

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Personal Relationships - Part 5 Retaliation and Vengeance

Text: Matthew 5:38-42

Introduction: It seems at the reading of the text we are to be pacifists and allow lawlessness to prevail. That's not the point as we will see in our text. Some have drawn this point this way. It was in the book *War and Peace* where the author says "*Eliminating the police, military and all forms of authority will bring about a utopian society.*" We know this isn't true. Many American cities tried this (and some still are) and the crime rate has been the highest ever. Man left alone, man seeking his own right, will always end up in evil, crime and wickedness.

Again we see the issue is the heart. As with the prior personal relationship that Jesus deals with, murder, adultery, divorce and honoring your words, again we look to the issue of the heart. The Pharisaical system only dealt with the external not the internal. That's why our Lord starts off each section with "*you have heard*" and then "*but I say to you.*"

POINT 1 - THE PRINCIPAL OF THE MOSAIC LAW

Exodus 21:24-25 "*eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*" Leviticus 24:20 "*fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.*" There is also the expression "tit for tat" or "quid pro quo". In the texts we just read, the law of God, was a form of *quid pro quo* where the idea was punishment for the crime.

The law of God designed here had basically two points. First, to curtail further crime. Deuteronomy 19:18-21 "*The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*" Secondly, it was to prevent excess punishment based upon personal vengeance. Punishment was to match not exceed the crime. Lamech avenged way beyond measure, Genesis 4:23-24 "*Lamech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give heed to my speech, For I have killed a man for wounding me; And a boy for striking me; If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.*" You see the excess vengeance. This law was given for the civil law system, the courts. Its core design was to remove excess retaliation on the part of the one who was offended. God himself instituted the judges and magistrates to take care of civil matters.

POINT 2 - THE PERVERSION OF THE LAW

The eye for an eye law was a good law. It was not an unjust law. God designed such a law to limit man's personal retribution. The law limited retaliation from an offended individual. The reason is

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what we see in this entire section of the sermon, a heart issue. Man deep down in his heart has a tendency to extract far more punishment than the crime. He wants to really show them, to make them pay. It has been said *"A pound of flesh for an ounce of offense."* Human vengeance wants to extract more and more. This law was designed to avert human vengeance. It doesn't mean it was designed to avoid consequences for a crime, but to avoid a retaliatory person from personal vengeance.

This isn't a vigilante approach. This isn't the wild wild west we see in movies. In these days if a man was offended or violated in some form, he would go to the court and the court, based upon witnesses would extract the proper judgment. In other words, an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, burn for burn. It was usually in some form of monetary payment or the like. But the point being the vengeance was removed from the one who was offended. Because the offended would likely extract far more than what fit the crime.

Illustration: Judges 1:6-7 *"But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me."* Now here's on OT illustration, literally, he was repaid by what he had done. In many countries today, if you're caught stealing they will cut your hand off. This has a tremendous effect on shop lifting. There are rules and laws put into place for a reason. It's to deter crime. God established laws to do such. These are laws that are spiritual as well and we see this clearly. Galatians 6:7 *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap."* Luke 6:38 *"For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."*

POINT 3 - THE PERSPECTIVE

Do not resist an evil person. This text does not imply we should not do anything about wickedness or evil. It doesn't mean we should turn our heads and look the other way. Nor is it teaching that Christians should be doormats too wickedness. Jesus and His Apostles opposed evil. When the Temple was being misused Jesus turned over the tables of those doing that and drove them out. James 4:7 *"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* 1 Peter 5:8-9a *"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith."*

Resist evil and sin in the church. Modern day churches don't resist evil or wickedness in the church, they often rename it or soften it to be acceptable. 1 Corinthians 5:13 *"But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."* The person who sins should be reprov'd in private, then with witnesses if he or she refuses to repent. Finally, if no repentance is evident they would be brought before the church to be excommunicated. Matthew 18:15-17 *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the*

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mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." 1 Timothy 5:20 "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." There's a reason for laws, there's a reason for resisting evil and wickedness, both in the world and in the church.

Lawlessness is not a design of God, it's a product of sin. Many city leaders have decided that the less police, the less law, the less prosecution, the better people will behave. That's one of the dumbest things I've heard. If it not for God restraining evil with laws and His own providence, man would utterly destroy himself. The point of the eye for an eye law was to restrain and punish those who did wickedly. Romans 13:4 defines the purpose of human law that God instituted, "for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." Believers are to report crimes, uphold moral standards, and encourage others to do so, to follow the law. God is a merciful God and a God of love, but also a God of judgment and wrath. 1 Timothy 1:8-10 "But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching."

Vs. 39a does not contradict Scripture. The point of the text is a law against personal vengeance. In other words, it prevents you from extracting more than the law requires. It prevents you from taking the "law into your own hands." Cf. Romans 12:17-19.

Application: Jesus is speaking of personal vengeance. He is addressing the fact not to take vengeance into your own hands. You will always want to extract more than the crime is worth. You will go beyond an eye for eye and "make them pay."