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**A Disciple's Heart...Opposes Revenge
Matthew 5:38-42**

Matthew 5:38-42 *You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*

Sounds like it's coming from some hippy, Northern California, Gandhi-like passivist, eh?

Retribution is considered normal to our culture, and treated as almost indispensable to schools and methods of modern leadership.

We all have in us an inexhaustible capacity for nurtured anger and a desire for vengeance against wrongdoers. We all want to see other people suffer for their misdeeds, especially those misdeeds against us.

The Old Testament Law, given to Moses addressed this problem:

Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21 all talk of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but this was given to help the Israelites understand fair or equal retribution. God gave them this legal gauge to clearly measure right and wrong. God gave them boundaries for revenge and punishment.

The Lex Talionis (part of the Code of Hammurabi, 200's BC) is pretty much the oldest law in the world

- it limited the extent of vengeance or retribution
- and it is the basis for our whole system of civil, penal and international law, the foundation for all codes of justice

Why all this? Because

- We all have a desire to take responsibility to right the wrongs done to us. That's why we're drawn to movies where the hero does just that, and ultimately wins
- We all want to determine what is right and wrong. We like the idea of being our own prosecuting attorney and trial judge
- We all have the capacity to react to a wrong said or done against us with retaliation weightier than the original wrong. Because we're Americans, and we like to win

- Because what seems “fair” to us usually means what feels “good” to us. Because when you boil any of us down, we’re all about ourselves - our feelings have become our lens for reality

However, and in spite of all this, Jesus is calling his disciples to something different, something radical, a revolutionary righteousness

Jesus is saying; this is how my disciples should react to personal offenses. Entrust yourself to God, don't take the law into your own hands. Joyfully, go above and beyond what is required of you in responding with grace, and the world will stand there completely dumbfounded over your actions.

Note: Jesus was not saying don't defend yourself when physically threatened, or ignore the legal system. He was commanding us to kill the urge to retaliate.

Back in Matthew 5, Jesus gives us four examples, four illustrations of what He is talking about:

Matthew 5:39b *But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

A) This is about **responding to insult**, and back in the day an insult apparently included a pop to the face

Most people were right-handed, so to hit the other person's right cheek they had to do it back-handed. This was considered to be more insulting, like saying you were being insulted as being “inconsequential” or “a nothing.”

Usually, the backhanded insult was reserved for people deemed to be “heretics.” Jesus is saying that if someone accuses you of being a heretic because you proclaim and live for Jesus, give him or her the other side of your face too. The Law said you could or should take that insulter to court; Jesus says you don't have to.

What's this mean for us?

As disciples of Jesus, we willingly give up our rights to fairness

Is this easy for us? NO

If your spouse or roommate is messy, are you tempted to leave a mess?

If your coffee date is late, do you make sure to be late yourself the next time?

All of that, even the little petty stuff we're tempted to do is a form of retaliation. Jesus says not to do it, so we can look more like Him.

Matthew 5:40 *And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.*

B) This is about **being ripped off**

Back in the day, legally someone could sue you for the shirt off of your back. (Jesus is clearly talking to the poorest of his listeners on this one.) The person who sued you could keep your tunic (your shirt) forever, but a person's cloak had to be returned to that person every evening, because a poor person slept in their cloak. They had to have it. Therefore the Law said they had to have it, sued or not. Jesus says, let them keep it.

The Apostle Paul talks about this in **Romans 12:17-21** *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'* To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

C) Jesus then turns to what we would call **forced labor**, being forced to do something we do not want to do, something we think is stupid or a waste of time. (For us, this is speaking to any of us who work for someone else.)

Matthew 5:41 *And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

In the way back times, the ancient Greeks had their version of the pony express. They would "borrow" a horse and ride it with the mail until the horse got tired. They would then ditch that horse and "borrow" another one to continue delivering the mail. This inconvenienced the owner of the horse.

The Romans had a similar system by the first century. Any Roman soldier could force a Jew to carry part or all of his load for a mile. This was the Romans' way of keeping the Jews humble, and the Jews felt degraded by it.

What Jesus said to his listeners was probably more than they were willing to hear. He tells them if forced to go one mile, suggest adding another mile to it.

The theologian, Kent Hughes says, "This is how Rome was won to Christ. Revolutionarily righteous people possessing revolutionary joy even when treated unfairly cause everyone's hearts to look upward."

D) Jesus finishes up his four illustrations with how to respond **when someone borrows something from you, or you loan them money and they never return what they borrowed, or never pay you back.**

Matthew 5:42 *Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*

This is hard for us, because we don't like lending without being paid back. Jesus is instead calling his disciples to reject a tight-fisted attitude.

He is calling His disciples away from greed, away from a self-serving, me-first attitude, toward an attitude of generosity, a lifestyle of knowing that what we have is all be God's grace. He is the one "who owns the cattle on a thousand hills." It's not the end of the world if someone doesn't return what he or she borrowed from you.

Luke 6:35-36 *But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

Our responses to each of these illustrations Jesus gave us are an opportunity for witness.

Questions that arise from this:

Why does Jesus call us to resist with grace to the wrongs done to us?

Because our response can point our oppressor to Jesus!

Are there ever times when we should resist?

Yes, when you or someone is physically threatened

Yes, when, as Alexander MacLaren (the great Scottish preacher) said it this way: "When not resisting would make the oppressor more angry, resistance then becomes a form of love and therefore the duty for the said of the wrongdoer.'

What's the point of our reactions to injustices done to us?

We do what will best point the oppressor to Jesus, be it not to resist, or on those rare occasions when resistance is called for.

In **1 Peter 2:21-25** the Apostle tells us how Jesus responded to wrongs and injustices done to him:

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his footsteps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, by his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

The Law then as now is all about "what is fair?"

The Law of Grace says, "what is righteous?" "What will point people to Jesus?"

If you hear Jesus' command and think, "Never - no way, those actions would never genuinely flow from my heart." You are right.

They won't. Unless you've been given a new heart. If you do not have the Spirit of Christ living in you, this kind of life is impossible.

Only the Holy Spirit has the power to renovate our hearts. We have to rely on Him.

Thank God, for He is bringing your dead heart to life. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you kill the urge to retaliate, and to bring about a kindness in you that makes the world scratch its head.

Thank Jesus for the meekness he demonstrated in his death. Praise God because in the end he will bring all things to justice, for his glory.

If you hear Jesus' command against retaliation and your heart is in agreement, thank the Holy Spirit for his presence in your life.

Thank Jesus for his heroic and humble death on the cross. Thank God that you belong to him and can entrust yourself to Him.

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you through complicated circumstances and empower you to respond cheerfully and generously.

Praise Jesus because he will return again, not as a suffering servant but as glorious judge and king.

And all injustice will be gone forever, including the injustices we commit against Jesus. Cool, huh?