

## A Word Concerning Confrontation # 10

Matthew 5: 38-42

As we continue our study in the Sermon on the Mount, we come to a passage that we all have heard a portion of quoted many times in our lives: [An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth](#). This is often quoted in anger, or in a desire to repay a wrong one has experienced.

Clearly those who seek to use this verse as a means to satisfy their vindictive spirit are not within the will of God. Jesus lived among a society that had taken this commandment, given in the law of God, to justify their retribution upon others. No doubt Jesus had witnessed the injustice of many who suffered at the hands of those who sought to use God's Word as the premise for their anger and retribution.

Whether we like to admit it or not, most of us have at some point desired to get even with those who have wronged us. There is something within our human nature that desires to "return the favor." As we will discover, those attitudes and actions are contrary to what the Lord desires of us. I want to take a few moments this evening and consider the [motives](#) Jesus deals with as we think on: [A Word Concerning Confrontation](#).

**I. The Commandment of the Law (38)** – [Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth](#): As with many of His previous thoughts, Jesus once again speaks of that which they had heard and held to be true. This was in fact given to Moses among the many commandments that God gave to Israel. Let's look at this commandment a bit closer. Notice:

**A. The Context of the Command** – As with much He addressed in previous verses, this too was not being considered in its proper context. There can be no doubt that it was recorded in Scripture. In fact it is mentioned several times in the Old Testament. [Ex.21:24 – Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot](#), [Lev.24:20 – Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again](#). [Deut.19:21 – And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot](#).

- This command is mentioned in Scripture, given of the Lord, but it must be considered within its context. Each time that it is mentioned, it is given in the context of judicial law. It was not given or reserved for individual use or justice. Those who administered the law could pass judgment and exact retribution, but it was not given for the people to exact judgment in and of themselves. It was given as a guideline for the judges when considering proper judgment.

**B. The Corruption of the Command** – As is always the case, when Scripture is taken out of context, it results in corruption. Apparently many among the Jews were using their interpretation of this command to exact judgment and retribution. What would be the reasoning for such corruption? I am sure that it came about for reasons that remain today. Consider:

**1. Appeasement** – Surely there were those that had genuinely suffered injustice at the hands of another. They had suffered in the flesh, whether it was physical or emotional injustice, and the flesh desired to be vindicated. I am sure that we can all relate to that. There is something within us that desires those who have wronged us to suffer for their wrongs. Our flesh takes satisfaction in the suffering of those who have inflicted pain upon us. Society views those who refuse to defend themselves as weak. (The better man is the one who has the ability to walk away from confrontation.)

- As long as we live in a body of flesh that desire will remain, but as we will discover in a moment, it is not pleasing to the Lord. The judicial system has the right and authority to exact judgment, but God's people should never seek revenge.

**2. Approval** – As we consider the context of this passage, we know that Jesus was speaking to those in authority, those the common people looked to for leadership. Surely there were those who exacted judgment because they knew that is what society expected. They knew the people would demand justice, even if it wasn't proper justice. They were committed to keeping the people happy and preserving their image among the people. Apparently the Jewish leadership had condoned this injustice to please the people.

- Would you not agree that we are seeing that in abundance in our day? Many have no concern for what God's Word says about a particular matter; most are more concerned with pleasing people and maintaining their influence among society. However, it doesn't matter what this world approves or how many are engaged in a particular act; God's Word ought to define who we are and how we behave in society!

## **I. The Commandment of the Law** (38)

**II. The Clarification of the Law** (39a) – **But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil:** As we've grown accustomed to hearing, Jesus speaks further to that which they have heard and hold dear. I want to mention a couple of things about His statement. Notice:

**A. The Application** – Jesus is speaking against personal retribution and vindictiveness. He is urging them to avoid confrontation and resist the urge to seek personal retribution.

▪ The Bible is clear in regard to the authority of human government and our obligation to submit unto it. [1 Pet.2:13-14](#) – [Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; \[14\] Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.](#) We are to submit to the laws of the land and expect to receive punishment for wrongdoing, but that in no way gives us the right to seek out our own form of justice. God will take care of that. [Romans 12:17, 19](#) – [Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. \[19\] Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.](#) The Christian is not to seek an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. [Rom.12:18](#) – [If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.](#)

**B. The Confusion** – Quickly I want to address some confusion that has arisen from this verse. In regard to refusing to resist evil, Jesus is teaching that we should resist the urge to seek retribution for those who have done evil to us. Once again we must keep things in their proper context. If we took that verse out of context and caused it to stand alone, one would erroneously discern that Jesus is speaking of the refusal to confront any sin or error. Clearly, when one considers the complete teaching of Scripture, that is not the case. [Jam.4:7](#) – [Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.](#) [1 Pet.5:9](#) – [Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.](#) As God's people we have an obligation to stand for truth and oppose sin. Nations and governments have an obligation to confront injustice and deal with it accordingly.

### **I. The Commandment of the Law** (38)

### **II. The Clarification of the Law** (39a)

**III. The Correlation to Life** (39b-42) – Here we find that Jesus goes on to give several examples of how we are to respond to the situation of life. Consider His teaching:

**A. Relating to Retaliation** (39b) – [but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.](#) Our Lord teaches us to turn the other cheek when we have been struck unjustly.

He is dealing with a personal insult and how we are expected to respond. Among the Jews, a slap to the face was among the most degrading acts that could be committed.

- We need to notice that this involves much more than an outward reaction. It actually deals with an attitude of the heart. With the exception of a few childhood scuffles, I can't remember being slapped unjustly. However, there have been times when I have been struck emotionally and had the urge to strike back with harsh words. The Christian is expected to avoid confrontation and always seek the "high road" when confrontation comes.
- Jesus is our great example in this regard. He rebuked the officer who struck Him during the mock trial, but He did not strike back. Consider the agony He endured during the crucifixion, all without lashing out or seeking retribution.

**B. Relating to Litigation (40)** – *And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.* As we continue on, it seems as if a slap in the face would be easier to endure than this, but yet again Jesus reveals how we are to respond. It appears that those in authority would have ruled against the one of whom Jesus spoke and demanded that he offer his coat as a means of payment. The coat speaks of "*a tunic, an undergarment worn next to the skin.*" He reveals that if they were commanded to give their coat, they were to be willing to offer their cloke as well, the "*upper garment, or mantle.*"

- This speaks of integrity. It seeks to reveal one's intent to bring reconciliation to the dispute. It has the idea of doing whatever is necessary to right the wrong and restore honor to one's name and reputation. It reveals that there is no bitterness or ill will against those whom we have had a dispute.

**C. Relating to Cooperation (41)** – *And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* In a general sense we all understand what our Lord is saying here: we are to go the extra mile in order to help a brother. However, there is a deeper meaning when we fully understand the context. "*Roman law gave a soldier the right to force a civilian to carry his pack for a milion, a Roman mile, which was slightly shorter than our modern mile. The law, designed to relieve the soldier, not only caused great inconvenience to civilians but was made even more despicable by the fact that the oppressed were made to carry the equipment and weapons of their oppressors. Outside of combat the Roman soldier was probably never more hated than when he forced someone to carry his pack.*" <sup>1</sup>

- Clearly Jesus is speaking of being asked, or even forced, to do something we really didn't want to do. I am certain that we've all had occasions when we were asked to do something that we really didn't want to do. It may have been a legitimate need, but we didn't

have the time or just didn't want to do it. If we are to be what the Lord desires of us, we will be willing to go the extra mile regardless of the inconvenience. Many today seem to resent having to do only what is expected, much less being willing to go beyond that which is expected. May we have the attitude our Lord desires and be willing to give of ourselves for the needs of others, even when we really don't feel like it.

**D. Relating to Suppression (42)** – Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. It is easy to consider this verse and miss the real meaning of Jesus' teaching. Certainly He is teaching that we ought to be generous to those in need, but we have to remember the context of the message. He has been dealing with those with whom there has been confrontation. He is not merely speaking of giving to those who have been good to us. Our generosity is not to be reserved for those of our "inner circle." This is difficult to accept many times, but Jesus is teaching that we are to give liberally to those who have wronged us in the past. Regardless of past deeds, actions, or feelings, we are to turn none away in need.

- To put it in layman's terms, we are not to have the attitude of "that serves you right. You should have been more thoughtful and kind in the past." We are to put the past behind us and be willing to give in Christian love to those in need. I can assure you that will offer a good slice of "humble pie" but it is what the Lord desires and expects!

These have been simple but enlightening verses. I know that they deal with issues that we have all faced at some point in life. It is easy to allow bitterness and anger to cloud our hearts and minds in such a way that we fail to do what we should. The flesh desires to get even, but the Lord desires that we represent His holiness even when we are wronged.

Is there something in your life that you can't seem to let go of? Is there bitterness or resentment toward another? I can tell you from experience, you will be the one to suffer because of that. If there is a need in your life, Jesus has the answer. Why not come and seek Him to give you the peace you need to move on in life and have your joy restored?

<sup>1</sup> MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 1-7.