

## The Believer's Right Not To Fight

Matthew 5:38-42

### Introduction

In Christ's Sermon on the Mount Jesus has declared that true righteousness is internal and has gone to great lengths to expose the meaning and danger of sin. Jesus does not come to destroy the Law but fulfill it. The Law revealed the minimum expectations of external compliance in religious and social interactions. But Jesus reminds His listeners that God cares about the human heart. While the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in our passage it is not possible to practice what Jesus preaches without supernatural assistance. Jesus has spoken about anger (vv.21-26); lust (vv.27-32); deception (vv.33-37); and now Jesus will address the issue of retaliation (vv.38-48). The Law of Moses required that people not take the law into their own hands by seeking private revenge against an enemy.

But what about people who refuse to recognize God's Laws of Righteousness? What about the person who does not recognize purity or peace? How do we deal with people who hold on to selfishness and violence?

How does Jesus deal with the problem? He asks citizens in His Kingdom to be willing to suffer loss rather than cause others to suffer loss (1 Cor.6:1-8). Remember Jesus is dealing in the realm of private offenses—and that His statements do not prohibit or exclude Civil Governments or Civil Courts the power to accuse and convict people of crimes. Not to long ago the President of the United States made this tragic comment;

“Which passages of scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is OK and that eating shellfish is an abomination? Or we could go with Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith?”

Read more at <http://www.youngcons.com/40-mind-blowing-quotes-from-barack-obama-about-islam-and-christianity/#jFoOezz3Kr6Sdz8x.99>

Indeed Mr. President. Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy?

Years ago another President was followed by a group of media people to church one Sunday. After the fiery message the President was asked what the Sermon was about. “Sin” was Teddy Roosevelt's single word reply. “How does God feel about sin Mr. President?” “He's against it.” Roosevelt replied. “What do you think, Mr. President?” “I'm against it too,” Jesus is against sin. He is for humility in our hearts, purity in our speech, in our home. Jesus is for integrity and honesty. Jesus links the ideas of truth and justice. How do you treat people? Do you treat them on the basis of how they treat you? **Once again Jesus provides radical insight. We are not to treat others based on how they treat us or our feelings. We are to treat them according to the Law of Love. We do not have to live our lives based on whether people respect us or treat us with dignity. We can rise above our feelings and live our lives based on the Word of God and the character of Christ.**

### The Law Of Retribution (v.38)

*Matthew 5:38–48 (NKJV)38“*You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’*”*

## **The Believer's Right Not To Fight**

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

We find the Laws concerning retribution in Leviticus 24:19-24 and Exodus 21:24. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." Lev.24:20; "Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again." Deuteronomy 19:21; "And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot".

Once again people misinterpreted the Law. Some saw in this Law Biblical justification for retribution. The Law was not given to insist on retribution but rather to limit retribution.

The Law allowed a measure of justice if the victim wishes. He did not have to insist on it. The Law was given to guide the judges in the execution of justice. It was not given to individuals to take vengeance on others. The Law could be sometimes satisfied with goods, services, money, valuables, property or ransom. There was one exception. In the case of murder—the murderer was to pay with his or her life (see Numbers 35:31).

Why was the Law given? To limit revenge. To serve as a restraint and a deterrent. To limit the penalties and to insure the punishment fit the crime.

### **The Law Of Resistance (vv.39-41)**

*39But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

The Bible teaches that we are to resist the Devil. We are to resist evil. Jesus Himself resisted both the Devil and Evil. Jesus drove the money changers from the Temple and resisted the punishment of the High Priest (see John 18:22-23). Paul the Apostle resisted evil (see Acts 16:35; 22:25; 23:3; 25:9-10).

What does this mean? Let people hurt you? Let people abuse you? I think it means we do not seek evil for evil; we bear no ill will, we retain no grudge. We do not resent people or mistreat us or persecute us. We do not seek revenge or the chance to retaliate. We forgive. We help those who hurt us. We are Citizens of the King.

There is a reason we reject vengeance and retaliation.

The principle applies to Citizens in Christ's Kingdom. It does not apply to the City or State or Nation! Jesus is speaking of personal insults and indignities—not acts of war against people groups or nations. Citizens of the Kingdom may elect to remain neutral or even appeal to some conscientious objections in times of war—but not based on this Scripture. Here Jesus is speaking about personal insult and personal injury.

## **The Believer's Right Not To Fight**

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

The United States of America is a violent place. Every 17 seconds a violent crime is committed somewhere in America. A forcible rape, child sexual assault, murder, aggravated assault, robbery, theft, larceny, burglary.

Why bring this up? Behind every crime statistic is a real criminal and real victims. Some criminals believe that the world owes them something, that you owe them something. They believe you deserve to be victimized and that your property should be stolen. And if you stand in the way you deserve to be hurt or killed. With so much crime and so much hate and so much wickedness, we are all tempted to take the Law into our own hands. We sometimes experience overwhelming feelings to avenge the wrong, and alleviate the suffering that have been perpetrated on ourselves or the people we love. Jesus is not suggesting that laws be abolished or justice not served. Jesus is addressing the very real issue—of your heart and my heart when we experience injury.

When someone slaps you its personal. Jesus in effect is saying you do not have the right to personal retaliation when you are wronged. Jesus is not saying you have no right to defend yourself or your family. Jesus is not suggesting that we take no stand against evil. We are to 'resist the devil' (James 4:7) and all the evil he stands for and inspires (see John MacArthur p. 331). We are to resist evil in the church. Paul opposed Peter to his face for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11). When Paul got wind of sexual immorality in the church Paul wrote "remove the wicked from among yourselves" (1 Cor.5:13).

What about evil in the Government? What if the Government becomes the instrument of Satan and the instrument of evil and the instrument of oppression and persecution towards Jews or Christians? Paul wrote that Governments role is "a minister of God for your good" (Rom.13:4). "For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

How about that as a Scripture to guide our public policy? Or how about Peter's admonition (1 Peter 2:13-14; "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.")

We are believers. We are not law breakers. We keep the law and urge others to keep the law. If someone is caught molesting children in our church—we report them to the police. If someone is stealing church property we report them to the police. Jesus said I should turn my cheek—but I won't turn your cheek. It is not a kindness or love to hide people's crimes.

I am not to resist someone who is harming me personally. But I will resist someone who harms you. Jesus is condemning take the law into our own hands. Jesus is not condemning Law Enforcement. Paul wrote in Romans 12:7; "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. . .never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is

## **The Believer's Right Not To Fight**

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

mine saith the Lord.” For Christians personal revenge is not an option. We are called to overcome evil by doing good. What do we do if someone hates us or hurts us or slights us?

Harm. You might think—I am not going to give up my rights or surrender my rights or renounce my rights. I have a right to fight. You also have the right not to fight. Jesus is not suggesting that humans have no basic rights. Jesus is simply saying that non-retaliation is better than retaliation. We have basic human rights. But Jesus is going to challenge our rights of dignity, security, liberty and prosperity. In what way? Love trumps dignity, security, liberty and prosperity.

### **Dignity (v.39b)**

*“ . . .turn the other cheek”*

Under the Law and in the old economy some forms of retaliation and revenge were permissible. But now Jesus gives us the right to turn our cheek—that is exercise non resistance.

According to the Bible human beings have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. All people are made in the image of God. My mother taught me there was never a good reason to be rude. God also expects us to treat others with dignity. But God knows we live in a fallen world. God knows there are people who will hate you, despise you, insult you; sometimes for what they think is a very good reason—like Saul of Tarsus who hunted and tortured and imprisoned Christians because he thought he was doing God a favor. Sometimes the insults seem disconnected from reason. Jesus is not simply concerned with the insult—but with our reaction to the insult. I am trying to imagine a culture where a slap in the face is a good thing! For most it is demeaning. To the Jew a slap in the face was the height of contempt. To the Italian a slap in the face is the root word for Vendetta (just kidding). In the N.T. Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin. The High Priest ordered Paul slapped; Paul's response was “who do you think you are you white washed tomb”. Someone said, “be careful how you address the High Priest”. Paul's immediate response was, “I didn't know it was the High Priest”. Punching may be painful but slapping was the height of disrespect. In the ancient culture slaves would rather have a whip across the back than a slap across the face.

When someone lies about you, insults you, demeans you, humiliates you, we are told to turn the other cheek. “Wait a minute. . .” you might be thinking. No one has the right to treat me with disrespect. Exactly. They have no right. But will people insult, demean and humiliate? What will you do when they do what is not right? Warren Wiersbe suggests (p.24);

“In order to ‘turn the other cheek’, we must stay where we are and not run away. This demands both faith and love. It also means that we will be hurt, but it is better to be hurt on the outside than harmed on the inside. But it further means that *we should help the sinner*. We are vulnerable because he may attack us anew; but we are also victorious because Jesus is on our side, helping us and building our characters”.

## **The Believer's Right Not To Fight** **Matthew 5:38-42**

Violence is for the weak. Violence is for those who do not have the courage to suffer, not for the sake of pain but for the sake of Christ. You may say, "I'm not willing to take the loss. I'm not willing to suffer."

Then you are in effect saying, "I am not willing to be like Christ." When we turn the other cheek we are in effect saying, "I will not avenge, I will remain humble, I will remain gentle." You will note something about Jesus. When he was attacked, he never defended Himself. When His Father's House was misrepresented, when the disciples were threatened, then Jesus became a force to be reckoned with. When Jesus hung from the Cross he said "Father forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

1 Peter 2:20-23; "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth;" who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."

John MacArthur (p.333); "When someone attacks our right to dignity, we are not to defend that right by retaliation. We are to leave the protection and defense of our dignity in God's hands, knowing that one day we will live and reign with him in His Kingdom in great glory".

### **Security (v.40)**

*40If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.*

Now Jesus uses draws an illustration from the world of law. Most people in the land of Israel were poor. They had a 'shirt'—an undergarment almost like a tunic or a T-shirt. They had a 'coat' a kind of poncho or serape. This doubled as a blanket at night and coat in cold weather. The Law of Moses required that a person's coat be returned to its owner 'before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body' (Ex. 22:27-27).

In the ancient world of the first century sometimes legal judgments were settled with clothing items. The Court's could require a person to surrender their tunic (undergarment) but could not compel a person to surrender their cloak (outer garment). **But it could be voluntarily surrendered as payment.** So what is Jesus saying? We should be willing to give up—what we can legally keep—in order to pay or satisfy a legitimate debt. Do you owe someone something? Did you borrow money and promise to pay it back? Have you used the excuse—"I can't really afford to pay back the debt". Has someone taken you to Court to require the repayment of a legitimate debt? The point Jesus is making is that if you go to Court and a Judgment has been made against you, you should be willing to pay even more! **This is to show or demonstrate that we are not bitter or angry or resentful!** According to Paul (see 1 Cor. 6:1-8) it is better to

## **The Believer's Right Not To Fight**

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

be defrauded than to be resentful or bitter or spiteful. The principle remains constant in the Scriptures; take the loss.

#### **Liberty (v.41)**

*41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.*

Now Jesus draws an illustration from the world of politics. The key word is 'compel' a word that meant to compel or press into service. In the ancient world there were public couriers who could command or compel subjects or citizens to bear a burden. If a Roman soldier came to you and pressed his Spear onto your shoulder you were 'compelled'. Was the privilege abused? Yes. But Jesus teaches that we are to go the extra mile. The point—believers—in Jesus—citizens in God's Kingdom go the extra mile.

What happens when the Roman soldier presses his spear against your shoulder? The Roman government could be cruel, unfair, and force subjects and citizens to carry burdens! Can you imagine being forced to bear a burden by the very government that oppressed you? Even when the burden is despised (like taxes) we must be willing to submit. **Again we surrender rather than retaliate!** You mean Jesus hates a government that guarantees the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? I don't think that is what is meant here! God made people to live in freedom. I am for freedom. Our government and other governments give lip service to freedom—but sometimes they ask the Citizen to bear a burden.

**What in the world are you saying Jesus?** The Lord Jesus issues a constant call throughout His ministry to self-sacrifice. The life God calls us to live must be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit and the example of Christ. Jesus calls on us to answer insult (v.39) and injustice (v.40) and inconvenience (v.41) with love. William MacDonald calls this the gospel of the second mile (see Believer's Bible Commentary pp.1222-1223).

#### **The Law Of Generosity (v.42)**

*42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.*

Does this mean give to anyone whatever they want? Even if it might harm them? The Lord Jesus does not command us to give them what they want the most—but rather what they need the most. What is Jesus saying? Christians are givers not takers! We help those in need. The picture is fairly simple—when someone needs help we help. But the Bible is not suggesting help absent wisdom or absent discernment or absent discretion. In Psalm 112:5 we read, "A good man shows favor, and lends; he will guide his affairs with *discretion*". *We give with discretion.* What does that mean? We give—but not to encourage laziness or idleness or license! We are motivated by love and compassion. The believer stands ready to give and help the needy.

## **The Believer's Right Not To Fight**

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

We work to meet our needs and to help those in need. The Bible also says, “let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that has need” (2 Co. 9:7-8).

We give—but we give in such a way that the person who receives trusts the Lord.

We give—knowing that we are stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us.

We do not give to satisfy a greed—or to further—wickedness or sin. We are not under obligation to respond to every foolish, selfish, request that someone makes. If a child asks for a loaded gun or a psychotic killer a knife—you don't give it to them.

What is implied? Citizens in God's Kingdom are generous when faced with real need. We are not talking about tokens—gifts given to ease the conscience but a real desire to help people in need.

### **Conclusion**

In a broken world Citizens offer resistance, seek revenge, exercise retaliation. Jesus has a better idea. Jesus encourages us to love our enemies. Jesus introduces the idea that forgiveness is a choice rather than retaliation. When faced with the decision to suffer or cause suffering—to harm or be harmed Jesus opts to take the loss. We suffer insult and injury and refuse to get even. A willingness to love means a willingness to suffer hurt and not run away from pain. **The citizens in God's Kingdom are never to be the ones who cause pain and then run away. The only person who can live—without a grudge, without spite, without resentment, without offense is the person who has died to self. When you fight for your rights, insist on your rights, retaliate when injured—it is proof positive self remains on the throne of your life. Rom. 14:8; “For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”**

George Mueller wrote; “There was a day when I died, utterly to George Mueller and his opinions, his preferences, and his tastes and his will. I died to the world, to its approval and censure. I died to the the approval or the blame of even my brethren and friends. And since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.”

Abraham decided to give the best land to Lot. Joseph decided to kiss and forgive his brothers. David refused to take Saul's life. Elisha fed the enemy armies of Assyria. Stephen prayed for his killers—even when they were killing him. This is what Jesus wants from you.