

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adult Sunday School

SERMON ON THE MOUNT (I)

LESSON ELEVEN: RETALIATION

I. PASSAGE

Matthew 5:38-42, “³⁸ Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: ³⁹ But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also. ⁴¹ And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. ⁴² Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

II. INTRODUCTION

The teachings under the Sermon on the Mount may seem very basic for Christians. These are God’s important instructions how a Christian should live his life in holiness and righteousness on earth to the glory of God. Though basic, spiritual things are still spiritually discerned (see 1 Corinthians 2:14). Without the help of the Holy Spirit, there is no way we can understand the teachings in the Bible from God’s perspective. Without the right understanding of the teachings, it is impossible to live a life that is glorifying to God.

The whole purpose why God wants us to learn His Word is so that we may glorify Him. As God’s people, we must always bear this in mind. It is not about us. It is about knowing God and how we are to glorify Him. For we are made for Him and in Him. God’s teachings go beyond our human wisdom and understanding. Because of sin, we fall short of God’s glory. But thanks be to God that His only begotten Son Jesus Christ has redeemed us from our sins, and given us His mind, heart and Spirit that we may conform to His image in order to glorify Him.

In this lesson, the Lord is correcting His disciples the misconception concerning retaliation.

III. LEX TALIONIS: THE LAW OF RETALIATION

Retaliation means counter-attack. It is an action or reaction to return an attack. It is to fight back and get even when under attack. That is retaliation. And there is a law that governs the retaliation. It is called the law of retaliation (in Latin: Lex Talionis). And it was taught to the Jews by the scribes and the Pharisees based on the law of Moses in verse 38 saying, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” They took this from Exodus 21:24 under one of the many laws which God gave to the children of Israel through Moses. And basically, this law is to punish the lawbreakers and to make sure they are punished justly and accordingly, not under-punished or over-punished.

No one is to think that after they had broken the law, nothing will happen to them and they could get away with it. No, they will be brought before the judge and punishment will be dispensed accordingly. That is why the law of retaliation called for “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” There is a law that has been put in place. This law protects the victims and comforts them that they will be vindicated accordingly. If there is no law of retaliation in the society, it becomes a very dangerous place to live in. Everyone will live in anxiety and fear if there is no law of retaliation to protect them. If there is no “an eye for an eye,” those stronger will just bully those who are weaker. And those who are weaker will have no other way of protecting themselves. This law of retaliation is a good law. This law should instill great fear upon those who are contemplating to break the law. They will be severely punished if they become law-breakers.

However, not everyone is given the authority to exercise this law of retaliation. The higher authority is given the mandate to enforce the law. No one is to think that they can take matters into their own hands. The authority to mete out “An eye for an eye” punishment is reserved for the lawcourt and those in authority to manage and dispense the judgment accordingly in a formal and legal setting.

However, the scribes and the Pharisees had taught the people that they can take matters into their own hand if they were to suffer any form of injustice yet not serious enough to involve the law court. They can simply go and take the guilty to task and do whatever they want to them. They were given the right to take matters into their own hands.

IV. “RESIST NOT EVIL”

The scribes and the Pharisees gave the “green light” for the people to hide behind Moses’ law to justify their personal actions of discipline. “But,” the Lord Jesus says otherwise. When it comes to breaking the laws of the land, let the authority do what they need to do to pass the right judgment upon the guilty. But when it comes to personal injury, we are “not to resist evil.”

According to the scribes and Pharisees, the Jews are to follow the law of Moses that teaches them “an eye for an eye” and “tooth for tooth.” If people were to verbally attack them, they are to fight back. “But” Jesus says, we are not to resist evil. We have no power to control other people’s words and actions but we can control ours. As such, we do not have to behave like them.

As Christians, we are not to resist evil. We are not to retaliate by taking revenge and take matters into our own hands. The Lord used four illustrations to prove His point that as God’s people, we are not to resist evil.

- A. **Turn the Other Cheek.** How do you smite a person’s face using your right hand? Your open palm will hit on the person’s left cheek. Turn the other cheek would require the back hand to hit. And this way of smiting by the back hand is very humiliating. Yet this is what the Lord wants us to do.
- B. **Give Away Your Cloke.** The example quoted here is based on an unjust case. If a person insisted your coat (inner garment) belongs to him though it is not, be willing to give up your coat as well as your cloke (outer garment) to him. There is no need to fight for them. If he wants them, let him have it.
- C. **Go Another Mile.** The word “compel” here means force. Who will force you to go one mile? In those days, Israel was under the Roman occupation. The Roman soldiers were allowed to ask any Jew to run an errand for them not exceeding one mile. This was the farthest that a Jew would oblige any Roman soldier. But the Lord Jesus says, “be willing to go another mile.” In other words, give up your right. You had already gone one mile, be ready for another.
- D. **Be Willing to Lend Money.** This is an area where most people will hesitate, for fear of losing the money, since money borrowed may not get it back. Yet the Lord says, “give to him that ask you.” The word “give” means to supply, and provide. Be willing to help. Do not turn away those who genuinely needed help.

The tendency to retaliate is in our blood. Doing any of the above seems impossible for us. Some may even think it is illogical to let evil have its way. We need God’s wisdom to help us understand why we must not resist evil. We are showing forth Christlikeness when we love one another unconditionally, and be willing to forgive and forbear with one another, and not retaliate when suffered wrong.

Let us not resist evil, but be willing to suffer humiliation and loss for Jesus’ sake. Let us be willing to sacrifice, go another mile, and to give and help one another with the best of our ability. Yes, it is not easy, but it is not impossible with God’s help. May God help us. Amen.