

# Matthew 5:38-42

- keep your human dignity as a witness of Christ -

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## Introduction

- ❖ “But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mt 5:39).
  - Does this passage teach non-violence and pacifism? This was the meaning of famous men like the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)<sup>1</sup> and the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).<sup>2</sup> They have been greatly influenced by these words of Jesus.
- ❖ It is necessary to understand:
  - The meaning of the original law in the Old Testament as a rule applied to doing justice by the court. This teaching was probably extended to personal revenge in case of wrongs done by “an evil person.” This evil person is not specified, but given the examples, he is in the position to humiliate a disciple of Christ (“you”) by:
    - **slapping** the face on the right cheek;
    - **suing** for a tunic (underwear);
    - **forcing** for a mile (public service).

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<sup>1</sup> See for information: Wikimedia Foundation. (2023, January 31). Leo Tolstoy. Wikipedia. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo\\_Tolstoy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Tolstoy)

<sup>2</sup> See for information: Wikimedia Foundation. (2023, January 31). Mahatma Gandhi. Wikipedia. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma\\_Gandhi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi)

His intentions ("evil person") are not sincere. He is motivated by, hate, and lust for power over the powerless.

- These actions are possible in cases of oppression and persecution. The theme of persecution is important in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5:10, 11-12, 44; Mt 10:16-23; 13:21; 24:9-14).
  - As they persecuted Christ, the disciples will be persecuted: "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also." (Jn 15:20).
  - And: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:21-23).
- ❖ These examples are not meant to be copied but to be applied differently in various situations of persecution and humiliation as a witness to Christ and preserve human dignity:
  - "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7:12). The law of retaliation (personal revenge) would sound like this: "Do to others what they have done to you."
  - Trust your cause in the hands of God: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom 12:19). See also Romans 12:14-21.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological notes, and technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone".

## Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus a summary of the background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:13-17):
  - Before Jesus was baptised by John, he said: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfil all righteousness.**"
  - And after: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on

him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'

- The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfilment of all righteousness**. <> "For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law..." (Mt. 5:20).

❖ The preaching of Jesus:

- Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
  - "From that time on Jesus began to preach, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt. 4:17).
- Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
  - "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt. 3:1-2).
- And later on, when Jesus sent out his twelve disciples:
  - "As you go, preach this message: '**The kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt. 10:7).
- These two aspects, repentance and the kingdom, are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.

❖ The life of Jesus Christ:

- Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets, and he lived according to the Law and the Prophets. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his life. He lived according to his teachings and by doing so set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." When Jesus was arrested, he didn't strike back.

❖ The future of the Kingdom:

- After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount: "**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (...) and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**" (Mt. 28:18-20).
  - This authority is reflected in expressions like: "**But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Mt. 5:22).
  - And in: "Not everyone who says to me, '**Lord, Lord,**' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but..." (Mt. 7:20).

## Form and structure

- ❖ The Sermon on the Mount consists of five main parts:
  - 1. General calling to repentance and the promise of the Kingdom: Matthew 5:3-10, characterized by: “Blessed are...”
    - 2. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and all who want to learn from him: “Blessed are **you...**” The main theme is “**the prophets**” (Mt. 5:11-16).
      - 3. The central part is an exposition of the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17-7:12):
        - “Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them” (Mt. 5:17)...
          - The Lord’s Prayer is found at the very centre of the sermon!
        - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the **Law and the Prophets**” (Mt. 7:12).
      - 4. After his exposition of the Law and the Prophets, he returns to the theme of the Prophets, and warns against “**the false prophets**” (Mt. 7:13-23). This contrasts with the second part of the sermon.
    - 5. He concludes his sermon again with a general call to choose: “**Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine...**”(Mt. 7:24-27).
- ❖ Matthew 5:38-42:

<i>The teaching of the Pharisees</i>	“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’	
<i>The teaching of Jesus</i>	But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person.	
<b>Examples</b>	<b>“an evil person”</b>	<b>“do not resist”</b>
1.	If someone <b>strikes you</b> on the right cheek,	turn to him the other also.
2.	And if someone <b>wants to sue you</b> and take your tunic,	let him have your cloak as well.
3.	If someone <b>forces you</b> to go one mile,	go with him two miles.
<b>Examples</b>		<b>“do not turn away”</b>
4.	to the one who <b>asks you,</b>	Give

5.	from the one who wants to borrow from you.	and do not turn away
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- ❖ There is a difference between examples 1-3 and 4, 5. The first three are unfriendly and hostile – actions of the “evil person.”
  - Compare the verbs used: to strike / to sue / to force <> to ask / to borrow

### Technical and hermeneutical notes

- ❖ It is important to realise that Jesus preached his sermon around 30 AD in Galilee.
  - To Jews living in a country,
    - which was part of the Roman Empire;
    - who had contact with the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman culture; this culture was prominent in a city like Tiberias (Lake of Tiberias = Sea of Galilee) and the Decapolis, nowadays Jordan.
  - To Jews,
    - who frequented the synagogues and were used to listening to the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes, their spiritual leaders at that time;
    - who were expecting the promised One (according to Dt. 18:15-18; Mal. 4:4-5; Mt. 11:3);
    - who were longing for the restoration of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:12), which is the main theme of Jesus' teachings.
- ❖ This background is needed to understand some passages of the sermon, especially those that speak of persecution (Mt. 5:10-12), pagans (Mt. 6:7, 32) and hypocrites.
  - The selection of topics found within the Sermon on the Mount reflects some debated issues among first-century Jews such as (Mt. 5:31-32; Mt. 19:3-9). Jesus doesn't cover all aspects of the Law, for instance, the fourth commandment (Sabbath Day) is not found here, although it was hotly debated between the Pharisees and Jesus (Mt. 12:1-8). Neither does he refer to the greatest commandment (Mt. 22:37-40).
  - He especially confronts the teaching of the Pharisees and Scribes. Some of the topics found in the sermon are also found in Matthew 23, where he condemns them for their hypocritical stance.

- Jesus doesn't give a new set of rules or applications but proposes a different mindset. This mindset is governed by (see application):
  - the blessings of the Kingdom (Mt. 5:3-10);
  - the Lord's prayer (Mt. 6:9-13), the central part of the sermon.

### Persecution

- ❖ Persecution is an important theme in Matthew, which not must be overlooked concerning Matthew 5:38-42: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10; also Mt 5:11, 12; 5:43, 44; Mt 10:23-39; Mt 16:24-26; Mt 24:9).
  - Bashaw defines persecution as "Persecution occurs when a group or individual inflicts physical, emotional, or social suffering on another individual or group because of who they are or what they believe."<sup>3</sup>
    - This persecution became soon a reality when Jesus was taken captive and crucified. The early church experienced persecution soon after Pentecost (Acts 8:1; 9:1, 2), not only in Judea but later also in other parts of the Roman Empire.
- ❖ Jesus on persecution: "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44).

### Revenge and vengeance<sup>4</sup>

- ❖ Biblical narratives show how revenge "initiate cycles of increasing violence." Note especially the song of revenge of Lamech (Gen 4:23, 24). "Absalom's murder of Amnon, in retaliation for the rape of his sister Tamar, begins a series of events that nearly destroys the house of David (2 Sam 13–20)."
  - "By contrast, the refusal to seek revenge is portrayed as exemplary in the cases of Joseph and his brothers (Gen 50:15–21) and David and Saul (1 Sam 24; 26)."
    - Joseph said: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen 50:19, 20; see also Rom 8:28).
    - David said: "May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you" (2 Sam 24:12).

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<sup>3</sup> Bashaw, J. G. (2011, p. 591). *Persecution*. In J. B. Green (Ed.).

<sup>4</sup> See Couey, J. B. (2011, p. 682). *Revenge*. In J. B. Green (Ed.).

- ❖ Vengeance is identified as a divine prerogative (Ps 94:1; Nah 1:2).
  - "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19).
  - A prayer for revenge is found in Psalm 79:10. See also Psalm 137.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ "The tendency in biblical texts, however, is to curtail and discourage revenge." The *lex talionis* (law of retribution) in Exodus 21:22–27 limits actions of revenge by a standard of proportionality in contrast to the song of Lamech (Gen 4:23, 24). It is a court that speaks justice and not an individual, like Lamech.
- ❖ "Human actions are necessarily inadequate and often have unintended outcomes; consequently, the resolution of wrongs is deferred to God, upon whom all hopes for justice ultimately rest."<sup>6</sup>

#### A comparison with Luke 6:27-36

- ❖ A comparison shows the following:
  - : words of Jesus found in both Gospels, with slight variations.
  - : words of Jesus found in one Gospel and not in the other or as a part of a different pericope.
    - Missing in Luke:
      - "You have heard that it was said... Do not resist an evil person."
      - "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."
    - Missing in Matthew:
      - "Bless those who curse you." (Compare Mt 5:44).
      - "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Compare Mt 7:12.)
      - "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Compare Mt 5:8; 12:7.)
  - : words of Jesus found in both Gospels but at a different relative position.
  - : words of Jesus found in both Gospels but expanded in one of the Gospels or found at another instance in the other Gospel.

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<sup>5</sup> *Psalm 137* - [christianstudylibrary.org](https://www.christianstudylibrary.org). (n.d.). Retrieved January 19, 2023, from <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Psalm%20137.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Couey, J. B. (2011, p. 682). *Revenge*. In J. B. Green (Ed.).

**Matthew 5:38-47**

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

that you may be sons 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.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

**Luke 6:27-36**

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

bless those who curse you,

pray for those who mistreat you.

If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.

If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what



credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great,

and you will be sons of the Most High,

because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

## Exposition

### Verse 38

- ❖ **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’”**
  - **“You have heard.”** You are the disciples, the people standing on the slope of the mount listening to Jesus. Jesus refers to the teaching of the Scribes and the Pharisees, which they (= you) had heard in their synagogues. He does not refer to the teaching of the Old Testament, nor is he quoting the Old Testament!
  - **“that it was said.”** The Scribes and Pharisees read, explained and applied the words of God, which he had given to the people of Israel by his servant Moses. “That is was said” refers to the authority of Moses (and God), which doesn't mean that these words were exactly taken from the Old Testament.
  - **“Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.”**
    - Exodus 21:22-25 is an example of casuistic law based on different cases (see also Lev 24:19, 20; Dt 19:21):
      - Case 1: “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely”
      - Case 1a: “but there is **no serious injury**, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows.”
      - Case 1b: “But 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.”
        - Note the following:
        - A court is involved! This court must decide whether there is a serious injury, fine the offender or set a penalty.
        - Personal revenge and retaliation are not allowed!
        - Stott remarks: “**It thus had the double effect of defining justice and restraining revenge.** It also prohibited the taking of the law into one’s own hands by the ghastly vengeance of the family feud.”<sup>7</sup>
        - Leviticus 19:18: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.”

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<sup>7</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1985, p. 104).

- This law was given by God to the judges of Israel as a rule of administering fair and equitable criminal justice. However, the religious leaders of Jesus' day extended it into an instruction to justify personal revenge in case of "an evil person", or "an enemy."
- Personal revenge was rejected in Proverbs (wisdom):
  - "Do not say, 'I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did.'" (Prov 24:19).
  - "Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you" (Prov 20:22).
  - "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you." (Prov 25: 21, 22; see also Rom 12:17-21).

❖ Jesus does not repudiate the Old Testament law.<sup>8</sup>

- It is possible that the Pharisees limited the teaching to the people of Israel and at the same time taught the people to take revenge when an enemy or evil person was involved.

Verse 39-42

❖ **"But I tell you."** This is in contrast with the teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus does not abrogate the law but he is fulfilling the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17-20), which implies that these teachings are in accordance with Moses, the Law and the Prophets.

- Look at the following table. The green column suggests possible reactions of resistance:

<i>The teaching of the Pharisees</i>	"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'		
<i>The teaching of Jesus</i>	But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person.		
<b>Examples</b>	<b>"an evil person"</b>	<b>"Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth."</b>	<b>"do not resist"</b>
1.	If someone <b>strikes you</b> on the right cheek,	<i>Strike him back</i>	turn to him the other also.
2.	And if someone <b>wants</b>	<i>Take something back</i>	let him have your cloak

<sup>8</sup> As C. Marshall states ((2011, p. 120). *Capital Punishment*. In J. B. Green (Ed.)).

	to sue you and take your tunic,		as well.
3.	If someone forces you to go one mile,	Take revenge	go with him two miles.
<b>Examples</b>			<b>“do not turn away”</b>
4.	to the one who asks you,	Do not give	Give
5.	from the one who wants to borrow from you.	Do not borrow	and do not turn away

- The first three actions are notoriously hostile, the last two are more neutral. The tone of the words is different.
  - The first three are aimed at the humiliation of the other person, see explanation below, especially verse 40. So Schellenberg: “In fact, however, each of Matthew’s examples depicts nonviolent resistance, an attempt to preserve one’s dignity and to unmask the injustice of one’s opponent (Wink). A backhanded slap on the right cheek constitutes an insult, the intention of which is not to injure but to humiliate. By refusing to be cowed and turning the left cheek, which can be struck only with a real, equal-to-equal blow, one robs the aggressor of the power to humiliate.”<sup>9</sup>

### Verse 39

#### ❖ “Do not resist an evil person.”

- not “resist” = “ἀνθίστημι”: 1. be in opposition to, set oneself against, oppose; 2. to be resistant to power, resist;<sup>10</sup> to resist by actively opposing pressure or power.<sup>11</sup>
  - Newman and Stine comment: “The context, as well as the parallels found in (Jewish) rabbinic sources, suggests that the word has a specifically legal connotation: ‘resist’ in a court of law, or ‘oppose’ before a judge. (...) the verb

<sup>9</sup> Schellenberg, R. S. (2013, p. 668). *Peace*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

<sup>10</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 80).

<sup>11</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, Vol. 1, p. 494).

carries the sense of a retort or of a payment in kind, be it immediate and personal or before a court of law (Lk 21:15; Acts 13:8; Rom 13:2; Gal 2:11)."

- "For these reasons it is important that *resist* not be translated so as to refer to physical resistance."<sup>12</sup>
- **"evil person"** = **"πονηρός"**: substantive: *wicked or evil-intentioned person, evildoer*,<sup>13</sup>
  - **"evil"**: pertaining to **being morally or socially worthless, wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate**.<sup>14</sup>

Matthew 5:39	Luke 6:29
If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.	If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also.
"strikes" = <b>"ῥαπίζω"</b> : <b>to strike with the open hand, especially in the face (cheek), slap</b> <sup>15</sup>	"strikes" = <b>"τύπτω"</b> : <b>to inflict a blow, strike, beat, wound</b> . <sup>16</sup> This is more elegant than ῥαπίζω. <sup>17</sup>
"turn to" = <b>"στρέφω"</b> : <b>to change the position of something, turning</b>	"turn to" = <b>"παρέχω"</b> : <b>to make available, give up, offer, present</b> <sup>18</sup>

- **"strikes you"** = **"slaps you."**
  - Newman and Stine remark: "In the near East, both in Jesus' day and in the present, **the most insulting physical blow** that one can give another is a slap with the back of the hand against the right cheek. Luke, on the other hand, substitutes a different verb (6:29; see above), suggesting 'a violent act.'"<sup>19</sup>
  - It is an act of humiliation, both in the Roman-Greek and in the Jewish world.

<sup>12</sup> Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 148).

<sup>13</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 851).

<sup>14</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 851).

<sup>15</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 903).

<sup>16</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1020).

<sup>17</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 904).

<sup>18</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 776).

<sup>19</sup> Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 149).

- “turn him the other also”
  - This is an act of moral strength. It is in a sense, revenge in reverse.<sup>20</sup>
    - Isaiah 50:6: “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.” See also Matthew 26:67 and 27:30.

Verse 40

- ❖ The following example sounds absurd. Why should someone sue somebody and take a tunic? It is the “evil person”! He wants to expose the nakedness and thereby humiliate the other.

Matthew 5:40	Luke 6:29
And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.	If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.
<p>“to sue” = “κρίνω”: 5. <b>to engage in a judicial process, judge, decide, hale before a court, condemn</b><sup>21</sup></p> <p>order: tunic – cloak</p>	<p>“to take” = “αἰρέω”: 3. ③ <b>to take away, remove, or seize control without suggestion of lifting up, take away, remove.</b> By force, even by killing.<sup>22</sup></p> <p>order: cloak – tunic</p>

- “tunic” = “χιτών”: *tunic, shirt*, a garment worn next to the skin.<sup>23</sup>
- “cloak” = “ἱμάτιον”: a piece of clothing, 2. outer clothing *cloak, robe*<sup>24</sup>
- Nolland comments: “First, we have no reason to doubt that the indebtedness implied is genuine: the plaintiff has a good case. Second, the one being summoned to court is extremely poor: there is nothing but the clothing in which he or she stands to sue for in compensation for the unpaid debt. Third, the attempt to gain possession of the tunic,

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<sup>20</sup> Betz, H. D. (1995, p. 289).

<sup>21</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 568).

<sup>22</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 28).

<sup>23</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1085).

<sup>24</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 475).

while probably not technically in violation of OT law, is clearly in violation of the spirit of Ex. 22:25–27.”<sup>25</sup>

- First, we do have reason to doubt that the indebtedness is not genuine. It is the “**evil person**” who acts as a plaintiff. Second, we don’t know anything about the poverty of the one being summoned. Jesus addresses “you,” which implies that every disciple can be summoned to court. And third, the “evil person” or wicked person is not interested in the spirit of the Old Testament law.
- Nolland continues: “It is doubtful whether the situation envisaged in the example would ever arise in practice, and if it did, whether the court would countenance such an action.”<sup>2627</sup> It must be stressed, that this has happened in times of persecution, as history has shown.
- Chrysostom<sup>28</sup> writes: “After you give your coat and your cloak, even if your enemy should wish to subject your naked body to hardships and labors, not even then, Jesus says, must you forbid him.”<sup>29</sup>

#### Verse 41

- ❖ This third example is not found in Luke but it fits in the context of Matthew.
  - = “**ἀγγαρεύω**”: *press into service, and so force, compel*<sup>30</sup> (Mt 27:32 – Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross of Jesus.)
  - This is also meant to humiliate.
  - The answer is: show your human dignity.

#### In short

- ❖ Betz comments: “There can be no question that the *evil* must be defeated and eliminated if justice is to prevail. The evil committed cannot be eliminated by revenge against the evildoer,

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<sup>25</sup> Nolland, J. (2005, p. 259).

<sup>26</sup> Nolland, J. (2005, p. 259).

<sup>27</sup> Luz, U. (2007, p. 272).

<sup>28</sup> For more information on Chrysostom, see Wikimedia Foundation. (2023, January 17). John Chrysostom. Wikipedia. Retrieved January 27, 2023, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Chrysostom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Chrysostom)

<sup>29</sup> Simonetti, M., Ed. (2001, p. 118).

<sup>30</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 7).

however; this evil can be eliminated only by its removal from the evildoer. One should therefore see nonretaliation as a weapon to combat evil and to help justice prevail.”<sup>31</sup>

- ❖ Luz writes: “Although these commandments are meant to be obeyed, their intention is not that they simply be obeyed literally; they are to be obeyed in such a way that in new situations what they demand is repeatedly to be discovered anew in freedom but in a similar radicality.”<sup>32</sup>

#### Verse 42

- ❖ **“Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”**
  - These have a more friendly tone compared to the three previous ones.
  - Both teachings imply that the disciple is in the position of giving and borrowing.

## Application

#### The wider literary context

- ❖ The explanation and application of this passage require good notice of the following notes.
  - Jesus did not abrogate the Old Testament Law, as given by Moses (Ex 21:22-27; Lev 24:19, 20; Deut 19:19, 21): “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17).
  - Jesus corrected the prevailing teaching in the synagogues of his days. This teaching justified taking personal revenge against “an evil person.”
    - In the context of the Sermon of the Mount, the “evil person” is the persecutor “because of righteousness” (Mt 5:10): “Blessed are you **when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil** against you because of me” (Mt 5:11). Persecution is a major theme in the Gospel of Matthew.
    - This explains probably also some differences with the Gospel of Luke, in which the theme of persecution is less prominent.
- ❖ These teachings belong to the realm of personal ethics and wisdom, like the Proverbs (see above).
  - The government is still called to protect its citizens (Rom 13:1-7), also against violence, oppression and persecution by mobs

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<sup>31</sup> Betz, H. D. (1995, p. 283-284).

<sup>32</sup> Luz, U. (2007, p. 274).



### The context of the Sermon on the Mount

- ❖ The explanation and application of this part of the Sermon on the Mount. This context must be taken into account:
  - “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Mt 5:6; Mt 6:33<sup>33</sup>).
    - The reference to Solomon in Matthew 6:29 is aimed at seeking wisdom.
    - The righteous will turn in the other cheek, let take also the cloak, go for two miles.
  - The Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:9-13) and Matthew 5:38-42. The Lord’s Prayer is also intended for people who find themselves in difficult circumstances.

‘Our Father in heaven,	Our Father in heaven, is Creator, Saviour and ultimate Judge.
hallowed be your name,	In turning the other cheek,... going the second mile... giving, the name of the Lord must be hallowed.
your kingdom come,	The rules of the kingdom of God are different from the rules of this earth. He will do justice and justify the righteous.
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.	I will glorify your name, just as the angels in heaven glorify your name.
Give us today our daily bread.	God will provide, even when the “evil person” sues you for your tunic.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.	A Christian will not take revenge but forgive, just like Christ (Lk 23:34).
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’	Deliver us from the “evil person.”

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<sup>33</sup> Hempenius, E. J. (n.d.). *Matthew 6:19-34 - Christianstudylibrary.org*. Retrieved January 27, 2023, from <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Matthew%206.19-34.pdf>

- Matthew 7:12 is very instructive for the understanding of these teachings: “So in everything, **do to others what you would have them do to you**, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”
  - “One must also avoid retaliation against oppressors, including proportional responses of vengeance (“eye for an eye”). Jesus, in one of his most radical teachings, advocates total self-surrender to the deeds and needs of others, including evil deeds such as striking a person’s cheek or suing for a person’s clothing”<sup>34</sup>
  - Stott writes: “That principle is love, the selfless love of a person who, when injured, refuses to satisfy himself by taking revenge, but studies instead the highest welfare of the other person and of society, and determines his reactions accordingly.”<sup>35</sup>

### The New Testament

- ❖ “Christian believers in particular are expressly summoned to forgo retribution or retaliation in favor of forgiveness and reconciliation and to leave issues of ultimate justice to God (Matt. 5:38–48; Rom. 12:17–21; 1 Pet. 2:21–23).”<sup>36</sup>
  - Romans 12:17: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”
  - Romans 12: 19-21: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
  - Other words to consider:
    - Romans 12:18: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
    - 1 Corinthians 4:12, 13: “When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”

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<sup>34</sup> Spencer, F. S. (2013, p. 285). *Forgiveness of Sins*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

<sup>35</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1985, p. 107).

<sup>36</sup> Marshall, C. (2011, p. 441). *Justice, Retributive*. In J. B. Green (Ed.).

- Colossians 3:12: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15: "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else."
- 1 Peter 3:9-11: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.'"
- What is needed:
  - Ephesians 6:14-17: "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."
  - 2 Peter 1:5-7: "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

Praise Christ:

- ❖ 1 Peter 2:20-23: "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."
- ❖ Transforming approach:
  - "He directs special attention to the abusive practices of persons who wield power over others, and he calls for creative and potentially life-transforming moral responses to those practices."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ogletree, T. W. (2011), p. 491. *Love, Love Command*. In J. B. Green (Ed.).

- “Treating the perpetrator in such a way that the cycle of violence and counterviolence is interrupted is the demand of ethical responsibility.”<sup>38</sup>

### Persecution and Oppression

- ❖ It is necessary to identify persecution and oppression in your context and develop the wisdom to respond to these situations.
  - Always keep your human dignity. See Matthew 7:12.

## Quotes

- ❖ CHRYSOSTOM<sup>39</sup>: “What then?” one asks. “Should we not resist the evil one at all?” Indeed we should, but not in this way. Rather, as Jesus has commanded, we resist by surrendering ourselves to suffer wrongfully. In this way, you shall prevail over him. For one fire is not quenched by another, but fire by water. THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, HOMILY 18.1.<sup>40</sup>
- ❖ CHROMATIUS<sup>41</sup>: Beyond the tolerance of physical injury, the Lord wants us also to have contempt for things of this world and to be so far removed from every lawsuit or contest of judgment. **If by chance a slanderer or tempter comes forward to initiate a lawsuit for the sake of testing our faith** and desires to rob us of the things which are ours, the Lord orders us to offer willingly not only the things that the person goes after unjustly but even those not demanded.” TRACTATE ON MATTHEW 25.2.1.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Betz, H. D. (1995, p. 293).

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