



1 Peter 3-8-9

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Special Music: “Love Your Enemies”

Kyle Sigmon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnVjNaBfQL0>

A Zen Koan is basically a teaching parable and there is a Zen Koan that goes like this:

Two monks were returning to the monastery in the evening. It had rained, and puddles of water had collected on the roadside. At one place a beautiful young woman was unable to cross the road because of a puddle. The elder monk lifted her, carried her across, and left her on the other side of the road before continuing on his way to the monastery.

In the evening the younger monk approached the elder monk. “Sir, as monks, we cannot touch a woman.”

The elder monk answered, “Yes, brother.”

“But, Sir, how then is it that you lifted that woman on the roadside?”

The elder monk smiled. “I left her on the other side of the road, but you are still carrying her.”

This concept of placing the needs of others above the law is not limited to Christianity. But it is in Christianity that we find Jesus holding us accountable for our actions when it comes to the needs of others and also the law as it is revealed..

But, in a way, it puts a strange spin on the actual intent. Remember that Jesus was reprimanded by religious leaders for allowing his disciples to pick off heads of grain and eat them on the Sabbath. But Jesus explains to them that, while they are well versed in the law, they do not understand the intent of the law, what we refer to today as the spirit of the law.

“Going the extra mile” is a reference to **Matthew 5:38-42**.

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’

39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

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

We hear these individual verses, and we can quote them. We use often pull them out of our brains when we are looking to chastise someone or question their actions. Especially if those actions are in retaliation against us for something we have done:

Eye for an Eye

Turn the other cheek

Go the extra mile

It was a law in the Roman Empire that if you met a Roman soldier on the road, the soldier could force you to carry his pack for a mile. And a soldier's pack was extremely heavy. A person did not consider it a privilege to carry that pack. If they were able to spot the soldier before being seen, they probably searched for a good place to hide. And do understand that there was no reward for obeying this law anymore that we get a reward for obeying the speed limit or not robbing a bank.

Jesus tells His disciples that they are looking at things the wrong way. He tells us that we should see carrying that pack for a mile, if we do it with a smile and a positive outlook, that this lawful order of forced service could actually be an opportunity to change someone's life. He goes on to say that we, as His followers, should always seek to go the extra mile. We may have no choice in that first mile, but the second mile is by choice, and the person we are serving can't help but to take notice. It's still not motivated by reward, but by a sincere desire to be of service. The joy we receive from serving others can be a reward in and of itself.

But that really doesn't address our problem of this Great Consternation that so many people seem to live by. "Eye for an Eye."

Eye for an Eye is an Old Testament reference that we readily whip out when we want to justify our retaliation against someone who wrongs us or the ones we love. We find the reference in **Exodus 21:23-25 and is echoed in Leviticus 24**

22 "If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows.

23 But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,

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

25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

This whole section in Exodus is filled with crime and punishment and seems to be spoken as law. After all, it does come from God and He is the source for the law. Are we on the same page here? Do we read that a transgression should be responded to with an equal punishment? That's only fair, isn't it?

If we kill someone intentionally, we should be killed. If we put someone's eye out, then we should have our own eye put out. If we knock out someone's tooth, then we should have a tooth knocked out as well. It seems like a legal balancing system to deal with transgressions. In most cases, the injured party was the one

that delivered the punishment to the perpetrator in a public forum. One did not take this kind of action without involving a judge. I will also mention that there are considerations in this section of the scriptures with regards to the transgression being an accident. Punishment is still required but it doesn't seem to be as severe. There are ways to reconcile in those cases. There is a huge difference between someone who is injured by accident and someone who is injured intentionally.

On a side note, I also want you to recognize in this particular passage that we are talking about, that although it is the woman who gets hurt, it is her husband that is considered to be the injured party, similar to if someone were to kill an animal that belonged to him.

If we consider this passage to be part of the Mosaic Law (and it was taught as such by the Jewish leaders), then why in Matthew does Christ start by saying **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’”** Why doesn't He begin by saying, “The Law Says?”

In some ways, the world has not changed a lot since the time that Christ entered it 2000 years ago. When we feel wronged by another party, we still seek equal retribution. We want to be compensated for transgressions against us, intentional or otherwise. If someone robs us, we want full restitution for what

was taken, and we want the robber to spend time in jail for his crime. If someone injures us, we want financial restitution and if that injury is permanent, we want major restitution. Our system of jurisprudence allows us to seek recompense through the court system with both criminal and civil allegations. But we have also reached a point, at least in western civilization, where we don't allow ourselves to break someone's leg who may have caused our own leg to be broken. The punishment for a wrong will be handled in a different manner and will not be performed by us.

But having that system in place, does not always bring restitution in our minds. If someone hits us, we really want to hit them back and we feel that it isn't "fair" that if we do, we can be charged with assault. We struggle when our personal morals clash with political more's, biblical teachings, and our own legal system. There are times when we feel restrained because we cannot take the law into our own hands when we feel the law is wrong. The battle is constant, and we often find that we do not understand the legal system because we do not speak legalese. It is easy to fall back on "Eye for an Eye" when we do not comprehend the meaning of the words spewing from the mouths of lawyers. We are constantly told to trust a system that we do not understand and is beyond our control.

And then we have to confront our own legal system when our morals clash with a government system that tries to define morals. As a people, we often want laws that protect our rights and our property from those who wish to take or destroy them while at the same time, we don't want those laws to prevent us from engaging in activities that we feel are rightfully ours. I call that the "As long as no one else gets hurt, I have a right to do it" philosophy. In other words, we don't want the government defining our morality but we want the government to protect us from the personal moral choices of others. Which is where we start running into ambiguities. What do you do with the death penalty? How do you handle abortion and right to life? How do you treat "white collar crime?" as opposed to armed robbery? How do you deal with the fact that some very ugly crimes are dismissed due to technicalities while seemingly minor crimes are treated with years of imprisonment? How do you reconcile the death of someone in police custody or when the policemen that we respect, knowing that they are putting their lives on the line each and every day for us, overstep their bounds? How do we justify a system where the rich can buy the best lawyers available and the poor are often stuck with underexperienced, under-paid and overworked public defenders? How do we reconcile our personal experiences with a justice system that, at times, fails us? Let's face it, we often don't think about that person in jail that claims that they are innocent unless that person in jail happens to be us.

I do not mean this as a condemnation of our legal system. In spite of the fact that our system sometimes falls short of our expectations and even our

understanding, in spite of the appearance at times that equality isn't as equal as we think it should be, it is still the best system on the planet for handling injustice and people work tirelessly to constantly analyze, modify, adapt and revise the system in an attempt to create an ever more impartial and balanced environment where everyone is granted the same equal opportunity under the law. And yes, sometimes the system gets it wrong. But it is bound to get it wrong because most of our laws are based on the "eye for an eye" standard rather than grace. Sometimes that young mother so desperate to feed her kids steals a loaf of bread and goes to jail for 5 years. Sometimes we find ourselves so constricted by the laws of our own making that we do not allow compassion and mercy to play a part in our system of crime and punishment.

But Jesus tells us that our struggles come from looking at injustice in the wrong way. He's really quite blunt about it.

"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 anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

And Peter admonishes by saying:

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

This puts our response outside of the law, not above it. It allows us to show grace just as Christ shows grace to us. We have to stop thinking in terms of “If someone slaps you on the right cheek, file a lawsuit.” We have to find ourselves to be like-minded, put ourselves in the other’s shoes. When we encounter that mother that steals a loaf of bread from us to feed her kids, we should take time to see her in the same way Jesus sees her. And instead of taking her to court and riding the coat of a law that is clearly in our favor, we take the initiative to forgive her, let her keep the bread and then buy her and her family meat, milk, eggs and vegetables as well.

Both Jesus and Peter are not telling us to ignore that law. Nor are they telling us to fall short of the law. After all, Jesus came to fulfill the law. He also made it clear that the law was made for man, not man for the law. **Mark 2:27** says this:

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

And yes, this passage talks specifically about the Sabbath but the obedience to the Sabbath was part of the law and lack of obedience regarding the Sabbath was punishable by imprisonment and even death.

The laws that are established, both God's laws and man's laws, are put into place not to restrict us, but to protect us from one another. We are a stiff-necked people, given to pride and arrogance. We often seek ways around the law, looking for ways to reinterpret the law or find loopholes to avoid the law. The Jewish people were no different. They too sought ways to either avoid the law or the consequential punishment that might occur from disobedience.

But Jesus is telling us that the law is a good thing and that our perspective as Christians is not about avoiding the law or looking for ways to subvert it, but that we should raise the level. We should increase the container of the law so that it encompasses the spirit of intent as well as the law itself.

Peter reminds us that the way to do this is:

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

He reminds us that Jesus taught us to give to others that which we receive from Him. He gives us mercy and expects us to show mercy. He gives us grace and expects us to show grace. He has freed us from condemnation with the expectation that we will do likewise to those in our debt. He expects no more from us than what He has freely given to us.

This places extends the purpose of the law and expands our perception of the bubble of legality. It raises the bar for compassion, empathy and grace. We need for our compassion, mercy, and grace to drive our interpretations of the law and to open our eyes to what the law is really all about. It was never intended to put others down but to allow us the flexibility to raise those same people up.

The elder monk in our story faced a moral quandry based on the precepts of his religion but did not hesitate to put the needs of the young woman above his own needs to obey the law because he understood that the law was made for man, not man for the law. Let us embrace the words that Peter used:

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

AMEN

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