

Matthew 5:38-42 Retaliation

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

1. Introduction:

A. Requirement of participation in Kingdom Life:

-Matthew 5:48 You therefore must be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

teleios -without blemish, nothing left out.....¹

B. False and True Righteousness:

By confining the law of God to outward duties only, they trained their disciples, like apes, to hypocrisy. They lived, I readily admit, as ill as they taught, and even worse: and therefore, along with their corrupted doctrine, I willingly include their hypocritical parade of false righteousness. -John Calvin²

2. Challenge: Have to do something with this passage

3. What does “...an eye for an eye” mean?

V38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’

From Three OT passages: (see also Lev. 24:19-20, Deut. 19:21)

¹† τέλειος. 1. The adj. means a. “whole,” of sacrifices, “without blemish,” Hom. Il., 1, 66, then “complete” in compass, with no part outside, nothing which belongs left out, Aristot. Metaph., IV, 16, p. 1021b, 12 f. τέλειος can then be par. to ὅλος, Phys., III, 6, p. 207a, 9 and 13, cf. ὅλον οὐ μὴδὲν ἔστιν ἔξω, 11 f.¹

² Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, p. 281). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Exodus 21:23-25, “But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

lex talionis FROM THE Latin *lex* ‘law’ and *talio(n-)* ‘retaliation’³

A. Its Meaning: A law of retaliation by which the guilty party suffers the same harm as that experienced by the injured party.⁴

This simple law, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” **is the foundation principle of all human justice.** All human justice is based on the fact that the punishment must never exceed the crime. It also is a law given by God to restrain vengeance, to take vengeance out of human relationships and put it within duly constituted authority so that it can be dealt with properly. -John MacArthur ⁵

B. Its Venue: Civil Courts

Deuteronomy 16: 18 Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. ¹⁹ Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Exodus 21:1 “Now these are the rules that you shall set before them.

C. Did not Govern Personal Relationships

Leviticus 19:17 “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

D. Its Administration (how literal?)

³ Soanes, C., & Stevenson, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Concise Oxford English dictionary* (11th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴ Huffmon, H. B. (1992). Lex Talionis. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 4, p. 321). New York: Doubleday.

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

At times, unimaginative societies have favored a policy of literal taliation—e.g., putting out the left eye of someone who injured another’s left eye. But given the inherent difficulties in carrying out specifically equivalent punishment—someone with but one eye; parties of rather different ages, etc.—the famous “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” does not provide genuinely specific guidance any more than a literal interpretation of “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away” (Matt 5:29). In view of the Bible’s interest in compensation to the injured party, as opposed to physical punishment of the guilty party, it seems likely that the reference to equivalency was intended even originally as a statement of principle. The injured party was probably seen as better served by compensation than by mere punishment.⁶

4. How had OT teaching been perverted? Had expanded venue of *rex talionis* into personal relationships; became self-appointed avengers.

Disaster in society-

Spiritual Disaster-

The only person who is non-defensive, non-protective, non-vengeful, never bears a grudge, has no spite in his heart, is a person who has died to self. What is there to defend? If I die to self, what is to defend? But if I’m going to fight for my rights, then I prove the point that self is on the throne, self is ruling.

Jesus had died to self in the sense that He had abandoned Himself to the Father’s will, so if He died, He died. Paul had abandoned himself to the Father’s will and died to self, so that he said, “If I live, I live to the Lord. If I die, I die unto the Lord. So whether I live or die, I’m the Lord’s.” He knew what it was to say, “I die daily.” If Paul had lived for himself, he would have gone through his life defending himself against his critics; he never did.

You see, selfishness is defensive, protective, vengeful, spiteful, reactionary. So if we are to have the Spirit that Jesus asks for, we have to die to ourselves. -MacArthur⁷

⁶ Huffmon, H. B. (1992). *Lex Talionis*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 4, p. 322). New York: Doubleday.

⁷ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

5. What was Jesus Teaching?

Principle: V. 39 “Do not resist the one who is evil.”

Four Scenarios:

1. **Dignity**: But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

The Jews said that the most demeaning, contemptuous act was to slap someone in the face. To have a fight was to treat someone as an equal, but to just slap them was demeaning. The Jews said that the most demeaning, doubly-contemptuous, arrogant act of a man is to slap you with the back of his hand. Epitetus, a Roman slave, wrote, “A slave would rather be thrashed with a whip than slapped with the back of his master’s hand.” It was just demeaning....

What Jesus is saying is that when someone treats you in a way that is less than you deserve, when someone takes the right to dignity that you have, don’t retaliate. Be slapped again before you would ever think to retaliate. Take as much as they want to give, but don’t retaliate.

....If you’re worried about dignity, beloved, someday you’re going to be a son of God in the image of Jesus Christ and you’ll stay that way forever. God’s going to pour out all the goodness of His grace on you forever and ever, so if you’re worried about your dignity, just hang on; you’ll get it. Don’t fight for it here, because if you do, you disavow that you are a son of God and you are related to Jesus Christ because you won’t be acting in a way consistent with Them. -MacArthur⁸

⁸ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

2. **Security:** 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

What the idea is here is that you've done something and you're being sued in court. There is a place for that; the courts have to decide certain disputes. So what happens is that you don't have anything to pay except that thing that you're wearing. I mean, you're down to nothing. He's going to get your proverbial shirt. When he gets your shirt, just to show how magnanimous your heart is, and just to show how sorry you are that you ever did anything to cause him trouble, give him your coat too.

...But Jesus is saying, "If someone has come to court and you have to give him your shirt, don't begrudge him. Don't be angry, bitter, retaliatory. Show him you're really sorry that it ever happened, and that you're so magnanimous, all you have left to keep you warm, your last little bit of security, you're willing to give him." -MacArthur⁹

"What then!" one may say, "am I to go about naked?" We should not be naked, if we obeyed these sayings with exactness; rather more abundantly than any should we be clothed. For first, no one would attack men of this disposition; and next, if there chanced to be any one so savage and ungentle, as to proceed even so far, yet many more would be found to clothe him, who acted with such self-denial, not with garments only, but even with their own flesh, if it were possible. -John Chrysostom¹⁰

3. **Freedom:** 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

You say, "That's hard to do." Right, but that's the spirit of your Father in Heaven. If God only went the first mile with us, we'd be in real trouble. He's carried our burden far beyond that. Don't be concerned with your liberty any more than you're concerned with your security or dignity. God will give you the freedom of the sons of God, the security of His home in Heaven forever, the dignity of the image of Jesus Christ. Don't chase the things here that destroy the testimony that God wants you to be. -MacArthur¹¹

⁹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom. (1888). Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew. In P. Schaff (Ed.), G. Prevost & M. B. Riddle (Trans.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* (Vol. 10, p. 125). New York: Christian Literature Company.

¹¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

4. **Property** 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you

Deuteronomy 15:7 “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, ⁸ but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. ...verse 10 You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. ¹¹ For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’

Though the words of Christ, which are related by Matthew, appear to command us to give to all without discrimination, yet we gather a different meaning from Luke, who explains the whole matter more fully. First, it is certain, that it was the design of Christ to make his disciples generous, but not prodigals: and it would be a foolish prodigality to scatter at random what the Lord has given us. Again, we see the rule which the Spirit lays down in another passage for liberality. Let us therefore hold, first, that Christ exhorts his disciples to be liberal and generous; and next, that the way of doing it is, not to think that they have discharged their duty when they have aided a few persons, but to study to be kind to all, and not to be weary of giving, so long as they have the means. - John Calvin¹²

5. Conclusions/ Applications:

¹² Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, p. 301). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.