

“BE-ing H.O.L.Y. Kingdom Citizens”

Matthew 5:38-42

July 13, 2025

- INTRO:** What's your greatest promise/vow ever made?
- Answer for every **TRUE** Christian: “Yes LORD!”
 - Worst broken-promise...? ***“Lukewarm living!”***
 - **Woe to those whose vows are vain!** (cf. Matthew 23)
 - Answer for every **TRUE** Christian: “Yes LORD!”
 - **Question:** Who/what did you say yes to?
 - **Question:** What is your sworn mission?
 - ***WHAT DO YOU WANT?*** - Jesus
 - How much do you want it?
 - How much is it worth? **(Christ's life!)**
 - How much is it worth to YOU?
 - Remember: ***“BE holy, for I the LORD your God am holy!”***
 - Remember: ***“Seek 1st the kingdom & His righteousness!”***

PRAYER

CONTEXT: Matthew's Gospel on The Gospel of Jesus Christ

BIG IDEA: Kingdom righteousness is holy,
Christ-like & accepting of sacrificial losses
...for the sake of lost souls, a good witness, & God's glory!

(OFTEN TIMES, THE WAY LOVE WINS... IS BY TAKING THE LOSS.)

PREVIEW: 1. READ 2. REALIZE 3. RESPOND
(Context; Content; Contrast; Confront; Correct; Clarify; &
CHRIST-LIKENESS)

T/S: *“Of all Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, the one before us (vv. 38-48) is the most challenging.” - Sproul*

TEXT: Matthew 5:38-42

³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But 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...

VIDEO:

Biblical Cheek-Turning & Self-Defense
(per Dr. Wayne Grudem)

Turn the other cheek... sometimes!

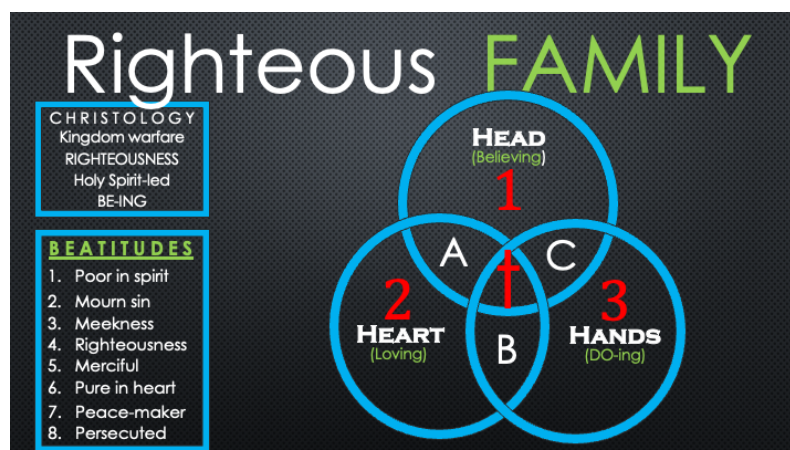
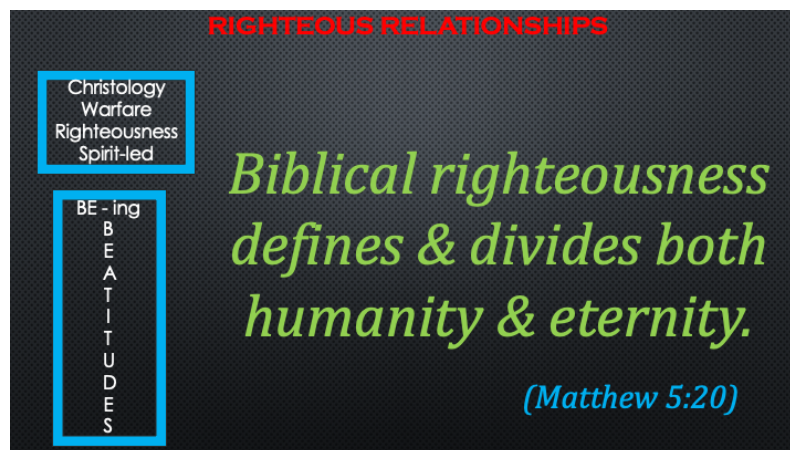
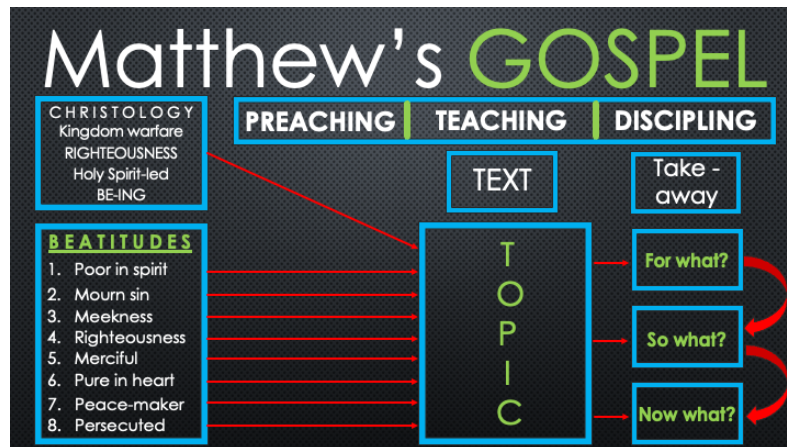
TO STAY ON THE NARROW ROAD, YOU NEED TO KNOW WHERE THE GUARDRAILS ARE... IN SHORT, RIGHTEOUS, FAITHFUL-OBEDIENCE REQUIRES ABIDING-UNDERSTANDING & RIGHTEOUS-APPLICATION.

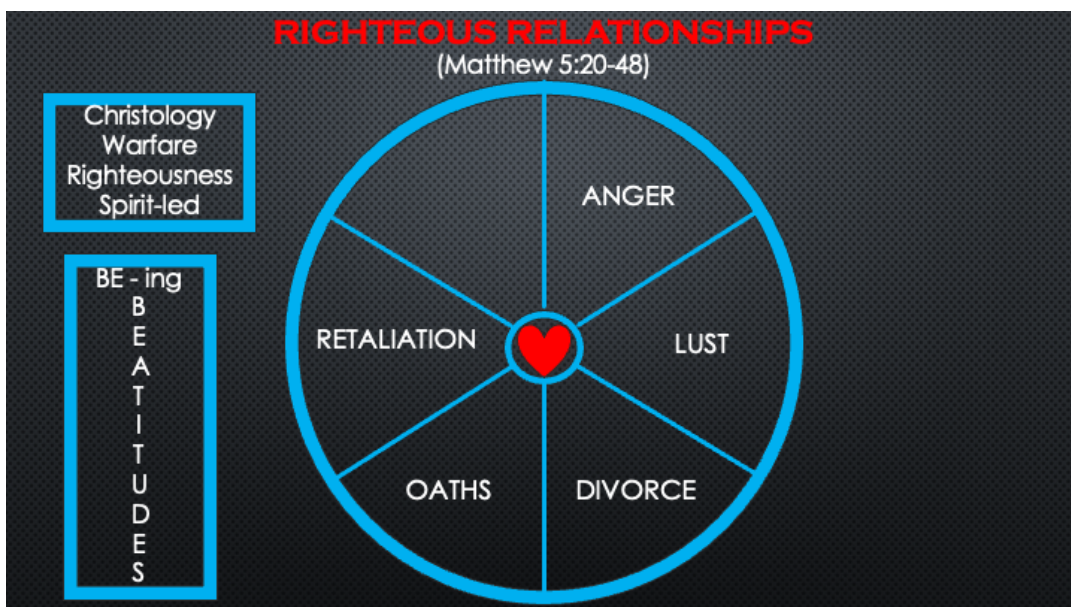
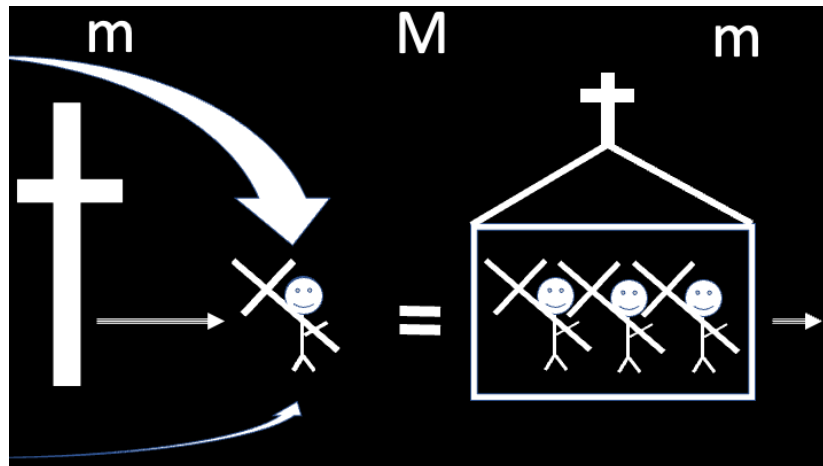
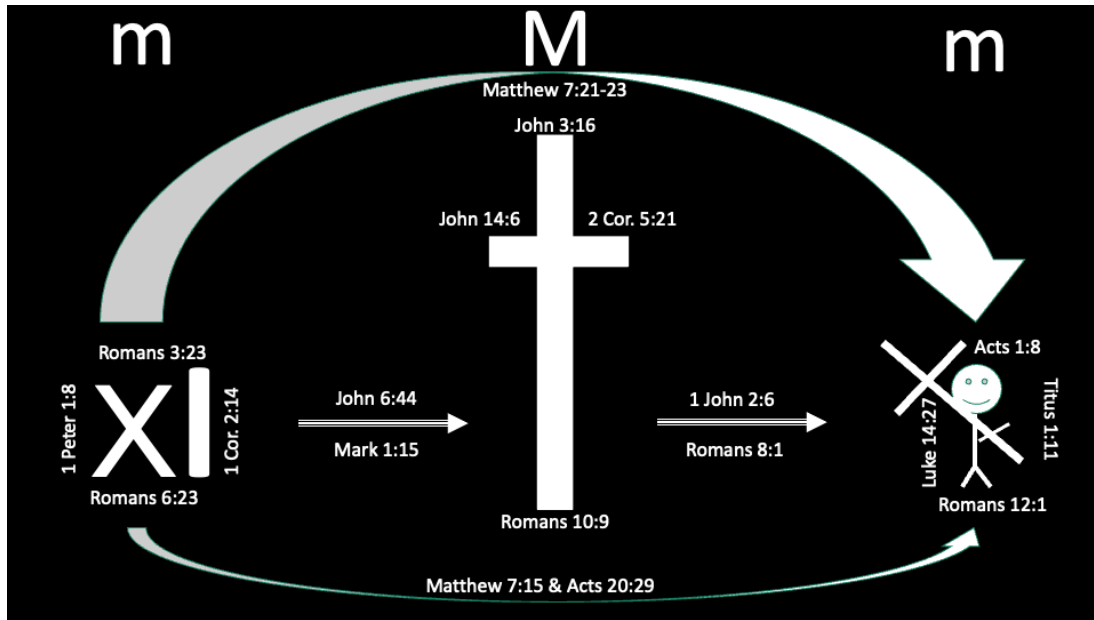
- Pure pacifism does not define personal purity...
That is NOT what Jesus is teaching or preaching...
- **CHRISTIAN CLARITY IS NEEDED HERE FOR CHRISTIAN CHARITY TO BE RIGHTEOUSLY REPRESENTED.**

T/S: Lets Read, Realize. & Respond thru the text’s 7 C’s...

I. READ

a. CONTEXT *"You have heard that it was said"*





b. CONTENT

Matthew 5:38

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

- This IS **God’s Word**... Jesus is quoting Himself!
- **NOTE:** these terms were for governing people...
- **THESE ARE GOD’S HOLY STANDARDS!**
 - Holy **RECIPROCITY**
 - Holy **IMPARTIALITY**
 - Holy **JUDICIARY**

The law of an **eye for an eye** was a just law, because it matched punishment to offense. It was a merciful law, because it limited the innate propensity of the human heart to seek retribution beyond what an offense deserved. It was also a beneficent law, because it protected society by restraining wrong-doing (and the wrong-doers).

**GOD’S “JUST” EARTHLY JUDGMENT...
FORESHADOWS HIS JUST ETERNAL JUDGMENT!**

Romans 3:25-26

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 He did it to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

c. CONTRAST

Matthew 5:38-39a

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

³⁹***But...***

- Jesus intentionally uses ***"but"*** statements...
- ***"BUT"*** = contrasting conjunction
- He is teaching: **'B'** (next) differs from **'A'** (prior)

II. REALIZE

a. CONFRONT

Matthew 5:38-39b

³⁹***But I say to you,***

- See Who is speaking: CREATOR Christ (John 1:1).
- ***Contrast His confrontational passion/posture!***
- *Hear His Almighty attitude & authoritative tone!*

(KEY CONTEXTUAL POINT)

Jesus is not establishing a new system of justice for government or for those who are in positions of authority; He is speaking specifically to the arena of personal ethics, how we are to behave as Christians.

- Sproul

b. CORRECT

Matthew 5:39c

Do not resist the one who is evil.

- This little sentence is loaded...
 - FIRST... note, it's a **command from Christ**...
 - It confuses some & gets corrupted by many.

“Do not resist”

- JESUS IS **NOT** COMMANDING ABSOLUTE PACIFICISM, NOR RELIGIOUS MARTYRDOM!
- Christ is NOT demonizing self-defense!

VIDEO: *Biblical Self-Defense*
(per SBTS Honest Answers)

“evil”

- *Evil portrays what is morally corrupt, hurtful, & actively hostile toward God's design.*
- Evil can describe a person, a generation, a thought, a deed, a spiritual power, even a climactic “day” of intensified opposition.
- The term ***“evil”*** is *never ethically neutral*;
- **Evil is the antithesis of divine goodness!**

Continuity with the Old Testament

- Heb. *rāʿ* = evil rooted in the creation-fall narrative.
- N.T. carries that forward, presenting Christ as the *One who rescues “us from this present evil age”* ([Galatians 1:4](#)).
- *Jesus contrasts the “good treasure” of a righteous heart with the “evil treasure” of a corrupt heart in* ([Luke 6:45](#)).
- Paul commands: *“Abhor/hate what is evil; cling to what is good”* ([Ro. 12:9](#)), affirming moral polarity.

Theological Significance

- **Total Depravity:** Humanity minus grace = *“evil”* ([Matthew 7:11](#)).
- **Personal and Cosmic Conflict:** Evil is both a heart condition and a spiritual empire ruled by Satan.
- **Sovereign Restraint and Final Judgment:** God presently limits evil ([2 Thessalonians 3:3](#)) and will decisively purge in the end... ([Matthew 13:49-50](#)).
- **Redemptive Deliverance:** *The cross & resurrection secure removal from the dominion of evil and promise believers ultimate protection* ([John 17:15](#))

This “evil” encapsulates every thought, act, person, spirit, or era set against God. Its 79 New Testament occurrences form a mosaic that clarifies the human predicament, magnifies the gospel’s rescue, and fortifies the church’s mission until the day when the Lamb annihilates all evil and ushers in unending righteousness.

VIDEO: *Biblical Self-Defense*
(per GotQuestions.org)

MacArthur & A.W. Pink:

When the church stopped preaching God's righteousness, justice, and eternal punishment of the lost, it stopped preaching the fullness of the gospel, and both society and the church have suffered greatly for it. And when the church stopped holding its own members accountable to God's standards and stopped disciplining its own ranks, a great deal of its moral influence on society was sacrificed. One of the legacies of theological liberalism is civil as well as religious lawlessness.

Not restraining evil is neither just nor kind. It fails to protect the innocent and has the effect of encouraging the wicked in their evil. Proper restraint of evil, however, is not only just but is beneficial as well. As Arthur Pink says,

Magistrates and judges were never ordained by God for the purpose of reforming reprobates or pampering degenerates, but to be His instruments for preserving law and order by being a terror to evil. As Romans chapter 13 says, they are to be "a revenger to execute wrath on him that doeth evil." ... Conscience has become comatose. The requirements of justice are stifled; maudlin (weak & foolishly weepy) concepts now prevail. As eternal punishment was repudiated—either tacitly or in many cases openly—ecclesiastical punishments are shelved. Churches refuse to enforce sanctions and wink at flagrant offenses. The

inevitable outcome has been the breakdown of discipline in the home and the creation of 'public opinion,' which is mawkish (sickly, nauseating-emotionalism) and spineless. School teachers are intimidated by foolish parents and children so that the rising generation are more and more allowed to have their own way without fear of consequences. And if some judge has the courage of his convictions, and sentences a brute for maiming an old woman, there is an outcry against the judge. (An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974], p. 112–13)

To lower God's standard of justice is to lower God's standard of righteousness—which Jesus came to fulfill and clarify, not to obviate or diminish.

Pastoral and Discipleship Implications

1. Train believers to distinguish godly resistance (against Satan, sin, heresy) from wrongful resistance (against God's will or ordained order).
2. Encourage courage and clarity in confronting doctrinal drift, following Paul's example with Peter.
3. Equip saints with the whole armor of God, emphasizing both humble submission to the Lord and steadfast opposition to the devil.
4. Model non-retaliatory love in personal grievances, reflecting Christ's ethic of enemy love.
5. Instill confidence that gospel proclamation, powered by the Spirit's wisdom, will ultimately prove irrefutable.

Contemporary Application

In an age of relativism, believers must graciously yet firmly resist ideologies that contradict biblical truth. At the same time, the church must avoid the twin dangers of carnal retaliation and seditious defiance of legitimate authority. Rooted in submission to God and armed with His Word, Christians are called to stand—unmoved by opposition, unmixed with compromise, and unafraid of the outcome, for...

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

These “spiritual experts” are “Scriptural perverts!”

- Always be mindful of 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Remember the **Compatibilist** principle/position.
- It’s critical to learn the *“Guardrails of God’s Word”*
- ...and therein ***be guided by God’s Spirit!***

Jesus does not teach, as many have claimed, that no stand is to be taken against evil & that it should simply be allowed to take its course. Jesus & the apostles continually opposed evil with every means & resource. Jesus resisted the profaning of God’s Temple by making a whip of cords & physically driving out the sacrifice sellers & moneychangers (Matt. 21:12; John 2:15). We are to ***“resist the devil”*** (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9) & *all the evil that he stands for & inspires* (Matt. 6:13;

Rom. 12:9; 1 Thess. 5:22; 2 Tim. 4:18). - **MacArthur**

VIDEO: Biblical Self-Defense
(per Apologia Radio)

- **Capital/Enemy Punishment = Genesis 9:5-6**
 - **Pre-Law**
 - 1st Peter 2 adds additional biblical support...

Deuteronomy 19:18-21

The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, ¹⁹ then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. ²⁰ And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. ²¹ Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Romans 12:17-21

*Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ 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."
²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."
²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

WE ARE TO LEAVE VINDICATION IN THE HANDS OF THE ONE WHO, UNLIKE US, IS PERFECT... WE DO NOT WANT TO GET EVEN; WE WANT TO GET ONE UP. GOD KNOWS THAT, WHICH IS WHY HE INSTRUCTS HIS PEOPLE TO LET HIM HANDLE VINDICATION.

– R.C. Sproul

c. CLARIFY

On matters that define & divide humanity & eternity it is critical to understand what God's Word really says & what He/it really means...

This is true, in part, because as Jesus will soon tell everyone: only His narrow path will lead His "few" that love & live on it to heaven... While, by contrast, the overwhelming crowds & massive majority that live on the lukewarm broad road, are all heading to hell's destruction & eternal damnation.

Think about it... while the family & flock of the LORD live & love within the narrow guardrails of God's Word, being guided by His Spirit... Satan's minions & prisoners-of-war all live on wide-open "goat farms." ...And make no mistake, those "goat farms," be they small & sleepy or huge and entertaining... they all serve as feeding troughs & recruiting centers for the Devil's wolves.

[Matthew 5:38-42](#)

[38](#) "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 the one who is evil.

Creator Christ's 4 clarifying corrections:

1. HOLY HUMILITY

But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

- Retaliation is sinful opposition to sanctification.
- Taking retaliatory vengeance is defiant rebellion.
- **Romans 12:9**... *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."*

Among Jews, a slap or other striking in the face was among the most demeaning and contemptuous of acts (cf. Matt. 26:67–68; Mark 14:65; John 18:22). To strike someone elsewhere on the body might cause more physical harm, but a slap in the face was an attack on one's honor and was considered to be a terrible indignity. It was to be treated with disdain, as being less than a human. Even a slave would rather have been stuck across the back with a whip than be slapped in the face by his master's hand.

- **Disobedient “winning” is delusional losing!**
- **Reconciliation & Restoration > Retaliation.**
- **Jesus did NOT literally “turn the other cheek”** in John 18:22-23... hence, His “principled message” is of meek & humble submission to personal insults & indignities – without sinful retaliation and/or unrighteous, unforgiving anger.

VIDEO: *Turn The Other Cheek*
(per GotQuestions.org)

2. OVERFLOWING OFFERINGS

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

The shirt mentioned here was a type of tunic worn as an undergarment, and the coat was an outer garment that also served as a blanket at night. Most people of that day owned only one coat and probably only one or two shirts. It was the outer garment, the coat, that Mosaic law required be returned to its owner “*before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body*” (Ex. 22:26–27).

Jesus is not speaking of a robbery, in which a person tries to steal your clothes, but of the legitimate claim of *anyone who wants to sue you.*

When a person had no money or other possessions, the court often would require the fine or judgment be paid by clothing. The attitude of a kingdom citizen, one who is truly righteous, should be willingness to surrender even one's **coat**, his extremely valuable outer garment, rather than cause offense or hard feelings with an adversary. The court could not demand the **coat**, but it could be voluntarily given to meet the required debt. That's exactly what Jesus says we should be willing to do.

If a legal judgment is fairly made against us for a certain amount, we should be willing to offer even more in order to show our regret for any wrong we did and to show that we are not bitter or resentful against the one who has sued us.

In so doing we will show the love of Christ and that we are “sons of [our] Father who is in heaven” (v. 45).

**IT IS EVEN BETTER TO BE DEFRAUDED
THAN TO BE RESENTFUL, SPITEFUL, &
VENGEFUL (SEE 1 COR. 6:1–8.)**

3. LAVISHING LABORERS

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

- Going the “extra mile” has long been a way of describing virtue and exceptionalism... now you know where that came from.
- While the Roman culture & law made it legal for some to force others to carry their stuff for a mile, the missional servant was to offer to go far beyond the minimal requirements – joyfully.
- It was under that law that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the crossbeam of the instrument of Jesus’ execution.

- We don't go the extra mile so that we can get an extra reward (that's the worldly way). No. Christ has told & shown us that going the extra mile IS the reward (see Hebrews 12:1-3a)!
- Many blessings are only found on the extra mile!
- It's amazing how "special" & "extra" seem to go together like peanut butter & jelly... Special blessings on extra miles... & extra blessings on special (above & beyond normal) miles...
- While we can & should BE like Jesus on the first mile... we are most like Christ on the extra miles!

4. YEA-SAYING YOKEFELLOWS

⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, & do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

- Saying "yes" to GENEROSITY
 - Being others-oriented
 - Beware "when helping hurts"
 - Being both shrewd & innocent...
- BEing Christ-like givers vs cultural/churchy takers
- BEing Christ-like lovers vs. counterfeit liars...
- BEing warm-hearted vs. cold & hard-hearted...
- BEing open-handed vs. tight-fisted...
- BEing "good Samaritans" vs. religious hypocrites...
- Generously saying YES missionally...
 - Yes LORD!
 - Yes Church.
 - Yes Neighbor...

Jesus is not speaking of begrudging acquiescence to a plea for help, but willing, generous, and loving desire to help others. He is speaking of generosity that genuinely wants to meet the other person's need, not tokenism that does a good deed to buy off one's own conscience.

III. RESPOND:

a. CHRIST-LIKENESS

JESUS DOES NOT UNDERCUT CIVIL JUSTICE, WHICH BELONGS IN THE COURTROOM. HE UNDERCUTS PERSONAL SELFISHNESS...

We need HOLY Heads, Hearts, & Hands...

1. **H:** Holy Humility

*Instead of properly acknowledging the law of an **eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth** as a limit on punishment, they conveniently used it as a mandate for vengeance... a personal license for revenge... The self-centered & self-asserted righteousness of the scribes & Pharisees had made a shambles of God's holy law. - MacArthur*

Jesus is talking here about insult and slander. If someone slanders you, (be humble) & make yourself vulnerable to be slandered again. If someone insults you, do not respond by insulting him in return; (be humble) & make yourself vulnerable to being insulted again. – **Sproul**

2. **O:** *Overflowing Offerings*

Let us hold NOTHING back when it comes to God getting glory thru our worshipping & witnessing!

3. **L:** *Lavishing Laborers*

May we always BE Christ's
extra-mile missionaries!
I pray that our work
will be our
witness!
(Eph. 2:10)

4. **Y:** *Yea-saying Yokefellows*

- We want to be as gracious and generous with others as God has been with us...
- *BE-ing the beatitudes is key...*
- We want our lives to preach Christ!

b. CONSIDER again / REVIEW:

Kingdom righteousness is holy,
Christ-like & accepting of sacrificial losses
...for the sake of lost souls, a good witness, & God's glory!

(OFTEN TIMES, THE WAY LOVE WINS IS BY TAKING THE LOSS.)

c. CLOSE:

How wrong do we think about & handle our rights?

- ***We fight to hold on to what we think or claim is ours...***
- We compromise &/or give away what God commands us to keep & champion.

*The only person who is non-defensive, non-vengeful, never bears a grudge, and has no spite in his heart is the person who has died to self. To fight for one's rights is to prove that self is still on the throne of the heart. The believer who is faithful to Christ lives for Him &, if necessary, dies for Him (**Rom. 14:8**). It is impossible to live for self & for Christ at the same time.*

- **Are we fearing God & trying to manage man/culture?**
- **Or are we fearing man, while trying to manage God?**

That is the spirit Jesus teaches in this passage, a spirit all men fail to possess apart from saving grace. It is the spirit Abraham manifested when he gave the best land to his nephew Lot. It is the spirit of Joseph when he embraced and kissed the brothers who had so terribly wronged him. It is the spirit that would not let David take advantage of the opportunity to take the life of Saul, who was then seeking to take David's life. It is the spirit that led Elisha to feed the enemy Assyrian army. It is the spirit that led Stephen to pray for those who were stoning him to death. It is the spirit of every believer who, by the Holy Spirit's power, seeks to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48)

Is this not what Jesus Himself did? *"He was oppressed & He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, & as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth"* (Isa. 53:7).

VIDEO: *Pantwi's Persecution*

LOVE WINS BIBLICALLY WHEN WE (LIKE CHRIST) TAKE THE LOSSES MISSIONALLY! AND CONVERSELY, SADLY... TRAGICALLY... SIN WINS BIBLICALLY WHEN WE FIGHT THE LOSSES CULTURALLY.

PRAY

Study / Research Notes:

Matthew 5:38-42

Retaliation

38“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 the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. **40**And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. **41**And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. **42**Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

◀ 436. anthistémi ▶

Lexical Summary

anthistémi: To resist, to oppose, to withstand

Original Word: ἀνθίστημι

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: anthistémi

Pronunciation: an-thee'-stay-mee

Phonetic Spelling: (anth-is'-tay-mee)

KJV: resist, withstand

NASB: resist, opposed, resists, cope, has opposed, oppose, opposing

Word Origin: [from [G473 \(ἀντί - instead\)](#) and [G2476 \(ἵστημι - standing\)](#)]

1. to stand against, i.e. oppose

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

resist, withstand, oppose

From [anti](#) and [histemi](#); to stand against, i.e. Oppose -- resist, withstand.

see GREEK [anti](#)

see GREEK [histemi](#)

HELPS Word-studies

436 *anthístēmi* (from [473](#) /*antí*, "opposite/against" and [2476](#) /*hístēmi*, "to stand") – properly, *take a complete stand against*, i.e. a "180 degree, *contrary* position"; (figuratively) to establish one's position *publicly* by *conspicuously* "holding one's ground," i.e. *refusing to be moved* ("pushed back").

[436](#) /*anthístēmi* ("oppose *fully*") means to *forcefully declare one's personal conviction* (where they unswervingly stand); to *keep one's possession*; *ardently* withstand, without giving up (letting go).

[[436](#) (*anthístēmi*) was a *military* term in classical Greek (used by Thucydides, etc.) meaning "to strongly resist an opponent" ("take a *firm stand against*").]

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

from [anti](#) and [histēmi](#)

Definition

to set against, i.e. withstand

NASB Translation

cope (1), oppose (1), has opposed (1), opposed (4), opposing (1), resist (5), resists (2).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon

STRONGS NT 436: ἀνθίστημι

ἀνθίστημι: perfect **ἀνθέστηκα**; 2 aorist **ἀντέστην** (imperative **ἀντίστητε**), infinitive **ἀντιστῆναι**; middle, present **ἀνθισταμαι**; imperfect **ἀνθισταμην**; (**ἀντί** and **ῖστημι**); **to set against**; as in Greek writings, in the middle, and in the perfect pluperfect (having present and imperfect force, Winers Grammar, 274 (257)) and 2 aorist active, **to set oneself against, to withstand resist, oppose**: perfect active, [Romans 9:19](#); [Romans 13:2](#); [2 Timothy 4:15](#) (R G). 2 aorist active, [Matthew 5:39](#); [Luke 21:15](#); [Acts 6:10](#); [Galatians 2:11](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#); [2 Timothy 3:8](#); ([2 Timothy 4:15](#) L T Tr WH). imperative, [James 4:7](#); [1 Peter 5:9](#). Middle: present, [2 Timothy 3:8](#). imperfect, [Acts 13:8](#).

Topical Lexicon

Conceptual Overview

Strong's 436 portrays a decisive "standing against." Scripture applies the term in two contrasting directions: (1) sinful opposition to God, His appointed servants, or His established authorities; and (2) righteous resistance to Satan, falsehood, and moral evil. The tension between these uses

highlights the believer's need for discernment: one may either “withstand in the evil day” ([Ephesians 6:13](#)) or be found “resisting the ordinance of God” ([Romans 13:2](#)).

Occurrences Across the Canon

Fourteen New Testament passages employ the verb. Narrative books show opponents resisting apostolic preaching ([Acts 6:10](#); 13:8). The Gospels record Jesus' injunction not to retaliate against personal offense ([Matthew 5:39](#)) and His promise to supply irrefutable wisdom ([Luke 21:15](#)). Pauline and General Epistles broaden the term into ethical, ecclesial, and spiritual spheres: confronting hypocrisy ([Galatians 2:11](#)), combating doctrinal error ([2 Timothy 3:8](#); 4:15), submitting to civil rule ([Romans 13:2](#)), and engaging the devil in warfare ([Ephesians 6:13](#); [James 4:7](#); [1 Peter 5:9](#)).

The Teaching of Jesus: Non-retaliatory Resistance

[Matthew 5:39](#) anchors the Sermon on the Mount ethic: “But I tell you not to resist an evil person. If someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Here *anthistēmi* forbids personal vengeance, not lawful self-defense nor spiritual warfare. Jesus redirects disciples from instinctive payback toward redemptive meekness, anticipating the cross itself.

Righteous Opposition to Falsehood

[Acts 13:8](#) depicts Elymas “opposing” Barnabas and Saul, illustrating how sorcery contests gospel advance. Luke similarly notes that Stephen's adversaries “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by whom he spoke” ([Acts 6:10](#)). These episodes underline the inevitability of resistance whenever truth confronts darkness and establish a paradigm for Spirit-empowered proclamation that silences gainsayers.

Confronting Error Within the Church

Paul “opposed [Peter] to his face” at Antioch ([Galatians 2:11](#)), modeling courageous, brotherly correction for the sake of gospel purity. In [2 Timothy 3:8](#) he recalls Jannes and Jambres who “opposed Moses,” applying their example to men “opposing the truth” inside the church. Timothy is to recognize and expose such teachers whose “folly will be clear to all” (verse 9), while being warned that Alexander the coppersmith “vigorously opposed our message” ([2 Timothy 4:15](#)).

Resistance to Divine Authority: A Grave Error

[Romans 9:19](#) voices the objection, “Who can resist His will?” underscoring God's irresistible sovereignty. The same letter warns, “Whoever resists the authority resists what God has appointed” ([Romans 13:2](#)). Opposition to legitimate civil governance is tantamount to opposing God Himself. The repeated term intensifies the call to conscientious submission—unless obedience to God requires otherwise ([Acts 5:29](#)).

Spiritual Warfare: Standing Firm Against the Devil

[Ephesians 6:13](#) commands believers to don the full armor of God “so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and having done everything, to stand.” James amplifies: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” ([James 4:7](#)). Peter echoes: “Resist him, standing firm in your faith” ([1 Peter 5:9](#)). The verb depicts active, faith-filled opposition, empowered by divine armor, humble submission, and corporate solidarity.

Eschatological Assurance

Jesus promises persecuted witnesses, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” ([Luke 21:15](#)). The term guarantees ultimate vindication for faithful testimony during tribulation; human opposition cannot overturn divinely bestowed wisdom.

Pastoral and Discipleship Implications

1. Train believers to distinguish godly resistance (against Satan, sin, heresy) from wrongful resistance (against God’s will or ordained order).
2. Encourage courage and clarity in confronting doctrinal drift, following Paul’s example with Peter.
3. Equip saints with the whole armor of God, emphasizing both humble submission to the Lord and steadfast opposition to the devil.
4. Model non-retaliatory love in personal grievances, reflecting Christ’s ethic of enemy love.
5. Instill confidence that gospel proclamation, powered by the Spirit’s wisdom, will ultimately prove irrefutable.

Historical Reception in the Church

Early apologists invoked [Luke 21:15](#) when defending the faith before magistrates. Reformers cited [James 4:7](#) to urge resistance to the devil through Scripture and prayer. Missionaries have long found in [Acts 6 and 13](#) assurance that hostile cultures cannot finally withstand Spirit-filled witness.

Contemporary Application

In an age of relativism, believers must graciously yet firmly resist ideologies that contradict biblical truth. At the same time, the church must avoid the twin dangers of carnal retaliation and seditious defiance of legitimate authority. Rooted in submission to God and armed with His Word, Christians are called to stand—unmoved by opposition, unmixed with compromise, and unafraid of the outcome, for “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

4190. ponéros ►

Lexical Summary

ponéros: Evil, wicked, bad, malicious

Original Word: πονηρός

Part of Speech: Adjective

Transliteration: ponéros

Pronunciation: po-nay-ROS

Phonetic Spelling: (pon-ay-ros')

KJV: bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked(-ness)

NASB: evil, wicked, bad, evil one, crimes, envious, evil things

Word Origin: [from a derivative of [G4192 \(πόνος - pain\)](#)]

1. hurtful, i.e. evil
 2. (figuratively) calamitous
 3. (passively) ill, i.e. diseased
 4. (especially, morally) culpable, i.e. derelict, vicious, atrociously wicked
 5. (neuter, singular) mischief, malice
 6. (neuter plural) guilt
 7. (masculine, singular) the devil
 8. (plural) sinners
- {(properly) in effect or influence, and thus differing from G2556, which refers rather to essential character, as well as from G4550, which indicates degeneracy from original virtue}

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

evil, grievous

From a derivative of [ponos](#); hurtful, i.e. Evil (properly, in effect or influence, and thus differing from [kakos](#), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from [sapro](#)s, which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figuratively, calamitous; also (passively) ill, i.e. Diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. Derelict, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners -- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked(-ness). See also [poneroter](#)os.

see GREEK [ponos](#)

see GREEK [kakos](#)

see GREEK [sapro](#)s

see GREEK [poneroter](#)os

HELPS Word-studies

4190 *ponēros* (an adjective which is also used substantively, derived from [4192](#) /*pónos*, "pain, laborious trouble") – properly, *pain-ridden*, emphasizing the inevitable agonies (misery) that always go with *evil*.

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

from poneó (to toil)

Definition

toilsome, bad

NASB Translation

bad (5), crimes (1), envious (1), envy* (1), evil (50), evil one (5), evil things (1), malignant (1), more evil (1), more wicked (1), vicious (1), wicked (6), wicked man (1), wicked things (1), worthless (1).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon

STRONGS NT 4190: πονηρός

πονηρός (on the accent cf. Lob. ad Phryn., p. 3 Götting, Lehre v., Accent, p. 304f; (Chandler §§ 404, 405); Lipsius, Grammat. Untersuch., p. 26), **πονηρά**, **πονηρόν**; comparative **πονηρότερος** ([Matthew 12:45](#); [Luke 11:26](#)); (**πονέω**, **πόνος**); from Hesiod (Homer (ep. 15, 20), Theog.) down; the Sept. often for פֶּגַע ;

1. full of labors, annoyances, hardships;

a. pressed and harassed by labors; thus Hercules is called **πονηροτατος καὶ ἄριστος**, Hesiod fragment 43, 5.

b. bringing toils, annoyances, perils: (**καιρός**, Sir. 51:12); **ἡμέρα πονηρά**, of a time full of peril to Christian faith and steadfastness, [Ephesians 5:16](#); [Ephesians 6:13](#) (so in the plural **ἡμέραι πονηραί** the Epistle of Barnabas 2, 1 [ET]); causing pain and trouble (A. V. **grievous**), **ἔλκος**, [Revelation 16:2](#).

2. bad, of a bad nature or condition;

a. in a physical sense: **ὀφθαλμός**, diseased or blind, [Matthew 6:23](#); [Luke 11:34](#) (**πονηρίαὶ ὀφθαλμῶν**, Plato, Hipp., min., p. 374 d.; the Greeks use **πονηρῶς ἔχειν** or **διακεῖσθαι** of the sick; **ἐκ γενετῆς πονηροὺς ὑγιεῖς πεποιηκέναι**, Justin Martyr, Apology 1, 22 ((cf. Otto's note); others take **πονηρός** in Matthew and Luke as above ethically; cf.

b. and Meyer on Matt.)); καρπός, [Matthew 7:17f](#).

b. in an ethical sense, **evil, wicked, bad**, etc. ("this use of the word is due to its association with the working (largely the servile) class; not that contempt for labor is thereby expressed, for such words as ἐργάτης, δραστήρ, and the like, do not take on this evil sense, which connected itself only with a word expressive of unintermitted toil and carrying no suggestion of results" (cf. Schmidt, chapter 85, § 1); see κακία, at the end); of persons: [Matthew 7:11](#); [Matthew 12:34](#); [Matthew 18:32](#); [Matthew 25:26](#); [Luke 6:45](#); [Luke 11:13](#); [Luke 19:22](#); [Acts 17:5](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:2](#); [2 Timothy 3:13](#); γενεά πονηρά, [Matthew 12:39, 45](#); [Matthew 16:4](#); [Luke 11:29](#); πνεῦμα πονηρόν, an evil spirit (see πνεῦμα, 3 c.), [Matthew 12:45](#); [Luke 7:21](#); [Luke 8:2](#); [Luke 11:26](#); [Acts 19:12f, 15f](#); substantively οἱ πονηροί, **the wicked**, bad men, opposed to οἱ δίκαιοι, [Matthew 13:49](#); πονηροί καὶ ἀγαθοί, [Matthew 5:45](#); [Matthew 22:10](#); ἀχάριστοι καὶ πονηροί, [Luke 6:35](#); τὸν πονηρόν, **the wicked man**, i. e. the evil-doer spoken of, [1 Corinthians 5:13](#); τῷ πονηρῷ, **the evil man**, who injures you, [Matthew 5:39](#). ὁ πονηρός is used pre-eminently of **the devil, the evil one**: [Matthew 5:37](#); [Matthew 6:13](#); [Matthew 13:19, 38](#); [Luke 11:4](#) R L; [John 17:15](#); [1 John 2:13](#); [1 John 3:12](#); [1 John 5:18f](#) (on which see κεῖμαι, 2 {c}); [Ephesians 6:16](#). of things: αἰών, [Galatians 1:4](#); ὄνομα (which see 1, p. 447a bottom), [Luke 6:22](#); ῥαδιούργημα, [Acts 18:14](#); the heart as a storehouse out of which a man brings forth πονηρά words is called θησαυρός πονηρός, [Matthew 12:35](#); [Luke 6:45](#); συνείδησις πονηρά, a soul conscious of wickedness (conscious wickedness; see συνείδησις, b. sub at the end), [Hebrews 10:22](#); καρδιά πονηρά ἀπιστίας, an evil heart such as is revealed in distrusting (cf. Buttmann, § 132, 24; Winer's Grammar, § 30, 4), [Hebrews 3:12](#); ὀφθαλμός (which see), [Matthew 20:15](#); [Mark 7:22](#); διαλογισμοί, [Matthew 15:19](#); [James 2:4](#); ὑπόνοιαι, [1 Timothy 6:4](#); καύχησις; [James 4:16](#); ῥῆμα, a reproach, [Matthew 5:11](#) (RG; others omit ῥῆμα); λόγοι, [3 John 1:10](#); ἔργα, [John 3:19](#); [John 7:7](#); [1 John 3:12](#); [2 John 1:11](#); [Colossians 1:21](#); ἔργον (according to the context) wrong committed against me, [2 Timothy 4:18](#); αἰτία, charge of crime, [Acts 25:18](#) L T Tr marginal reading WH marginal reading The neuter πονηρόν, and τό πονηρόν, substantively, **evil, that which is wicked**: εἶδος πονηροῦ (see εἶδος, 2; (others take πονηροῦ here as an adjective, and bring the example under εἶδος, 1 (R. V. marginal reading **appearance of evil**))), [1 Thessalonians 5:22](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:3](#) (where τοῦ πονηροῦ is held by many to be the genitive of the masculine ὁ πονηρός, but cf. Lünemann ad loc.); (τί πονηρόν, [Acts 28:21](#)); opposed to τό ἀγαθόν, [Luke 6:45](#); [Romans 12:9](#); plural (Winer's Grammar, § 34, 2), [Matthew 9:4](#); [Luke 3:19](#); wicked deeds, [Acts 25:18](#) Tr text WH text; ταῦτατά πονηρά, **these evil things** i. e. the vices just enumerated, [Mark 7:23](#).

Topical Lexicon

Overview of Meaning

The adjective πονηρός portrays what is morally corrupt, injurious, and actively hostile toward God's design. It can describe a person, a generation, a thought, a deed, a spiritual power, or even a climactic "day" of intensified opposition. The term is never ethically neutral; it is the settled antithesis of divine goodness.

Continuity with the Old Testament

In the Septuagint πονηρός frequently renders Hebrew *rā'*, rooting the concept in the creation-fall narrative. As Adam and Eve's sin unleashed a realm of evil, the New Testament carries that storyline forward, presenting Christ as the One who rescues "us from this present evil age" ([Galatians 1:4](#)).

Major New Testament Categories

1. Moral Character

- "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts..." ([Matthew 7:11](#)).
- The unregenerate are "alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds" ([Colossians 1:21](#)).

2. Collective Unbelief

- "An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign" ([Matthew 12:39](#); 16:4; [Luke 11:29](#)), indicting national hardness of heart.
- The kosmos system "lies in the power of the evil one" ([1 John 5:19](#)).

3. Inner Thoughts and Outward Acts

- "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" ([Matthew 9:4](#)).
- Lists of vice include "wickedness" ([Mark 7:22-23](#)), "evil boasting" ([James 4:16](#)), and actions deserving church discipline ([1 Corinthians 5:13](#)).

4. The Evil One

- With the article, πονηρός becomes a title for Satan: "The evil one does not touch him" ([1 John 5:18](#)); "deliver us from the evil one" ([Matthew 6:13](#)).
- Spiritual warfare language ("shield of faith... to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one," [Ephesians 6:16](#)) presumes a personal malevolent being.

5. Evil Spirits and Afflictions

- Jesus and the apostles expel "evil spirits" ([Luke 7:21](#); 8:2; [Acts 19:12-16](#)), revealing demonic oppression as a present reality overcome by divine authority.

6. The Evil Day

- “Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand” ([Ephesians 6:13](#)). A future, climactic assault intensifies the need for vigilance.

Contrasts and Parallels

πονηρός stands in deliberate tension with ἀγαθός (“good”) and χρηστός (“kind”). Jesus contrasts the “good treasure” of a righteous heart with the “evil treasure” of a corrupt one ([Luke 6:45](#)). Paul commands believers, “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good” ([Romans 12:9](#)), affirming a non-negotiable moral polarity.

Theological Significance

- Total Depravity: Humanity apart from grace falls under the label “evil” ([Matthew 7:11](#)).
- Personal and Cosmic Conflict: Evil is both a heart condition and a spiritual empire ruled by Satan.
- Sovereign Restraint and Final Judgment: God presently limits evil ([2 Thessalonians 3:3](#)) and will decisively purge it at the consummation ([Matthew 13:49-50](#)).
- Redemptive Deliverance: The cross and resurrection secure removal from the dominion of evil and promise the believer ultimate protection ([John 17:15](#)).

Practical Ministry Applications

1. Preaching and Teaching

Call sin what Scripture calls it—evil—to expose its gravity and magnify grace.

2. Discipleship and Sanctification

Encourage believers to “overcome evil with good” ([Romans 12:21](#)) through Spirit-empowered obedience.

3. Spiritual Warfare

Equip congregations with the “full armor of God” ([Ephesians 6:13-17](#)), emphasizing prayer, faith, and Scripture.

4. Pastoral Care and Deliverance

Maintain biblical vigilance regarding demonic influence, following apostolic patterns of prayer and authority in Christ.

5. Corporate Prayer

Persist in the Lord's model: "Deliver us from the evil one" ([Matthew 6:13](#)), recognizing ongoing need for divine protection.

Historical and Cultural Context

In Greco-Roman ethics "evil" often denoted social harm; Scripture deepens the diagnosis to inner rebellion. Second Temple Judaism spoke of the yetzer hara (evil inclination); the New Testament identifies both internal corruption and external satanic agency. Early Christians, facing persecution, applied [Matthew 5:39](#) ("do not resist an evil person") to model sacrificial witness while still opposing moral evil through righteous living.

Summary

πονηρός encapsulates every thought, act, person, spirit, or era set against God. Its 79 New Testament occurrences form a mosaic that clarifies the human predicament, magnifies the gospel's rescue, and fortifies the church's mission until the day when the Lamb annihilates all evil and ushers in unending righteousness.

MacLaren's Expositions

Matthew

NON-RESISTANCE

[Matthew 5:38-42](#).

The old law directed judges to inflict penalties precisely equivalent to offences- 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth' {[Exodus 21:24](#)}, but that direction was not for the guidance of individuals. It was suited for the stage of civilisation in which it was given, and probably was then a restriction, rather than a sanction, of the wild law of retaliation. Jesus sweeps it away entirely, and goes much further than even its abrogation. For He forbids not only retaliation but even resistance. It is unfortunate that in this, as in so many instances, controversy as to the range of Christ's words has so largely hustled obedience to them out of the field, that the first thought suggested to a modern reader by the command 'Resist not evil' {or, an evil man} is apt to be, Is the Quaker doctrine of uniform non-resistance right or wrong, instead of, Do I obey this precept? If we first try to understand its meaning, we shall be in a position to consider whether it has limits, springing from its own deepest significance, or not. What, then, is it not to resist? Our Lord gives three concrete illustrations of what He enjoins, the first of which refers to insults such as contumelious blows on the cheek, which are perhaps the hardest not to meet with a flash of anger and a returning stroke; the second of which refers to assaults on property, such as an attempt at legal robbery of a man's

undergarment; the third of which refers to forced labour, such as impressing a peasant to carry military or official baggage or documents-a form of oppression only too well known under Roman rule in Christ's days. In regard to all three cases, He bids His disciples submit to the indignity, yield the coat, and go the mile. But such yielding without resistance is not to be all. The other cheek is to be given to the smiter; the more costly and ample outer garment is to be yielded up; the load is to be carried for two miles. The disciple is to meet evil with a manifestation, not of anger, hatred, or intent to inflict retribution, but of readiness to submit to more. It is a hard lesson, but clearly here, as always, the chief stress is to be laid, not on the outward action, but on the disposition, and on the action mainly as the outcome and exhibition of that. If the cheek is turned, or the cloak yielded, or the second mile trudged with a lowering brow, and hate or anger boiling in the heart, the commandment is broken. If the inner man rises in hot indignation against the evil and its doer, he is resisting evil more harmfully to himself than is many a man who makes his adversary's cheeks tingle before his own have ceased to be reddened. We have to get down into the depths of the soul, before we understand the meaning of non-resistance. It would have been better if the eager controversy about the breadth of this commandment had oftener become a study of its depth, and if, instead of asking, 'Are we ever warranted in resisting?' men had asked, 'What in its full meaning is non-resistance?' The truest answer is that it is a form of Love,-love in the face of insults, wrongs, and domineering tyranny, such as are illustrated in Christ's examples. This article of Christ's New Law comes last but one in the series of instances in which His transfiguring touch is laid on the Old Law, and the last of the series is that to which He has been steadily advancing from the first-namely, the great Commandment of Love. This precept stands immediately before that, and prepares for it. It is, as suffused with the light of the sun that is all but risen, 'Resist not evil,' for 'Love beareth all things.'

It is but a shallow stream that is worried into foam and made angry and noisy by the stones in its bed; a deep river flows smooth and silent above them. Nothing will enable us to meet 'evil' with a patient yielding love which does not bring the faintest tinge of anger even into the cheek reddened by a rude hand, but the 'love of God shed abroad in the heart,' and when that love fills a man, 'out of him will flow a river of living water,' which will bury evil below its clear, gentle abundance, and, perchance, wash it of its foulness. The 'quality of' this non-resistance 'is twice blessed,' 'it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.' For the disciple who submits in love, there is the gain of freedom from the perturbations of passion, and of steadfast abiding in the peace of a great charity, the deliverance from the temptation of descending to the level of the wrong-doer, and of losing hold of God and all high visions. The tempest-ruffled sea mirrors no stars by night, nor is blued by day. If we are to have real communion with God, we must not flush with indignation at evil, nor pant with desire to shoot the arrow back to him that aimed

it at us. And in regard to the evil-doer, the most effectual resistance is, in many cases, not to resist. There is something hid away somewhere in most men's hearts which makes them ashamed of smiting the offered left cheek, and then ashamed of having smitten the right one. 'It is a shame to hit him, since he does not defend himself,' comes into many a ruffian's mind. The safest way to travel in savage countries is to show oneself quite unarmed. He that meets evil with evil is 'overcome of evil'; he that meets it with patient love is likely in most cases to 'overcome evil with good.' And even if he fails, he has, at all events, used the only weapon that has any chance of beating down the evil, and it is better to be defeated when fighting hate with love than to be victorious when fighting it with itself, or demanding an eye for an eye.

But, if we take the right view of this precept, its limitations are in itself. Since it is love confronting, and seeking to transform evil into its own likeness, it may sometimes be obliged by its own self not to yield. If turning the other cheek would but make the assaulter more angry, or if yielding the cloak would but make the legal robber more greedy, or if going the second mile would but make the press-gang more severe and exacting, resistance becomes a form of love and a duty for the sake of the wrong-doer. It may also become a duty for the sake of others, who are also objects of love, such as helpless persons who otherwise would be exposed to evil, or society as a whole. But while clearly that limit is prescribed by the very nature of the precept, the resistance which it permits must have love to the culprit or to others as its motive, and not be tainted by the least suspicion of passion or vengeance. Would that professing Christians would try more to purge their own hearts, and bring this solemn precept into their daily lives, instead of discussing whether there are cases in which it does not apply! There are great tracts in the lives of all of us to which it should apply and is not applied; and we had better seek to bring these under its dominion first, and then it will be time enough to debate as to whether any circumstances are outside its dominion or not.

Benson Commentary

Matthew 5:38-42. *Ye have heard*, &c. — Our Lord proceeds to enforce such meekness and love toward their enemies, on those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, as were utterly unknown to the scribes and Pharisees. And this subject he pursues to the end of the chapter. *It hath been said*, viz., in the law, Deuteronomy 19:21, *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth* — Though this statute was only intended as a direction to judges, with regard to the penalties to be inflicted in case of violent and barbarous assaults; yet it was interpreted among the Jews as encouraging a rigorous and severe revenge of every injury a man might receive. *But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil* — Or, rather, *the evil man*, as τῷ πονηρῷ ought to be rendered. Dr. Doddridge reads

the clause: *That you do not set yourselves against the injurious person*, viz., in a posture of hostile opposition, as the word *αντιστηναι* implies, and with a resolution to return evil for evil. *But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek*, &c. — Where the damage is not great, choose rather to pass it by, though possibly it might, on that account, be repeated, than to enter into a rigorous prosecution of the offender. *And if any man will sue thee, &c., and take away thy coat* — By the word *χιτων*, here rendered *coat*, it seems we are to understand an inner garment; and by the word, *ιματιον*, rendered *cloak*, an outer garment. Dr. Doddridge renders the former, *vest*, and the latter, *mantle*. They are parts of dress, under different names, still used in Barbary, Egypt, and the Levant. See Shaw's *Travels*, pp. 289, 292. Our Lord, it is to be observed, is not here speaking of a robber attacking a person on the highway, to whom it would be natural to take the outer garment first, but of a person suing another at law, as our translators seem properly to have rendered *κριθηναι*. The meaning of the whole passage evidently is, rather than return *evil for evil*: when the wrong is purely personal, submit to one bodily injury after another, give up one part of your goods after another, submit to one instance of compulsion after another. That the words, *Turn to him the other cheek also*, (and consequently those in the next clause,) are not to be taken literally, appears from the behaviour of our Lord himself, [John 18:22-23](#). *Give to him, that asketh thee*, &c. — Give and lend to any that are in want, so far, (but no farther, for God never contradicts himself,) as is consistent with thy engagements to thy creditors, thy family, and the household of faith.

Upon the whole of this passage, from [Matthew 5:38](#), we may observe, that it seems to have been primarily intended to counteract and correct that abuse of the law of retaliation above mentioned, which was common among the Jews, who carried their resentments to the utmost lengths; and, by so doing, maintained infinite quarrels, to the great detriment of social life. For this purpose, our Lord “puts five cases wherein Christian meekness must especially show itself. 1st, When any one assaults our person, in resentment of some affront he imagines we have put upon him. 2d, When any one sues us at the law, in order to take our goods from us. 3d, When he attacks our natural liberty. 4th, When one who is poor asks charity. 5th, When a neighbour begs the loan of something from us. In all these cases our Lord forbids us to resist. Yet, from the examples which he mentions, it is plain that this forbearance and compliance are required only when we are slightly attacked, but by no means when the assault is of a capital kind. For it would be unbecoming the wisdom which Jesus showed in other points, to suppose that he forbids us to defend ourselves against murderers, robbers, and oppressors, who would unjustly take away our life, our estate, or our liberty. Neither can it be thought that he commands us to give every idle fellow all he may think fit to ask, whether in charity or in loan. We are

only to give what we can spare, and to such persons as out of real necessity ask relief from us. Nay, our Lord's own behaviour toward the man that smote him on the cheek, shows he did not mean that in all cases his disciples should be passive under the very injuries which he here speaks of. In some circumstances, *smiting on the cheek, taking away one's coat, and the compelling one to go a mile*, may be great injuries, and therefore are to be resisted. The first instance was judged so by Jesus himself in the case mentioned. For had he forbore to reprove the man who did it, his silence might have been interpreted as proceeding from a conviction of his having done evil, in giving the high priest the answer for which he was smitten." But, admitting that this rule has for its object small injuries, and that our Lord orders his disciples to be passive under them rather than to repel them, it is liable to no objection: for he who "bears a slight affront, consults his honour and interest much better than he who resists or resents it; because he shows a greatness of mind worthy of a man, and uses the best means of avoiding quarrels, which oft-times are attended with the most fatal consequences. In like manner, he who yields a little of his right, rather than he will go to law, is much wiser than the man who has recourse to public justice in every instance; because, in the progress of a law-suit, such animosities may arise as are inconsistent with charity. To conclude, *benevolence*, which is the glory of the divine nature, and the perfection of the human, rejoices in doing good. Hence the man that is possessed of this god-like quality cheerfully embraces every occasion in his power of relieving the poor and distressed, whether by gift or loan. Some are of opinion, that the precept concerning almsgiving, and gratuitous lending, is subjoined to the instances of injuries which our Lord commands us to bear, to teach us that, if the persons who have injured us fall into want, we are not to withhold any act of charity from them on account of the evil they have formerly done us. Taken in this light, the precept is generous and divine. Moreover, as liberality is a virtue nearly allied to the forgiveness of injuries, our Lord joined the two together, to show that they should always go hand in hand. The reason is, *revenge* will blast the greatest *liberality*, and a *covetous heart* will show *the most perfect patience* to be *a sordid meanness of spirit*, proceeding from selfishness." — Macknight.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

5:38-42 The plain instruction is, Suffer any injury that can be borne, for the sake of peace, committing your concerns to the Lord's keeping. And the sum of all is, that Christians must avoid disputing and striving. If any say, Flesh and blood cannot pass by such an affront, let them remember, that flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and those who act upon right principles will have most peace and comfort.

(b) The law of retaliation, 38–42.

38. *An eye for an eye*] See [Exodus 21:24](#). The Scribes draw a false inference from the letter of the law. As a legal remedy the *lex talionis* was probably the best possible in a rude state of society. The principle was admitted in all ancient nations. But the retribution was exacted by a judicial sentence for the good of the community, not to gratify personal vengeance. The deduction that it was morally right for individuals to indulge revenge could not be justified.

Pulpit Commentary

Verses 38-48. - The two remaining examples of the current teaching of the Law are very closely connected together, and, in fact, our Lord's corrections of them are intermingled in [Luke 6:27-36](#). Yet the subjects are really distinct. In the first (vers. 38-42) our Lord speaks of the reception of injuries, in the second (vers. 43-48) of the treatment of those who do them. Godet's remarks (in his summary of [Luke 6:27-45](#)) on the use made by St. Luke of these examples are especially instructive. "These last two antitheses, which terminate in Matthew in the lofty thought (ver. 48) of man being elevated by love to the perfection of God, furnish Luke with the leading idea of the discourse as he presents it, namely, charity as the law of the new life." Verses 38-42. - **The reception of injuries.** The Law inculcated that the injured should obtain from those who did the wrong exact compensation (on this being properly a command, not merely a permission, *vide* Mozley, 'Ruling Ideas,' etc., pp. 182, sqq.). Our Lord inculcates giving up of all in-sistance upon one's rights as an injured person, and entire submission to injuries, even as far as proffering the opportunity for fresh wrongs. Verse 38. - *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*. No short phrase could more accurately describe the spirit of the Mosaic legislation. Offences against individuals were to be punished by the injured individual receiving back, as it were, the exact compensation from him who had injured him. While this was originally observed literally, it was in Mishnic times (and probably in the time of our Lord) softened to payment of money (*vide* Lightfoot, 'Hor. Hebr.'). The phrase comes three times in the Pentateuch ([Exodus 21:24](#); [Leviticus 24:20](#); [Deuteronomy 19:21](#)). Notice:

(1) The LXX. has the accusative in each case, although only in the first does a verb precede. Probably the expression had already become proverbial in Greek even before the translation of the LXX.

(2) The Hebrew of [Deuteronomy 19:21](#) is slightly different from that of the other two passages, and as the preposition there used (ב) is not so necessarily

rendered by ávri, that passage is perhaps the least likely of the three to have been in our Lord's mind now. It seems likely, however, that he was not thinking of any one of the three passages in particular. The words served him as a summary of the Law in this respect. Matthew 5:38

MacArthur Commentary:

An Eye for an Eye

(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 him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (5:38–42)

One element of the great American philosophy of life is that we all have certain inalienable rights. Among the most important privileges that our Declaration of Independence espouses are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In our day the number of rights claimed has greatly expanded. Movements have developed for civil rights, women's rights, children's rights, workers' rights, prisoners' rights, and so on.

**NEVER HAS A SOCIETY BEEN MORE
CONCERNED ABOUT RIGHTS.**

We idolize the hero who stands up for what is his no matter who it may offend.

That self-interested, self-protecting spirit characterizes fallen human nature.

Above all else, sinful man wants what he thinks is his own.

And in the process of protecting what is his own, he is also inclined to wreak considerable trouble on anyone who takes what is his.

RETALIATION, USUALLY WITH INTEREST, IS A NATURAL EXTENSION OF SELFISHNESS.

Inordinate concern for one's own rights comes from inordinate selfishness and leads to inordinate lawlessness. **When our supreme concern is getting and keeping what we think is rightfully ours, then whoever or whatever gets in our way—including the law—becomes expendable.** Since it is not possible for everyone to have everything he wants, **to insist on our own way invariably tramples on the rights and welfare of others.**

Respect for law and for the welfare of others is always among the first and major casualties of self-assertion. When self is in the foreground, everything else and everyone else is pushed to the background.

When self-interest dominates, justice is replaced by vengeance.

Impartial concern for justice becomes partial concern for personal revenge. Concern for protecting society becomes concern for protecting self-interest. As James points out, that perversion is the source of wars and every other human conflict.

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war

in your members? You lust and do not have; so, you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so, you fight and quarrel” (James 4:1–2).

When rights are first, righteousness suffers.

Few people have had their legitimate rights trampled on more than Paul.

Yet to the selfish, indulgent Corinthians he wrote,

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?... Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?... If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. (1 Cor. 9:1, 4–6, 12)

Paul willingly set aside his rights
for the sake of the gospel and the welfare of others.

But Paul did not always win the fight against his innate fallenness. When he was brought before the Sanhedrin during his last imprisonment in Jerusalem, he began his testimony by saying, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” At that, “the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, **‘God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?’**” When Paul was informed that he was speaking to the high priest, he apologized and said, **“I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’” (Acts 23:1–5).**

Because Paul's anger momentarily got the best of him, he retaliated with harsh words.

Ananias perhaps was not dressed in the customary high priestly garments, and therefore Paul failed to recognize him. But had he known he was speaking to Ananias, Paul would have had all the more justification, from a human standpoint, to righteously deride the one who ordered him struck. Ananias was an unusually vile, arrogant, and immoral man who continually profaned his high office. And, as Paul reminded him, to order a prisoner struck before he was convicted was against the very Jewish law Ananias was sworn to administer.

YET PAUL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HIS ANGRY RETORT WAS WRONG.

In God's eyes he had no right to speak disparagingly of any ruler, and he condemned his own actions by Scripture.

PROBABLY **NO PART OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT HAS BEEN SO MISINTERPRETED AND MISAPPLIED**
AS **5:38–42.**

➤ It has been interpreted to mean:

- Christians are to be sanctimonious doormats.
- It has been used to promote pacifism,
- conscientious objection to military service,
- lawlessness (is okay),
- anarchy (is okay),

- and a host of other positions it does not support.
- The Russian writer Tolstoy based one of his best-known novels on this passage. The thesis of *War and Peace* is that the elimination of police, the military, and other forms of authority would bring a Utopian society.

But Jesus already had made plain that He did not come to eliminate even the smallest part of God's law (5:17–19), which includes respect for & obedience to human law & authority

Among the many unrighteous things that the religion of the scribes and Pharisees (see Matt. 5:20) included was their insistence on personal rights and vengeance.

**IN HIS FIFTH ILLUSTRATION
CONTRASTING THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS
WITH GOD'S, JESUS AGAIN SHOWS HOW
RABBINIC TRADITION HAD TWISTED
GOD'S HOLY LAW TO SERVE THE SELFISH
PURPOSES OF UNHOLY MEN.**

THE PRINCIPLE OF MOSAIC LAW

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”
(5:38)

This quotation is taken directly from the Old Testament
(Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21)

and reflects the principle of *lex talionis*, one of the most ancient law codes.

Simply put,

it required that punishment
exactly match the crime.

The same idea is carried in the expressions *tit for tat* and *quid pro quo*. **The earliest record of *lex talionis* is in the Code of Hammurabi, the great Babylonian king who lived a hundred or so years before Moses.** It is likely, however, that the principle was in wide use long before that time.

In the Pentateuch an *eye for an eye, and*
a tooth for a tooth are part of longer lists
that include “*hand for hand, foot for foot,*
burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for
bruise” (see Ex. 21:24–25) and “*fracture for*
fracture” (Lev. 24:20).

In both the law of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi **THE PRINCIPLE OF PUNISHMENT TO MATCH THE CRIME HAD TWO BASIC PURPOSES.**

1. The first was **TO CURTAIL FURTHER CRIME.** When a person is punished for his wrongdoing, *“the rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you”* (Deut. 19:20).

2. The second purpose was **TO PREVENT EXCESSIVE PUNISHMENT BASED ON PERSONAL VENGEANCE AND ANGRY RETALIATION**

of the type of which **Lamech** boasted: *“For I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me; if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold”* (Gen. 4:23–24). **PUNISHMENT WAS TO MATCH, BUT NOT EXCEED, THE HARM DONE BY THE OFFENSE ITSELF.**

It is of the utmost significance that each of the three Pentateuch accounts that prescribe the eye for an eye principle has to do with the civil justice system.

- A. Exodus 21–23 deals entirely with God’s provision for Israel’s civil law, as do the similar teachings in
- B. Leviticus 24 and
- C. Deuteronomy 19.

Punishment was sometimes carried out by the victim, but the trial and sentencing were always the responsibility of duly appointed judges or of a large, representative body of citizens (see Ex. 21:22; Deut. 19:18; Lev. 24:14–16).

The law of an **eye for an eye** was a just law, because it matched punishment to offense. It was a merciful law, because it limited the innate propensity of the human heart to seek retribution beyond what an offense deserved. It was also a beneficent law, because it protected society by restraining wrongdoing.

SELFISH OVERREACTION IS THE NATURAL RESPONSE OF SINFUL HUMAN NATURE.

We are tempted to get more than just even. Anger and resentment demand the sort of retaliation Lamech glorified.

Human vengeance is never satisfied with justice; it wants a pound of flesh for an ounce of offense.

That is one reason why God restricts vengeance to Himself.
“Vengeance is Mine, and retribution” (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).

God’s command for the individual has always been,
“IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, GIVE HIM FOOD TO EAT; AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM WATER TO DRINK” (Prov. 25:21; cf. Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:20).

No individual has the right to say, “Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work” (Prov. 24:29).

In no instance did the Old Testament allow an individual to take the law into his own hands and apply it personally.

THE PERVERSION OF RABBINIC TRADITION

Yet that is exactly what rabbinic tradition had done.

**EACH MAN WAS PERMITTED, IN EFFECT,
TO BECOME HIS OWN JUDGE, JURY,
AND EXECUTIONER.**

God's law was turned to individual license, & civil justice was perverted to personal vengeance.

*Instead of properly acknowledging the law of an **eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth** as a limit on punishment, they conveniently used it as a mandate for vengeance—as it has often been wrongly viewed throughout history.*

What God gave as a restriction on civil courts, Jewish tradition had turned into personal license for revenge. In still another way, the self-centered and self-asserted “righteousness” of the scribes and Pharisees had made a shambles of God’s holy law.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIVINE TRUTH

But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (5:39–42)

In the command **do not resist him who is evil**

**JESUS REBUTS THE PHARISEES’
MISINTERPRETATION AND FORBIDS
RETALIATION IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

He/Jesus does not teach, as many have claimed, that no stand is to be taken against evil and that it should simply be allowed to take its course. Jesus and the apostles continually opposed evil with

every means and resource. Jesus resisted the profaning of God's Temple by making a scourge of cords and physically driving out the sacrifice sellers and moneychangers (Matt. 21:12; John 2:15). We are to "resist the devil" (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9) and all the evil that he stands for and inspires (Matt. 6:13; Rom. 12:9; 1 Thess. 5:22; 2 Tim. 4:18).

A PROPER RESISTING OF EVIL INCLUDES RESISTING IT IN THE CHURCH.

- *When Peter compromised with the Judaizers, Paul "opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned" (Gal. 2:11).*
- *When there is immorality in the congregation, God says, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13; cf. Deut. 13:5).*
- *Jesus said that a believer who sins should first be reproved in private, and then before two or three other church members if he does not repent. "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" (Matt. 18:15–17).*
- *Paul echoes Jesus' teaching when he says that those in the church who continue in sin should be rebuked "in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning" (1 Tim. 5:20).*

That the principle of nonresistance does not apply to governmental authorities

is clear from many passages in the New Testament.

- *Civil government “is a minister of God to you for good,”*
- *Paul says. “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 upon the one who practices evil” (Rom. 13:4).*
- *Peter commands, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right” (1 Pet. 2:13–14).*

For the sake of God’s righteousness, as well as for the sake of human justice, believers are obligated not only to uphold the law themselves but to insist that others do so as well.

To report crime is an act of compassion, righteousness, and godly obedience as well as an act of civil responsibility.

To belittle, excuse, or hide the wrongdoing of others is not an act of love but an act of wickedness, because it undermines civil justice and divine righteousness.

**AS LONG AS THE NATURAL HUMAN HEART EXISTS, EVIL
WILL HAVE TO BE RESTRAINED BY LAW.**

Our crime-wrecked society would do well to reexamine—and reapply—biblical law. When God is forsaken, His righteous standards are forsaken, and His law is forsaken.

Antinomianism,

the doing away with law, is as much an enemy
of the gospel as legalism and works
righteousness.

*The Old and New Testaments are never at odds
in regard to law and grace, justice and mercy.*

**THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHES NOTHING
OF A RIGHTEOUS AND JUST GOD APART
FROM A MERCIFUL AND LOVING GOD, AND
THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHES NOTHING
OF A MERCIFUL AND LOVING GOD APART
FROM A RIGHTEOUS AND JUST GOD. THE
REVELATION OF GOD IS UNCHANGING IN
REGARD TO MORAL LAW.**

When the church stopped preaching God's righteousness, justice, and eternal punishment of the lost, it stopped preaching the fullness of the gospel, and both society and the church have suffered greatly for it. And when the church stopped holding its own members accountable to God's standards and stopped disciplining its own ranks, a great deal of its moral

influence on society was sacrificed. One of the legacies of theological liberalism is civil as well as religious lawlessness.

Not to restrain evil is neither just nor kind. It fails to protect the innocent and has the effect of encouraging the wicked in their evil. Proper restraint of evil, however, not only is just but is beneficent as well.

Arthur Pink says,

Magistrates and judges were never ordained by God for the purpose of reforming reprobates or pampering degenerates, but to be His instruments for preserving law and order by being a terror to evil. As Romans chapter 13 says, they are to be “a revenger to execute wrath on him that doeth evil.” ... Conscience has become comatose. The requirements of justice are stifled; maudlin concepts now prevail. As eternal punishment was repudiated—either tacitly or in many cases openly—ecclesiastical punishments are shelved. Churches refuse to enforce sanctions and wink at flagrant offenses. The inevitable outcome has been the breakdown of discipline in the home and the creation of ‘public opinion,’ which is mawkish and spineless. School teachers are intimidated by foolish parents and children so that the rising generation are more and more allowed to have their own way without fear of consequences. And if some judge has the courage of his convictions, and sentences a brute for maiming an old woman, there is an outcry against the judge. (*An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974], p. 112–13)

To lower God’s standard of justice is to lower God’s standard of righteousness—which Jesus came to fulfill and clarify, not to obviate or diminish.

Anthistēmi (**resist**) means to set against or oppose, and in this context obviously refers to harm done to us personally by someone **who is evil**.

JESUS IS SPEAKING OF PERSONAL RESENTMENT, SPITE, AND VENGEANCE.

IT IS THE SAME TRUTH TAUGHT BY PAUL when he said, **“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.... 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” (Rom. 12:17, 19).**

Vengeful retaliation has no place in society at large, and even less place among those who belong to Christ. We are called to overcome someone’s evil toward us by doing good to them (Rom. 12:21).

After establishing the basic principle in Matthew 5:39a, in verses 39b–42 Jesus picks out four basic human rights that He uses to illustrate the principle of nonretaliation:

1. **DIGNITY,**
2. **SECURITY,**
3. **LIBERTY,** and
4. **PROPERTY.**

DIGNITY

but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. (5:39b)

As human beings we have the right to be treated with basic dignity, respect, and consideration. **BECAUSE EVERY PERSON IS CREATED IN HIS IMAGE, GOD DEMANDS THAT WE TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH RESPECT.** But he knows that we will not always be so treated. Often for the very reason that we belong to God and go by the name of His Son, we will be mistreated, ridiculed, and held in contempt (Matt. 10:16–23; John 15:18–16:3; 1 Pet. 2:20–21; 3:13–17; 4:12–19; 2 Tim. 3:12).

It is the way we react to mistreatment and insult that Jesus is talking about here.

KEY CONTEXT:

Among Jews, a slap or other striking in the face was among the most demeaning and contemptuous of acts (cf. Matt. 26:67–68; Mark 14:65; John 18:22). To strike someone elsewhere on the body might cause more physical harm, but a slap in the face was an attack on one's honor and was considered to be a terrible indignity. It was to be treated with disdain, as being less than a human. Even a slave would rather have been stuck across the back with a whip than be slapped in the face by his master's hand.

To strike someone on the *right cheek* would then be a vicious angry reaction, indicating an act of insult.

Yet when we are insulted, maligned, and treated with contempt—literally or figuratively struck on the cheek by someone—we are to
turn to him the other also.

But Jesus' point pertains more to what we are not to do than what we are to do.

Turning the other cheek symbolizes the non-avenging, non-retaliatory, humble, and gentle spirit that is to characterize kingdom citizens (cf. vv. 3, 5).

Jesus strongly resisted evil that was directed against others, especially His Father—as when He cleansed the Temple... But He did not resist by personal vengeance any evil directed at Himself.

WHEN THE LEADERS OF THE SANHEDRIN, AND LATER THE SOLDIERS, PHYSICALLY ABUSED HIM AND MOCKED HIM, HE DID NOT RETALIATE EITHER IN WORDS OR IN ACTIONS
(Matt. 26:67–68).

- As Isaiah had predicted of Him, Christ gave His back to those who struck Him and His cheeks to those who plucked out His beard (Isa. 50:6).
- As Jesus hung from the cross, He prayed, ***“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”*** (Luke 23:34).
- Peter sums up our Lord's example: ***“But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you***

have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet. 2:20–23).

When someone attacks our right to dignity, we too are not to defend that right by retaliation.

We are to leave the protection and defense of our dignity in God’s hands, knowing that one day we will live and reign with him in His kingdom in great glory.

SECURITY

And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. (5:40)

KEY CONTEXT:

The shirt mentioned here was a type of tunic worn as an undergarment, and the coat was an outer garment that also served as a blanket at night. Most people of that day owned only one coat and probably only one or two shirts. It was the outer garment, the coat, that Mosaic law required be returned to its owner “before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body” (Ex. 22:26–27).

Jesus is not speaking of a robbery, in which a person tries to steal your clothes, but of the legitimate claim of *anyone who wants to sue you.*

WHEN A PERSON HAD NO MONEY OR OTHER POSSESSIONS, THE COURT OFTEN WOULD REQUIRE THE FINE OR JUDGMENT BE PAID BY CLOTHING. THE ATTITUDE OF A KINGDOM CITIZEN, ONE WHO IS TRULY RIGHTEOUS, SHOULD BE WILLINGNESS TO SURRENDER EVEN ONE’S COAT, HIS EXTREMELY VALUABLE OUTER GARMENT, RATHER THAN CAUSE OFFENSE OR HARD FEELINGS WITH AN ADVERSARY. THE COURT COULD NOT DEMAND THE COAT, BUT IT COULD BE

VOLUNTARILY GIVEN TO MEET THE REQUIRED DEBT. AND THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT JESUS SAYS WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO DO.

If a legal judgment is fairly made against us for a certain amount, we should be willing to offer even more in order to show our regret for any wrong we did and to show that we are not bitter or resentful against the one who has sued us.

In so doing we will show the love of Christ and that we are “sons of [our] Father who is in heaven” (v. 45).

IT IS BETTER EVEN TO BE DEFRAUDED THAN TO BE RESENTFUL AND SPITEFUL. (PAUL LATER INSTRUCTS CHRISTIANS REGARDING LAWSUITS IN 1 COR. 6:1–8, EMPHASIZING A SIMILAR PRINCIPLE OF WILLINGNESS TO FORFEIT ONE’S DUE RATHER THAN BE VENGEFUL.)

LIBERTY

And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. (5:41)

The third right the Lord indicates kingdom citizens are to be willing to sacrifice is that of liberty. God’s original intention was for everyone made in His image to live in freedom.

HUMAN BONDAGE/SLAVERY ARE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL and have no part in God’s original plan for His creation. The best of human governments have always tried to protect the freedom of their citizens, and sometimes even of foreigners.

In light of God’s will and proper human justice, men have the right to certain freedoms. But...

like all other rights, freedom is not to be cherished and protected at the expense of righteousness or even of faithful witness.

Roman law gave a soldier the right to *force* a civilian to carry his pack for a *million*, 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.

Yet, even so despised a burden should be carried willingly. Jesus says—not only willingly but with magnanimity.

*When we are forced to go **one mile**, we should willingly go **two**.*

When we are robbed of some of our cherished liberty, we should surrender even more of it rather than retaliate. In so doing we are obedient to our Lord and testify to His righteousness, knowing that in Him we have a dearer freedom that the world cannot take from us.

PROPERTY

Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.
(5:42)

THE FOURTH RIGHT WE ARE TO SURRENDER IS THAT OF PROPERTY.

Possessiveness is another characteristic
of fallen human nature.

We dislike giving up, even temporarily, that which belongs to us. Even as Christians, we often forget that nothing truly belongs to us and that we are only stewards of what belongs to God. But as far as other people are concerned, we *do* have a right to keep that which we possess. By right it is ours to use or dispose of as we see fit.

But that right, too, should be placed on the altar of obedience to Christ if required.

*When someone asks to **borrow** something from us, we should not **turn away from him**. In other words, we should give him what he wants.*

THE IMPLICATION IS THAT THE PERSON WHO ASKS HAS A GENUINE NEED.

We are not required to respond to every foolish, selfish request made of us.
Sometimes to give a person what he wants but does not need is a disservice,
doing him more harm than good.

Also implied is the principle that we should offer to give what is needed as soon as we know of the need, whether or not we are asked for help.

Jesus is not speaking of begrudging acquiescence to a plea for help, but willing, generous, and loving desire to help others. He is speaking of generosity that genuinely wants to meet the other person's need, not tokenism that does a good deed to buy off one's own conscience.

**JESUS DOES NOT UNDERCUT CIVIL JUSTICE,
WHICH BELONGS IN THE COURTROOM. HE
UNDERCUTS PERSONAL SELFISHNESS
(CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FALSE RELIGIONISTS
LISTENING TO HIM ON THE MOUNTAIN), WHICH
BELONGS NOWHERE AND ESPECIALLY NOT IN THE
HEARTS OF HIS KINGDOM PEOPLE.**

A biographer of William Gladstone, the great British prime minister, wrote of him, "Of how few who have lived for more than sixty years in the full light of their countrymen and have, as party leaders, been exposed to angry and sometimes spiteful criticism, can it be said that there stands against them no malignant word and no vindictive act. This was due not perhaps entirely to Gladstone's natural sweetness of disposition but rather to self-control and a certain largeness of soul which would not condescend to anything mean or petty."

The only person who is non-defensive, non-vengeful, never bears a grudge, and has no spite in his heart is the person who has died to self. To fight for one's rights is to prove that self is still on the throne of the

heart. The believer who is faithful to Christ
lives for Him and, if necessary, dies for Him
(Rom. 14:8). It is impossible to live for self
and for Christ at the same time.

[George Mueller](#) wrote, “There was a day when I died,
utterly died to George Mueller and his opinions,
his preferences, and his tastes and his will. I
died to the world, to its approval and its
censure. I died to the approval or the blame of
even my brethren and friends. And since then, I
have studied only to show myself approved
unto God.”

That is the spirit Jesus teaches in this passage, a
spirit all men fail to possess apart from saving grace.
It is the spirit Abraham manifested when he gave the
best land to his nephew Lot. It is the spirit of Joseph
when he embraced and kissed the brothers who had
so terribly wronged him. Is the spirit that would not
let David take advantage of the opportunity to take
the life of Saul, who was then seeking to take David’s
life. It is the spirit that led Elisha to feed the enemy
Assyrian army. It is the spirit that led Stephen to pray

for those who were stoning him to death. It is the spirit of every believer who, by the Holy Spirit's power, seeks to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48).¹

St. Andrews (R.C. Sproul) Commentary:

LOVING OUR ENEMIES

Matthew 5:38–48

Of all Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, the one in the passage before us is the most challenging.

ONCE AGAIN JESUS ANNOUNCES A CONTRAST BETWEEN HIS TEACHING AND WHAT THE PEOPLE WERE ACCUSTOMED TO LEARNING FROM THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE RABBIS.

Here [He focuses on the principle called the *lex talionis*, or the “law of the talon” or “claw,”](#) which is found to some degree in the Old Testament but is also found widely among ancient Semitic people going all the way back, for example, to the Code of Hammurabi.

Vengeance Belongs to God

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’ ” (v. 43).

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 327–336.

I have heard critics complain that the Old Testament system of justice was harsh and cruel. They point to the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth as an example of such cruelty. Yet I cannot imagine a more just system than to have a punishment fit the severity of the crime. If one were to put out the eye of another, taking out both eyes of the offender would be unjust; in such a case the penalty would be more severe than the crime.

However,

Jesus here is not establishing a new system of justice for government or for those who are in positions of authority; He is speaking specifically to the arena of personal ethics, how we are to behave as Christians.

MOST IMPORTANT IN THIS TEACHING IS JESUS' SPEAKING AGAINST INDIVIDUAL PURSUITS OF VENGEANCE AND RETALIATION.

“But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (v. 39).

In other words, we are not to retaliate, slap for slap. As Christians we are called to turn the other cheek. I find it strange that Jesus would speak of slapping someone on the right cheek, since most of people are right-handed. How would we go about slapping someone on the right cheek if he is standing in front of us?

Someone posed that enigma to me back when I conducted a Bible study for the Pittsburgh Steelers. There were twenty-eight team members who professed faith and came to the study. The study met in the home of Terry Bradshaw at the time. I was trying to explain the difficulty of this text, and I asked the defensive end L. C. Greenwood if he would volunteer to help me illustrate it. He stood up, towering over me. I got up on a folding chair so that I could look L. C. in the eye, and, after promising not to hurt him, I reached around his neck and tried to hit him on

the right cheek. I could barely get there; I could only tap him. I was trying to illustrate that *in view here is hitting someone on the right cheek with the back of your hand, which was the ancient gesture of insult.*

Jesus is talking here about insult and slander. If someone slanders you, make yourself vulnerable to be slandered again. If someone insults you, do not respond by insulting him in return; make yourself vulnerable to being insulted again. This has great application to us in the twenty-first century, an age when the Internet provides a medium for any manner of insult or slander with impunity. Theologians of note are attacked all the time. I know of a website that was dedicated to attacking me, not theologically but personally. When that happened I offered no response.

- We are told not to seek revenge or retaliation for the injuries we suffer at others' hands. Paul wrote, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Vengeance is not yours or mine; it is God's. Jesus Himself said, "Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" (Luke 18:7).
- **WE ARE TO LEAVE VINDICATION IN THE HANDS OF THE ONE WHO, UNLIKE US, IS PERFECT IN HIS VINDICATION. WE DO NOT WANT TO GET EVEN; WE WANT TO GET ONE UP. GOD KNOWS THAT, WHICH IS WHY HE INSTRUCTS HIS PEOPLE TO LET HIM HANDLE VINDICATION.**

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 (vv. 40–41).

According to Roman law, the authorities had the right to compel someone to transport goods up to the length of one mile without compensation. **It was under that law that Simon of Cyrene was compelled**

to carry the crossbeam of the instrument of Jesus' execution.

Jesus says here that if someone is afflicted with this unjust oppression, go even an extra mile.

Is this not what Jesus Himself did?

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

CHARITY

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

Jesus is putting forth a spirit of charity, a spirit of being willing to help those in need and those who ask you for support.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN, OF COURSE, THAT WE ARE NOT TO BE DISCERNING IN ITS APPLICATION. IF WE WERE TO GIVE TO EVERYONE WHO ASKS US FOR ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING, WE WOULD BE COMPLETELY DEPLETED AT THE END OF A WEEK.

What Jesus is instructing is the willingness
to give and to help.

In the early Christian writing called the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, there is this aphorism: “Let your donation sweat in your hand.” The principle enjoined there is to be wise in your giving. We are not to give to just anything; rather, we must make sure that we give to worthwhile causes. Such qualifications come from the overall teaching of Scripture about almsgiving.

Love for Enemies

Then we get to the crux of the matter: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies”** (vv. 43–44). According to Jesus, we must love those who slap and slander us. Jesus was not speaking of warm, fuzzy feelings of affection. “Love” here is a verb. Therefore, Jesus is not advocating feelings of love toward our enemies but doing the loving thing. We are to deal with our enemies by doing the loving thing for them. Jesus does not leave that in the abstract. He gives a list of examples to illustrate His point: **“Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”** (vv. 44–45). That goes against everything in our natural makeup. However, Jesus wants us to imitate our Father in heaven, who has treated the wicked with love.

People claim that God loves all men unconditionally, but the Bible is clear about how it defines the love of God for people. We can distinguish among three types of divine love. The first is God’s *benevolent* love, His good will. God has a good disposition to all of His creatures even in their fallenness. Added to God’s benevolent love is His *beneficent* love whereby God not only has a good will toward His creatures but does good things for them, as Jesus illustrates here. God is beneficent toward wicked people in letting them bask in the sun. He lets His sunlight fall upon the evil and the good. He lets the rain fall for the just and the unjust, so that the unjust farmer receives the benefit of God’s kindness of rain for his crops. People curse God and use His name in vain every day. They blaspheme Him. Yet whereas we curse Him, He blesses us. Whereas we do evil, He does good. God does not engage in retaliation against those who stand against Him. Every wicked person enjoys the love of God at least in terms of the first two kinds of love—benevolent love and beneficent love.

The third kind of love, the love of *complacency*, refers to the unique delight and affection God has especially for His only begotten Son. It is His Son that the Father calls His “beloved.” The Father has a special love for Christ that He does not have for everyone else in creation, but that special love of complacency is not limited to Jesus. It is extended to all who are in Christ Jesus. None of us deserves God’s love of complacency, but every Christian enjoys love from God that the wicked do not enjoy.

God’s Standard

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (vv. 46–48). Many argue, “Jesus doesn’t really mean that we’re called to be perfect, because He understood that no one’s perfect. Everyone falls short of the glory of God, so He must have meant something else.” But He meant what He said—we are called to be perfect, just as in the Old Testament God said to His people, “Be holy; for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44).

We cannot be holy the way God is holy, nor can we reach perfection before we get to heaven. Jesus knows that, and He knows that this ethic is a difficult one. He also knows that we adjust our personal standards to our level of performance. Every last one of us has done this. Instead of elevating our performance, we reduce the standard. Jesus is explaining that God's standard does not change, and God's standard is perfection.

When people tell me they do not need Jesus, I ask, "Are you perfect?" Most people admit that they are not. "To err is human," they say, to which I respond, "If you are not perfect, you need Jesus in order to survive the judgment of God." The only place to get perfection is in Christ, who kept the standard perfectly.

That is what the gospel is about, and that is why the law drives us to the gospel every time. When I read Jesus' words, I hear the law. I hear what I am required to do, which causes me to pray, "Lord, I cannot do these things. Help me!" He gives me One who did do those things, and He cloaks me in the righteousness of Christ, which is what grace is. Grace is not that God abolishes or compromises the standard. Grace is what He gives us as a gift. He has given us a Savior who is not only adequate but also perfect. That is the amazing thing about grace.²

² Robert Charles Sproul, [Matthew](#), St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 123–127.