

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Matthew 5:38-42

I. INTRODUCTION

Going the extra mile

II. THE TEXT

KJV—**38** *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. 41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

NIV—**38** *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

NASB—**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 an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.*

The Message—*Here’s another old saying that deserves a second look: ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’ Is that going to get us anywhere? Here’s what I propose: ‘Don’t hit back at all.’ If someone strikes you, stand there and take it. If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. And if someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.*

Parallel Text: Luke 6

29 *"Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. 30 "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.*

NOTE: Luke inserts Golden Rule in his version—which comes later in Matthew.

III. BACKGROUND

A. OLD STANDARD

Ex 21:23-5—*"But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*

Lev 24:20-22—*'If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. 'Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. 'There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the LORD your God.'*"

Dt 19:21—*Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

B. MEANING OF THE OLD STANDARD

1. Even—handed justice
 - a. Lays down principle of ‘proportional retaliation’—putting limits on vengeance.
 - b. *lex talionis* = ‘law of the talion’—or law of retaliation
 - c. Also found in the Code of Hammurabi—16th century BC
2. It was a more moderate standard than Graeco-Roman ones, which were more severe.
3. It was used to mitigate violence
 - a. To prevent its upward spiral—of vendettas and blood-feuds
 - b. The measure of vengeance was fair and final—and could not be disputed or invite retaliation.
4. Still—it was designed to be severe enough to check violence—e.g. “show no pity.”
5. And—it was designed to protect and preserve the integrity and security of whole society.
6. But this was not *required*
 - a. For retaliation against humans—the Old Testament did not *require* retribution
 - b. In fact the OT called for mercy—and restraint

Lev 19:17-18--*You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*

Prov 20:22—*Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the LORD, and He will save you.*

Prov 24:29—*Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."*

C. CONTEXT OF JESUS’ DAY

1. The basic principle originally applied to a more strict situation

- a. Only related to retaliation
- b. Only in the Jewish legal system
- 2. Now its application has been broadened
 - a. To cover social and legal relationships—even outside the legal system
 - b. Broader principle: the right aggressively to protect one's own interests

D. FIVE SITUATIONS ADDRESSED BY JESUS

- 1. FIRST SITUATION—striking on the cheek
 - a. Deals with overt violence
 - b. Right hand striking right cheek
 - 1. Back-handed attack—right hand to right cheek
 - 2. Probably—someone insulting you
 - 3. The Mishnah laid down penalties for insulting by the back-handed slap

“If a man cuffed his fellow he must pay him a sela”—*B. Qam.* 8:6
The tractate goes on to lay down the penalties for slapping, hitting with the back of the hand.
 - c. Could be—unprovoked attack—trying to pick a fight
 - d. In either instance—offending party is wrong—and retaliation would *seem* to be in order
- 2. SECOND SITUATION—suing for the shirt
 - a. Deals with legal situation
 - b. Two items concerned
 - 1. **χιτών** = shirt worn by everyone—‘tunic’
 - 2. **ὑμᾶτιον** = cloak—used for variety of purposes
 - To carry objects or grain
 - Outer garment for cold weather
 - A blanket—usually for the poor
 - c. Assumptions
 - 1. Person suing has a legal case—and is justified in bringing suit

2. Person being sued is very poor—their shirt is the only thing worth taking for the debt
3. Though legally justified—this suit violates the *spirit* of Mosaic law

Ex 22:25-27— If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear *him*, for I am gracious.

4. One's cloak could not be taken permanently—it could be surrendered only voluntarily
- d. Again—given these circumstances—fighting the suit would *seem* to be in order
3. THIRD SITUATION—going one mile
 - a. Deals with compulsory but often unpaid public service
 - b. Common practice in Middle East since Persian rule
 1. **Persian Empire**
 - **Persian Royal Post authorized its couriers whenever necessary to press into service anyone available and/or the latter's animal. There must be no delay in the dispatch and delivery of the king's decrees**
 2. **General principle**
 - Right of an occupying power to press into service persons/animals without notice
 3. Based on officials' genuine need for transport/labor—for good of the kingdom
 - c. **Roman law**—allowed soldiers to impress people to carry supplies
 1. Soldiers could force service for one Roman mile = 1000 paces = 8 stadia (4854 feet)
 2. **Example: they did so with Simon of Cyrene—forced him to carry the cross! (Mk 15)**
 - d. Great resentment among Jews against Romans—especially when right was abused
4. FOURTH AND FIFTH SITUATIONS —giving to those who ask
 - a. Both situations are inversions of the previous three
 1. Previous three situations dealt with persons in more powerful situation
 2. These final two deal with a poorer or less powerful people
 - A beggar who has nothing

- A borrower who has fallen on hard times
- b. Similarity to previous situations
 1. Responding to a person who takes the initiative to take/ask something from you
 2. Response requires decision—whether or not to give up what seems rightfully yours
- c. Giving to the poor—in Jewish tradition

Dt 15:7-8—*If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.*

- d. Lending to the needy—in Jewish tradition
 1. Lending was allowable—but one could not charge interest

Ex 22:25—*If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.*

- Several other passages allow one to lend—but all forbid charging usury
- 2. Debts were subject to being cancelled
 - a. All debts were to be cancelled at the sabbatical year—procedures outlined in **Deut 15**
 - b. All property was to be returned during the jubilee year—procedures outlined in **Lev 25**

III. EXPLANATION

A. GENERAL PRINCIPLE

1. “Do not resist and evil person”
 - a. Wording
 1. Do not resist = **ανθιστημι** = stand/set against—withstand—oppose
[sounds like ‘antihistamine’—but not etymologically related]
 2. Evil person = **πονηρος** = evil
 - a. Can mean either ‘evil’ or ‘evil person’
 - b. Same word used for ‘evil one’ in previous passage—**Mt 5:37**
 - c. Here—clearly means **evil person**—one who does such things
 - d. Cannot mean ‘evil’ in general—because we are *commanded* to resist evil

b. Meaning

1. Don't be aggressive in asserting your rights against an opponent
2. Let Christian kindness transcend legalistic retribution
3. Let your moderate spirit be known to all men—**Phil 4:5**
4. This does *not* mean—do not resist evil—which we are *commanded* to do

Jas 4:7—*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

I Pe 5:8-9—*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, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.*

2. Jesus illustrates his point with five examples

- a. Five moral/ethical situations—with pre-determined legal/moral requirements
- b. Over-arching meaning—Jesus uses each situation to make yet another point
 - Don't be legalists
 - Show a generous spirit
 - Put others' needs before your own

B. FIVE MORAL/ETHICAL SITUATIONS

1. **FIRST SITUATION**—THE SLAP

- a. Do not resist insults: do not trade insults with another person
- b. Do not resist provocation: do not be drawn into a fight
- c. By not resisting
 1. One unmasks the perpetrator for who he really is—a bully
 2. One shows moral strength—willing to suffer rather than escalate the spiral of violence
- d. Paul provides a good commentary on this verse

Rom 12:19-21—*Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- e. This does not mean to let injustice pass without notice

Jn 18:19-23—Jesus’ dignified response—**19** *The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 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. 21 Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.” 22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?” 23 Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?”*

- f. This does not mean *never* respond to violence
- g. It does not bear on the pacifism issue and the right of self-defense

2. **SECOND SITUATION**—THE SUIT

- a. Do not resist person suing you
- b. Go *beyond* what he expects—and offer him more
- c. By not resisting—one unmasks the plaintiff for who he really is
 - 1. A selfish person with no compassion
 - 2. Someone who is prepared to strip away the last vestige of a person’s dignity

3. **THIRD SITUATION**—IMPRESSMENT

- a. Do not begrudge lawful service to the government—though you may resent it
- b. By giving ungrudging compliance
 - 1. You meet a genuine need of someone else
 - 2. You make both them and you feel better about the transaction
 - 3. You lay a basis for new, better relationship in the future
- c. Also fits Paul’s injunction to be obedient to the lawful authorities—**Rom 13:1-7**

1 *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.*

4. **FOURTH AND FIFTH SITUATIONS**—GIVING TO OTHERS

- a. Generosity should be extended also to the poor
- b. Jesus reinforces the Jewish tradition of almsgiving—giving with the ‘open hand’

- c. He gives further directions for almsgiving in **Chapter 6**—secret giving—not for notice/reward
- d. Notice two things
 - 1. Giving to the poor
 - a. Jesus *commands* to give
 - b. Expectation we *must always* be prepared to respond to those in need
 - 2. Lending
 - a. Is not an imperative—but a subjunctive: we *should* not turn away
 - b. Also—there is not requirement to loan money
 - c. Rather—be open to helping—[not turning away]—in whatever way we are capable
 - Loaning what they need
 - A word of encouragement
 - Connecting them with someone else who can help
 - d. Jesus does not limit help to *loaning*—maybe we can *give* the person what is needed

IV. WHAT DID JESUS REALLY MEAN?

A. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1. Go beyond what others expect—go above and beyond—to show you are my disciples
- 2. Don't always seek aggressively to protect your rights
- 3. Show a moderate spirit—be gentle and don't over-react
- 4. Don't be legalists—show a generous spirit
- 5. Seek ways to engage others and change negative relationships to positive ones
- 6. Overcome evil with good
- 7. Be peacemakers—as in the 7th beatitude—**verse 9**
 - This passage forms a bridge to the next one
 - **vv 43-44**—don't hate your enemies—love them and pray for those who persecute you
- 8. Don't be selfish—but look after others' interests first:

Phil 2:3-4—*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

B. WHAT JESUS DID NOT MEAN

1. This is not a new legalistic code for legal/moral behavior—but examples for general guidelines
2. They do not absolutely restrict use of force against violence
 - a. Jesus was addressing private retaliation
 - b. Not a basis for neglecting good public order and defense
3. They do not mean legal recourse is never allowable
4. They do not mean we let people run roughshod over us by abusing their power