

## The Christian And Retaliation

No. 49

### Introduction.

- I. I would like to call your attention to Matthew 5:38-42. Quo. ASV
- II. This passage is one of the most meaningful and yet one of the most abused passages in God's word.
  - A. Very often a person will commit evil against someone who has wronged him. When he is reproached for this, he says the Bible teaches, "An eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth." He feels that this justifies his conduct.
  - B. Let us carefully analyze this passage to see if it teaches this spirit of retaliation.
- I. "**An Eye For Eye**" - Jesus opened this passage by saying, "Ye have heard it was said, 'An eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'"
  - A. This commandment is found in the law of Moses. (Exod. 21:22-25; Lev. 24:19, 20).

**EXO 21:22** "And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide.

**EXO 21:23** "But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life,

**EXO 21:24** eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

**EXO 21:25** burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

**LEV 24:19** 'And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him:

**LEV 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.

1. The law of Moses very clearly taught, "An eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth." This law was not given, however, to private individuals as many have thought and taught. It was a judicial law. It was given to the judges to regulate their decisions. They were to administer "an eye for eye" to wrongdoers.
  2. Sometimes this law is **looked upon as being a very bad and unfair law**, but in reality it was a very excellent law. It was an excellent law because it made the punishment fit the crime and because it was intended to discourage crime. A person would think twice before he put out the eye of another if he knew he would receive the same or an equivalent punishment.
- B. **Christ did not find fault with this law as it applied to the judges.** He found fault with the way the Jewish teachers had misused it. They had interpreted this law to refer to private individuals, and taught a person had the right to afflict injury on another who had harmed him.
- II. "**Resist Not Him That Is Evil**" - In contrast to this, Jesus said, "Resist not him that is evil."
  - A. He taught us we are not to return evil for evil, but we are to endure the evils committed against us.
  - B. The question might be raised, "**How far does this passive, non-resistance to evil go?**" Are there limits to it? Does it mean a man cannot protect his property? Does it mean that a man cannot protect his own life? Does it mean that a man cannot protect the life of his wife and children?

1. Sometimes this passage is interpreted by good people to mean such. They teach that under no circumstance can a man defend himself and his family.
  2. This is not, however, the meaning of the prohibition. This is pressing this command too far. Christ is here condemning the spirit of revenge. He is condemning the spirit of “getting even” and the spirit of hatred and bitterness. He is not saying a man cannot protect himself and his family.
  3. There is a big difference between the spirit of revenge and protecting life. For example, a man can **call upon the police** to protect himself and his family without having this spirit of revenge. A man can stop a maniac from murdering his family without having any revenge, malice or hatred in his heart.
- C. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that Jesus is here dealing with **petty grievances**, not matters of life and death. This is borne out by the four examples He used in this text.

1. The first example Jesus gave is that of a man being **struck on the right cheek**.
  - a. If this happens Jesus taught that one is not to retaliate evil for evil but is to patiently endure the assault. He did not say a Christian is obligated to let the person beat him to death without any resistance. Such complete non-resistance would be an encouragement to crime.
  - b. In **Matthew 18:15-17**, Jesus taught what we are to do if a brother in Christ commits evil against us. (Relate). Jesus here teaches that the one harmed is to act, not be completely non-resistant to wrong.
  - c. John records these words in John 18:19-23.

**JOH 18:19** The high priest therefore questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

**JOH 18:20** Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues, and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.

**JOH 18:21** "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; behold, these know what I said."

**JOH 18:22** And when He had said this, one of the officers standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?"

**JOH 18:23** Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

Notice here that Jesus was not completely non-resistant. He gave a rebuke to the officer for slapping Him.

- d. Paul wrote these words in Romans 13.

**ROM 13:1** Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

**ROM 13:2** Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

**ROM 13:3** For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same;

**ROM 13:4** 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 upon the one who practices evil.

**ROM 13:5** Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

- 1) Paul stated the government is the agent of God to afflict punishment on evil-doers.
  - 2) The Christian has the right to resist evil by calling upon the civil government to protect him. The books of Acts contains several examples of Paul appealing to the civil authorities for protection. On one occasion nearly 200 soldiers were employed to protect him. (Acts 23:23).
2. The second example Jesus gave is that of a **man desiring to take away you coat**.

- a. Jesus taught that instead of going to law with a revengeful spirit that one should suffer loss. It is more important to control one's spirit than losing a coat. Not only is one to give up his tunic (his inner garment), but he is to give up his cloak (his outer garment). This will cause the person to realize that there is something unique about a Christian and will cause him to be ashamed.
  - b. Notice again this is limited to a petty grievance. Jesus was not saying that we cannot use proper means to protect our homes and other valuable possessions.
3. The third example Jesus gave is that of **being compelled to go one mile**.
- a. Roman law required the Jew to journey one mile with Roman soldiers, helping them carry their loads.
  - b. Jesus said one should not only do this, but should go an extra mile. One could go 2 miles without losing his day's wages. Again this is a minor grievance.
4. The final example Jesus gave is that of **helping the poor**.
- a. We are not to refuse those who are deserving of help. (Gal. 6:10).
  - b. This commandment also has some exceptions.
    - 1) We are not to help those who are too lazy to work. (2 Thess. 3:10).
    - 2) Furthermore, we are not to starve our families to feed someone else's family. (1 Tim. 5:8).

**Brother J.W. McGarvey**, one of the restoration preachers, said: “**This** command which enjoins non-resistance, like most of the other precepts of this sermon, does not demand of us absolute, unqualified passivity at all times and under all circumstances. In fact, we may say generally of the whole sermon on the Mount that it is not a code of slaves, but an assertion of principles which are to be interpreted and applied by the children of freedom. We are to submit to evil for principle's sake and to accomplish spiritual victories, and not in the abject servile spirit as blind followers of a harsh and exact law. On the contrary, taking the principle, we judge when and how to apply it as best we can. Absolute non-resistance may so far encourage crime as to become sin. The example given, a slap in the face, has been regarded as a gross insult in all ages, but it is not an assault which imperils life. Self-preservation is a God given right, which under most circumstances, a Christian can claim. He may resist the robber, the assassin and all under men of that ilk, and may protect his person and his possessions against the assaults of the violent and lawless. But when the honor of Christ and salvation of man depends on it, he should observe this commandment even unto the very letter. Many men strive for self-protection when life is threatened without any spirit of revenge.”

### III. Returning Good For Evil

- A. It is clear that this passage does not teach complete non-resistance to all evil.
  1. It does teach the Christian is not to be filled with the spirit of revenge.
  2. It also teaches that whenever possible that a Christian is to return good for evil. (Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:20, 21).
- B. The Bible contains some outstanding examples of returning good for evil.
  1. One of the most impressive examples is **Joseph**. All of us remember how the brothers of Joseph beat him and

sold him into slavery because they were envious of him. Later, through, the providence of God, Joseph was made the head over Egypt. When the 7 years of famine came that Joseph had prophesied would come, it was necessary for the brothers of Joseph to come to Egypt to secure food. When they came to Joseph, he could have returned evil for evil and had them killed or placed in prison. Instead of doing this Joseph forgave his brothers and returned good to them. He said, "I will nourish you and your little ones." The Bible also says, "he comforted them and spoke kindly unto them." (Gen. 50:21).

2. Another wonderful example is **David**. Saul, the king of Israel, was very envious of David because the people were chanting, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." He became angry and tried to kill David. When David later had an opportunity to kill Saul he refused to return evil for evil and spared Saul.
3. Another example is **Stephen**. (Acts 7:60).
4. The greatest example is **Christ**. (Lk. 23:34).

## Conclusion.

- I. Let us always imitate our Lord by returning good for evil.
  - A. This evidences that we are sons of God endowed with the spirit of Christ.
  - B. This evidences that we have put on Christ and are following in the steps of the One "who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." (1 Pet. 2:23).
- II. I would like to conclude this lesson by telling about a **man who lived in Canada**. His house was on the highway just outside the garbage collection area. The garbage trucks didn't come out far enough to pick up his garbage, so he hit on a novel idea. He put the garbage in an attractive package and set the package out by the side of the road. He then looked out the window and saw a car approaching. The man in the car saw the package, stopped the car and got out. He looked around to see that no one was watching, picked up the package, got back into his car and sped away. You can imagine how surprised this man was when he opened the package farther down the road and found that he had nothing but garbage.
  - A. **This is a picture of those living in sin**. Thinking God does not see them and they can mock God, they seize the attractive pleasures of sin, only to later find that they have garbage of the soul that brings bitterness here and condemnation in the hereafter.
  - B. The way of the transgressor is hard and full of bitterness, but the way of Christ is full of joy and happiness. Won't you come to Christ! Won't you put your trust in Him. Come as we stand and sing.

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