

Mt.5:38 ¶ "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'<sup>39</sup> "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.<sup>40</sup> "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.<sup>41</sup> "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.<sup>42</sup> "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

Once again we have Jesus declaring in opposition to false interpretation and misapplication of the Scriptures, "But I say unto you."

Neither of the 4 statements is from the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments as some previous quotes were. However, the eye for an eye is a quote from the Scriptures and the other statements are very culturally relevant. In the end as it has been all through the Sermon on the Mount the greater purpose in Jesus giving His law is to make it clear that these things are matters of the heart. It is all about the attitude of the heart, Jesus never was nor ever will be interested in mere external obedience. The New Covenant is a Covenant whose terms involve a changed heart as we established earlier in our study.

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26, NAS95).

**Heb 8:10\*** "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM **ON THEIR HEARTS**. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

The writer of Hebrews is quoting from Jer. 31:33.

The Law of Christ for His New Covenant people is not a law or laws written on tablets of stone. This law will be written on the hearts of all those who are genuinely His because they have salvation by His grace. They and they alone will be able to obey Christ in any manner. They will not only desire to obey but will be equipped to obey because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and when they are disobedient they will know it because of the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

This is what makes the distinction between the Christ's kingdom dwellers and the ones who have a false righteousness as Jesus has warned that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

In our text this morning Jesus first mentions a part of the law that governed the nation of Israel in civil matters found in three statements.

This command is found in Ex 21:24 Le 24:20 De 19:21.

Ex 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

Le 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.

De 19:21 "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

In these places it was given as a rule *to regulate the decisions of judges*. They were to take eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, and to inflict burning for a burning. As a *judicial rule* it is not unjust. Christ finds no fault with the rule as applied to *magistrates*, and does not take upon himself to repeal it. But, instead of confining it to magistrates, the Jews had extended it to *private* conduct, and made it the rule by which to take *revenge*. They considered themselves justified, by this rule, to inflict the same injury on others that they had received. So again by Jesus' day they had misinterpreted and misapplied God's word. I cannot stress enough that that is the same situation we are in today. Regardless of what kind of church we are attending, the possibility of misinterpreting and misapplying Scripture because of the traditions of men rather than the rigorous study of the Scripture is rampant.

It is a heart matter when one seeks revenge and retribution and forgetting that Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay.

So in light of the error that was going on regarding the truth of Scripture Jesus **says'** but I say unto you do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek turn the other to him also.

We can only imagine the immediate reaction to this statement.

Then and now personal revenge in Middle Eastern society and other places is a reality. And people who know the Middle East today will tell you that this practice of personal revenge continues to be a very great factor in society there. A professor of mine took a group to Israel a few years ago. In the context of that visit to Israel for study, one young Jewish member of the group, an American Jewish fellow saw a classmate of his from Northeastern University. She happened to be Muslim. She was on the street unaccompanied by her brothers. And so this young Jewish man went over to speak with her and they had a very nice uneventful conversation and he walked away. Her brothers

spotted him speaking to their sister. Her brothers came and kidnapped this man that night because he had broken their Muslim law, which says, you may not speak with a single woman unaccompanied. They chained him to the bumper of their car and drug him through the streets of Jerusalem until he was left for dead. He was in the hospital for months and months and months. And when he got out of the hospital, then his brothers perpetuated that blood feud by going and murdering the young men who were the brothers of this young lady. These sorts of feuds perpetuate without laws to protect them, and that law of the Old Testament, of Moses was designed to protect precisely that type of thing from happening because it puts the decision on punishment and justice, not in the hands of the individuals, who have been harmed, but in the hands of the courts.

What was the purpose and the reason for Jesus' teaching, for this new way for His kingdom people to react when accosted by someone? Does this apply to all circumstances when I am approached with the intent of evil harm being done to me or my family? What do I do if I see another individual being attacked? Do I ignore it, do I look the other way?

The literal greek means not to set ourselves against an evil person who is injuring us. That at least tells us we are not restricted in coming to another persons aid when they are being attacked. As a matter of fact I would say that Great Commandment of Jesus concerning loving our neighbor as ourselves makes us guilty of sin if we don't try to help in some way if we are able.

But what do we do if evil is being perpetrated toward us in a criminal act? Should I just let some one attempt to rob me knowing they may do more than take my wallet or should I look the other way if some one attempts to rape my wife or daughter or my son?

I believe we can reconcile this rather easily.

John 15:13\* "Greater love has no one than this, that one **lay down his life** for his friends.

The ultimate act of loving someone is dying for them if need be. This means intervention. Now of course Jesus substituted for us at Calvary. He took all the wrath that was meant for me and did not utter one single word or retaliate in any way. But in laying down my life

for another it may mean in the midst of a struggle but it still does not mean that I am retaliating out of revenge.

At one point in Jesus ministry he tells his disciples the time is coming and among other things to have a sword. Lk.22:36. He says this on the way to Gethsemane.

They were going into the midst of dangers. The country was infested with robbers and wild beasts. It was customary to go armed. He tells them of those dangers-of the necessity of being prepared in the usual way to meet them. This, then, is not to be considered as a specific, positive *command* to procure a sword, but an intimation that great dangers were before them; that their manner of life would be changed, and that they would need the provisions *appropriate to that kind of life*. The common preparation for that manner of life consisted in money, provisions, and arms; and he foretells them of that manner of life by giving them directions commonly understood to be appropriate to it.

The sword was not to be used against the enemies of the gospel.

Then once they are in Gethsemane we read,

**47\*** ¶ While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd *came*, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him.

**48\*** But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

**49** When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"**50** And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. **51** But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

**52** Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber?"

A sword used to protect against a robber is not a foreign idea for Jesus. Paul writes in Romans that the sword is equal to the power of the magistrate or the government and keeping law and order in a society.

But Peter has violated Jesus own teaching about suffering persecution by drawing his sword to protect Jesus when it is Jesus purpose to not be protected.

So how do we not resist evil?

Being slapped on the right cheek by a right handed person means being back handed.

That brings more force behind it than an open handed slap. Usually this occurs in fits of anger or momentary rage or in deliberately trying to embarrass someone. It is not the

normal way someone slaps you. When this occurs Jesus says, if necessary let them strike the other cheek also. Do not retaliate. I believe the implication is that this is over a personal matter or possibly one striking out at you because of your testimony and giving a warning to be quiet and to say no more. In the context of the entire sermon I believe it has more weight in the earlier statements of Jesus about rejoicing when we are persecuted for His names sake.

In any case, personal revenge, and retribution are not to be considered. It is a matter of the heart. Even in defending my family, if I subdue one who has tried to harm them I may want to get in an extra punch, or a kick or a hit with a baseball bat just out of anger and a desire for vengeance. Jesus says no.

Jesus next addresses a very personal matter.

Someone wants your clothes. This is not a robber approaching you for he would want the outer expensive garment..

This is a litigious situation. Someone wants to sue you and demands your inner garment. Jesus says let him have it rather than going to court. And give him the outer coat as well because the law will do so anyway if they judge in his favor..

Now of course, this is not an absolute in one sense or Jesus would be encouraging frivolous litigation and a number of people would be running around in nothing but loin cloths.

So what is Jesus saying to us today.

Now, don't misunderstand what Christ is saying. He is not telling you, Christians may not resort to a court of law. He is not saying that Christians may have nothing to do with lawyers. He is not saying Christians shouldn't be lawyers and they shouldn't practice law, and they should never go to court. That is not His point.

His point is to detect an attitude in us. Are we quick to demand our rights, are we quick to press our interests despite the needs of others, are we willing to forebear and to forego our rights for the sake of the kingdom? We talk about all kinds of reform being needed in our society. Perhaps we do, but we need heart reform too.

Because nothing can protect you from people that are ready to sue you at the drop of a hat. What is that? It is a reflection of the state of the heart. And we are all at one time or another ready to respond in that way. Because we in our day, are concerned about our rights. And if our children have done something wrong at school, it couldn't have been our children, and hey, our children have their rights, it has got to be the principal, it has got to be the teacher. And if something has happened out in the community, it certainly has to be the responsibility of that big large nasty industry that has done something. It couldn't be individuals that are at fault. And certainly not us. And we have a mindset which insists upon our rights and is quick to attack others. Jesus is responding precisely to that.

Think about the apostle Paul. Paul was a Roman citizen and that gave him certain rights. One of those rights was that you cannot be beaten by a Roman procouncil without a trial. On numerous occasions, the apostle Paul never mentioned the fact that he was a Roman citizen, until after the beating had been administered. Why? It appears as we study Paul in the book of Acts that when Paul thinks that there is a kingdom matter at stake, he will call upon his Roman citizenship and insist on being treated according to the Roman law. But when a matter only concerns Paul and his reputation or his circumstances, he won't even tell people of that right that he could have claimed. He even does this at times with the churches as he visits them He could claim his apostleship and in essence demand room and board and all that was needed as he went from place to place to teach the brethren, but he did not do it.

Is that our attitude, or are we always poised and on guard ready to stand on our rights, even when others are taking advantage of us.

Should we always demand our rights or should we be peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of god. When ever it is possible be at peace with all men.

Then Jesus makes things even a more complex and difficult.

He says in vs. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

This was Roman law. If a Roman soldier approached you and told you to carry his luggage or something for him you were obliged to do so. You had no choice. In more ancient times the Persians would have people take messages for them to an outpost by using horses or chariots of those under their rule.

This very thing was done to Simon of Cyrene who was thus compelled to carry the cross of Christ (Mt 27:32)

Jesus attitude is go two miles rather than one. Rather than argue show a different kind of spirit. Be willing to do more than what is required even if it is something that is being forced on you.

This must have been especially hard for any of the political Jewish Zealots like Simon who were being attracted to Jesus' teaching.

Of course this does not have anything to do with immorality of any kind.

Again, the heart attitude is what will allow this to occur especially when we are responding to anyone who can claim legitimate authority over us.

What Jesus has to say next can also very easily be misread and misapplied.

**v42\* "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.**

Here Jesus is again instructing us that we need to develop a habit of the heart.

This is not an absolute to give to everyone everytime and everything they ask for. This is not meant to bring you to abject poverty.

If I see the signs of drug addiction or alcoholism in a person I am not going to give them money so they can abuse themselves again. I may buy them a meal or a cup of coffee if that is what they need or provide them clothing or go out of my way to get them help and use it as a bridge to build a relationship that may lead to sharing the gospel.

But If a widow, an orphan, a truly needy person, or a person who is infirm, lame, or sick, comes my way, I should help in whatever way I can.

I like what D.A.Carson says about this verse:

"The burden of the passage is this: Christ will not tolerate a mercenary, tight fisted, penny pinching attitude which is the financial counterpart to a legalistic understanding of

an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Don't be asking yourself all of the time what's in it for me? What can I get out of it?"

In each of these verses this morning Jesus is saying that His kingdom people have no rights. Not that we don't have rights in the legal sense as Paul did, but that we are not to be concerned first of all with our rights when we do have rights of one sort or another. We never have the right to retaliate, especially violently but we might have some legal right in some matter but it may be better to give it up.

Jesus is saying that we don't have the rights to our possessions when we can help others. This passage is compelling us to regard very highly the principles of self-sacrifice rather than personal satisfaction.

This is not about what is right or wrong it is about the way of the cross. It is about "but I say unto you." It is about living the norms of the Christian life and having the result of people knowing that Christ's true disciples are different than others in this world.

It is about the church being what Christ says she should be. We don't exist as Christians in a vacuum we are a body, the church needs to be seen living like this, not just you or me but Christ's church.

What Jesus says next will be astounding and these verses are building to an unheard of concept- Love your enemies.

So if we are filled with anger and rage and want revenge, if we cannot humble ourselves in any way when we are taken advantage of by others who have authority over us, if we do not have an attitude of charity and helping others when we can then how are we going to be able to love our enemies.?