. 5:

God's people are taken to court, but they do not compose the court.

In the OT God's people sat in judgment over criminals. They sat on the "bench" as judges of civil matters, but no longer.

Now the disciples of the kingdom will:

- be judged rather than judge
- submit to the verdict, but not render the verdict (even if the verdict is against them)

When Paul was judged unjustly he defended himself, but he submitted to the verdict of the civil authorities.

He did not campaign to elect "Christian judges" and "Christian juries." We shall, if necessary forfeit our property, but we shall not judge civil matters.

In essence:

- God's people will not **execute** civil laws (v39)
- God's people will not **judge** civil laws (v40)

SIDE NOTE: Can a Christian serve on a jury? — NO!

How do you get out of jury duty? I don't know!

Charles Everett:

"You can make me sit on the jury, but you cannot force me to render a verdict. You might as well let me go to prevent a "hung jury.""

TEXT (4)

Matthew 5:41

41 “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

compel (ἀγγαρεύω) — “to press or compel another to go somewhere, or carry some burden”

A good example is found in Matthew’s gospel:

Matthew 27:32

32 Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear [Jesus’] cross.

A Roman soldier could commandeer a Jew to carry his pack one mile (1000 paces). The Jews resented this.

ILL: Jew grabs pack and angrily counts steps, “*One, two, three ...*” Then slams pack into ground.

Rather than rebelliously resisting with a heart full of bitterness, Jesus said we should gladly and cheerfully go 2000 paces.

SUBMISSION TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT

- At one time God’s people would have planned a revolt and a war with foreign governments to free themselves from oppression. They would seek to establish their own government.
- Now God’s people must submit to the governing authorities that be. Rather than rebelling to form their own government, they obey the existing government (Rom 13:1-6).

They will gladly go beyond the requirements (two miles) so long as it does not conflict with God's laws (Acts 5:29).

TEXT (5)

Matthew 5:42

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

This passage has been greatly abused because many fail to examine the context of the verse. People begin to fret and worry:

- "If we give away our money to everyone who just comes and asks for it, we would have nothing left for ourselves."
- "Do we have to give to some lazy bum who refuses to work, but still he is asking from us?"

ILL: One preacher [Marietta, GA – summer of 1990 (as I recall)] taught: "If your neighbor borrows your lawn mower this summer and never returns it, what will you do when he asks for your chain saw in the fall?"

His implication was that if you don't give the chain saw, you are not doing what Jesus taught here.

If we would look at the context all these problems vanish!

Who is the one asking and borrowing in this verse? Why he's the man who:

- slapped us in the face
- sued us in court and took our clothes
- compelled us to go a mile

This man wanting to borrow something is that hateful enemy of ours. Apparently he has fallen upon hard times and now comes to us asking (*not compelling now*) for assistance.

Luke's account makes this point even plainer:

Luke 6:35

35 "But love your enemies, do good, and lend (i.e. to your enemies), hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

NOTE: An enemy who comes for assistance is having to eat a lot of "*humble pie*" to come now and ask a favor after the way he's treated us.

ILL: "He's treated me like dirt all these years, and now he has the gall to come ask a favor! I'll teach him a lesson!!"

Now, if we would honest we have all felt that way before ... Amen?!

Romans 12:17-21

- 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.
- 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.
- 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.
- 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."
- 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We must learn to turn all vengeance over to God. Let Him take revenge for us, but we ourselves will "*return good for evil.*"

POINTS IN GIVING

Let us say a couple of things about giving in general.

Sometimes we act as though this passage is all the Bible ever said about the subject of giving. There are other passages too.

(We are taught in the Bible to use discretion.)

Psalms 112:5

5 A good man deals graciously and lends; He will guide his affairs with discretion.

We must use discretion when giving. How much we give is limited by:

- our ability
- the actual need of the one asking
- whether the one asking can provide for himself

2 Thessalonians 3:10

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

Neither are we obligated to provide luxuries for anyone. We are to see that they have necessities (food, clothing, shelter), but more than this we are not required.

ILL: Some bums come around wanting gas, bus tickets, etc. I am not obligated to provide these things. To buy such items for these people only encourages further indolence.

CONCLUSION

Not only did Jesus teach us not to “*resist evil,*” and to “*turn the other cheek,*” He also provided us with a perfect example of how to do this:

1 Peter 2:21-24

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

Jesus did not ask us to do something He was unwilling to do Himself.

He could have called twelve legions of angels to save Him and take vengeance, but instead He prayed, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*

May God help us to “follow in His steps.”