

Eye for an Eye, a Tooth for a Tooth:

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the profound implications of divine justice and mercy through the lens of the principle 'an eye for an eye' as fulfilled in Christ's suffering.

Scripture: Exodus 21:23

Topics: "Divine Justice", "Sacrifice of Christ"

Description

Art Katz explores the profound implications of the principle of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' emphasizing that this ancient law reflects God's justice and the sacrificial love of Christ. He highlights how Jesus, as the ultimate representative for humanity, bore the weight of sin and fulfilled the demands of divine justice through His suffering. Katz argues that while humans may seek to mitigate justice among themselves, God must uphold His own standards of equity, which were exemplified in the crucifixion of Christ. This act was not merely punitive but a demonstration of God's love and mercy, revealing the moral foundation of the universe. The sermon calls for a deeper understanding of God's justice and the significance of Christ's sacrifice in light of the Lex Talionis.

Transcript

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An Essay into Lex Talionis, the Forgotten Principle of God In the remarkable pattern of these days, I find myself up at 3:00 a.m. praying, seeking the Lord and looking into the devotional readings for the day now hardly begun. The text of last evenings February 27 selection from Spurgeon's Morning and Evening arrested me: The Lord Jesus had goings forth for His people as their representative before the throne, long before they appeared upon the stage of time. It was 'from everlasting' that He signed the compact with his Father, that He would pay blood for blood, suffering for suffering, agony for agony, and death for death in the behalf of his people...He gave himself up without a murmuring word that from the crown of His head to the sole of His foot...that He might be spit upon, pierced, mocked, rent asunder and crushed beneath the pains of death (Emphases mine).

There is a resonance here of the ancient Old Testament Law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." As if sin in its totality was requited and totally subsumed in One Act by God Himself! That He "became sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." I turned then to the text in Exodus 21:23-25 that is hauntingly suggestive of a Christ Crucified; thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

My margin (KJV) explains, "That is, measure for measure, the basis of the laws of equity." While it is true that Jesus enjoins us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38) not to requite others who have requited us, and that while we must not require 'retaliation,' may God for the purposes of righteousness and cosmic justice not require it of Himself? Could this not begin to explain why Jesus was 'marred more than any man' and that the offense to many in the unsparing devastation depicted in Gibson's film, The Passion of the Christ, bloodied, slashed, torn, pierced both in hands and feet "wound for wound, stripe for stripe" be the summing up of all the sin of mankind whose justice required requiring?

While the rabbis have historically turned from a literal fulfillment of a Lex Talionis, to a more rational and liberal principle of compensation of injury suffered through the payment of money, God is required to honor his own Law with unsparing severity for it is the statement of Himself as the Author of a just universe "a Maker and Ruler of the world--a Being who, if He exists at all, must be infinitely good,─:[might in the case of blasphemy against His Name] a sin involving quite peculiar and exceptional guilt.

Hence, absolute equity [my emphasis throughout], no less than governmental wisdom, demanded that the Law...should be impartially enforced [not sparing His own son].* Hence, it pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53: 6, 10). The penalty that divine justice required and that men are unable to pay was borne by the blemishless Lamb who was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed (vv.4,5).

I suspect that we have not understood how much more must God uphold the standard of equity and justice in the literal enactment upon His own Son of "life for life, bruise for bruise, stripe for stripe, in hand and foot"--whether by thorns or spikes, the lash or the fist. Men may lessen or mitigate the penalty in issues between themselves, but He cannot who is responsible for the moral sanity of the planet in which He must Himself be the uttermost example! To make its 'victim' the object of pity is to miss the enormous declaration at the Cross of the Justice of God as well as His immeasurable love and mercy in taking upon Himself, in just retribution, that requiring which is at the heart of a Moral Universe and Cosmos.

That we have disregarded His example or sentimentalized or trivialized it explains in our society the present prevailing amorality and pervasive evil. That "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," is not an expression of neither arbitrary spite nor an indifference to the One who bore it, but of a God obliged for all mankind's sake, to preserve the moral foundation of His own Creation. * From the little known classic of an earlier and better time (1899), a commentary on The Book of Leviticus, by S.H.Kellog.

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