

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT SERIES
“RETALIATION - FROM A BITTER HEART”
Text: Matthew 5:38-42

Key Word: Retaliation

Key Thought: What Our Attitude Should Be When We Are Treated Improperly.

Life is an interesting opportunity for us to respond in many ways. A pessimist would think that just living is an opportunity to be mistreated. The optimist on the other hand would see life as an opportunity to shine forth when evil assails us. Jesus took the latter approach to shine forth in a world filled with evil and abusive people.

“A pessimist can hardly wait for the future so he can look back with regret.”

Source Unknown

“I read about a schoolboy who brought home his report card. It was heavy with poor grades. ‘*What have you to say about this?*’ asked his father. ‘*One thing for sure,*’ the boy replied, ‘*You can be proud of me, Dad. You know I haven't been cheating!*’”

“Morning Glory”
August 12, 1993

The portion of scripture that we are about to study this morning brings Christian ethics to its ultimate level. With the bombing of the World Trade Centres in 2011, many opposite viewpoints rose about how to respond properly. Was the 91% approval rate of retaliation any indication of the condition of hearts in the USA? **What about the Oct 7th 2023 attack on Israel?**

*** The attacks began with a barrage of at least 4,300 rockets launched into Israel and vehicle-transported and powered paraglider incursions into Israel. Hamas militants breached the Gaza–Israel barrier, attacking military bases and massacring civilians in 21 communities . . . According to an IDF report that revised the estimate on the number of attackers, 6,000 Gazans breached the border in 119 locations into Israel, including 3,800 from the elite "Nukhba forces" and 2,200 civilians and other militants. Additionally, the IDF report estimated 1,000 Gazans fired rockets from the Gaza Strip, bringing the total number of participants on Hamas's side to 7,000.

In total, 1,195 people were killed: 736 Israeli civilians (including 36 children), 79 foreign nationals, and 379 members of the security forces. 364 civilians were killed and many more wounded while attending the Nova music festival . . . About 250 Israeli civilians and soldiers were taken as hostages to the Gaza Strip, including 30 children, ***

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/October_7_Hamas-led_attack_on_Israel

I. THE OLD LAW OF RETALIATION

II. THE NEW LAW OF NON-RETALIATION

I. THE OLD LAW OF RETALIATION

A. The Lex Talionis

This Law is the oldest law in the world. It was based upon an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Some have described it as “*tit for tat*.” It was discovered from writings during the reign of Hammurabi in Babylon (2285-2242 B.C.). This law made an interesting distinction between those with a different status in their society.

“If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman’s eye, his eye one shall cause to be lost. If he has shattered a gentleman’s limb, one shall shatter his limb. If he has caused a poor man to loose his eye, or shattered a poor man’s limb, he shall pay one mina of silver . . . If he has made the tooth of man his equal fall out, one shall make his tooth fall out. If he has made the tooth of a poor man fall out, he shall pay one third of a mina (1.25 lbs in weight) of silver.”

[The Lex Talionis](#)

B. The Mosaic Law

This was very similar to Mosaic Law that followed.

*“But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,
24. eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
25. burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”*

Exodus 21:23-25

*“If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him:
20. fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.”*

Leviticus 24:19,20

“Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Deuteronomy 19:21

I. THE OLD LAW OF RETALIATION (Contd.)

1. The Limitation of Vengeance - Before we think that this is some kind of a bloodthirsty law we must understand the context of the time it first originated in. It actually had an aim of limiting the amount of vengeance that would take place.

In tribal societies when a man of one tribe injured someone from another tribe, a tribal war began. All the men of a tribe committed themselves to repaying ALL the members of the other tribe as a form of retribution. **In other words, every member of that tribe would die because of the action of one man.** It wouldn't stop with just an eye for an eye.

Therefore, this law limited the action toward only the man who committed the act and also limited the retaliation to only within what had taken place.

2. The Limitation of Court Action - This was never intended to be a law that could be solely acted out by an individual whenever he chose to do so. **It was limited to a court of law with a proper judge (Deuteronomy 19:18) presiding and assessing the damage before passing on the sentence.**

3. The Limitation of Symbolic Use Only (Matthew 5:38) - This law was never intended to be literally carried out. The Jewish jurists argued that it wouldn't be fair to carry it out to the letter of the law in case a good eye was displaced for a bad eye and the same for a tooth.

*** I can remember when Matthew was about 6 years old that one of his baby teeth was being pushed out by the ingrowing one. Unfortunately it was pushing it out horizontally. We tried to remove it but the tooth had a hook that was keeping it from coming out. One day at church he was running in the hallway and came a round a corner where he hit another young boy - face to face. The tooth came out. One act of disobedience (running in church) led to less suffering. God works in mysterious ways. ***

C. The Baba Kamma (The First Gate) - This was a Jewish law that placed a monetary value upon injuries in the order of the severity of the damages.

“If a man has injured another, he is liable on five counts – for injury, for pain, for healing, for loss of time, for dignity suffered.”

The Baba Kamma

1. For injury - Here a man was looked upon in the value of a slave ready to be sold in a marketplace. The value of this person was evaluated *before* and *after* the injury. The one committing the injury had to pay the difference.

I. THE OLD LAW OF RETALIATION (Contd.)

C. The Baba Kamma (Contd.)

2. For pain - It was estimated how much pain a man would be willing to accept to undergo the pain of injury inflicted. The man would then have to pay that amount.

****** A somewhat tortuous test was done a number of years ago on rats. Scientists placed a grid that they could adjust an electrical current between a rat and its offspring. They increased the current to see how much pain it would withstand to get over to its offspring.

They then did the same for a male and female rat that were in heat. They turned up the electrical charge until it almost burnt the feet off the little male critter. It wasn't going to give up without a good fight. ******

3. For healing - When it came to healing the one who injured had to pay all the medical bills until the complete cure was gained.

4. For loss of time - Compensation for wages lost while the person was injured and unable to work had to be paid out. Also if the injured person was no longer able to continue in a well-paid position a compensation package had to be arranged.

5. For dignity - Damages had to be paid for humiliation and indignity for any injury that had taken place.

D. This is not the whole of the Old Testament teaching - We need to compare this with other Old Testament scriptures.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

Leviticus 19:18

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink."

Proverbs 25:21

II. THE NEW LAW OF NON-RETALIATION

A. Striking the Right Cheek (Matthew 5:39)

If you are right-handed (as most people are) you would find it very difficult to strike someone on their right cheek. The only simple way to do it is with the back of your hand. According to Jewish Rabbinic law, anyone striking someone with the back of their hand was considered twice as insulting as using the front of the hand.

Since most people do not strike us on the face, it is apparent that Jesus was referring to the issue of retaliating when someone insults us. We must strive not to resent and retaliate when someone hurls an insult toward us.

Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a wine-bibber. His accusers also said that He was a friend of sinners, tax collectors and harlots. The early Christians were called cannibals and of being sexually permissive because of their involvement in what became known as their **“Love Feasts.”** Throughout history Christians have been accused of being a “thorn in the flesh” to the average citizen who lives as he/she wishes (ie. - slavery, abortion, euthanasia, adultery, or the alphabet community).

King David is one of the foremost examples of a man who refused to let his heart resent those who fought against him. It began with king Saul throwing spears at him (I Samuel 18:10-11; 19:9,10). **David felt deep remorse for even cutting the corner off of Saul’s robe (I Samuel 24:1-7). David also refused to retaliate against his son Absalom who secretly tried to take the kingdom from David (II Samuel 15:1-12). When being cursed by Shimei as being a man of blood and a scoundrel, David spared his life from the hands of Abishai (II Samuel 16:5-14).**

B. Suing and Taking a Tunic or Cloak (Matthew 5:40)

A **tunic (chitōn)** was a long inner garment which was made of either cotton or linen. Even the poorest of individuals owned one. A **cloak** was a great blanket-like outer garment which was worn as a robe during the daytime and then used as a blanket to keep out the cold at night. **Usually a common Jewish man would only have one cloak.** It could be used in a trading agreement with a stipulation clearly attached to it.

*“If you take your neighbour’s cloak as a pledge,
return it to him by sunset
27. because his cloak is the only covering he has for
his body. **What else will he sleep in?** When he cries
out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.”*

Exodus 22:26,27

II. THE NEW LAW OF NON-RETALIATION (Contd.)

B. Suing and Taking a Tunic or Cloak (Matthew 5:40) (Contd.)

Jesus was saying that we must not stand upon our rights.

“There are people who are forever standing upon their rights, who clutch their privileges to them and who will not be pried loose from them, who will militantly go to law rather than suffer what they regard as the slightest infringement of them. Churches are tragically full of people like that, 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.**”

William Barclay
“The Gospel of Matthew”
Vol. 1, p. 167

“Man must evolve from all human conflict to a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. **The foundation of such a method is love.**”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

We must think differently as Christians. **It is not a matter of our rights, but of our duties; not of our privileges but of our responsibilities.**

Camels may build up a pressure cooker of resentment toward human beings until the lid suddenly blows off and they go berserk. In Asia, when a camel driver senses trouble, he gives his coat to the animal. Rather like Japanese workers reported to work off frustrations by beating up models of their executives (ie. an effigy), the camel gives the garment hell -- jumping on it, biting it, tearing it to pieces. When the camel feels it has blown its top enough, man and animal can live together in harmony again.

David Taylor
Zoo Vet (Lippincott)
quoted by Charles Swindoll,
“Growing Strong”
p. 332.

II. THE NEW LAW OF NON-RETALIATION (Contd.)

C. Striving to go the Second Mile (Matthew 5:41)

The background of what Jesus was referring to comes from the Persians. They had an elaborate postal system for their time. It consisted of segments of road was each divided up into a day's journey on horseback. At the end of each segment was found food for the courier, water and fodder for their horse as well as a fresh horse. In the event that anything was missing the courier could compel any citizen to supply their need.

This word came to denote any action placed upon a common citizen by those who had the rule over them. This was commonly used to supply food, billeting as well as carrying baggage. Every Jew was under the yoke of slavery to any Roman. **The Romans could require that their baggage be carried for one mile. Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus under this law.**

Jesus taught His disciples to carry the load not just one mile without bitterness and resentment but carry it the second mile with an attitude of cheerfulness and grace. We are never to do difficult things with an attitude of just barely completing it.

“The inefficient workman, the resentful servant, the ungracious helper **have not even begun to have the right idea of the Christian life.**”

William Barclay
“*The Gospel of Matthew*”
Vol. 1, p. 169

D. Security in our Giving (Matthew 5:42)

The basis of what Jesus ended His thoughts with were found in Deuteronomy 15:7-11. There would always be the poor and needy in the land. There was no social security system in their day which was run by a government agency. If you knew of a need — you met it with your resources.

Those who followed the Rabbinic teaching of Hillel were required to bring any individual up to **their** normal standard of living. A person could very well return to a state of riches as they laid their rags aside. The humiliation that covered them because of their poverty would quickly vanish. **This was never intended to encourage an individual to return to a pattern of laziness and irresponsibility.** It was a HAND UP not a HAND OUT.

People will continually come asking for financial help. True Christians have a heart of gold tempered with discernment AND a head of knowledge tempered in wisdom.

What a better way to live our lives! Jesus wanted everyone to leave their bitter heart aside.

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Date: Apr 27/25

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: Lord You Have My Heart - Em

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- 3. The Limitation of Symbolic Use Only - *Matthew 5:38***

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- 2. For pain**
- 3. For healing**
- 4. For loss of time**
- 5. For dignity**

D. This Is Not the Whole of the Old Testament Teaching - *Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 25:21*

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B. Suing and Taking a Tunic or Cloak (Matthew 5:40) - *Exodus 22:26,27*

C. Striving to go the Second Mile (Matthew 5:41) - *Matthew 27:32*

D. Security in our Giving (Matthew 5:42) - *Deuteronomy 15:7-11*