

"God's Standards for Dealing with Offensives"

Part 1

Matthew 5:38-42

Introduction: In our study of the Sermon on the Mount we have come to a passage of Scripture that applies to everyone and at the same time it is in complete contrast with how we think. You will see this as we consider this passage. There is much here to be covered so it will take two weeks to cover that which is before us.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is doing two things:

1. He is showing His disciples how children of the Kingdom are to live their lives.
2. He is speaking directly to the self righteous religious leaders and He is stripping them completely of their self righteousness.

He has showed them they are murders, adulterers, liars, and in the section we are about to dive into Jesus will show them they have sinful hearts full of revenge, vengeance, unforgiveness and hatred. Some may say that Jesus was too sharp and direct with these people but that is what they needed. There was no other way for them to see their true spiritual condition and their need for a Savior until they first of all were brought face to face with their sin and that is exactly what Jesus does in Matthew 5.

In our society today people are always crying about their rights. Our society is very big on rights today. There are civil rights, women's rights, equal rights, constitutional rights, workers rights and the list goes on and on. To go along with all of these rights is the constant

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fight for rights. The unions are fighting for the rights of its members, attorneys fight for the rights of people every day. We live in a society where people are always demanding their rights. We are taught today that if someone infringes on your rights then do all you can to get even with them. We have been taught to take nothing from anyone and when someone violates our rights that we have the right to pay them back for their actions. We make heroes out of people that stand their ground and refuse to allow anyone to infringe on their rights. Our society views people that are meek and humble and those who are weak. They are seen as people who are afraid of standing for their rights.

So with all of this going on in our society we as believers have played right into the fight and the demand for rights. If someone does something to us there is that desire to somehow get even with them. You see there is always that desire in all of us to have the last word so that we can walk away feeling that we really gave them a piece of our minds and we really put them in their place.

Where does all of this come from? Let me show you a few verses and then help you to see what has happened.

Genesis 1:26-27

²⁶ And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

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You and I have been created in the image of God and I believe that part of that image within us is the desire to see justice. That only makes sense because God is a God of justice and we have been created in His image. But the desire for justice that has been placed within us has been distorted by sin and now because of the sinful heart of man that justice has been turned into revenge and vengeance. Every person here has that potential within them to seek vengeance and revenge and the desire to get even. We all have at one time or another demanded our rights.

Now just in case I have entered into your personal space and you are thinking that you do have certain rights and that NO ONE is going to take them from you let me show you something that Paul wrote.

1 Corinthians 9:4-6, 12

⁴ Have we not power to eat and to drink?

⁵ Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

⁶ Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

¹² If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

Paul says here, "Don't we have the right to food and water at the church's expense, and have the right to marry, and have the right to be supported by the church for the work of the ministry which we do?" Then in verse 12 he tells them that he has set all of his rights aside for the so as not to hinder the gospel in anyway. Let me tell you exactly

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what Paul was saying here, "My personal rights are nothing to me compared to building God's Kingdom. I am willing to set aside all of my rights so as to reach the lost for Jesus Christ."

I give you all of this to set the stage for what we are about to consider in Matthew 5 and because we live in a society that lives by the "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" law. With all of this said let us get to the first point tonight.

I. The Teaching of the Rabbis (5:38)

Notice Matthew 5:38

Here again Jesus makes a reference to the teaching of the religious leaders. Not the teaching that He refers to is actually found in the Old Testament in 3 different passages. It is the teaching "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". This was exactly what the religious leaders taught and it was right out of the Old Testament but they had pulled the verse completely out of context. They had taken the verse and they had twisted it to fit their own sinful hearts just as they had done with so many other parts of the Law. It is my desire to place this statement back into the proper context and to show you exactly what they were doing. In order to understand their distorted teaching we must take a journey through the Old Testament.

I want to show you first of all the passages where the saying is found.

Exodus 21:22-24

²² If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

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²³ And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

²⁴ Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

²⁵ Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Leviticus 24:16-22

¹⁶ And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.

¹⁷ And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.

¹⁸ And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast.

¹⁹ And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him;

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.

²¹ And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death.

²² Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 19:16-21

¹⁶ If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;

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17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;

18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

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.

In these 3 passages there are some key words that help us to understand the context.

Exodus 21:22

22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

Leviticus 24:16

16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.

Deuteronomy 19:17-18

17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;

18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother

The words priests, congregation, and judges tell us that the law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was meant to be carried out in the civil court. The entire meaning behind the law was the punishment was to fit the crime. God established this law for several reasons.

1. To protect innocent people. - If there was a thief in the midst of the people he would be caught and taken to the civil court where he would be punished and that punishment was designed to stop him from stealing again. Thus the law would protect the innocent people.
2. To instill in the minds of the people there are consequences for sin.
3. To be sure the person's punishment was not beyond his or her crime. - You see it is the tendency of mankind to want to go way beyond a tooth for a tooth. Most of the time people desire two legs for a tooth. This law limited vengeance.

Let me show you how this was carried out in the Old Testament.

Judges 1:6-7

6 But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

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7 And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

This was the law of "an eye for an eye" in action.

Let me get back to the point. The law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was meant for the court system. It was not meant to be carried out by the individual who was offended or harmed. The offender was to be handed over to the court system where he would be handed his punishment. But God's law for Israel did not stop there.

Leviticus 19:16-18

16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour; I am the LORD.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

They were to hand the criminal over to the court system and they were **not** to carry a grudge. They were to forgive the criminal. Now please don't think that forgiveness was only to be given when the offence was small. This applied to every situation when someone was a victim of a crime, from perjury to murder. Justice was to be carried out and forgiveness was to be given.

Now let us get back to Matthew 5:38.

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The rabbis had taken this Old Testament law and pulled it completely out of context and they were teaching that the Old Testament law of "an eye for an eye" justified getting even with the person who had committed a crime against them. Just as they had with many other passages they had twisted this law so as to justify their own sinful hearts. They used the "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" law to justify the unforgiveness, the vengeance, and the hatred they possessed in their hearts for those who had offended them. The law was meant to make sure the punishment fit the crime and to keep the punishment in the limits of the crime. The religious leaders used the law as a "right" to carry out personal vengeance.

This law was never meant for personal revenge it was meant only for the court system. God knew that if it was ever carried out personally there would be nothing but chaos in society. By the way make a note of this thought, when people are all about getting their rights and they decide to fight for their rights it always leads to lawlessness. People who are focused upon their rights and are set on fighting for them will always push the law aside in order to get what they think they deserve. That is lawlessness.

Let me put this altogether so we can understand what God desires of all of us. It is justice in the court room and forgiveness in the heart.

Notice Matthew 5:38-39

If we are somehow attacked by a criminal we are to hand them to the court system for their justice and we are to love them and forgive them in our hearts.

Conclusion:

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How is this even possible because we are talking about real criminals here? We are not just talking about someone who has cut us off and stolen our parking place at the grocery store.

The answer is in something we learned months ago in our study of God's Word. This can only be done when we die to self. It is the old self in us that demands the rights and seeks to retaliate when offended. That which God desires of us will never be seen in us as long as we allow self to control us.

Romans 14:8

⁸ For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

1 Corinthians 15:31b

I die daily.