

“GOING THE EXTRA MILE”

Matthew 5:38-48

How would you respond if somebody wronged you? Some of you might be thinking...

- “I’d give them what’s coming to them.”
- “I wouldn’t get mad, I’d get even.”

Our flesh pokes and prods us to retaliate when somebody mistreats us and to practice reciprocal love. That is, only love those people who love us. How does that square up with the teachings of Jesus? Too many Christians shove Jesus and His clear teachings to the fringe of their lives, especially if their private agendas are threatened. Listen, the more we marginalize our Lord and His kingdom agenda, the shoddier and the more spiritually anemic our lives become.

In this text, Jesus shows us the right way to respond when we are wronged.

Matthew 5:38–42... “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.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth.’” (38)

- This quotation is taken directly from the Old Testament—**Ex. 21:24, Lev. 24:20**. The meaning of these verses is that the punishment must fit the crime

Exodus 21:23–25... “But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* 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.”

Leviticus 24:19–20... ‘If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: **20** fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.’”

- The Old Testament Law was divided into three parts: the MORAL LAW, the CEREMONIAL LAW, and the CIVIL LAW. These directions were given in the context of a civil justice system and they were given for two purposes—to reduce crime and to assure fair punishment. In no way did the Old Testament Law allow individuals to take the law into their own hands and carry out vigilante justice.

“But I say to you, do not resist an evil person” (39)

Don’t misinterpret what Jesus is saying here. Some have said that believers are never to take a stand against evil. They are to just let it run its course. This is the reason why some are pacifists. Let me tell you why that can’t be true.

Do you remember the time Jesus took fashioned a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple? He was taking a stand against evil and so must we!

Romans 13:1–4... 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. **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; **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 on the one who practices evil.

This is the role God has granted to the government to carry out civil justice. Paul gave instructions to the church in Rome concerning this idea of personal vengeance as it relates to the Christian life.

Romans 12:17–21... Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **19** 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. **20** “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 ON HIS HEAD.” **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Jesus is referring in this case to someone who launches a personal attack against us (by someone who is evil). In this text, I want you to see that Jesus gives four specific illustrations. Each of these commands requires Jesus’ followers to act more generously than what the letter of the law demanded. “Going the extra mile” has rightly become a proverbial expression and captures the essence of all of Jesus’ illustrations.¹

¹ Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 113.

“Whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (39)”

For a Jew, a slap was one of the most demeaning things you could do to a person. (***Matt. 26:67-68; Is. 50:6***) It was an attack on one’s honor! So how are we to react to an insult hurled at us?

Striking a person on the right cheek suggests a backhanded slap from a typically right-handed aggressor and was a characteristic Jewish form of insult. Jesus tells us not to trade such insults even if it means receiving more. In no sense does v. 39 require Christians to subject themselves or others to physical danger or abuse.²

**Jesus says we are to turn to him the other cheek.*

This is not what we want to hear. Deep inside us we have a desire to retaliate—to stand up for our rights. Hear this. You and I are a part of our Lord’s eternal kingdom, and we are to live our lives in subjection to His commands. We must trust Him to protect us and our honor!

“If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.” (40)

“Shirt” was a tunic worn as an undergarment. **“Coat”** was an outer garment that served as a blanket at night. Jesus is referring to a lawsuit.

As MacArthur commented, *“The attitude of a kingdom citizen, one who is truly righteous, should be a willingness to surrender even one’s coat, his extremely valuable outer garment, rather than cause offense or hard feelings with an adversary.”* Paul highlighted this same principle...

² Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 113.

1 Corinthians 6:4–8... So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? **5** I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, **6** but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? **7** Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? **8** On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do this even to your* brethren.

**Jesus said it is better to be defrauded than to be bitter or resentful or spiteful.*

“Whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.” (41)

Roman law gave a soldier the right to force a citizen to carry his pack for a Roman mile. So an oppressed citizen would have to endure the dishonor of carrying a pack for their mortal enemy.

**Jesus says that His followers are to carry the pack for an extra mile.*

“Give to him who asks you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.” (42)

The implication here is that the person who asks for money has a legitimate need. Jesus is not requiring believers to respond to every selfish request made of them. This command goes to the root of our selfishness.

**Jesus is saying that we are to be generous to those who have real needs.*

It is also crucial to note that “a willingness to forego one’s personal rights, and to allow oneself to be insulted and imposed upon, is not

incompatible with a firm stand for matters of principle and for the rights of others (cf. Paul's attitude in Acts 16:37; 22:25; 25:8–12)."³

Tension. That's the best word to describe the effect these words have on our lives. They cut against the grain of our human nature and demand a life of sacrifice.

How will you respond when someone does you wrong? Choose to obey the Lord Jesus. This kingdom response requires several things from us.

1. Commit to Christ.

You must come to the place where you acknowledge your utter sinfulness and turn to Jesus in saving faith and commitment. You can't live this way if you are not a part of His eternal kingdom and if you do not possess the Holy Spirit!

2. Die to self. (Ro. 14:8-9; Luke 9:23)

This attitude is what enabled some of God's finest to live out this principle.

__ Abraham gave the best of the land to Lot.

__ Joseph embraced his brothers who had treated him horribly.

__ David honored Saul when he had a chance to kill him.

__ Stephen prayed for those who were killing him.

__ Paul did not demand his rights from the Corinthian church.

3. Take the risk.

³ Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 114.

Here's the bottom line. Will you trust the word of Christ? Will you go the second mile with people even if they treat you wrong? Go for it. God has your back!