

# “Turn the other cheek”

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The Sermon on the Mount, by Carl Heinrich Bloch, used by permission of the National Historic Museum at Frederiksborg in Hillerød, Denmark

**The purpose of this brief article is for each of us to spend a few minutes studying and analyzing what, for many people, is far and away the most difficult commandment in the entire New Testament to keep and observe....it certainly is for me personally. In fact, this commandment appears so completely opposite from modern-day societal expectations, and modern societal norms, that many people, even people within the Church of Christ simply ignore this verse and ones related to it (we will see WHY in just a few moments). We will be looking at the words of Jesus Christ himself, excerpts from the famous “Sermon on the Mount”, and very clearly and very quickly and very effectively, we will see why the Gospel that Jesus preached was the very antithesis of the rest of the world, both then and now.**

### **Matthew 5:38-45**

**38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’**

**39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.**

**40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.**

**41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.**

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

**Jesus continues in verse 43, with an even wider admonition than mere retaliation, telling his followers how to treat their “enemies”.....**

**43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor[c] and hate your enemy.’**

**44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**

**45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven...**

**Astonishing. I am NOT to retaliate against those who would strike or**

abuse me....I am not to “get even”, I am NOT to show someone else that I am NOT one to be trifled with, and it seems I am not to even raise a hand to defend myself from personal attack. We must not render evil for evil, or repay those who abuse us in the same way.

**(NOTE.....”WAR” IS ANOTHER ISSUE, CERTAINLY WORTHY OF ITS OWN STUDY.**

**Our focus today is on “personal” retribution and “personal” retaliation. Numerous early 'Restorationists”, including Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, Tolbert Fanning, and David Lipscomb) were summarily opposed to Christians participating in armed conflict, be it on a personal or national level...see “On Civil Government” by Lipscomb, for example.**

**Personal revenge is condemned in both testaments...we need to carefully distinguish between personal revenge (i.e. insulting one who has insulted me, striking someone who has struck me, etc.) and the role of “justice” via civil government....see Paul’s writings in Romans 13: 1-6.**

Similar “pacifist” sentiment appears elsewhere in the NT....

**“And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also...Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ....Luke 16:29-30.**

The background, especially the OT background of overtones of the words of Jesus here (note that he states “Ye have heard it said”...an obvious reference to the Law of Moses, which the crowd would certainly know and follow) needs to be addressed....many will argue that Jesus was arguing AGAINST the Old Testament (the very reason Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah).

The key wording, known even today by even nominal Bible students, is the adage of “*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” (“*Lex Talionas*” is the corresponding Latin term, meaning “law of

*retribution” or “let the punishment fit the crime”).*

“Lex Talionis (Latin for "law of retaliation") is the principle of retributive justice expressed in the phrase "an eye for an eye," (Hebrew: עין תחת עין) from Exodus 21:23–27. The basis of this form of law is the principle of proportionate punishment, often expressed under the motto "Let the punishment fit the crime," which particularly applies to mirror punishments (which may or may not be proportional).

At the root of the non-biblical form of this principle is the belief that one of the purposes of the law is to provide equitable retaliation for an offended party. It defined and restricted the extent of retaliation. This early belief is reflected in the Code of Hammurabi and in the laws of the Old Testament (such as Exodus 21:23–25, Leviticus 24:18–20, and Deuteronomy 19:21). In reference to torts, the Old Testament prescription "an eye for an eye" has often been interpreted, notably in Judaism, to mean equivalent monetary compensation, even to the exclusion of mirror punishment. In other cultures, notable Islam, the code has been taken more literally; a thief may lose his left hand in punishment”...

“Lex talionas” at [www.newworldencyclopedia.org](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org).

“In the early period of all systems of law the redress of wrongs takes precedence over the enforcement of contract rights, and a rough sense of justice demands the infliction of the same loss and pain on the aggressor as he has inflicted on his victim. Hence the prominence of the "lex talionis" in ancient law. The law of Israel is no exception: in its oldest form it included the "lex talionis," the law of "measure for measure"...and the popular thought, as reflected in Talmudic sayings, imagined that God punishes nations and men with sufferings nearly identical with those which they have sinfully inflicted upon others...The principle that "with what measure ye mete it shall be measured unto you" is solemnly asserted to underlie the divine law...”.

”Retaliation” from 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia.

“Three primary passages in the Torah for עֵין תַּחַת עֵין *'ayin takhat* *'ayin* (an eye in place of an eye) in Ex. 21:22–27 and Lev. 24:17–22 as well as עַיִן בְּעַיִן *'ayin b'ayin* (an eye with an eye) in Deut. 19:15–21...

The Torah specifically forbids vigilantism and all these judgements are handed down in a court of law (Lev. 19:18), in the presence of witnesses, not randomly carried out between victim and perpetrator.”

From “Matthew 5:38-42: Yeshua restores the mercy-full meaning of ‘eye for eye’”, Hallel Fellowship, [www.hallel.info](http://www.hallel.info).

“The *lex talionis*, the law of the talion, which provides for the right of retaliation, has its origins in the Old Testament and in Hammurabi's Code, and sets forth the basic formulation of reciprocity in response to moral injury—measure for measure. "An eye for an eye," misunderstood as a mantra for the bloodthirsty, has attained a thuggish reputation.

But it has an altogether different meaning. If anything, "an eye for an eye" is a check on excess. It demands exactness and has no tolerance for recklessness. The wrongdoer who causes someone to lose an eye will have to forfeit one of his own—no more, no less. And not out of pure hate, but in accordance with what is due.”

from “Eye for an Eye: The Case for Revenge”, by Thane Rosenbaum in *The Chronicle*, March 26, 2013 , Fordham University School of Law.

“An eye for an eye - This is an exact quotation found in three OT passages (see... Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21) and reflects the principle of *lex talionis*, (*lex* = law + *talionis* = retaliation = literally the "law of retaliation") one of the most ancient law codes discovered even in the secular code of Hammurabi (a Babylonian king - see article on Babylonian law) composed sometime around 2000BC. Simply

put, this law required that the punishment match the crime and corresponds to modern expressions like "*tit for tat*" and "*quid pro quo*" (Latin for "something for something"). In that sense *lex talionis* was merciful for it limited the magnitude of one's revenge, restraining an angry response...in ancient Israel, the right to carry out this principle of *lex talionis* was restricted to the judges of Israel and not to individuals (independent of the judges or civil authorities).

“Matthew 5:38-39 Commentary” [www.preceptustin.org](http://www.preceptustin.org).

“Perhaps no utterance of the Master has resulted in greater consternation and misunderstanding than this passage. A misapplication of this precept has resulted in both fanatical religious positions on the one hand and scoffing skepticism on the other. What is the meaning and application of this great moral commandment?

The Lord quoted the law of Moses directly in noting that law He was replacing (cf. Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19,20; Deuteronomy 19:21). This is the oldest principle of simple justice known to man. It is known as the Lex Talionis, or the principle of "like for like." It is part of the earliest surviving code of laws, the Code of Hammurabi, ruler of Babylon from 2285 to 2242 B.C. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, I, 160).

Enemies of the Bible assail this law as brutal. Actually, far from being so, the purpose of this commandment was to prevent brutality. Human nature demands revenge for wrong suffered, for this is justice, but hatred and anger produce excessive revenge. One man knocks out another's tooth, so the other man kills the aggressor. We read of this thing in the newspaper every day. The law of "like for like" limits this revenge. The punishment must be equivalent to the injury received. Furthermore, this law acts as a safeguard against personal injury. If an assailant knew he would

**suffer in return the equivalent of the pain, injury or suffering he inflicted, he would not, in most cases, inflict the injury.”**

**from “Vengeance” by Keith Sharp, Truth Magazine, 8-31-1979.**

**The phrase “an eye for an eye” appears three times in the Old Testament. In each case, the phrase was given as a sentencing guideline to a judge after a guilty verdict had been reached. In each case it was just a portion of a much longer statement.**

**Exodus 21:22-25....(KJV)**

**22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.**

**23 And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,**

**24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,**

**25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.**

**(As a side note, verse 22 is a particularly interesting passage in regards to the volatile topic of abortion...God sees an unborn child equal to an adult).**

**Leviticus 24:17-22...**

**17 And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.**

**18 And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast.**

**19 And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him;**

**20 Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.**

**21 And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a**

man, he shall be put to death.

**22 Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the Lord your God.**

**Deuteronomy 19:16-21...**

**16 If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;**

**17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;**

**18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;**

**19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.**

**20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.**

**21 And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

**In not one of these cases is there a mention of personal retaliation. Only a judge was to hand down these punishments after carefully determining who was the guilty party and who was the aggrieved party. The punishments were a sentencing guideline so that the punishment fitted the crime.**

**“it is critically important to remember that each OT passage that mentions the principle of lex talionis (Exodus 21:22-27; Leviticus 24:19,20; Deuteronomy 19:19) specifies in context that it is to be carried out by the judges and civil authorities of Israel.**

**It is true, that an injured party might be allowed to inflict the actual punishment, but even in these situations it was the civil body that had**



the responsibility to try and sentence the guilty one. One can readily understand how such a system would serve to prevent an injured individual from over reacting and taking more than their "pound of flesh".

It is interesting that even this merciful principle established by God has commonly been misrepresented as vindictive, but it is not. *Lex talionis* is not a license for cruelty, but a limit to it..It is not a license for vengeance but a guarantee of justice”

From [www.preceptaustin.org](http://www.preceptaustin.org)

**Does Jesus’ usage of someone being “slapped” have specific meaning in this parable?**

**“In Jesus' day a slap to one's face was considered a gross insult by the Jews, and was among the most demeaning and contemptuous acts one person could inflict on another person. Jesus is not describing a physical attack and telling us to roll over and "play dead".**

**He is describing what was well known in the culture to be a calculated insult. A slap to one's face was not intended to cause physical harm but was intended as a terrible indignity, in which one human created in the image of God is treating another human being as even less than a human...A slave would rather receive a rod or whip across the back than a slap from their master's hand...”.**

from [www.preceptaustin.org](http://www.preceptaustin.org).

**“Notice that Jesus specifically mentions "the right cheek," which tells us he is describing a backhanded slap (since most people are right-handed, this is surely what Jesus had in mind). According to rabbinic law, to hit someone with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as hitting**

him with the flat of the hand. The back of the hand meant calculated contempt, withering disdain. It meant that you were scorned as inconsequential - a nothing.”

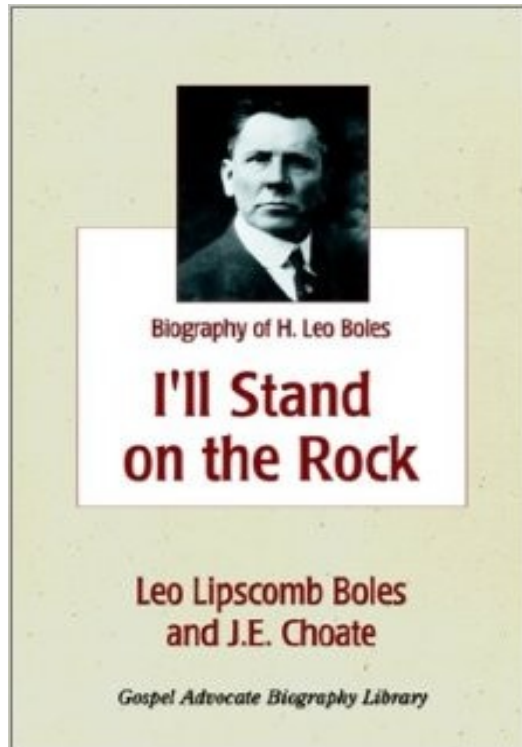
Quote from Kent Hughes, [www.preceptustin.org](http://www.preceptustin.org).

"What's interesting in the expression is that Jesus specifically mentions the right side of the face...If I hit you on your right cheek, the most normal way would be if I did it with the back of my right hand....To the best of our knowledge of the Hebrew language, that expression is a Jewish idiom that describes an insult, similar to the way challenges to duels in the days of King Arthur were made by a backhand slap to the right cheek of your opponent."

From RC Sproul, “Did Jesus advocate the use of a sword for self-defense purposes (Luke 22:36-38)?”, Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries.

Thus, it seems from Jesus' comments that the Jews had twisted the original intent of these scriptures and had applied these guidelines to their individual lives. If someone punched them, they felt justified in punching back – so long as they didn't exceed what the other person was attempting to do to them. Retaliation had become the norm for the Jews, which Jesus was attempting to dispel. So what does this verse mean for us today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, vs. what the Jews of the day had both taught as well as practiced?

“...Jesus quotes from the Law of Moses and puts his interpretation over against the traditions of the Jews. Jesus is...teaching against retaliation, the Jews had perverted Ex. 21:23, Le. 24:20, Deut. 19:21. God had never taught the spirit and practice of retaliation as the Jews were teaching and practicing it.



**It was never the law of God for anyone who had lost an eye to knock out the eye of his enemy, or if in personal combat had lost a tooth could knock out the tooth of his assailant; no such procedure was permitted without judicial process...Jesus opposed their practice; he was not opposed to the law; he came to fulfill the law, but not to disregard it" ...."The Gospel According to Matthew" Commentary, by H. Leo Boles, pages 146-147.**

**"It is a significant fact that when the Lord placed his own teaching in Matt. 5: 38, against the ancient law recorded in Ex. 21: 23-25, which required life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe; he confined his modification of that law to the point of personal resentment in returning evil for evil."-M. C. Kurfees, in "The Law of God on Capital Punishment."**

**“...the rabbinic tradition had perverted *lex talionis*, an "eye for an eye", which in the OT did not allow an individual to take the law into his own hands and apply it personally.**

**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 (permit to act, freedom to take a specific course of action), and 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.**

**John MacArthur, Matthew 1-7, MacArthur New Testament Commentary.**

**Excerpt from “Who Has Departed From The Faith?” by Foy Wallace, Bible Banner, October 1942...**



**“... The example given, a slap in the face, has been regarded as a gross insult in all ages, but it is not an assault which imperils life.”**

**We find this precept illustrated by the Master himself. He did not literally turn the other cheek to be smitten, but he breathed forth a mild and gentle reproof where he might have avenged himself by the sudden death of his adversary (Jno. 18: 22, 23). The example of Paul also is given, but it is not so perfect as that of the Master (Acts 33: 2-5).**

**Self-preservation is a law of God giving rights which, under most circumstances, a Christian can claim. He may resist the robber, the assassin and all men of that ilk, and may protect his person and his possessions against the assaults of the violent and lawless (Acts 16: 35-39).**

**But when the honor of Christ and the salvation of man demands it, he should observe this commandment even unto the very letter... A man may strive for self-protection when life is threatened without any spirit of revenge...”**

**“Jesus begins by citing the oldest law in the world--an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. That law is known as the Lex Talionis, and it may be described as the law of tit for tat. It appears in the earliest known code of laws, the Code of Hammurabi, who reigned in Babylon from 2285 to 2242 B.C.**

**The Code of Hammurabi makes a curious distinction between the gentleman and the workman. "If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman's eye, his eye one shall cause to be lost. If he has shattered a gentleman's limb, one shall shatter his limb. If he has caused a poor man to lose his eye, or shattered a poor man's limb, he shall pay one mina of**

silver ... If he has made the tooth of a man who is his equal fall out, one shall make his tooth fall out. If he has made the tooth of a poor man fall out, he shall pay one third of a mina of silver." The principle is clear and apparently simple--if a man has inflicted an injury on any person, an equivalent injury shall be inflicted upon him.

That law became part and parcel of the ethic of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we find it laid down no fewer than three times. "If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:23-25). "When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured" (Leviticus 24:19-20). "Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:21).

These laws are often quoted as amongst the blood thirsty, savage and merciless laws of the Old Testament; but before we begin to criticise certain things must be noted.

(i) The Lex Talionis, the law of tit for tat, so far from being a savage and bloodthirsty law, is in fact the beginning of mercy. Its original aim was definitely the limitation of vengeance. In the very earliest days the vendetta and the blood feud were characteristic of tribal society. If a man of one tribe injured a man of another tribe, then at once all the members of the tribe of the injured man were out to take vengeance on all the members of the tribe of the man who committed the injury; and the vengeance desired was nothing less than death.

This law deliberately limits vengeance. It lays it down that only the man who committed the injury must be punished, and his punishment must be no more than the equivalent of the injury he has inflicted and the damage he has done. Seen against its historical setting this is not a savage law, but a law of mercy.

(ii) Further, this was never a law which gave a private individual the right to extract vengeance; it was always a law which laid down how a judge in the law court must assess punishment and penalty (compare Deuteronomy 19:18). This law was never intended to give the individual person the right to indulge even in the vengeance of tit for tat. It was always intended as a guide for a judge in the assessment of the penalty which any violent or unjust deed must receive.

(iii) Still further, this law was never, at least in any even semi-civilized society, carried out literally. The Jewish jurists argued rightly that to carry it out literally might in fact be the reverse of justice, because it obviously might involve the displacement of a good eye or a good tooth for a bad eye or a bad tooth. And very soon the injury done was assessed at a money value; and the Jewish law in the tractate Baba Kamma carefully lays down how the damage is to be assessed. If a man has injured another, he is liable on five counts--for injury, for pain, for healing, for loss of time, for indignity suffered.

In regard to injury, the injured man is looked on as a slave to be sold in the market place. His value before and after the injury was assessed, and the man responsible for the injury had to pay the difference. He was

responsible for the loss in value of the man injured. In regard to pain, it was estimated how much money a man would accept to be willing to undergo the pain of the injury inflicted, and the man responsible for the injury had to pay that sum. In regard to healing, the injurer had to pay all the expenses of the necessary medical attention, until a complete cure had been effected. In regard to loss of time, the injurer had to pay compensation for the wages lost while the injured man was unable to work, and he had also to pay compensation if the injured man had held a well paid position, and was now, in consequence of the injury, fit for less well rewarded work. In regard to indignity, the injurer had to pay damages for the humiliation and indignity which the injury had inflicted.

In actual practice the type of compensation which the Lex Talionis laid down is strangely modern.

(iv) And most important of all, it must be remembered that the Lex Talionis is by no means the whole of Old Testament ethics. There are glimpses and even splendours of mercy in the Old Testament. "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people" (Leviticus 19:18). "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Proverbs 25:21). "Do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me" (Proverbs 24:29). "Let him give his cheek to the smiter; he be filled with insults" (Lamentations 3:30). There is abundant mercy in the Old Testament too."

*Commentary on Matthew, Chapter 5, by William Barclay, see at [www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org).*



**As Barclay notes, there are indeed multiple verses in the OLD Testament regarding “retaliation” which read VERY similarly to Jesus’ admonitions (OT writings which the “eye for an eye” Jews Jesus was addressing conveniently ignored)...(these provide a bit more detail than Barclay provided, along with additional verses)....**

**You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (Lev. 19:18).**

**Do not say, “I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work” (Prov. 24:29).**

**“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you” (Prov. 25:21-22).**

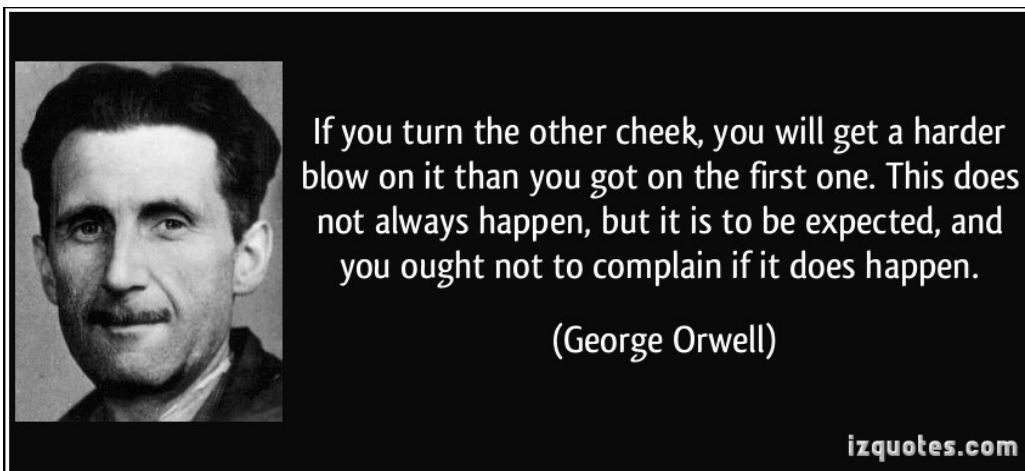
**If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it (Exod. 23:4-5).**

**Simply stated, Jesus taught that rather than returning the evils done to us, we should return good instead. Again, this becomes a VERY challenging command to follow, whether it be from personal insult, personal slight, verbal attack, or (less commonly), PHYSICAL attack. We are to treat others as we would want others to treat us.**

**The first question many new Christians (or even some OLDER Christians) might and do ask is “WHY?” What can be the**

possible rationale for a commandment which, on its face, may seem nonsensical, or even illogical? After all, if we simply acquiesce to an attacker or to a bully, are we not thus emboldening the attacker to become even MORE aggressive, perhaps even expanding on to NEW victims?

“ When you are a child of God. . .you try thereby to imitate Jesus, in the midst of evil. Which means, if someone slaps you on the one cheek, you turn the other cheek, which is an act of resistance. It means that you do not only love your neighbor, but you recognize that even the enemy has a spark of God in them, has been made in the image of God and therefore needs to be treated as you, yourself, want to be treated. Jesus is very clear about this: "do unto others as you want others to do unto you." Not as they do unto you, but as you want them to do unto you - which is a rather powerful ethic for personal relationships, regardless of whether family or school or community or nation. ”  
-- James Lawson, preparing students for nonviolent action at a FOR workshop.



The answer to “Why?” lies in Romans 12:19-21....

**19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.**

**20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.**

## **21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.**

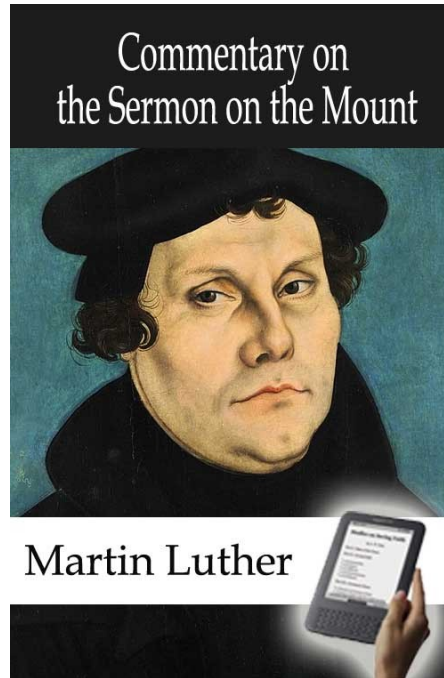
Two important points need to be made....we are assured by God that “vengeance” is HIS responsibility, not ours, and God promises that HE will dole out “vengeance” through his supreme and all-knowing justice. Vengeance is NOT our responsibility, no matter how strongly we feel it might be, or would even WANT it to be, in certain situations.

Secondly, we are to differ from the rest of the world....we are to be pillars of light in a darkened and evil world....we are to stand in contrast with the tepid society around us. Verse 20 states that by NOT retaliating (as most all of society would feel justified in doing when “attacked”), we might well prick the conscience of our attacker....we might well cause him to feel guilt over what he has done, and in doing so, his heart might well be opened and receptive to the message of the Gospel and the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

“...Paul suggests that the enemy will burn with shame for his abuse of one who loves him”, Richard A. Batey, page 157, [www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org).

“...see to it that he who hurts you does not make you as he himself is, namely, a wicked person. Nor let his wickedness defeat your goodness. But let your kindness overcome his malice and so change him into a good person....He answers a fool according to his folly and becomes like him who permits himself to be overcome of evil. So he does not improve the fool, but rather falls into the same folly.

But he who overcomes evil with good, answers him in such a way that the fool no longer regards himself as wise, but recognizes his folly and detests and regrets it.”....”Romans” by Martin Luther, page 178.



**“....there is inherent in man a sense of justice, a feeling that evil-doers should be punished. Taking vengeance is the savage’s way of exacting justice, but not the Lord’s way...the individual should not with his own hands try to take satisfaction for injuries. To punish evil doers is God’s prerogative; let Him do the punishing in his own appointed way” ....”Commentary on Romans”, RL Whiteside, page 256, 1945.**



**“Punishing evil is God’s job, not yours. To stoop to vengeance is to join their evil”...”From Burden to Joy: A Study Guide to the Book of Romans” by Bill Boverie, page 108, SIBI.**

**“How can we expect peace if we retaliate? How can we expect to live in a world of love if we keep a heart of hate? Of course, it is easier to fight back, take an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But there are good reasons for overcoming this urge: One, to rise above the animal. Two, self-preservation, for if all enemies should slit each other's throats, there soon would be no one left...**



**The only satisfactory way to deal with your enemies is to be good to them; they don't know how to handle this tactic-those coals of fire you heap on their head begins to burn....”**

**“Thoughts of Gold, Words of Silver” by Leroy Brownlow, 1974, page 31.  
From the James Burton Coffman Commentary on Romans....**

**“If the child of God should retaliate in kind for all acts of enmity against himself, he would shortly find himself engaging in all kinds of shameful and wicked conduct. *To prevent such an unwholesome development, the servant of the Lord must launch a counter-attack, returning good for evil, and deploying good actions against the evil actions of the enemy.*”**



**Here in Romans 12:21 is the grand strategy of God with regard to human evil. The natural man finds himself living and operating in a world where one rotten apple can make a barrel of good apples rotten; but the spiritual man, having the mind of the Spirit, proceeds upon the premise that one good apple might make a barrel of rotten apples sound”....**

**“God...will use the wicked to avenge the wrongs heaped upon his children, but especially at the judgement day will he requite the evildoers for all the wrongs inflicted on them. Leave it to the hands of God to punish the wrongdoers....”**



**from Romans Commentary, David Lipscomb, page 231.**

**Acting in complete and polar opposition to what the “world” expects is what differentiates “Christians” from the world.**

**“An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”**

**Mahatma Gandhi, 1947.**

**Similar sentiment echoed by Jim McGuigan, from “Romans”, page 375...**



**“When nations or people go after one another in the modern spirit of ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’, we’re on our way with lightning speed...to a sightless, toothless world”.**

**“There are many passages in the Old Testament and early Jewish writings which address the victims directly, asking them to suspend personal vengeance and leave it either to the appointed authorities or to God.**

**Lev 19:18 explicitly forbids the taking of vengeance against another member of the community, with the assumption that the punishment will be properly handled by the judges. Deut 32:35 addresses the problem of vengeance toward Israel’s enemies, who are beyond the reach of her legal system. This verse explicitly declares that vengeance is God’s.**

**Similarly, Psalm 94:1-7 calls upon the God of vengeance to render judgment upon the wicked, who are identified as Israel’s enemies.**

**Prov 20:22 discourages repaying evil through personal vengeance and advises waiting for the Lord.**

**Prov 24:29 explicitly forbids the talionic type of retaliation: “Do not say, ‘I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done.’”**

**In 1QS 10.17-18, the author voices his decision not to repay anyone with “the reward of evil” ((r lwmg), which presumably refers to personal vengeance, and explains his resolution by confessing that “the judgment of every living being (resides only) with God, and he (alone) shall pay man his reward.”**



**2 Enoch 50:2- 4 encourages the reader to endure every assault, persecution, and evil word for the sake of the Lord, and to abstain from vengeance even if he has an opportunity to do so. Like other passages which discourage vengeance, this text also affirms that God is the one who will take vengeance at the day of judgment.**

**In view of these recurrent advices to refrain from personal retaliation, found in various segments of the Old Testament and early Jewish writings, the citation of the lex talionis in Matt 5:38 could be understood as a word of warning to the victims of injustices to delimit retaliation, which is then juxtaposed to Jesus' teaching in v. 39a that his followers should not retaliate at all. The advantage of this interpretation is that it retrieves the original intention of the lex talionis as a restrictive measure for personal vengeance and juxtaposes it to Jesus' teaching on nonretaliation, which fulfills the intention of the law because it sets additional, more radical, restrictions to revenge.**

**However, there is no evidence in the existing literature that the lex was interpreted as a "green light" for taking the law into one's own hands. Personal retaliation was encouraged neither in Judaism nor in Greco-Roman world. Paul's exhortations to the church in Rome to repay no one evil for evil (Romans 12:17) and to abstain from vengeance because vengeance is God's (Romans 12:19) show that the early church was familiar with biblical teaching on nonretaliation. Thus, even though it is conceivable that Matthew, like Paul, wanted to remind his readers not to avenge themselves when offended by others, it is more likely that the quotation of the lex talionis and Jesus' teaching on nonresistance share the same legal underpinning.**

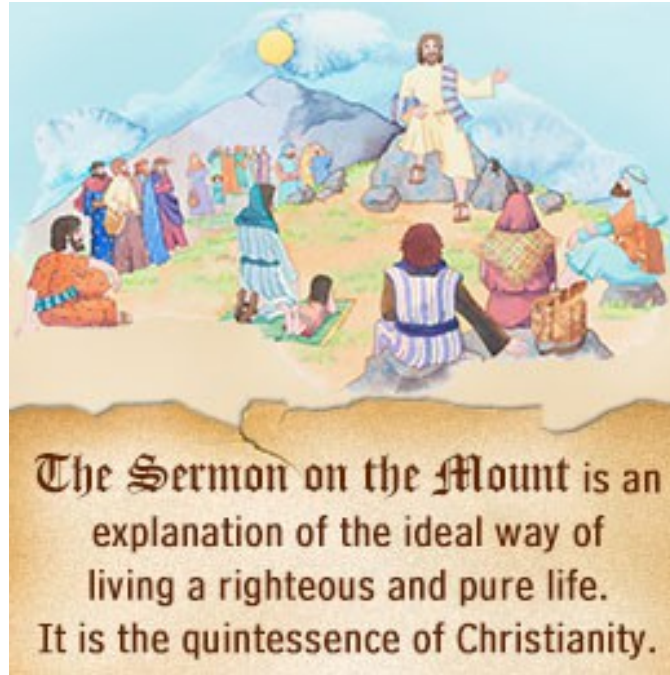
**Jesus quotes the lex as a legal principle which allows the victims to press charges if they were offended. Since it defines the realm of expectations of the members of a given community with regard to just punishments of the perpetrators, it encourages taking legal actions when injuries occur.**

To this understanding of the lex Jesus now juxtaposes his own teaching, which advises them not to pursue this course of action at all. In this way, Jesus' teaching does not contradict the law but fulfills it. He asks his followers to give up certain rights and practice personal restraint, which grasps the spirit of the law from the perspective of the injured party.

**“Turning the Other Cheek to a Perpetrator Denunciation or Upholding of Justice? Lidija Novakovic Bethel University, St. Paul, pages 6-7.**

People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway. If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.

Mother Teresa



**“PERSONAL REVENGE IS FORBIDDEN! (Matthew 26:52, 53; Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23).**

**i. Suffer indignity without retaliation (e.g., turn the other cheek), (v. 39)  
*"but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."***

**Self preservation is a basic instinct of man - to defend himself, protect himself from harm - to survive. Jesus asks us to resist that instinct: but how can this be? Are we not to look after ourselves, so that we can serve God? Or does serving God mean allowing Him to care for us as we suffer indignity and unjust treatment from others?**

To be slapped in the cheek was a common mode of insult and injury (Acts 23:2), an open hand was culturally interpreted as a greater insult than being punched. Should we allow this today? The Lord and His disciples did not resist people, and suffered indignity (Matthew 26:67; John 18:22 and 19:3; Acts 5:40, 41; 7:58; 16:22-24; 19:29; 21:30, 31, 32, 35; 2 Corinthians 11:20).

What did they do instead? They prayed for their persecutors (See verse 44, also Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; 2 Timothy 4:16). They appealed to God for mercy and entrusted God to judge (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23).

Many godly people have been mistreated at the hands of evil doers, yet did not lash out, Hebrews 10:32-34. Retaliation of any kind is forbidden - to do so would make us just as guilty as the one committing the evil act (Romans 12:21; 1 Peter 3:9). We must infinitely forgive, (Matthew 18:21, 22), and suffer the indignity (disgrace or dishonour, undeserved bad treatment)....

Proverbs 3:31, *"Do not envy a man of violence, And do not choose any of his ways" ....We must learn "gentleness" (Gal. 5:23, a fruit of the spirit) - when the world encourages violence and aggression."*

From "Revenge" by Jules Cseszkó, Balfout Street Church of Christ, [www.churchofchrist.com.au](http://www.churchofchrist.com.au).

**"Non-resistance and forbearance are to be the rule among Christians. They are to endure personal ill-usage without coming to blows. They are to be as the anvil when bad men are the hammers, and thus they**

are to overcome by patient forgiveness. The rule of the judgement-seat is not for common life; but the rule of the cross and the all-enduring Sufferer is for us all.

Yet how many regard all this as fanatical, utopian, and even cowardly!

The Lord, our King, would have us bear and forbear, and conquer by mighty patience. Can we do it? How are we the servants of Christ if we have not his spirit?"

Charles Spurgeon, "The First Beatitude", published 8-5-1909, delivered as sermon in 1873 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

We are not to undertake vengeance upon others....we are not to strike back, respond, retaliate, "get even", "teach that guy a lesson", or descend to the level of a world largely apathetic, or even hostile, to Christianity. We are told to leave in peace with ALL men, even our "enemies" ....Romans 10:18....

**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**

And ordinarily, if we look hard enough, this is precisely what we are able to do.

We are to be a "light" unto the world (see Matthew 5:14-16, 2 Corinthians 4:6, 1 Peter 2:9, Acts 13:47, Hebrews 10: 24-25, 2 Peter 1:19, Matthew 4:16, Acts 26:18, Ephesians 5:8, Romans 13:12, etc.)...

**HOW CAN WE EXPECT TO BE A SHINING "LIGHT" UNTO THE DARKENED ABYSS OF THIS WORLD, REFLECTING THE PURITY**

**AND PERFECTION OF JESUS, WHEN WE CONDUCT OURSELVES  
IN WORDLY WAYS...WHEN WE REACT AS THE WORLD WOULD  
REACT...WHEN WE WOULD STRIKE BACK AT OTHERS, JUST AS  
THE WORLD WOULD STRIKE BACK. HOW CAN WE BE A  
“LIGHT” UNTO THE WORLD WHEN WE ACT AS THE WORLD?**

**Even today, many professed “Christians” will say they “believe” in “an eye for an eye”: they are thus denying the commands of the very Savior they claim to follow. Turning the other cheek” flies in the face of our natural desires and impulses, and is often contrary to not only what societal expectations might predicate, but also might be in direct conflict with what our parents and grandparents might have taught us, as well. Nonetheless, this is the explicit command from Jesus Christ Himself, and obedience to His words is of paramount importance for both the salvation of our souls, as well as reflecting Christ upon a barren, desolate world to hopefully bring souls to Christ....and this morning, what is more important to you? Getting “even” with someone, or bringing that someone to Jesus? Both your soul, as well as that of your adversary, hang in the balance.**

**As we conclude, have you and do you “turn the other cheek”, or are you intent on twisted OT dogma, as is much of the world? Is your obedience to Jesus surpassed by your own ego, your own selfish desires to exact retaliation versus others, regardless of what the blessed words of the Savior are that you claim to follow??**

**Tim Bench**