

Matthew 5:38-42. Christ Forbids Revenge.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

Jesus teaches us to suffer personal injuries without complaint or resistance, and to focus on the duties we owe to others rather than dwelling on their behavior towards us.

Scripture: Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 19:17, Matthew 5:39, Matthew 6:14, John 18:23, Romans 12:17, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:23

Topics: "Non Retaliation", "Christian Ethics"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer preaches about the true meaning behind 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' emphasizing that it was a rule of punishment for civil authorities, not a call for personal revenge. Jesus corrected the Pharisees' misunderstanding, teaching that we should endure personal injuries without retaliation, rebuking with gentleness when necessary. The spirit of the command is to willingly yield our rights and focus on our duties towards others rather than fixating on our own rights, leading to peace and avoiding sinful responses to mistreatment. Mortimer highlights the importance of reflecting on our own behavior towards God, who has shown us unparalleled grace despite our ingratitude and disobedience.

Transcript

These directions have excited a great deal of surprise. It seems to proud man impossible that God should expect him to bear injuries without complaint, or desire of revenge. Let us inquire in what manner these directions are to be understood. The words, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," are the words of God, and Jesus did not contradict his Father's words, which were his own also, but he explained them. The Pharisees had misunderstood them, and represented them falsely to the people. Those words, "eye for eye," were a direction given to the civil authorities. See Ex. 21. It was to be their rule of punishment. If a man put out another man's eye, the civil authority might not take away his life on that account, but might assign a punishment equal to the injury he had inflicted. But this command was never intended to encourage revenge. The judge executes justice for the public good, and men may bring others to justice on the same account; but they may not practice private revenge from feelings of hatred and anger.

The Pharisees had explained this law very poorly, and had deceived the people. Jesus told them that far from revenge being allowable, we ought to suffer personal injuries without complaint, or resistance. He did not forbid us to remonstrate with our enemies, when we had the opportunity; for it is right to do all we can to deter others from committing sin. He himself expostulated with the man who dared to smite his cheek, as he stood before the high priest, saying, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why

do you smite me?" (John 18:23.)

When our Christian brethren trespass against us, we are bound to rebuke them, (though with mildness,) for it is written, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall rebuke him, and not allow him to sin." (Lev. 19:17.)

Are we not then to turn the left cheek to him that has smitten us on the right? The command is to be obeyed in the spirit, rather than in the letter. And what is the spirit of the command? It is a willingness to yield up our rights. We owe duties to others, and others owe duties to us. Now by nature we are apt to think little of the duties which we owe to others, and much of the duties they owe to us; that is, we think little of our duties, and much of our rights. We are inclined to watch the conduct of others towards us, and to feel angry when they do not behave as we think they ought. This is a ruinous course of thought; it not only makes us unhappy in THIS world, by leading us to feel dissatisfied and revengeful, but it endangers our happiness in the next, by taking off our thoughts from Christ, our atonement, and our example.

It is useless to think of the duties of others to us; they ought not perhaps to expect so much from us, or to behave to us with such disrespect, or with such harshness; but by dwelling on these subjects, we do not improve their conduct, but lose our own peace. On the contrary, it is most useful to think of the duties we owe to others, because we shall have to account for all our conduct at the last day. Then to have been ill-treated will be nothing, but to have ill-treated others will be dreadful. If we are engaged upon this profitable subject, we shall often not observe when our fellow-creatures behave ill to us, and thus we shall miss many occasions of uneasiness, and also of sin. But if we do observe any ingratitude, or unkindness, there is one great use we may make of the trial; we may examine whether there is no person to whom we have behaved in a similar manner. It is almost certain that we shall remember having done something like the offence we have received, to some of our fellow-creatures; but at all events, we shall find that there is One to whom we have behaved far, far more ungratefully than any have behaved to us. All that our fellow-creatures can do to us is but a faint shadow of the manner in which we have insulted God. What has He not a right to expect from us! If a man had expended all his property in ransoming a poor prisoner, would he not expect some grateful return for his generosity? But God has given up his only Son for our sakes. O sacrifice surpassing human thought! And how have we behaved towards him? How coldly! How unfaithfully! What reluctant obedience have we rendered! More frequently still, what open disobedience!

This consideration should make us very meek when we receive injuries. If it really sinks into our hearts, we shall become less ready to complain of others, and more earnest in our endeavors to behave well to them.

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