

The Forgotten Jesus Podcast
S7E31
Selfless Kingdom Living - Matthew 5:38-42

Description – We’re continuing today on the saying of Jesus from Matthew 5, looking today at what Jesus says about the type of lifestyle we’re to demonstrate to the world around us.

Matthew 5:38-42

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.** ³⁹ But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and don’t turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

A lot of people will use this passage as a proof-text for pacificism, and that may be part of it. But there’s more here. Remember, he’s interpreting the law. Specifically Jesus is dealing with the Law of Retaliation here.

Exodus 21:22-25

²² “When men get in a fight and hit a pregnant woman so that her children are born prematurely but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman’s husband demands from him, and he must pay according to judicial assessment. ²³ If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

So what’s happening here? If you hurt me, I’ll hurt you back. There’s a measured response here as well. You don’t get to kill someone for insulting you or punching you in the face. In other words, the punishment fits the crime.

God is showing that a punishment needs to match the crime committed against the person. The Law provided civil justice and allowed restitution to be made.

Leviticus 24:17-21

¹⁷ “If a man kills anyone, he must be put to death. ¹⁸ Whoever kills an animal is to make restitution for it, life for life. ¹⁹ If any man inflicts a permanent injury on his neighbor, whatever he has done is to be done to him: ²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Whatever injury he inflicted on the person, the same is to be inflicted on him. ²¹ Whoever kills an animal is to make restitution for it, but whoever kills a person is to be put to death.

So what does Jesus mean when He says, “don’t resist an evildoer?”

Jesus doesn't come to replace the Law, but to give the proper or right interpretation to the Law.

In Jewish culture, if someone tried to kill you, you had a right to defend your life, even up to the point of killing the other person if you had to.

Jesus is saying here's a better way to think about it. The issue with the phrase, "don't resist an evildoer"

But there are clear examples of people opposing or resisting in the bible.

We're even told in **1 Peter 5:8-9**,

⁸ Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

Galatians 2:11

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

John 18:19-23

¹⁹ The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

²⁰ "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus answered him. "I have always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews gather, and I haven't spoken anything in secret. ²¹ Why do you question me? Question those who heard what I told them. Look, they know what I said."

²² When he had said these things, one of the officials standing by slapped Jesus, saying, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?"

²³ "If I have spoken wrongly," Jesus answered him, "give evidence about the wrong; but if rightly, why do you hit me?"

Example: Jesus in the temple overturning the money changers tables, opposing what they were doing and practicing in the temple.

When Jesus says "don't resist an evildoer" he's saying you should not respond to evil with evil.

Back to Matthew 5:

Matthew 5:38-42

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What have we been taught about “turning the other cheek” - that we’re to not strike back, that we’re to just turn the other cheek so they can strike it too.

But remember what Jesus taught us about reconciliation with a brother or sister who has something against us. We’re to be agents of reconciliation. So if someone strikes us, what we really need to work on is getting to the heart of the matter of what’s going on.

Book Pastor References: “The Church Impotent: The Feminization Of Christianity”
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1591280567/>

The backdrop here is that Jesus is talking to people who were under the thumb of Rome, and the Roman footsoldiers who could do basically anything they wanted.

Think about it, when you’re looking at someone and are going to slap them with your right hand, you’re probably hitting their left cheek. In order to (in a right hand dominant society) slap someone on the right cheek, you’re having to backhand them, which was total disrespect.

So to turn the left cheek to them, was basically saying, don’t disrespect me in that way, we are humans created in the image of God. We’re equals.

Jesus is not advocating for being a doormat for evil, or for staying in an abusive relationship.

Jesus is teaching the kind of living and lifestyle and ethics that a kingdom follower has. A kingdom follower is not about getting even, a kingdom follower is all about getting empty. Empty of self and the desire to “get even.”

We’re not trying to appease ourselves, we’re trying to please God with our actions and attitudes. We live lives that are obedient to Him, and trust Him to avenge, Him to restore, Him to do what is right and just.

Remember what Abraham said of the Lord in Genesis 18:25, “Won’t the Judge of the whole earth do what is just?”