

# Sermon on the Mount: Christian Response to Personal Injury (Part 1)

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Jesus teaches his followers to live by a higher law of kindness and forgiveness, rather than seeking revenge and defending their supposed rights.*

**Duration:** 46:21

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:21-42

**Topics:** "Sermon on the Mount"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the Christian response to personal injury. He begins by reminding the congregation of the previous teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, which contrast popular ideas about true religion with what the Old Testament actually says. The preacher then delves into the passage from Matthew 5:38-42, where Jesus challenges the traditional 'eye for an eye' mentality and instead instructs his followers not to resist an evil person. He emphasizes the importance of showing love and grace to those who harm us, as this reflects the character of God and can lead others to find God through our actions. The sermon concludes by highlighting the ultimate ethical teaching of the New Testament, which calls believers to love even their bitterest enemies and become like their heavenly Father.

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## Transcript

Back with you this morning. There is a movement afoot for the session to prohibit my going away again because I come back with germs I didn't have when I left. I hope you'll withstand that as a congregation anyway.

Can I underscore Mr Lowe's appeal for next Lord's Day and for the preparatory service on Wednesday evening. It is necessary that we learn to come to this most sacred right of our Christian church in a manner that is acceptable that we profit as God meant us to profit. So we bid you if you're free on Wednesday evening or can make yourselves free join us.

The reason is not to have a great crowd. The reason is that together as a congregation we may acceptably administer and partake of the sacrament of our Lord. We would honor him and we covet your presence and if you cannot be with us we covet your prayers to this end that not only as individuals but as a people we may learn here and everywhere else to magnify the Lord our God.

Now will you kindly turn with me this morning to the Sermon on the Mount. We continue with our studies there. We're looking at a passage that begins with verse 38 in chapter 5 and proceeds over verse 42.

Matthew chapter 5 verses 38 to 42. You have heard that it was said eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I tell you do not resist an evil person.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. The Christian response to personal injury. May I remind you very briefly of the way we've come in this great Sermon on the Mount coming from the lips of our Lord.

With these words now before us we come to the fifth of six segments in the latter half of this chapter in which Jesus in one way or another contrasts popular ideas about true religion with what the Old Testament actually said or what he himself now declares. Thus far we have dealt with the subject of murder verses 21 to 26 adultery verses 27 to 30 divorce 31 to 32 and though the language is the language of oaths in verses 33 to 37 really it's about telling the truth. And there are two such segments that remain the one before us today and then the final one in this in this remarkable second half of Matthew 5 in which our Lord reaches the very climax of the ethical teaching of the New Testament.

Demanding of us not only as in this passage that we should learn not to resist an evil person who molests us but demanding of us that we should love not just the evil person but our bitterest enemy and that we actually should become like our very father who is in heaven. That is the topmost the capstone of the vast and deep ethical dissertation of our Lord in this particular section. Now you will doubtless have noted that all these issues are actually interrelated.

They're interrelated in this sense and you will see later on there is reason for my calling attention to it at this point. All of these issues have to do with personal relationships. This is basic to all of life if we can't get on with people we can't get on with God and if we can't get on with people we can't enjoy heaven either when we get there or here upon earth.

The purpose of God is that heaven should more and more invade earth in our own experiences here and now. Jesus came with heaven in his soul into a world of woe and he enjoyed the peace that passes understanding even when all the hideous things of his death were clambering around him and his enemies stood astride his way. Seeing the cross he could say my peace I give to you I've overcome the world don't be afraid I've overcome.

He could speak in those terms. Now unless we know how to get on with people we've not learned to live and Jesus has been telling us in all these several relationships how to get on with people their personal relationships. Now with that background let's come to what we have before us today.

The first thing that I have to mention is the perversion we have here the perversion of an old testament requirement. You have heard that it was said eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Now first of all let's say a word about the promulgation of that law.

It appears first of all immediately following the giving of the moral law the giving of the ten commandments a way back in exodus 21 to 23. Actually we only have one little little quote from a larger quote that we have in exodus to which I will turn in a moment and then there are two repetitions of that same injunction that

same basic injunction which includes these words tooth for tooth eye for eye etc. There are two additions adding one specific qualification.

Let me give it to you the precise statement referred to by Jesus in verse 38 is based on exodus chapter 21 verses 23 to 25. If there is serious injury caused to anyone among the children of Israel you are to take life for life eye for eye tooth for tooth hand for hand foot for foot burn for burn wound for wound bruise for bruise. The underlying principle of this to give it its latin name lex talionis which means law of exact retribution is quite simple really but I will enlarge it in a moment before I do so let me say this in Leviticus 24 verses 19 and 20 we have the additional words fracture for fracture and actually the one that is quoted in in Deuteronomy 19 21 has already been given which I must have I must have missed it's life for life but we already have that in in our Lord's words.

Now this law then this principle originated with God that's the thing we want to stress at this point it originated with God and it was given by him in order to regulate the behavior of his redeemed people the same God who in chapter 20 of exodus gave the ten commandments the two tables of the law with our duty to God and our duty to man now in chapters 21 to 23 gave certain regulations to the leaders of Israel as to how to apply the ten commandments and the spirit of those ten commandments to life in general because we do not read the old testament as we ought we often flounder here and we say how do the ten commandments apply how did they apply well if we read on you see chapters 21 22 and 23 and a few other chapters in Deuteronomy we would know that God gave certain regulations as to

how they were to apply it's very something that always comes to light in pastoral work some very well-meaning people were asking me just a little while ago but how does it apply to life certain thing I won't tell you what it was now if they read exodus 21 to 23 all the answers are there the Bible is a complete book God knows our needs and he tells us how to apply the basic principles now two things I want to say about this principle the first is this I want you to notice it was meant to regulate public life not so much relationships between individuals as public life among the children of Israel it needs to be clearly noted that this law concerning an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was not addressed to individuals God was not telling the individuals in Israel now look if your

neighbor knocks out your right eye you get his right eye back you know that's how it has been represented as if the almighty was telling people look get your hatchets out ready in case somebody does something to you if it's the right arm you lose will you get a right arm back if it's the left leg you lose will you get a left leg and it's all because we don't read the scriptures and we misrepresent the holy one of Israel because of our sheer downright ignorance of the word of God no no God gave the 10 commandments and then he told the leaders of Israel how to apply the 10 commandments and these words before us were given to the judges people we would call in our day the magistrates people who sit on the benches lawyers if you like judges the magistrates of that ancient day that was the the

elders that's what they were generally called but they they performed the tasks of magistrates now all these were given to them and they were taught how to apply them now what I want you to notice is this then this lever an eye for an eye or if you want to call it license or liberty to take another person's limb was not given to an individual it was given to the lawyers of the day it was given to the law courts of the day and if somebody has taken away my eye then I go I go before the elders and then the elders tell me if I insist that it is wrong the elders will and that I'm that justice must be done the elders will tell me right one eye for one eye one tooth for one tooth so you see this was given largely to curb something that is very native to human nature the desire for revenge and

to the desire to get much much much more back than anyone has ever taken from me and that brings me to its purpose its purpose was twofold one it was to represent the justice of God before people you cannot do anything wrong to one of God's creatures his person or his property without incurring the wrath of God and we take ages to to to really accept this for ourselves but you see you as a creature whoever you are you're made by God and whether you are interested in God or not God is interested in you you're his creature and even though you're the greatest sinner you still bear some relic of his image and God is interested in you he causes his sun to shine upon you and the rain to come upon you God is interested in all men and he says look if you deal wrongly with any man or any woman

anywhere you have to you have to you have to pay for that but says the Lord it will be on the basis of justice you take one eye no one no one with my permission will take two eyes from you it represented the sanctity and the justice of God on the one hand now the other side of the coin is this I've already referred to it see we are fallen creatures all of us and there is sin in our hearts and we're very selfish and very self-centered and you see if somebody knocks my tooth out by nature I want a couple of teeth back really if somebody breaks my leg I want to make sure at least that his leg his right leg his best leg is as fractured as mine and a little bit more because you see when you hurt my body you hurt my pride and as a fallen creature we are all proud and hurt pride takes us further

than a hurt body and this law was to guarantee a certain hedge a certain limit against the actions of individual men whose pride had been hurt as well perhaps as their tooth lost or their body maimed in some way or another the purpose of this principle this law then as originally given was at one and the same time to stress the sanctity of life as a whole God is holy and because God is holy his people must be holy too and then to protect his people against vengeance from an individual taking the law into his or her own hands and saying I'll get my own back no says the Lord I've given the ten commandments now I will tell the elders of Israel who administer the law in my name I will tell them how to apply it and I will make it clear that if somebody has been hurt he is never never to

receive more back than he has lost lex tions the just equivalent now that is the background by the time we come to the to the teaching of our Lord and to his day we discover a perversion of that old testament law you will pardon me having to sip a few drops of water the social climate in the theocratic state of ancient Israel required justice to be administered with care and compassion and the two words are important but here there was a particular perversion what was it well the particular perversion of which the pharisees and the leaders the teachers of the law were guilty amounted to this they took this principle that was given to the those who administered the law in the old testament they took it out of the hands of the lawyers and they said to individual people you can use it

yourselves and they took it out you see out of the hands of the of the of the law law per se and of legally trained people in their own day and said to the individuals if anybody takes an eye from you you see that you get your own eye back and that's where the perversion comes in they did not simply say you may get your eye back or get another eye get his eye or her eye but they said you can take it into your own hands and indeed they encouraged people to seek this kind of thing so that society was oftentimes on edge now the law clearly forbade this kind of thing i know from what i've said already but let me just in case somebody has a doubt let me just give you a passage of scripture one or two in leviticus chapter 19 and 18 god said categorically to his redeemed people he said do not

seek revenge or bear grudge against one of your people you're not to take revenge if you belong to the redeemed people of god under the old economy as under the new if you belong to the israel of god now

you don't stand over against another israeli israelite and go to law against him and enforce him to hand back things no no there's another law for you now that's in the old testament do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your own people but love your neighbor as yourselves now that's the old testament not the new i know it comes in the new but that's the old testament if anybody hasn't heard that this morning i want to say it again that's the old testament and it's not the only one of course listen to this do not say i'll pay you back for this wrong wait for the lord and he

will deliver you proverbs 20 20 or listen to this do not say i'll do to him as he has done to me i'll pay that man back for what he did that's proverbs 24 29 see the old testament said that in personal relationships especially with other redeemed men and women you're not to slap back you're not to go to the law court with another brother or sister because you belong in the theocratic community you belong to god you're one of god's you've got to live differently yet the pharisees removed or extended the application away from the law court and put it into the hands of individuals and they encouraged individuals to get their own back now that was to undermine the very purpose of the law and allow personal vengeance to raise its ugly head against anyone and to determine such important issues

issues that are too important for an individual himself or herself to determine in the words of dr john w wenham in our lord's day this excellent if stern principle of judicial retribution was being utilized as an excuse for the very thing it was instituted to abolish namely personal revenge our lord gives no hint that he wishes to see the magistrate relaxing his important social function of witnessing to the majesty of the law and to the sanctity of justice but he does discourage his disciples from appealing to justice when it is for merely selfish purposes of gaining their own rights in personal relationships then as jesus goes on to say we are not to resist an evil person we are to go beyond the mere requirements of the law the law was not meant to limit our kindness this law of a just

recompense the lex talionis was not was not put on the books in order to limit our kindness towards one another but to curb our greed and our arrogance and our hurt pride now this is the situation that jesus is here condemning and correcting failure to recognize this has caused no end of misunderstanding so that we need to have it clearly resolved in our minds if we are to appreciate what this teaching is and see how it applies to ourselves dr lloyd jones sums up in this way he says of the pharisees they were guilty of two main errors they were turning a negative injunction into a positive and furthermore they were interpreting it and carrying it out among themselves and teaching others to do so instead of seeing that it was something that was to be carried out only by the appointed

judges who were responsible for law and order i'm sorry to stay so long with that but that is the necessary background to what our lord is here saying the perversion of an old testament requirement now that comes us to begin with something which we shall have to continue with on another occasion the promotion of the divine requirement by our lord jesus christ and this is what we have in verses 39 to 42 but i tell you do not resist an evil person if someone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other also and if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well if someone forces you to go with him one mile go with him two miles give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you actually the passage before us today

needs to be seen as only part of the teaching of jesus concerning this important subject it is only a part jesus has more to say about this and particularly of course in the little section that follows and goes right to the end of of matthew 5 to which i've already referred where where he lays the capstone on it all and says you are not only to be non-resistant to evil men in personal relationships you are to love your enemies but

now let us look at what's before us this morning first of all the affirmation of this principle i tell you do not resist an evil person addressing himself to the matter of personal relationships jesus insists that the subjects of his rule and of his kingdom should not set themselves implacably over against their brothers and sisters in defense of their supposed

rights oh you may have a right if you've been slapped on the face you may have a right by law if you've lost an eye or your leg has been broken your rights in law may be thereby established if you were innocent but says jesus we don't live by our rights there is a higher law for those who follow me i am going to the cross and we live in the wake of the cross he died he did not press for his rights he abandoned them and we are to die with him in order to live in fellowship with him and there has to be a death to ourselves and our supposed rights and particularly not exclusively particularly in relation to our fellow believers in the kingdom and church of our lord jesus christ we must not press for our rights whether you're male or female old or young rich or poor cultured or illiterate

whoever you are where the moment you begin to stand on your rights in the christian church that moment you fly in the face of god the bible tells us that as lost sinners we only have a right to our condemnation we cannot start pleading for our rights for if god gave us our rights where would we be there is an arrogant ignorance about the man or the woman that shouts for his or her rights in the church of jesus christ blessed are the poor in spirit the poor in spirit will not plead for his or her rights whether it's the minister in the pulpit or the man in the pew we must learn to live by another principle to be crucified and die to ourselves in order to be alive unto god and responsive to the needs of men and this is very difficult but this is the christian way now this is highly

challenging and it has occasioned no end of controversies in the course of history many of which have unquestionably violated both the spirit and the letter of our lord's teaching what does it mean what really did jesus mean when he said and the king james makes it very difficult fortunately it is a little wrong and the niv corrects it but the king james says says uh that you resist not evil now i have the highest view of the king james version but but it is completely wrong there i do not know how those great stalwarts theologically and spiritually could possibly have put that into print that you don't resist evil god became incarnate to resist evil jesus lived throughout his life resisting evil exposing it and resisting it and condemning it and dying to redeem men from it how on

earth could they have said that that you don't resist evil life is a summons to resist evil that's not what jesus said what did jesus say what jesus said was that you we don't resist evil men in the context of personal relationships john stott has a note here and i think i will read it for you because i've profited from it and it's rather brief but it's good as all his writings are says he we cannot possibly interpret our lord's command as an invitation to compromise with sin or satan no the first clue to a correct understanding of his teaching is to recognize that the words toe panero in the greek the evil are here masculine and not neuter what we are forbidden to resist is not evil as such evil in the abstract nor the evil one meaning the devil but an evil person one who is evil or

as the new english bible translates it the man who wrongs you jesus does not deny that he is evil he asks us neither to pretend that he is other than he is nor to condone his evil behavior what he does not allow is that we retaliate do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you now we evidently need to be careful in our interpretation of these words lest we make them out to mean something contrary to what jesus meant or contrary indeed to the practice of jesus himself and this morning i must confine myself to general remarks in closing perhaps only one or two only first of all with regards to the application of this teaching

who does it apply to does it apply to everybody willingly now i have stressed all through this morning that our lord jesus is expounding this teaching in the context

in which he is dealing with personal relationships and i think that that is the key to it what jesus is saying here he is not saying to the leaders of the nations to the magistrates to the lawyers to the parliamentarians he is not laying down a rule that is necessarily to apply between nation and nation society and society what he is laying down here is a rule that is to apply when you believer meet somebody who slaps you on the face or takes away your eye or your tooth or whatever or does something similar and it's in this personal intimate relationship of life he tells us how to behave there are other rules and regulations that relate to the state mr low referred to one when he was addressing the children this morning there are sections of the new testament which tells us which tell us

about the state and the rights of the state and what powers are are given to the state jesus is not dealing with that so you see we are not here to take these words of our lord and apply them willy-nilly to everybody they are applied to people who've repented of their sins who've come to faith in jesus as the king of the kingdom and who on some level have experienced that which is reflected in the beatitudes they're poor in spirit they're meek they're seeking righteousness purity of heart they've become the salt of the earth and the light of the world now says jesus you people this is the way walking in it and you see you can't do that with a non-christian i know there are non-christians for some reason first from some inspiration or another can do some remarkable things and i don't mean

to take away from that but you cannot tell a non-christian to do what jesus tells his people here to do it is not in us by nature to turn the other cheek we want revenge i want to justify myself i want to get my rights and even a long time after some of us have been christian we haven't become dead to sin self made dominant for a long time so jesus is here saying to individuals in personal relationships this applies to you now that therefore is the reason why we would with many of the commentators on this subject reject the understanding of it which uh characterized the teaching of people like alexei tolstoy for example count tolstoy of russia he lived the end of the last century into the beginning of this century and um india's great mahatma gandhi and uh japan's toyohito kagawa we had

the privilege of entertaining him in our home on one occasion these were great men but whether they were great christians is another thing they believed you see that what jesus says here relates to the state and therefore they concluded as count tolstoy did in his war and peace he says it is wrong to have a police force you shouldn't resist evil or evil men let them go it is wrong to have uh soldiers and it is wrong to be a soldier it is wrong to have soldiers at all it's wrong to have a police force it's wrong to have magistrates you just let them go that's what jesus said well now jesus did not say that in relation to the state but he said that in personal relationships as christian men and women you're not to press for your rights i hurry for that and i just want to say a word about

this in closing with regards to the interpretation of the injunction itself now i believe as i think all of you who are regular members or adherents of knox will know i believe the scriptures to be the word of god in their entirety from genesis to revelation i believe in the infallible book and so i don't want you to think that i have changed my stance in what i'm going to say now but i cannot agree with people and we must not agree with people and i dare you to agree with people who say that we've got to understand every part of the bible literally you can't do it and what is going to really cause a bit of a worry to people who say i take the bible always at its literal meaning what's going to cause a little bit of a hurt here is this that jesus himself did not interpret this literally

always and if you insist on a literal interpretation all the time then you are going to say that our lord jesus christ did not live up to his own teaching now you say to me what what really are you getting at well now resist not evil turn the other cheek there are times and the natural understanding of these words if we did not have anything else to turn to the natural understanding of these words would have to be literal now let me say that quite clearly because the genre here is is is is is of that order jesus is speaking in prose not metaphorically not poetically he's speaking out clearly and we would have to interpret it literally did we not have something else to go by but you see our lord jesus christ did not himself nor did his apostles always do this literally i don't really know

how to what word to use in order to tell you how they did it when they did not do it literally but they kept the spirit of it and this i think is the main point they never they never so imposed their own rights upon men and women that they demanded their own rights rather they yielded their own rights and allowed people to do certain things to them now let me be specific in mark chapter 15 verses 16 to 20 we read that our lord jesus christ was marked and here he yielded himself physically you might say almost in literal in literal appreciation of these terms and fulfillment of these terms they clothed him with the castoffs of royalty they put a scepter a reed in his hand and an old crown of something on his head and you remember how the soldiers went past and bowed to him and mocked him

of course and called him the king the king of the jews and he took that but when he got when he got to pilate's praetorium let me read to you let me give you john's own words the high priest questioned jesus about his disciples and his teaching i have spoken openly in the world jesus replied i always taught in synagogues or at the temple where all the jews came together i said nothing in secret why question me ask those who heard me surely they know what i said when jesus said this one of the officials nearby struck him on his face is that any way to answer the high priest he demanded what did jesus do if i said something wrong jesus replied testify as to what is wrong but if i spoke the truth why did you strike me he demanded an explanation he did not turn the other cheek and said to the

man now look you struck me on the one cheek here's my other he didn't do it he asked for an explanation now he had reasons for that but what i am saying is this that despite all that jesus kept the spirit of his own injunction in this sense even there in pilate's praetorium he did not press for his own rights he refused to plead his own case he refused to defend himself he refused even even to make a case against the very people that were nailing him on the cross jews or gentiles but he gave himself up he delivered himself up to die now my friends there are times when you and i may have to do that and i think that it is this underlying principle that we're all at all times called upon to promulgate and to practice maybe not literally though sometimes it will be literally necessary to let

people smite us on the other cheek you know there are some people who do not know the evil that is in them until it comes out in action and i have known people literally come to conviction of sin and a sense of need of the savior only when they have done something drastic to a believer that has presented them with the gospel of our lord jesus christ and if needs be we must take that but even when we can't do that the spirit of it the deeper significance of it is this we must learn by the grace of god to say like john the baptist he must increase i must decrease or to say with the great apostle paul i live yet not i i'm not here to stress my own rights and what i deserve according to my own imagination we're not here for that we are here brothers and sisters to represent god now let me

give you the picture as i close here is someone who comes to you as a believer a man or a woman it doesn't matter and he's come up and he or she has slapped you on the face and he or she is enraged he

or she is out for revenge for something or other imaginary or otherwise what's at stake i'll tell you there is a man or a woman that needs the grace of god probably lost probably under the power of an evil spirit temper out of control hands out of control life out of control that man that woman needs christ needs god how can he or she find god not only by hearing his voice over your lips but seeing you act as god and for that reason we must not press our rights who are we to press our rights when the incarnate lord of glory said i came not to be ministered to but to minister and to give my

life a ransom for many who says the apostle for while we were yet sinners christ died for us the man who smites you on your cheek my friend needs god needs god's love needs god's grace he's lost and he can see god in you and in me if by the grace of god we heed the word of christ and by the same grace learn to live it we'll take up this theme again next time in the will of god but meanwhile shall we pray for it pray about it let us bow together oh lord our heavenly father you are a great god your word tells us that your world tells us that but so does a passage such as the one we have been reading this morning you know us you know what goes on in our hearts when we're hurt you know what goes on in our imaginations you know all about us you know our perils oh lord who did teach us in the

sermon on the mount that an evil look can be adultery in the heart but an evil word can be murder in the soul teach us to nip these things in the bud by your grace oh come and work in us a deep work who desirous truth in the inward parts and that for jesus sake amen

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