

Matthew 5:38-42 (NKJV)

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, '*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*'

³⁹ But I tell you not to 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 away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.

⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

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

We are dealing with a very interesting passage this morning. This is the passage that is the source text for the denominations that believe in **pacifism**. **Pacifism** is the belief that it is wrong to use force to resist evil. And it is primarily based on verse 39 where Jesus said, "**I tell you not to resist an evil person.**"

I think it is accurate to say that those who are pacifists believe our text to be an unqualified statement that prohibits a Christian from ever using physical force to resist people doing evil.

Now the question is, **is that what Jesus intended** when He said this? Was He really trying to get his followers to **never use force** at **any time** in any way to **resist evil**?

Well let's take a hard look at this passage. And we will look at it just like we have looked at the previous passages.

We will look at first, what did the Old Testament say.

Second, what did the Pharisees teach?

And third, what did Christ say?

Ok, what did the OT say?

Exodus 21:22-27 (NKJV)

²² "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.

²³ But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

²⁶ If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye.

²⁷ And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.

Leviticus 24:17-22 (NKJV)

¹⁷ 'Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.

¹⁸ Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.

¹⁹ If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him--

²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.

²¹ And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death.

²² You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I *am* the LORD your God.' "

Deuteronomy 19:20-21 (NKJV)

²⁰ And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

²¹ Your eye shall not pity: life *shall be* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

We see in the Old Testament that the law **clearly did say** that justice resulted in an **eye for an eye** and a **tooth for a tooth**. Justice was described as inflicting an **equal harm** that was done to the one that **inflicted** the harm. So that is correct. Justice truly is **equal retribution**. But we need to look at a few things here. First, what was the **intent**? And there appear to be **two** intended results. First is the revelation of what **true justice consists of**. And it truly is that the wrong that is **inflicted upon someone else** is the wrong that **one receives**. That is justice. And justice is not a bad thing. Justice is that which, when enforced, keeps evil in check. The law is good. The law protects the innocent. The law inflicts punishment on the evil doer to the degree of the evil he has done. That is fair and right.

But here is something about justice we don't often think about. Justice demands that the punishment **does not go beyond** that which was done. We don't usually think about that. If you kill my cat, that does not require that your child be put to death. No. Justice **limits the retribution** to to the extent of the harm.

Now that is a problem. That is not how our natural flesh responds. Flesh responds by demanding a **greater** penalty than the crime demands. We all know this because we were all children.

I remember a time when my brother and I were still living at home. I might have been 14. In our house we had 2 tvs. One was in our living room and the other was in my parent's bedroom. For whatever reason Butch, my brother, and I were watching tv in the bedroom. We did not always get along as well as Christians should. He had pushed me off the bed onto the floor three times, if memory serves correctly. His efforts also pushed me over the edge of any of my Christian virtues. Well Butch had just gotten over being hit by a football in his temple. The black and blue mark that had been the size of a softball had gotten down to the size of a quarter. And he was laying on the bed watching tv with that quarter size bruise laying unprotected. I remember walking up to that bed and punching my brother in the temple as hard as I could.

One might ask, was that just. I doubt it. I think what I did went beyond what was just. He had never hit me. And he really never hurt me. He just irritated me. But my self was responding in all its flesh-ness. And I am not alone in this. If all of us were to tell the whole truth about our pasts, we would all find places where our flesh got out of control. We would all have times of lashing out in anger and revenge. And the harm we inflicted was more than the harm that was done to us. Flesh is not satisfied with justice. It wants more. For it values itself in a higher estimation than it should.

It is interesting to me that the **least sin** against God deserves **death**. And that is a just penalty when the sin is a sin against God. But when the harm is **to us** we find that our flesh always **wants to be** God. So it takes insults very seriously. We think those insults deserve far more penalty than they have inflicted. Have you ever had your feelings intentionally hurt in public when you know the person intended to insult you? What did the inflictor **deserve**? What did you, at that moment, **want to do to them**? You get what I mean.

So justice was intended to **prescribe justice** but it was also intended to **prevent injustice**. It was intended to prohibit **retribution** that **exceeded** justice.

And there is also something else that is important to understand. These passages in the Old Testament were directed toward **civil authorities**. These were not directed to **individuals**. Justice in these passages was not prescribed for individuals to administrate. It was prescribed for the **civil government**. This is extremely important to understand.

There were laws addressed to personal self defense. And a person was allowed to protect people and property from evil people. These laws **were** directed to the individual citizen. But that was different than hunting a person down for vengeance, to demand and inflict justice.

This definition and prescription of justice was never intended to be a **personal** ethic. It was never a virtue for a man to **always demand justice**, even though he was not significantly harmed.

Now what did the Pharisees teach?

³⁸ **"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'**

The Pharisees had made what the old testament prescribed for civil justice into a **personal** mandate. It was similar to what they said about divorce being a "Command". Now, in the Pharisee's ethic, a person is **obligated to seek revenge** if he or she was attacked or insulted in any way. The Pharisees moved this law from the **law of civil government** and now the Pharisees are saying this is how you should personally respond if you have been wronged in any way. You should act decisively to **even the score, to right the wrong**. You have the **right** to do this thing. And not only do you have the right. You have the **obligation** to do it.

That was the problem. It is not that **justice** is wrong. But it is not a **personal** mandate. It is not what we have the **right to do** because we are humans. We may appeal to the civil courts for justice at times. But we do not **have to**. Just as we do not **have to** seek divorce, even if we have been significantly wronged.

That is how we must approach this passage.

And more than this, we must keep it in context.

Remember **who** Jesus is speaking to. He is talking to those who have gone through the **beatitude** sieve. These are people who have recognized their poverty of spirit. They have mourned their own evil. They have surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. These are **believers** that He is addressing.

And Christ has taken us through the gamut of the Pharisees abuse of the law. This law was supposed to **protect** people from harm. But by the time the Pharisees were done with the law, the law was being used as a **tool to harm** people. That stirred Christ up. Christ was all about protecting people using the law as it was intended. Authority is always to be used to, among other things, **protect people from evil**, especially the evil the strong do to the weak. It always has been that way and it always will be until Christ returns.

Jesus was raking the Pharisees over the coals for not **protecting the vulnerable** by their use of the law.

And we must always keep in mind that Jesus was not **changing** the law. Lots of people think that this was the intent of the sermon on the mount. They think that Jesus was setting up a new ethic counter to that of the Old Testament. But we have already looked at Jesus's words and we cannot possibly conclude that. He

already told us that the **smallest mark** on the **smallest letter** would not be undone. No the law is still the law.

Now how much sense would it make if Christ were suddenly to say that **the law should not protect people from evil?** How much sense would it make if He were to say that **those in charge of protecting the powerless from harm**, like Fathers in a household, should suddenly abrogate those duties and let the evil people do all the harm they want while we powerlessly watch. The whole idea goes against everything that Christ has stood for up to this point. Christ is raking the Pharisees over the coals because they would not use the law to protect people. Christ continually stood against the evil of the Pharisees. Look what He did in the temple. He used force there. He used physical force to drive the money changers out of the temple.

I think we have enough already to have a pretty good idea how to apply what Christ is saying. We can know what He means from the context.

³⁸ **"You have heard that it was said, '*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*'**

³⁹ **But I tell you not to resist an evil person.**

Now there are those how have made verse 39 as an absolute and take nothing else into consideration. They say we are never, in any way, to resist an evil person.

I find lots of problems with that.

The first problem is this.

The Old Testament is full of examples where godly men used their might to protect those under their power. Battles were fought. Families were defended. And all of that was seen as good.

Now, if suddenly all the rules are changing, if suddenly a man is not allowed to protect his family from unspeakable evil, would we not think that Jesus would make this painfully clear. Would He not use examples that would make it very clear that this is what He means? But look at the **four examples** Christ uses. They are all examples of **personal** insults, **personal** attacks of one's pride. None of the examples have **anything to do** with protecting the weak. They are all examples of protecting ones own prideful interests.

If Christ was turning over everything the Old Testament said, if Christ were overturning what one would have learned about protecting the weak with ones own life and whatever force a man could bring to bear against evil, would Christ not have used better examples? Would He not have used examples of not resisting evil people doing harm to the powerless? If he is unsaying what the law said, would He not have made that plain?

Now the second problem is this.

Look at this statement. **Do not resist an evil person.**

Does anyone really believe that Jesus meant this as an absolute absolutely?

Leo Tolstoy did. He believed that governments should have no police, no armies, no prisons. At least he was consistent. He was extremely wrong. What Jesus said in the sermon on the mount was not even written to governments. This was not addressed to civil authorities. It was written to beatitude Christians.

Now what does the scripture say about civil governments?

Romans 13:4 (NKJV)

⁴ For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

1 Peter 2:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,

¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

Scripture clearly endorses the right and responsibility of the civil government to punish evil and to administer justice. It is a gift to have a government that does this job well.

We really have to understand this to apply it properly. Christ was not addressing civil governments here. He was addressing born again believers. They are the only ones that can carry out what He is commanding.

But Leo Tolstoy took this non resistance to evil to its extremes.

Was this what Christ intended? Clearly not. He was not laying out a new ethic for the world to live by. He was addressing Christians.

But let's look at this for us. Suppose we were not to resist evil people, at all in any way. Ok. So a wolf enters the church. If we believed what some say Christ meant, we show them no resistance. We let them feed on the flock. We let them have their way. If they begin shooting, we let them. Why? Because Christ said don't resist them. Do we really think Christ would be pleased by that? Is that how the disciples applied what Christ said?

Should we never report a crime to the police? If what Jesus was saying was absolute, it would have to include this. We should not appeal to the government because we know that they will resist this evil man, so that would be the same as us resisting them. Could this be what Jesus was saying? If someone starts

shooting up the neighborhood, should we refuse to call the police because that evil person should not be resisted?

I did not do much study on the pacifistic position but I don't think even they would say that the courts and the police should never be appealed to. Most probably do not believe there should never be any resistance of any kind. They just restrict the application to their own personal physical force, personal violence. So even they do not believe Jesus meant force of any kind. They restrict it to a specific kind of force.

Even Christ appealed to justice in a civil court. When when He was in court he said this. **John 18:23 (NKJV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?" This was an appeal to the court to administer justice accurately. He wanted the court to administer justice. He wanted the court to do its job and protect the weak. Would Jesus have appealed to this court if the court was **not there to resist the evil person?** He would more likely have condemned the institution for even **attempting** to perform justice. He would not have appealed to it. Jesus was clearly not against the idea of justice or the active physical resistance to evil when carried out the proper way for the proper reason. And what of our children. What of **their** evil. Should we **not resist that?** Should we cast aside the mandate to spare the rod and spoil the child? Should we ignore the wisdom the scripture teaches us? When our child does evil things or makes evil threats, should we not resist them?

We could go on and on. But I think we see the inconsistency of an **absolute** application of pacifism. It does not fit with the broader view of scripture. The Old Testament would have to be undone to make it fit with an absolute application of never resisting an evil man.

While this is not an authoritative illustration, it is interesting. Look at the male species in much of nature.

We only need to watch a rooster and we get an idea of God's order of things. A rooster will give up its life defending its flock before it will allow the harm of a fox or a racoon. And that is noble. We respect that. That is what maleness is for. It is for protection, even if self sacrifice is needed. David would certainly not have regarded it wrong to defend his flocks from the bear or the lion. That is what he was there for. And He resisted evil men threatening his country the same way. He certainly resisted Goliath. And it was a sheer act of faith in God that God rewarded. Was David violating what Jesus was saying?

And David protected the families of his armies, his friends, his church as it were.

It is absurd to take what Christ said about not resisting an evil man to those absolute degrees.

And we must look at what other scriptures say. Someone might say, yes, the **civil government** should enforce justice. And we can call upon the government to do justice. But **we** can never use physical force to resist an evil man.

Do other New Testament scriptures apply this in the absolute? Did those closest to Christ apply this to say that one should never use force to stop evil?

Look at what Christ told His disciples.

Luke 22:36 (NKJV)

³⁶ Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it*, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

Now why would Christ tell His disciples to buy a sword? It wasn't for opening cans. It is clearly for self defense. How could they possibly use this sword if they were never to resist an evil man under any circumstances?

Acts 20:28-30 (NKJV)

²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

So was Paul telling them that when the wolves come in, allow it? Do not resist an evil man? That is clearly **NOT** what Paul is saying. Paul is saying **protect** the flock.

Resist an evil man. Do whatever you must do to protect that flock from that dangerous person. In this instance it may not have often been with physical force. But sometimes it could be. **Physical force** is required to protect against **physical violence**. If you are expected to protect someone, you are expected to use violence when necessary to do so. You can't really separate those concepts.

We could go on and on. There are lots of examples. We are told to **expend our lives** in the protection of those we love. That is the essence of manhood. Why should a woman have a man if a man will not protect her from other men? That is one of the major reasons women need men. We are to lay down our lives for the good of our families. Sometimes that is done to **constructively provide**.

Other times it is to **destructively protect**.

Men are provided to women and families for **provision** and **protection**. Christ is not unsaying this.

But Christ is saying something powerful. We cannot be distracted by what Christ is **not** saying. We must get to the heart of what He **is** saying.

What is it?

We need to look at it closely.

Look at the examples.

But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

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

⁴¹ **And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

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

The first example is the response to **personal insult**

The second example is the response to **personal security**

The third example is the response to **personal imperative inconvenience**

And the fourth is the response to **personal financial loss**.

Look at these. Do any of these harm your loved ones? Do any of these allow an aggressor to feed on the weakest people? No. This has nothing to do with serving in the army. This has nothing to do with the rights of the civil government. We see lots of scriptures about government. We have already read two.

We cannot possibly look at those scriptures and get the idea that the civil government should not use the sword, that the civil government should not resist evil people. Surely it should. And the better it does this, the better government it is. It is foolish to say that this passage prohibits the death penalty for murderers. It is foolish to say that this passage undoes the very idea of justice that the Old Testament lays out.

No. We have to reject that kind of application of this passage outright. While we should love our brothers and sisters who apply it this way, we do not need to respect this as a necessary or preferred application of our text.

No. We need to look at what this is **really** saying. And in reality it is addressing something **much more difficult** than allowing a wicked person to abuse us.

It is addressing the core of who we are. It is addressing evils we are prone to commit **every day**, not just the unusual event when a wicked person breaks into our home.

Jesus is addressing the heart of our **self worship**. Jesus is talking about death to self.

But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

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

⁴¹ **And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

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

We are going to end here, because I want to do justice to what is to come. We must hear these words from Christ. We must put them into practice. I have not said what I have said to **minimize** what Christ has said. I have simply not wanted us to pour all our efforts into applying this in a **wrong way**, in a way that Christ did not intend. I did not want us to miss what He is **really** commanding. His interest was not in creating a new denomination with a pacifistic mandate. No it is harder than that. It is deeper than that. It is more incipient than that.

Christ is calling us to live in a way that is **impossible** for the unregenerate person to live. He is calling us to a life free from the **tyranny of prideful self existence**. He is calling us to be completely free from the idea that **I am and there is no one besides**.

We will revisit this next week, Lord willing, and dig into the death to self that is required by Christ in this passage.