

Matthew 5:38-42 - New King James Version (NKJV)

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

Sermon by Roger Baker - - July 30, 2017

Roger helped to keep this passage in the broader context by reminding us that Jesus's intent in the Sermon on the Mount was to pull the rug of self-righteousness out from under us by showing us our inadequacy in obeying the law in letter and in spirit; particularly calling out the religious leaders of the day who had twisted the Old Testament law into a system of works-righteousness. Jesus used the language of "You have heard it said . . ." to indicate Old Testament teachings which had been perverted or misinterpreted, and "But I say . . ." to give His correct interpretation or teaching.

- Why would Jesus's repeated correction of the teachings of the self-righteous religious leaders have likely infuriated them, even to the point of wanting to murder him?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why was Jesus uniquely qualified to offer correct interpretations of these Old Testament passages?

Read Matthew 5:38-42. The law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Latin: *lex talionis*) originally related to issues of justice and civil law. The specific function of the law was to prevent government punishment of criminal activity from being too lenient or overly harsh: "the punishment must fit the crime." The peoples' confidence in the government to execute justice prevented inappropriate personal retaliation. How was this principle of civil law, mentioned three times in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deut. 19:21), being misunderstood and misused in Jesus's culture to justify, rather than prevent, personal vengeance?

In verses 39-42, Jesus uses illustrations of offended persons who, in the context of personal conflict, are instructed to go to great lengths to give up their rights rather than act in revenge. Roger pointed out that many of these illustrations have been misunderstood and have led to confusion as to Christ's intent. Many have used these passages to teach pacifism, to teach that we shouldn't struggle against Satan or evil, that we are to stand idly by when we see evil being done to others, or to teach that our court system should show mercy by "forgiving" crimes. How can keeping in mind that these verses portray our *personal* dignity being attacked in the midst of *personal* conflict help us avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations?

Roger took us to other passages of scripture which helped us to see that the issue in verses 39-42 boils down to choosing either a "prideful (vengeful) response" or a "gospel response" when confronted with differing types of evil done against you by others:

**Verse 39a – "But I tell you not to resist an evil person."**

**What is our natural response when people do evil to us? What is the "gospel response" when people do evil to us? (ref. Matthew 5:9-12)**

**Verse 39b – "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."**

**What is our common response when we face insult and humiliation? What is the "gospel response" when we face insult and humiliation? (ref. Romans 12:17-21)**

**Verse 40 - "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. "**

**What is our common response when someone threatens our security and protection? What is the "gospel response" when we face these circumstances? (ref. Matthew 6:25-34)**

Verse 41 - "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. " (in cultural context of Roman occupation/governance of Israel where Roman soldier could compel Jewish citizen to carry his pack or gear for up to one mile).

What is our common response when we are treated unfairly? What is the "gospel response" when we face this?

Verse 42 - "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

What is our common response when we lend and are not repaid or when our possessions are returned damaged? What is the "gospel response"? (ref. Luke 6:30)

**Application and Personal Reflection:**

How might Jesus's ethic of forgiveness rather than vengeance in times of personal conflict come to bear in your relationship with your spouse? Your children? Your co-workers? Those in your church family?

How did Jesus exemplify this ethic in His life? On the way to the cross? In His sacrificial death for you?

When we cling to our dignity, security, or money in times of personal conflict, does this usually result in peace?

Is your reaction to this teaching "I need to try harder" or "Apart from the grace of God, this is impossible"? Which response best displays the gospel? (ref. John 15:5)

*Roger closed with the point that these sayings are hard. But, are they harder than being slaves to pursuing justice, being easily offended, lacking peace, and being unforgiving? Christ can free us from these burdens!*