

FLIPPED

"THE FLIPSIDE OF REVENGE" MATTHEW 5:38-48

This Week's Core Competency

Kindness-Goodness – I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*

Jesus regularly criticized the Jews for their wrong-headed interpretation of the law, which resulted in them sacrificing its spirit on their legalistic altar. In Matthew 23:23 he warned, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." And in Mark 7:9-13 he declared, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And

Seriously following Jesus entails hard thinking about what he said and what he did not say.

- D. A. Carson

you do many things like that."

Based on their interpretation of the law which read, "If there is serious injury, 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" (Ex 21:23-25; cf. Lev 24:20; Dt 19:21), the Jews of Jesus' day understood that a man who had suffered a personal injury or loss had the right to retaliate in kind or seek comparable damages. Only in one case was this not permitted. A murderer was not allowed to buy his freedom; he had to die (Nu 35:31). This *lex talionis* or law of retaliation as it is sometimes called worked for justice by demanding that evildoers be punished while, at the same time, it worked against vindictiveness and cruelty by demanding that punishments fit their crimes.

The Mishnah, a six-part code of descriptive rules formulated toward the end of the second century A.D. by a small number of Jewish sages, gives us a good look at the attitudes and practices of the Jews to whom Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The fourth division on the order of damages contains rules prescribing that compensation must be paid to an injured party and how to calculate it. One part of the tractate *Baba Qamma* (8:1) reads:

A. He who injures his fellow is liable to [compensate] him on five counts:

B. (1) injury, (2) pain, (3) medical costs, (4) loss of income [lit.: loss of time], and (5) indignity.

C. For injury: How so?

D. [If] one has blinded his eye, cut off his hand, broken his leg, they regard him as a slave up for sale in the market and make an estimate of how much he was worth beforehand [when whole], and how much he is now worth.

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E. Pain:

F. [If] he burned him with a spit or a nail,

G. and even on his fingernail, a place in which [the injury] does not leave a lasting wound,

H. they assess how much a man in his status is willing to take to suffer pain of that sort.

I. Medical costs:

J. [If] he hit him, he is liable to provide for his medical care.

K. [If] sores arise on him, if [they are] on account of the blow, he is liable; [but if] they are not on account of the blow, he is exempt.

And so on . . .

On a lighter note, in another place in the same tractate reads (3:4):

A. Two pot sellers, who were going along one after another,

B. and the first of them stumbled and fell down,

C. and the second stumbled over the first—

D. the first one is liable [to pay compensation for] the injuries of the second."

But if two were going along and one was running and the other one was ambling or both of them were running, and they injured one another, then both of them are exempt (3:6).

Their preoccupation with seeking damages overshadowed any interest they might have had in showing kindness.

For Discussion

A single mom who attends your church damaged your car in the parking lot; she left a note to apologize. When you took your car to be repaired, you discovered it would cost \$485 to have the bumper repaired and refinished. When you talked to her about having the repairs made, she told you her insurance would not cover the cost and she would have to reimburse you herself. You know you can't afford to have it repaired, you know she is the one responsible, but you also know that she can't afford to have it repaired either. What do you do?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 5:38-48

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your

neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NIV(c)1984)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Bracket "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth" in v. 38.

* Draw a line through "and" in v. 38.

* Box "but" indicating contrast in vv. 39, 44.

* Circle "resist" in v. 39.

* Circle "evil person" in v. 39.

* Underline "right cheek" in v. 39.

* Bracket "love your neighbor and hate your enemy" in v. 43.

* Box "that" indicating purpose/result in v. 45.

* Circle "greet" in v. 47.

* Circle "perfect" (2x) in v. 48.

* Box "therefore" indicating result in v. 48.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Jews in Jesus' day read "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" much like many do today. Explain whether their interpretation of the *lex talionis* was prescriptive or restrictive.
2. Contrast Jesus' interpretation with theirs.
3. Explain the significance of "right cheek." Jesus could have said, "If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also."
4. Explain the significance of the defendant voluntarily surrendering his "cloak" to the plaintiff in a lawsuit.
5. Should Jesus' instructions regarding giving charity and loaning money be taken in an absolute sense, i.e., without exception? Explain.
6. Comment on the connection between the fifth (vv. 38-42) and the sixth (vv. 43-48) antitheses.
7. Contrast Jesus' interpretation of the command to "love your neighbor" with that of Jews in his day.
8. Explain the relationship of what Jesus said in verse 45a to the adage, "like Father, like son."
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the point of verses 45b-47.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Matthew 5:38-48 contains the last two "antitheses" found in the chapter. Different headings in the NIV obscure the close relationship between the two. Although the heading for the fifth is "An Eye for an Eye," it could just as easily be given the heading "Love for Brothers," which would clarify the fact that both pertain to love—the one for friends, the other for enemies.

The context for reading the fifth antithesis is summarized well by one author. "The Jewish people had heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' This famous law is found in Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, and Deuteronomy 19. Two things must be remembered about this law. First, however prescriptive it might have been, it was also restrictive; and therefore it was an excellent tool for eliminating blood feuds and inter-tribal warfare. Suppose someone cuts off my brother's hand, and I go and knock off the assailant's head. Immediately the initial violence has been escalated, and the assailant's family may feel honor-bound to butcher both me and my family. Where then will it end? But if, instead, the initial act of violence is met with reprisal in precisely the same kind and degree, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, that is the end of the matter. Second, the law was given to the Jewish people qua nation. The law was not designed to be discharged by individuals swept up in personal vendettas, but by the judiciary. By Jesus' day, however, both of these fundamentals 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" (D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 58, 59). Jews in Jesus' day used the law to serve their personal ends. They used what it said about divorce to legitimize divorce for any reason; they used what it said about oaths to parse their words and thereby escape their obligations; they used what it said about retaliation to excuse their tight-fisted, penny-pinching attitudes.

Jesus set them straight. "Do not resist an evil person," he told them. In other words, you don't have to retaliate against someone who wrongs you. The

law was given to *restrict* retaliation *not* to require it, so you have other options. By the way, it is almost certain that by the time of Jesus, literal retaliation for injury had been replaced in Jewish legal practice by money penalties, i.e., paying damages. If someone delivers a backhanded insult, you don't have to retaliate. (He wasn't talking about defending oneself in an assault.) Instead, you can turn the other cheek. If you give your tunic as collateral for a loan that you can't repay, you don't have to exercise your right to your cloak. Instead, you can give it to the lender it as well. If a Roman soldier commandeers you carry his gear for a mile, you don't have to drop it in front of him after walking 5,280 feet. Instead, you can carry it two miles or even further. You can "go the extra mile." And when someone asks for charity or for a loan, you don't have to turn him away because you think he doesn't deserve it or is a bad risk. Instead, you can give him charity no questions asked or make him a loan never expecting to be repaid. Ironically, Jews in Jesus' day were using the principle of judicial retribution as an excuse for the very thing it was instituted to abolish, namely personal vengeance, and Jesus would have none of it.

The context for reading the sixth antithesis is summarized well by another author. "We have already seen how blatant a perversion of the law is the instruction, 'Love you neighbor and hate your enemy,' because of what it omits from the commandment and adds to it. It deliberately narrows both the standard of love (leaving out the crucial words 'as yourself', which pitch the standard very high) and its object (qualifying the category of 'neighbour' by specifically excluding enemies from it and adding the command to hate them instead). I call the perversion 'blatant' because it is totally lacking in justification, and yet the rabbis would have defended it as legitimate interpretation. They seized on the immediate context of the inconvenient command to love the neighbour, pointing out that Leviticus 19 is addressed 'to all the congregation of the people of Israel'. It gives instructions to Israelites on their duties to their own parents, and more widely to their 'neighbour' and their 'brother'. They were not to oppress or rob him, whatever his social status might be. 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart . . . you shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall

love your neighbour as yourself' (vv. 17, 18). It was easy enough for ethical casuists (consciously or unconsciously anxious to ease the burden of this command) to twist it to their own convenience. 'My neighbour', they argued, 'is one of my own people, a fellow Jew, my own kith and kin, who belongs to my race and my religion. The law says nothing about strangers or enemies. So, since the command is to love only my neighbor, it must be taken as a permission, even an injunction, to hate my enemy. For he is not my neighbor that I should love him.' The reasoning is rational enough to convince those who wanted to be convinced, and to confirm them in their own racial prejudice. But it is a rationalization, and a specious one at that" (John R. W. Stott, *The Sermon on the Mount*, TBST, 115). Jews in Jesus' day interpreted "neighbor" as

narrowly as possible in order to justify the limited boundaries of their love.

And again Jesus set them straight. "Love your enemies," he told them, "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." In other words, if you want to be like your Father in heaven, you must love your enemies because that's exactly what he does. "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (v. 45). If you only show love to those who love you, if you only show favor to your brothers, you're only doing what tax collectors and pagans do. You're only acting like them. If you want to be sons of your Father in heaven, you must do much more. Christ's disciples are not called to be imperfect but to be perfect.

The Message of the Passage

Christ's disciples operate out of love for friend and foe alike, neither returning tit for tat nor hating their persecutors.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 38 **it was said** "The introductory formula, as in the second and sixth antitheses, lacks only the reference to 'the ancients' [*tois archaiois*]. The material cited is again drawn verbatim (as in the first two antitheses), except for the [*kai*], 'and,' from the OT (LXX), where it occurs identically in Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; and Deut 19:21" (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33a, *Matthew 1-13*, 130).
- v. 38 **eye for eye . . .** "In the fifth antithesis Jesus condemns the way that the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) had been abused to promote personal revenge. Found in similar form in the Code of Hammurabi (#196-200), the *lex talionis* is prominent in the Torah as God's means of providing justice and of purging evil from among his people . . . In some ancient societies punishment was handed out without regard for individual cases, and often the penalty far exceeded the crime. The law of retaliation was established as a check to inappropriate punishment" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 248). "The context makes it clear beyond question that this was an instruction to the judges of Israel. Indeed, they are mentioned in Deuteronomy 19:17, 18. It expressed the *lex talionis*, the principle of an exact retribution, whose purpose was both to lay the foundation of justice, specifying the punishment which a wrongdoer deserved, and to limit the compensation of his victim to an exact equivalent and no more" (Stott, 104).
- v. 39 **resist** "Set in antithesis to the judicial principle of the *lex talionis*, to oppose connotes legal opposition quite specifically in a judicial sense . . . Paraphrased, then, 5:39a would read, You shall not oppose an evil person in court" (Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 219); "it clearly refers to the legal right to sue for compensation from an aggressor" (Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation, 54). "*Antisthenai* ('resist') in v. 39 was often used in a legal context (cf. Isa 50:8) and in light of v. 40 is probably to be taken that way here. Jesus' teaching then parallels 1 Cor 6:7 against not taking fellow believers to court, thought it could be translated somewhat more broadly as 'do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you' (GNB)" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 113).
- v. 39 **evil person** "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 (as RSV rightly translates) or 'the man who wrongs you' (NEB)" (Stott, 105).
- v. 39 **right cheek** "Striking a person on the right cheek suggests a backhanded slap from a typically right-handed aggressor and was a characteristic Jewish form of insult. Jesus tells us not to trade such insults even if it means receiving more. In no sense does v. 39 require Christians to subject themselves or others to physical danger or abuse, nor does it bear directly on the pacifism-just war debate" (Blomberg, 113; for a brief discussion on that debate see Stott, 108-14).
- v. 40 **take** "Jesus envisages a situation in which someone adopts legal measures to deprive the disciple of his tunic. Take means here 'take into one's possession'; the verb can be used of seizing by force (21:35, 39). The proper response is not to fight back, but to be ready to let him have the outer garment as well, a more expensive garment and one that even the poorest had the right to keep (Exod. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:12-13). A person had an inalienable right to his cloak; it could not be taken away from him permanently. Its voluntary surrender is thus significant" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 128).
- v. 41 **two miles** "Verse 41 continues the legal motif by referring to Roman conscription of private citizens to help carry military equipment for soldier as they traveled" (Blomberg, 113; cf., 27:32).
- v. 42 **give** "With these sayings Jesus removes the obligation of judging the merit of the request for charity or the loan. His disciples are free to live generously without question" (Wilkins, 251). Giving and lending should be based on love (Lk 6:35). "Don't be asking yourself all the time, 'What's in it for me? What can I get out of it?'" (Carson, 62).
- v. 43 **it was said** "The final antithesis is the first to begin with a quotation not entirely from Scripture. 'Love your neighbor' comes from Lev 19:18, but 'hate your enemy' appears nowhere in the Old Testament" (Blomberg, 114).
- v. 44 **sons** "In Semitic thought, 'son' (or 'daughter') is used figuratively to express the idea that a person shares the quality or nature of the source specified" (Hare, 60, 61). So to love one's enemies is to be like the Father in heaven—like Father, like son. "God loves like that [i.e., v. 44], and his sons come to love in some measure like that, too" (Morris, 131).
- v. 47 **greet** "[*aspasesthe*] 'salute,' 'greet,' in parallelism with 'love,' means something like 'wish peace and blessing upon' or 'show favor toward' (the only other use of the word in Matthew occurs in 10:12)" (Hagner, 135).

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.
Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

Declare this week in your house as RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS WEEK! Post a large sign near the front door (even outside the front door) to declare your week-long celebration. Tell all family members to perform random acts of kindness each day. At dinnertime or before bed, have everyone report the acts of kindness they performed. Keep note of ones that are especially meaningful or unique. At the end of the week, have a RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS dinner and awards show. Hand out handwritten or computer generated certificates to all family members commemorating a special act they performed this week. If Johnny washed the dog without being asked, give him the TOP DOG GROOMER Award. If mom bought the person behind her at Starbuck's cup of coffee, she gets the GIFT OF FREE CAFFINE Award. Be creative! You can even go to the dollar store and get small objects that represent the acts as trophies. Being kind to others is contagious and once your kids get a taste of it they will develop a life-long habit of thinking of others first and serving. Sometimes they are easy to overlook so take the time to celebrate acts of kindness in your family everyday!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Matthew 5:38-48

1. What does "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" mean?
2. What does Jesus say we are supposed to do instead of seeking revenge?
3. Jesus said, "Love your _____ and pray for those who _____ you." (v. 44)
4. Who is easy to love? Who is hard to love?

What Do You Think

1. Do most people choose to forgive or seek revenge?
2. Why might Jesus want us to pray for those who persecute us?
3. According to the passage, how can we differ in this world?

What R U Going To Do

Visit one of the following websites to find ways to pray for Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus. Caution: Parents, preview stories first as some may contain disturbing information.
www.persecutedchurch.org
www.persecution.com
www.opendoorsusa.org

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Kindness/Goodness - Treating others better than myself

Memory Verse

Matthew 5:44, "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . ."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** ____ **Think** ____ **Do** ____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
 Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.