**Revenge?**

*Matthew 5:38-42*

FBCMBTS, 1/15; Singapore, March 16, 2016

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Preached at Crossroads International Church, Singapore

S: How did Jesus reframe the OT Law of *lex talionis* for his disciples?

C: By commanding them to not resist evil when honor, property, or liberty were abused but rather to give and lend freely.

HI: Renounce your right to revenge; embrace Christ’s call to bless.

P Think—understand Jesus’ fulfilling of the Law.

Feel—thankful and inspired at how Jesus modeled his own kingdom principles.

Do—Replace revenge with blessing.

Intro: Mark Twain said that he wasn’t troubled by the parts of the Bible he couldn’t understand. It was the parts of the Bible he DID understand that caused him grief. I wonder if he was reading the Sermon on the Mount. If your hand offends you cut it off. Do not worry about food and clothing. Love your enemies. Be ye perfect. Today: turn the other cheek, go the extra mile.

*Trans: I have some sympathy for MT.*

1. **Perfectly good law.** *Lex Talionis.* Law of retribution. Equal measure.

Lev. 24:19-20, (cf. Ex. 21:24) If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

* + Caused evildoers to think twice. Restrained evil.
  + Restrained the injured. Mitigated revenge.
  + Placed vengeance in hands of court, not individual.
  + Fair! Good law.
  + Hammurabi’s Law Code had similar law, but OT better. Ham’s varied the penalty based on status. E.g. harmed a slave, not equal harm to you. OT flattens this to a great degree because all are in image of God. Good law. *Lex talionis.*

*Trans: But Jesus overturned the OT Law. Maybe “overturned” is too strong. He fulfilled it. Carried it forward on the same trajectory and displayed in his own life. 17. How did he fulfill this law of* Lex Talionis*, law of equal retribution? He said ....*

1. **Put vengeance in a judge’s hands.**

\*\*Explain: yes, retribution is right, retribution is coming. God is just. The martyrs cry out in Revelation, how long oh Lord? He said be patient, have faith, I see, I hear, the grapes of wrath are stored and will be trampled out. Put vengeance in my hands.

Romans 12:17-19, Repay no one evil for evil . . . . Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

\*\*Convince that we can put vengeance in God’s hands: Father

* Lord’s Prayer
* Father in Heaven will reward (6:4, 6, 18);
* Do not be anxious (6:26—Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Luke, “not one of them falls”

[DDA’s bird house]

*Trans: So Jesus gives us a new way based on a renewed vision of God our Father. Vengeance is coming, but let’s leave that to God, your loving father. Instead . . .*

1. **Renounce your right to revenge and embrace Christ’s call to bless.**

* **Personal Honor** (38-39).

\*\*Explain slap (visual aid) Not personal injury as much as shame/honor. Very severe crime, both Jewish and Roman law have laws about it.

\*\*Application: stranger swears at you, tailgating you, boss yells at you.

* **Personal Property** (40).

\*\*Explain clothing. Loin cloth, one or more tunics, outer cloak, belt, head covering, sandals. Tunic [chiton] = undergarment worn next to skin. Long sleeved, long. Cloak [himation] is more important garment also used for sleeping.

Ex. 22:25-27 (cf. Dt. 24:10-13) If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering . . . in what else shall he sleep?

\*\*Apply—**Renounce your right to revenge, embrace Christ’s call to bless.**

Perhaps we have some sympathy for Mark Twain!

* **Personal liberty** (41).

\*\*Explain: Roman soldiers could requisition. Often not paid enough or given enough resources. Promoted scavenging and domineering. Notable example: Simon of Cyrene. “Mile” = “one thousand steps.”

\*\*Apply: [Watchman Nee. Pumped water (laborious). Neighbor drained. Pumped enough for two, melted man’s heart.]

42. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

*Trans: Review. That’s what he said, the way of his disciples.* ***Renounce your right to personal revenge. Embrace our Lord’s call to bless.*** *But these commands raise all sorts of questions:*

* *Isn’t justice also a biblical ideal, not just mercy?*
* *Where is the place for confrontation, rebuking? Isn’t that part of what it means to be a disciple?*
* *Where is the place of prophetic speech, denouncing evil? Jesus models this, doesn’t he? Yes, he does.*
* *Didn’t Peter and John resist the governing evil authorities? Yes. We must obey God rather than men.*
* *What about Bonhoeffer? He resisted Hitler, even joined an assassination plot. Was he right? Was he a Sermon on the Mount disciple?*
* *What does it look like in everyday life to* ***renounce our right to revenge and embrace Christ’s call to bless?***

*Lots of questions. Not sure I can unwind this golf ball, but here are some considerations that might help:*

1. **Answering objections.**

* Justice IS a virtue. Takes wisdom to be a disciple. Time and place for everything.
* This passage deals with personal hurt. Not speaking about defending defenseless and oppressed. Examples: your children, spouse, poor, uneducated, unborn babies. Even in those cases, we do not take vengeance, but we do defend.
* God has appointed government to deal retribution.
* Hyperbole. Not promoting nakedness.

*Trans: Nevertheless, even if we soften Jesus’ radical call to* ***renounce revenge*** *we’re still left with a radical call. The hyperbole is there for a purpose. Even if limited to personal hurt that is plenty to keep us busy. Maybe the best guide we have is our Lord. So what does it mean to* ***renounce revenge and embrace this call to discipleship, this call to bless? It means we walk in his steps. Jesus renounced personal vengeance. He blessed.*** *The final standard of ethics for a disciple is the example of our Lord. Ultimately it comes down to . . .*

1. **What would Jesus do?**

1 Peter 2:21-23, To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might walk in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

**Conclusion:** He trusted God to look out for his personal honor, property, liberty. He blessed those who cursed him and prayed for those that despitefully used him. People like you and me. He did not use lex talionis on us. Rather, he used it on his Son. “Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.” Knowing that Jesus has blessed us, and feeling the humbling joy of forgiven sins, and trusting God our heavenly father, like Jesus, we **renounce our so called right to revenge and instead we bless.**