

4. When the honor of Christ and the salvation of men require, however, the Christian should observe this high, exacting rule of non-resistance **to the letter.**
- C. **Let him have thy cloak:** *"And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."* (40)
1. This involves **judicial injustice.**
 2. The coat was the inner garment, the cloak the outer, also used as bed-covering at night. (Exodus 22:26,27.)
 3. *"Why not rather take wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?"* joyfully in such matters, rather than be ruled by a spirit of revenge and suffer all the bitter consequences? (1 Cor. 6:7; Hebrews 10:34.)
- D. **Go with him two:** *"And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two."* (41)
1. This refers to the practice, originated by the Persians and adopted by the Romans, of sending royal messages and documents by couriers, who could lawfully compel or impress citizens to help them forward, a practice especially galling to the Jews.
 2. Jesus teaches that it is better, in such cases, to go two miles then to be cursed by the spirit of revenge with all its bitter fruit.
 3. The spirit of personal retaliation has no place in Christ's kingdom or the heart of his disciple. (Rom. 12:17-21.) Defending our rights, when necessary, should always be done by a properly constituted process. (Acts 16:35-39.)
 4. The oppression in all these cases mentioned by Jesus involve lesser evils of life, not such major things as life itself.

III. THE POSITIVE SIDE OF THE LORD'S LAW. (5:42.)

- A. The Christian's revenge is returning good for evil. (Rom. 12:20,21.)
 1. Let us be more generous than demanded of us. (Luke 6:38.)
 2. *"He that soweth sparingly shall reap also..."* (2 Cor. 9:6.)
- B. Benevolence casts out revenge as light does darkness.
- C. Do we go only "the mile of compulsion" in (a) giving and (b) serving?
 --Charles E. Crouch

Two Mile Religion or The Law Against Retaliation

"Two Mile Religion" OR "The Law Against Retaliation"

Matthew 5:38-43

INTRODUCTION -

- I. This is the fourth series of illustrations the Lord gave setting forth the difference between the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, and that required of his disciples under his law. (5:17-20.)
- II. In this he deals with the right attitude toward those who (1) insult, (2) injure, or (3) impose upon us, and (4) the needy who ask for our help.
- III. It is not easy to give an adequate, comprehensive summary of Christianity in just a few words. (1 Cor. 16:13,14; 1 Tim. 3:16; James 1:27; etc.) From one point of view it is the great gift of God's redeeming love. (John 3:16.) From another viewpoint it is the glorious mission of Jesus as Saviour--the incarnation and atonement. (1 John 4:14; Luke 19:10; Matt. 1:21.) It is also the Lord's wonderful words, works, and plan of salvation. (John 20:30,31; etc.) From another standpoint, Christianity embraces the process of, and motivation for, developing the right attitudes in those who are regenerated, reformed, and fitted for the fellowship of God and angels in heaven. Man's reckless and carnal spirit must be subdued, tamed, and changed for the company of righteous and heavenly spirits forever. The will of man must be brought into submission to the will of God, and God's wonderful plan, wrought by his grace, must work in man, wrought by his obedient faith, to make this a reality. All this is involved in this lesson, in which Jesus makes resistance to evil sinful.

DISCUSSION -

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW OF RETALIATION. (5:38.)

- A. **An Eye for an eye:** *"Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."* (v.38).
 1. The law of Moses did allow retaliation for injury, but this was mostly a matter of **judicial revenge**, *"as the judges*

determine." (Exodus 21:22-25; Lev. 24:19,20; Deut. 19:15-21.)

2. Personal revenge and grudge-bearing were forbidden. (Lev. 19:17,18; Prov. 20:22; 24:19,29.) The injured person had the right to prosecute him who injured him but was not required to in all cases. (Deut. 19:15-21.) In the case of murder, the *lex talionis* did give to the next of kin the immediate right and duty of taking the life of the murderer (Gen. 9:5,6; etc.) hence, the "cities of refuge" became a necessity to protect the innocent and/or accidental manslayer in Israel. (Joshua 20; Numbers 35.)
 3. It was a good law for its time. Its purpose was to protect both parties from loss of either person or property, by causing any potential offender to realize that the injury he inflicted upon another would in the end be inflicted upon himself.
- B. How the scribes and Pharisees perverted this law.
1. They drew the unnecessary and false inference that **private revenge** was proper and necessary (provided the measure provided in the law was not exceeded), and that there was "no room left for remission, or the acceptance of satisfaction." --Matthew Henry.
 2. By their tradition they made void God's law (as in Lev. 19:17,18; Deut. 19:15-21; cf. Matt. 15:6b), making the law of retaliation "a ground for authorizing private resentments." --A. Clarke.
 3. One can imagine how easy it would be for passionate humans to pervert what this law allowed judicially, and let their vindictive spirits run wild.

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIRED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT. (5:39-41.)

- A. **Resist not him that is evil:** "*But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil.*" (39a) Cf. Romans 12:17: "*Render to no man evil for evil.*"
1. This challenging command of Jesus is clearly different from and superior to the Old Testament law of retaliation, and the righteousness established upon this is superior to the former. **This is one of the hallmarks of a Christian.**

Two Mile Religion or The Law Against Retaliation

2. However, the non-resistance to "*him that is evil*" enjoined by this principle does not require absolute, unqualified passiveness at all times and under all conditions. If we were to understand this principle in such crass, wooden, literal fashion, it (together with other principles taught in the sermon on the mount) would bring us into impossible situations, the meaning and benefits of the principle would be lost, crime and evil would be encouraged thereby to the injury of society.
 3. "**Evil**" in one sense is to be resisted by Christians wholeheartedly and unceasingly. (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8,9; Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Tim. 6:12.) Jesus himself used force. (John 2.) Paul asked for help in self-defense. (Acts 23:17.) The sermon on the mount "is not a code for slaves, but an assertion of principles which are to be interpreted and applied by the children of freedom." -- McGarvey-Pendleton, p. 244.
 4. **What Jesus here condemns is the spirit of revenge** against neighbor or friend who may, in a moment of hot passion, knock out your eye or tooth. **For principle's sake, personal revenge is here forbidden.** This startling but reasonable principle, showing how and when we are to exercise patience and forgiveness, is illustrated three ways, which does not (a) "throw dust in the eyes of reason," or (b) "spit in the face of sanctified common sense." -- Chappell, p. 149.
- B. **Turn the other cheek:** "*But whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.*" (39b)
1. Are we too sensitive? Too easily offended? What is our attitude?
 2. There are three possible attitudes toward those who impose insult, or violence upon us: (a) I can hit back--retaliate (any wounded animal can fight back; but this merely demonstrates which is the strongest animal physically, not morally); (b) I can run--show fear (which is not always best for the offender); or (c) I can stand my ground, take his insult, suffer wrong but not do wrong, demonstrating moral superiority and kindness.
 3. Jesus and Paul illustrate this principle. (John 18:22,23; Acts 23:2-5.)