



TURN YOUR CHEEK



JUSTICE JUSTIFIES A WHOLE LOT!

- Call it an overactive sense of justice, but most people never feel wrong about anything they do in the pursuit of “making it right.” Samson, for example, had to reassure himself of blamelessness (Judges 15:3). Joab justified personal vengeance in 2 Samuel 3 probably by arguing he was doing David a favor. Saul of Tarsus easily convinced himself he had to do many hostile things (Acts 26:9).
- Our sense of “justice”, unfortunately, can become miscalibrated. Blinded by prejudice, half-truths, allegiance, or good old fashioned selfishness, we lose our bearings. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil...” (Isaiah 5:20).

HERE'S THE BIG PROBLEM

The “eye for an eye” mentality comes so easily to us, but God’s will has always been for us to resist it. Unfortunately, many misconceptions cloud the conversation – so let’s tackle some tough questions!

- Doesn't the Bible tell us to take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?
- Isn't the purpose of government all about justice? Why isn't that vengeance?
- Does Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 mean we have to be doormats to the world?

A photograph showing the upper portion of a building with a corrugated metal roof and a street lamp. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The image is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the text area.

EYE FOR AN EYE

- Exodus 21:22-24, Leviticus 24:19-20, Deuteronomy 19:21
- There is certainly plenty of support from the Law, and the Pharisees of Jesus' time knew it. When He corrects them, however, it's never the Law itself that Jesus sees as problematic. Moses and Jesus were not at odds – remember what He said only a few verses earlier in Matt. 5:17-20! It was with the way the Pharisees handled the Law that was the problem.
- Our righteousness must exceed the Pharisees' in the sense that we do not take laws meant to be applied in an organized, theocentric justice system and apply them on a personal level to justify vengeance.
- Jesus never sanctioned vigilante justice. Neither did Moses. God values life to the extent that it is reprehensible to take or diminish the life of another person. In the hands of impartial, God-fearing judges, the “eye for an eye” system protected the innocent from abuse. It was precise.



VENGEANCE IS SLOPPY

- The reason justice was left in the hands of judges is because we tend to be very sloppy when we take things personally. The lines get blurred. We take more than we should, leaving the scales imbalanced. Most people can't help but turn it into "an eye for both eyes, and maybe even a little extra." So the tit-for-tat is never broken.
- The Old Testament proscribes personal vengeance (Exodus 23:4-5, Leviticus 19:17-18, Ezekiel 25:17). The example of David provides a stirring case-in-point (1 Sam. 24:12, Saul, Abner, Absalom, Shimei, etc.).
- The New Testament drives it home with similar plainness (Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:15).
- Just like the system under the Law of Moses, Christians are to leave justice in the hands of God and the government He ordains (Romans 13:1-5, 1 Peter 2:13-14).

MATTHEW 5:38-48

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

SO AM I JUST SUPPOSED TO LET PEOPLE WALK ALL OVER ME?

Jesus never asked us to be doormats or to be “too nice” to stop anybody from harming us. Quite to the contrary, Jesus didn't even live this way.

- Jesus used force when necessary to show His love of God's holiness (John 2:13ff).
- He used very strong language (Matt. 23:24-25, 33, 16:23, Luke 13:23).
- He spoke of hell and judgment frequently.
- He was “politically incorrect” and offended people (Matthew 15:12).
- His patience had limits (Matt. 17:17, Luke 13:6-9).
- He told us not to “cast pearls before swine”, which means we can say “No” at times.



AM I A DOORMAT?

- **Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:39-42 was in contrast to the popular "eye for an eye" mentality. Rather than seeking our own good and getting even with our enemies, Jesus is suggesting that more good can be done by ending the cycle of violence and responding with the most shocking weapon of all — love. Paul elaborates in Romans 12:17ff.**
- **We must resist the devil (James 4:7) and expose evil (Eph. 5:11). We must be bold in the face of suffering (1 Thess. 2:2, Phil. 1:20), never cowardly (Rev. 21:8). We must be willing to rescue "widows and orphans in distress" (Ja. 1:27) and give our lives to save others (John 15:13). "Turning the other cheek" is not passive and cowardly, but is active and disarming. "Walking the extra mile" is most certainly DOING SOMETHING.**

1 PETER 2:18-23

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 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.