

# Authentic Christians

Lesson 15 – Matthew 5:38-42

## 1. OT Background

- The “You have heard that it was said ...” formula points again to the perverted teaching of the religious leaders in Jesus’ day and their misunderstanding of the OT Law.
- OT penal code limited the amount of punishment to be inflicted + compelled the Israelites to punish for certain offences.
- In this case, the Law stated “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” meaning that the punishment cannot exceed the crime.

*“The words eye for eye, and tooth for tooth come from several Old Testament passages (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21); they are called the *Lex Talionis*, the law of retaliation. This law was given to protect the innocent and to make sure retaliation did not occur beyond the offense.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)*

- The *Lex Talionis* (“law of the claw”) was given by God to govern civil situations ... not personal conflicts as the rabbis were teaching ... the command was being used in Jesus’ day for personal offenses and to justify retaliation against those who caused any sort of personal offense.

*“... the eye-for-an-eye principle was given to govern matters of civil justice. It was a guideline for judges meting out punishment for civil infractions, to insure that the punishment fit the crime. It was a merciful principle, limiting the punishment according to the gravity of the offense. And in all cases where the eye-for-an-eye principle applied, judges were to find the offender guilty and assess the penalty, not the injured individual (Exod. 21:22–24; cf. Deut. 19:18–21). Nowhere did the Old Testament ever permit an individual to take the law into his own hands and apply it against those who had wronged him personally.” (MacArthur, The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness, pg. 33)*

*“But this statute, which pertains only to the magistrate enforcing **judicial** retribution, had been perverted by the Pharisees, giving it a **general** application, thereby teaching that each man was warranted in taking the law into his own hands. Our Lord here forbade the inflicting of **private revenge**, and in so doing maintained the clear teaching of the Old Testament (see Exod. 23:4, 5; Lev. 19:18; Prov. 24:29; 25:21, 22, which expressly forbade the exercise of personal malice and retaliation).” (Pink, Interpretation of the Scriptures, pg. 40)*

*“By Jesus’ day, however, both of these fundamentals (i.e. ... “however prescriptive it might have been, it was also restrictive” and “the law was given to the Jewish people qua [as a] nation”) were frequently overlooked. It became all too easy to see the law as prescriptive, and only marginally restrictive. The question then became, How far may my personal retaliation extend, without breaking the law? Worse, the law was thus being dragged into the personal arena, where it could scarcely foster even rough justice, but only bitterness, vengeance, malice, hatred.” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 52)*

*In what ways do people use the “eye-for-an-eye” formula today?*

*Is it ever appropriate to “take the law into your own hands”? (Movie: “Walking Tall”, tracking down and punishing a pedophile, “euthanizing” your neighbor’s dog after repeated violations of a city ordinance, killing an abortion doctor, civil disobedience, etc.)*

- The civil magistrates are required to punish evildoers (Rom. 13:1-4) but that prerogative is never given to the individual – retaliation is always condemned (e.g. Rom. 12:19).

## 2. **The Structure of the Passage**

- Jesus’ instruction was to refrain from resisting the “evil person” ... this person is one who is ethically and morally bad, i.e. one who is in opposition to God’s Word and will.
- The “evil person” is also defined by four events in the passage: 1) slaps you in the face; 2) sues for your undershirt; 3) forces you to walk a mile; and 4) borrows your money without repaying.

*“No matter how much we wish to follow Jesus seriously, we discover, sooner or later, that seriously following Jesus entails hard thinking about what he said and what he did not say.” (Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pg. 54)*

- The offenses under discussion in this passage are personal attacks (thus the reference to the “evil person”) ... not civil injustices ... each offense seems to progressively demand more and more personal sacrifice from the offended.

**HINGE:** *What connection does the 4<sup>th</sup> case study have with the other three?*

*“He is concerned the whole time about this question of the ‘self’ and of our attitude towards ourselves. He is saying in effect that if we are to be truly Christian we must become dead to self. It is not a question of whether we should go into the army or anything else; it is a question of what I think of myself, and of my attitude towards myself.” (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 246)*

*If this is true, how does this passage compare to Rom. 6, Col. 3:9-10, and 2 Tim. 3:1-9?*

- The unfortunate translation of ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ (“But I say unto you that ye resist not evil ...” [KJV] or “But I say unto you, not to resist evil ...” [1890 Darby Bible]) has led some to believe that Christians are mandated to be passive in disputes or embrace pacifism (opposition to war or violence as a means of resolving disputes [American Heritage Dictionary]).

*“Perhaps no man has more influenced men’s thinking concerning these matters than that great writer Count Tolstoy, and he did not hesitate to say that these words of our Lord are to be taken at their face value. He said that to have soldiers, or police, or even magistrates, is unchristian. Evil, he maintained, is not to be resisted; for Christ’s way is not to resist evil in any sense.” (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 242)*

*Since pacifism depends in part on this section of the passage – what is a biblical response to those who argue against military action, police protection, death penalty, etc.?*

- FOUR CASE STUDIES:

- Slapped on the right cheek (my attitude towards myself)

*“Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,’ which is not only a hurt, but an affront and indignity (2 Co. 11:20), if a man in anger or scorn thus abuse thee, ‘turn to him the other cheek;’ that is, ‘instead of avenging that injury, prepare for another, and bear it patiently: give not the rude man as good as he brings; do not challenge him, nor enter an action against him; if it be necessary to the public peace that he be bound to his good behaviour, leave that to the magistrate; but for thine own part, it will ordinarily be the wisest course to pass it by, and take no further notice of it: there are no bones broken, no great harm done, forgive it and forget it; and if proud fools think the worse of thee, and laugh at thee for it, all wise men will value and honour thee for it, as a follower of the blessed Jesus, who, though he was the Judge of Israel, did not smite those who smote him on the cheek ...” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible)*

- Slapping the “right cheek” was an insult since a right-handed man would normally use the back of his hand to slap the right cheek of his opponent. (See 2 Cor. 11:20)
- Jesus and Paul were struck in the face when they responded with seeming inappropriateness to the High Priest (John 18:22-23 & Acts 23:2-5) – the slap was not meant to injure but to shame.

*Contrast their responses when struck ...*

- The contrast Jesus is making (Pharisaical teaching on retaliation within the parameters of the Law VS. a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees) is stark – He returns to the essence of the Law (love for God and love for neighbor).
- A love for neighbor also includes the SUBSET “enemy” i.e. those who are opposed to us and in some way seek to cause us personal injury. (See Lk. 6:27-36)
- The insignificance of the offense is implied by the motivation behind the action and the response Jesus commands – instinctual self-preservation would require a response in kind, but revenge is NEVER allowed by Christ when honor is the only thing injured.

*What is an appropriate biblical response to those who have defamed us, have slandered us or have been indignant toward us? (See 1 Peter 3:9)*

*Defamation and slander is a serious crime in the business world (See defamation suit against Oprah Winfrey at [www.philly.com/inquirer/home\\_top\\_stories/20100317\\_Defamation\\_suit\\_against\\_Oprah\\_Winfrey\\_to\\_proceed.html](http://www.philly.com/inquirer/home_top_stories/20100317_Defamation_suit_against_Oprah_Winfrey_to_proceed.html)); based on biblical evidence, does this command extend to the Christian business owner who is being misrepresented in the media or business world?*