



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



You Want Me to Do What?!

Tim Badal | January 26, 2014 | Matthew 5:38-42

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 15

Turn in your Bibles to [Matthew 5](#). We're about one third of the way through our series looking at the Sermon on the Mount entitled "Upside-down Kingdom." We're almost through chapter five which is the longest of the three chapters—Matthew 5-7—that make up the Sermon on the Mount. I hope you are benefiting from our time in this series.

As we've been studying Jesus' sermon, He has been taking us on a journey. He has taken some of the cultural norms present even within our own church and turned them on their head. Many of these verses and passages have tested us. They have done so by showing us two profound truths:

1. Jesus is reminding us that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if we're going to do it on our own. None of us are able to do it on our own. In and of ourselves we will never be able to live out any of these things. That means when you hear the Sermon on the Mount you're going to feel like a failure. Because guess Who's preaching? It's Jesus. Guess Who's perfect? Jesus. Guess who's not perfect? We are not perfect. If you want to summarize what the Sermon on the Mount is about in a microcosm, it is first of all Jesus reminding us of this.
2. Jesus is telling us that He will empower us. We're going to feel like a failure but here's the thing: Jesus doesn't stop there. He didn't preach these things just to say, "Na-na-na-na boo boo, I'm better than you are. I'm perfect; you're not. You're all a bunch of miserable failures." Instead He is saying, "Stop trying to live life on your own. Stop being a failure in and of yourself. Understand that when you come to Me by faith and bow the knee to My Kingdom, here's My promise to you: I will empower you. I will fill you with My Holy Spirit. The things that were impossible for you to do in and of yourselves can become the essence of who you are in your everyday experience."

We need to be careful to not shrink away from these teachings. In their preaching of this passage, many people have minimized what Christ is requiring of us and by doing so have emptied His words of all significance. We must not do this. We need to make sure we don't seek to find excuses. Rather, we should submit to and even yearn to make these teachings our reality no matter how hard they may be.

The text before us contains what many would say is one of the most difficult passages for a civilized western citizen to follow. In other words, this is going to be difficult for us as Americans. We are so

committed to our rights and our dignity. Sticking to our rights is as American as apple pie but it's not how Jesus wants us to live. In many ways Jesus is telling us, "If you're going to follow Me, you have to surrender your rights as an American citizen for the sake of your heavenly kingdom."

As we approach this text we must not do what many have done and read contradictions into Scripture. The biblical authors are not in conflict with one another. We must use our minds and the whole counsel of God's Word to show the truth of Christ and the direction we need to go. Let's dig into [Matthew 5:38-42](#).

Here's what Jesus is telling us:

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹But 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. ⁴⁰And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Once there was a psychologist who had no children of his own. Whenever he saw neighbors scolding their children for some wrongdoing he would say to them, "You should love your children, not punish them." One hot summer afternoon the professor was doing some repair work on the concrete driveway leading to his garage. Completely worn out after several hours of work, he grabbed a towel, wiped the perspiration from his brow and started towards his house. Just then, he saw a mischievous little boy putting his hands into the fresh cement. He rushed over, grabbed the child and was about to berate him severely when a neighbor leaned out from his porch and said, "Watch it, Doc. Don't you remember? You must love the child."

Then the psychologist yelled back furiously, "I do love him—in the abstract, not in the concrete."

This is just a corny story but it has deep and profound implications in our text today. As we listen to Jesus' words, many of you will say, "I've got it Jesus. Yup, that's what I'm supposed to do. I can do that. It's a good principle. I can 'Amen!' the preacher that says that."

Here's the problem. We are like the psychologist; we love that kind of teaching in the abstract but not in the real world. It sounds good in the sanctuary. But it's another story in our offices, in our families, in our neighborhoods and amidst our enemies who wrong and hurt us. Then we say, "Yes Jesus, I agree with you in the abstract. But when it comes to surrendering my rights and I have skin in the game, it's different." All bets are off when someone wrongs us or hurts us.

One reason we feel this way is because the case for revenge is so natural to who we are. Like God, we as human beings are wronged and offended. Like our Creator, we are people of honor, dignity and respect. When our dignity and honor is attacked we long to demand it back in full. Where do we get that desire? I believe that we get it from God Himself. When God is offended or wronged, He demands repayment. Because of the offense of our sin, He demanded His Son go to the cross to take care of it. He couldn't overlook our offenses. He demanded repayment.

But here's the problem. Yes, we are bearers of God's image. Yes, we are offended and rightly feel like our honor should be treated with respect and dignity. But let us never forget that God is holy and we are not. God has wronged no one and we have wronged many. While vengeance and retaliation may be natural to

us in our human existence, Jesus tells us that when we seek revenge and retaliation we sin because we put our rights and dignity above the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Beatitudes In Matthew 5 call us...

- ...to be poor in spirit.
- ...to recognize our own wrongs that we have done to others and to God.
- ...to be meek. That means we don't assume that our rights will always be honored and we'll always get our way.
- ...to be merciful. That means when someone wrongs us, we extend mercy and grace even though they might deserve something else.
- ...to be peacemakers. It is easy to keep the peace when all is well, but we are called to be peacemakers even in times of great tribulation. You and I are called to be salt and light to the world even when people wrong us. We do this by not repaying evil with evil but repaying evil with good.

There is much for us to understand in this passage so I'm going to break it down in three ways:

Examining the Law of Retaliation

Rethinking Our Rights as Christians

Employing the Proper Response When Persecuted

1. Examining the Law of Retaliation

Jesus starts out by saying, *"You have heard that it was said..."* (Matthew 5:38). This is the fifth time that we have heard this. He says it regarding anger, lust, divorce, oaths and now revenge and retaliation. He says, *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'"*

Before we can understand the Old Testament rendering we need to understand the teaching that had been taking place during Jesus' day. The Law said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and the rabbis said that meant that if someone wronged me it was my job to wrong them. This is what the people were hearing in their synagogues. So as a God-fearing Jew, if someone hurt your foot, then you were to go and hurt his foot. If someone ruined your eye, you were to go and ruin her eye. If someone ruined your house, you would go and ruin his house. If someone took the life of my loved one, I was to go and take the life of her loved one. The rabbis would say, "Do not delay in doing so." Imagine the vigilante justice that was taking place.

When we operate this way it is rarely equal. Think of the unending circle of violence that would take place if we said, "Because they've done something to me I can go do something to them," every time we were offended or wronged by someone. You hurt me, so I hurt you, which means you have to hurt me back, which means I have to hurt you back.

Think of gangster violence that goes on in our cities today. It never stops. You shoot at me; I shoot back at you. You hit me; I hit you. Then some other random individual is shot and the city is embroiled in all kinds of violence because we have this tit-for-tat idea of revenge. We see this also in family feuds that begin with two people and escalate to two families who don't even understand what they are doing. It defiles everyone who's involved.

Jesus says, *"You have heard that it was said."* He's saying, "What you've been taught by the Pharisees and the rabbis is garbage. I need to restore the Law to where it was supposed to be—to its rightful place." He needed to reorder some things in His follower's lives so they could live up to what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

As with the four teachings before this one, Jesus starts at the beginning. The people of God had lost their way. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law had bought into a line of thinking that missed the very heart of God.

I want us to get back to the heart of God and to do so we have to get to the heart of His Word. We're going to look at three passages in the Old Testament. Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 21:22-25. Listen to the connections that we see here:

When men strive [fight] together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm [so she is brought into premature labor but brings forth a healthy child] the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Understand that there are judges involved. We will come back to that.

Now let's turn to Leviticus 24:17-22. Here's what the text says:

Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life. If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death. You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the LORD your God.

Notice that God says, "This is a rule. This is something I want you to follow." We're going to get to what Jesus is talking about in a moment, but hopefully these Old Testament passages are helping us understand what the Word was articulating.

Now turn to Deuteronomy 19:15-21 which says:

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests

and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

The text says, *"Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."* I want you to see something very important that is inherent within these texts. Notice all of the courtroom vernacular in that passage, words like "witnesses," "offenses," "evidence" and "charges." Our passage says they are to appear before the priests and judges who are in office. What is to happen to witnesses who falsely witness or accuse? They are to give an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand.

As we look at [Matthew 5](#), think of the three Old Testament passages we have just read. They all speak of the same law. It's the oldest law in the world. Did you know that? "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," is as old as it gets. In Latin it is called the *lex talionis* and we find it in the Code of Hammurabi, an ancient book of laws for creating order.

We have similar statements in our vernacular. One example is "a tit for a tat." In legal terms it's "quid pro quo." In America it means an equal punishment for the crime.

In Hammurabi's Code it meant that if a man has caused the loss of another man's eye, his eye shall be caused to be lost. If a man shatters another man's limb, his limb shall be shattered. There is a sense of justice bound up in the human heart. The problem is that it is perverted when it turns into vengeance. Don't miss the point. Jesus isn't saying that this law—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—isn't good. It is a good law. This law puts fear into the hearts of people. It does only good for righteous individuals. It protects them and judicially reminds the perpetrator or offender what will happen when he does wrong.

This Law Guarantees an Appropriate Retribution

Before we talk about retribution I need to articulate a couple of things. When the Mosaic Law says "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" it is not for us as individuals but for the institution of civil government. That is critical for interpreting this passage. Jesus is saying, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is fine when it comes to government. But when it comes to you, it's not okay for a follower of Mine. It is not your place to find vengeance."

In America, we seem to have forgotten—and maybe with good reason—that civil government is not a curse on society but a grace that God gives. That's hard for us to swallow at times. It doesn't mean that every government or every leader is good and fair. Just like all graces that God gives we defile them with our sin. But God has intended for government to do three important tasks:

1. It is to restrain evil.
2. It is to keep order.
3. It is to be fair, just and objective.

Citizens should be able to rely upon their government for those three things.

So when the law says "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," it is saying, "Government, you are to be the judge in all criminal and civil matters." It is not the church's job deal with crimes or litigation. Its job is to deal with worship, honoring God and preparing God's people for works of service. It is the government's job to deal with crimes, punishment and litigation. The law is giving parameters for the government's job. It is saying, "When someone does another person wrong or wrongs society as a whole, you are to put this law into action. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, any punishment you give will always fit the crime."

That means if someone breaks into your house they should know as a perpetrator they're going to get in trouble but that they will not get the death penalty. That punishment doesn't fit the crime. It also shows mercy to the victim and recognizes the terrible loss. If someone breaks my arm the government doesn't say, "Oh, that is so sad. Your arm was broken and we're going to sit idly by and let it go." No, the government says, "We recognize the pain and suffering that happens when you're assaulted and your arm is broken. We're not going to ignore this offense. We will rectify it by doing something very similar to them so that they may sympathize with what they've done to you." That's good.

It's beneficial to society. It deters wrongdoing because it tells people, "If you're going to hurt someone and break the law, then you will be hurt in return." It tells citizens that their government stands behind them when they honor the laws and statutes. It says, "You don't have to go and seek revenge. We will deal with it for you so that you don't have to be mired in the details of it. We will do so objectively and we will seek the full penalty for the crime that's been committed." All of this is good.

This Law Guards Against Personal Revenge

In its original form this law kept all men from the pursuit of revenge. How things had changed by the time of Christ! This law was a license for vigilante justice under the teaching of the rabbis. It compelled the people to take the law into their own hands and exact punishment as they saw fit in their own eyes. It wasn't just a law that they taught; it was a law that the Pharisees, chief priests and the Sanhedrin believed. We know this because of the trial of Jesus Christ. All of the litigation of those trials was in rebellion to the rule of law. In that day, the law said that you could not hold a trial during the night. Jesus experienced a couple of trials during the night. The law said that the accused would always have the opportunity for witnesses to speak on their behalf. Jesus was given none. Why would they blatantly disregard the law? Because they wanted to get a pound of flesh rather than deal with Jesus from a civil matter as they should have.

So they said, "We're going to make this a mockery." From the outset they commanded and exacted revenge on Jesus Who had upstaged them and had shown their hypocrisy through His love and truth. From the outset they were after their own personal vengeance, not order.

We need to understand that this "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" principle is not for us as individuals but for the government. Jesus' words tell us that it is wrong for us as His followers to live out that principle personally.

Many will take Jesus' words here and use them to fight against the issues of capital punishment and the use of force by our military. To do so is a complete disservice to our text. Here's what I understand. From a clear and natural rendering of the text—not only here but in other passages of Scripture—it seems that God gives the government great latitude in dealing with crimes and punishment. He gives heads of state great allowance to wage war. The only criteria that God demands of civil governments are to be just, to defend against great evils and atrocities and above all to be fair in their dealings.

You may say, "I'm against capital punishment." That's okay. But I see from Scripture that even though capital punishment is something many bristle against, God has said that if someone takes the life of another his life will be counted against him for the order of society. We can't miss that point.

Also, while war is a terrible thing, the Bible seems to give allowances for us to defend ourselves as a nation. We don't have to sit there when someone attacks us and say, "We'll turn the other cheek," and allow them to continue. But God doesn't give that allowance to the church or to individuals; He gives it to the government. [Romans 13](#) tells us we are to submit to the government. When we are doing good it will go well for us. When we are doing evil, we will suffer the consequences.

So this law isn't for us but for our civic leaders and judges. In our passage, Jesus says, "I'm not even going to address that." So I digress from the whole issue of government because that's not the purpose of Jesus' words in our passage.

2. Rethinking Our Rights as Christians

Jesus says, "*But I say to you...*" He's not talking to the Romans, to Congress, to our President or to a prime minister; He's talking to His followers. He says, "If you think you can get away with this "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" vengeance, you've got another think coming. If you think that you have a right to retaliate for a wrong done against you, think again." As followers of Jesus Christ we need to be willing to endure hardship like a good soldier. We need to be willing to overlook grievances and offenses and go the extra mile for the glory of God.

That's hard to swallow because there are a lot of wrongs that have been done towards us. So this means we have to rethink our rights as Christians. You might ask, "Tim, are you telling me I have to forgo my rights concerning personal wrongdoing? Are you saying I have no recourse but to forgive and show grace when someone wrongs me?" I'm not saying that but it sure seems like that's what Jesus is saying.

We are going to look at four particular areas of rethinking our rights in order to understand this from a wise and discerning point of view.

This Requires Emulating Jesus' Example

As believers we are called to diminish ourselves and our rights in some very tangible ways. Our goal as Christians must be to live like Jesus more and more each day. At our annual meeting on Friday I spoke about the elders' desire for us to be transformed people and a transformed church. To be transformed

means we have to change our daily lives to be better bearers of Christ's image. In greater measure, we need to do as He would have done, love as He would have loved, live as He would have lived and lead as He would have led. In order to do this we must follow His example.

Holiness and Christ-likeness aren't a game of pin the tail on the donkey where God blindfolds us and says, "Good luck! Just put the tail wherever you think it should go. Just try to be as close as possible." No, God said, "You're never going to be righteous on your own. You're lost. You're blind. The devil has held you captive so I need to send Someone Who can show you the way." So He sent His Son Who put on flesh and lived a life of holiness. Now God says, "I want you to do the same as He did. I want you to live like Him."

That's easy to say on Sunday morning. It's easy for me to preach it from the pulpit. It's much harder to live like Christ did at work, at school or in our family scenarios when people wrong us, hurt us and walk all over us. But Jesus did it. He lived a life of holiness amidst difficult situations.

From Jesus' earliest days His parents were ridiculed for alleged impropriety. On the playground of Nazareth, Jesus was called the bastard child. The other children would have said, "You're dad isn't your dad. Your mom was messing around when she shouldn't have been." As a child, Jesus was hunted. His parents had to flee to Egypt because someone wanted to kill Him. He was hounded and harassed by the rulers of His day. He was betrayed by one of His disciples and abandoned by most of His friends. The crowd that loved Him on Palm Sunday called for His crucifixion only a few days later. The leaders of His day arrested Him, beat Him and unjustly hung Him on a cross to die. Every day of His life He was open to insult and injury. He was even cursed and mocked while He died on the cross.

We have a tendency to think, "Well, Jesus only endured some hardships for 24 hours during His arrest and crucifixion." We need to understand He endured hardships all of His life. Do you think you have it bad? Leave perfection and angels worshipping you day and night to come and endure a lifetime of hardships. Not only that, but we deserve many of the hardships because we are a sinful people. Jesus was perfect. He was sacrificial love personified.

This inequity struck Peter. He was so struck by it that he wrote an entire letter in the New Testament on this issue of suffering. Jesus—Who was amazing and perfect—suffered over and over yet He honored God and did not repay evil with evil. Listen to Peter's reminder to us in 1 Peter 2:19-23:

For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrow while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin you are beaten for it that you endure? But when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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. He who 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.

How do we walk in the ways of Christ? When someone wrongs us, we don't wrong them back. When someone reviles us, we don't come back with a great put-down. When someone lies to us, we don't lie to them. When someone harms us, we don't harm them. It means we must follow in the steps of Jesus.

If you want to seek revenge you will never seek Christ. You have to make a choice. We all do. Either I'm going to follow in Christ's footsteps or I'm going to go my own way and seek revenge. You can't have revenge and Christ at the same time. You're going to serve one and hate the other.

This Requires Surrendering to Save Others

So we need to receive personal wrongs and offenses without a response and at times we will have to surrender our rights altogether for another's sake. Have you ever thought that some of the best evangelism can be done without ever sharing a word? It can be done by lovingly and graciously enduring hardships, mocking and beat-downs for the glory of God. We can be like Jesus in that way.

Paul says if we are going to participate in Christ's resurrection we must also participate in His death and suffering. This involves a couple of things. In Romans 9:3, Paul drops a nuclear bomb on us with his faithfulness. He says, *"For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* Do you understand what he's saying here? He is saying, "I am willing to give up my right for salvation for the sake of my fellow Jews. I am willing to forfeit the eternal salvation that is mine as a child of God so that others might be saved. God, I am willing to burn in hell if that will mean that You might save my kinsmen." Are you willing to do that?

John Knox once said, "Give me Scotland or I die!" That is a heartfelt cry. "Lord, I'll do whatever it takes. I'll forfeit whatever I have so that others might receive the gospel, even if I'm rightly due some things." Are you willing to endure that?

Our problem is that we're unwilling to endure someone cutting us off on the expressway. We're unwilling to give up our place in line at a grocery store. We are unwilling to allow someone to wrong us. We would rather seek retribution instead of allowing love to cover a multitude of sins. We do these things against the example of Christ and the lessons of Paul.

It's not easy. Paul told us it wouldn't be easy. In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 he says, "Ministry is going to be like this. Serving Christ means we are continually surrendering ourselves for the sake of others." How do we prove our faithfulness as followers of Jesus Christ? Paul says:

We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

The Bible seems to say that the gospel will require us to surrender our personal entitlement to rights, liberties and retaliation for the sake of God's Kingdom. Boy, that is hard. Is this really what Jesus is saying? It seems to be.

This Requires Testifying Through Trials

Our response in times of tribulation—when people wrong us—should not be revenge. So what should it be? We are to testify through trials. The Bible is full of passages where people endured all sorts of tribulation for the glory of God.

The best example of that in the Old Testament is the story of Joseph. Joseph was wronged by his brothers. My brothers have done some wrong things to me but nothing like what Joseph's brothers did. Joseph's brothers wanted him dead but they had some compassion. They threw him into a pit, sold him to a bunch of journeying traders and then told their father that he was killed by an animal. Joseph became a slave at the hands of his brothers. While Joseph's time in Egypt had some ups, it was mostly downs. You have to wonder what his response was.

Have you ever wondered what the moment of glorification was like for some of the Old Testament people when they got to heaven? For example, I would have loved to be a fly on the wall when Cain showed up in heaven and saw Abel standing there. Imagine what it would have been like when David died and saw Uriah face to face. What were those moments like? We don't know so we can only speculate. But we know what Joseph did.

I love how Joseph had a little fun with his brothers when they showed up in Egypt. He started messing with them. But he didn't enact an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He said, "Revenge doesn't belong to me because what you intended for harm God has used for good."

What a great principle! That means you will never experience God's good when someone wrongs you and you seek revenge. When you seek revenge you are not giving God enough time to address the good that's going to come. You're going to miss the blessing because you're too busy focusing on retaliating instead of letting God determine everything.

Joseph said, "What you did was wrong. Boy, it hurt. It wasn't fun. But do you know what? God took the garbage that you did in my life and He produced so much good—not only for me but for the good of a nation. It was for your good too! You are here in Egypt because you're out of food. You wouldn't have had anybody to get food from, but God used what you did wrong to save a nation and to save you." When we seek revenge, all of that's off the table.

We are called to rejoice when people harm us. You might be thinking, "What are you talking about, Tim? This is insanity!" Yes, it is insanity to the world but it is wisdom from God. In [Matthew 5:11-12](#) Jesus says, "*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven...*"

Don't miss this: you can't rejoice in God when you are pursuing revenge. You have a choice to make. You can honor God amidst the most difficult of circumstances: when people revile you, hate your guts, hurt you, harm you and cut you down from limb to limb. You can follow your own leading and desires, making sure they get their pound of flesh that's coming to them. Or as a follower of Christ you can choose to pursue, rejoice in and be glad in God. Those are your choices.

But understand this: when you choose to pursue revenge you're doing it alone. God isn't with you. God says, "It's not your place. It's Mine." Let's never forget that. Rejoice and be glad! Don't seek revenge.

This Requires Asserting Them When Applicable & Advantageous to the Gospel

Some of you may say, "Tim, this is all good and well, but I'm a discerning person and what you're really saying is that we are to be doormats for Christ." Yes, in some ways that is what I'm saying. But we need to be wise and discerning about how we apply this. We must assert our rights when applicable and advantageous to the gospel.

Let me explain. Let's say that while my family is sleeping tonight, an armed assailant comes into our home. Does it mean that when he comes into my home I'm going to welcome him? I could say, "Welcome to the house. My family is upstairs. All the stuff you could ever want is all here for your taking. While you're doing that I'm going to go down to the kitchen and make some breakfast for you. We can have some coffee and I'll tell you about Jesus."

God may lead you to respond that way but I don't believe He is leading me to do that. I'm going to defend my family and myself. I think it is right for me to defend what God has given me—my family more than my things. I'm not concerned about the TV; I'm very concerned for my wife and children. I'm going to defend them because that's what God has called me to do.

When Jesus says, "*Do not resist the one who is evil,*" that's not what He means. He's talking about what happens after the man has assailed us, taken everything we have and gone away. It isn't my job to find him, assail his family and steal from him. That would just add violence onto violence.

So I'm not saying we aren't to defend ourselves at all. I'm saying we are to be just in our defense. Not all defense is equal. In other words, I don't have to defend myself in every situation and I need to be discerning about the moments that call for defense and the moments that don't. When someone wrongs me, I am to hold him accountable for his actions but my job is to forgive him, pray for him and even love him as Christ has loved me.

Now you may say, "Wait a minute, how does that gel with the text?" The great reformer Martin Luther helps us a great deal with this. When he came to this text he said, "This is tough! How do we deal with it?" He said that it is probably wrong to look at a singular man in a singular way because we as human beings are multi-faceted. Man is an institution and an individual. He said, "Man is one coin but on each side of the coin there are different parts."

In other words, he was saying there is a tension for us as followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to be good citizens of our country and to submit to earthly authorities, but on the other hand we must also recognize that our Kingdom is not of this world. We have to bounce back and forth as good citizens of America and good citizens of the Kingdom of God. There will be times when we will need to assert our rights as citizens of this country and there will be times when we will forgo them for the citizenry of God's Kingdom. There is a tension between them.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that we are to obey as much as humanly possible unless it causes us to sin against God. So there will be times when we will assert our rights. God isn't saying that you can never call the police and say, "Hey, someone is stealing my van. Come and get them." I have a right to do that. Is it good for society and for you as a Christian to allow wrongdoing to happen? You're going to have to determine that. I can't make that decision for you. You're going to have to look at this Word and ask, "God, are You calling me to let it go? Or do I need to address it?" Do we need to do what Luther said in his great hymn and "let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also" ([A Mighty Fortress Is Our God](#)).

Notice what the Apostle Paul—who forgoes all of his rights—says. In two different places Paul asserts his rights. In [Acts 16:37](#) and [Acts 22:25](#) Paul says, "I have rights as a Roman citizen and you can't walk on them. Stop beating me because you can't do such a thing to a Roman citizen by birth. You need to try me in court with witnesses. You are breaking the law that we both uphold." In these moments, is Paul saying he has to give up his rights? There's a tension here. Sometimes he says, "I'm going to assert my right as a Roman citizen." Other times he says, "I'm willing to give up my salvation if it will save others." There is a great tension between our rights in the human existence and what we should hold on to in our spiritual existence.

Let me give you an amusing example of this. I had a wonderful pop machine in front of my shop. Pop machines are glorious. They give great joy to all who partake of them. It wasn't even my pop machine; it was a pop machine my family has had in front of the building for 40 years. It was never an issue.

Then a couple of years ago I got a letter from the village board telling me to get rid of the pop machine because it's in violation. I asked what violation it was and there was no violation—they just didn't want it there. I said, "I don't want to give up my pop machine. I enjoy it. It helps me make some money. It's never hurt anybody and it's obviously serving a great many people." I thought that was the end of it.

Then I got a call from the police. They said, "Hey Mr. Badal, the board has said you need to cease and desist. If that pop machine isn't gone by midnight you're going to jail." This is your pastor!

I was floored. I couldn't believe it! Are you kidding me? So I went over there and said, "Okay, I don't want to go to jail. The kids need a dad who's not in jail so we're going to take care of the machine." At 11:30 we got ready to remove the pop machine. There were two police officers watching to make sure it was taken care of and right before I unplugged the machine, they said, "Hey, can we get a can of pop before you unplug it?"

That shows how absurd the situation was. I was angry and I don't get angry very often. So I started putting together a letter. I thought, "That city hasn't seen nothing yet. I'm no dummy. I am going to deal with this. They don't know who they've just messed with." Some of you are thinking, "All of this over a pop machine?" Well, if we talked about your issues of revenge you would sound silly, too.

So I started writing my letter. It was a phenomenal letter. It was well written, had good vocabulary and great English. It was great—except I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. The Lord started convicting me as I was typing that letter. I wasn't even saying anything wrong. I was being incredibly submissive and respectful. There was no cursing or anything like that. But the Spirit of God started convicting me and saying, "Hey wait a minute, Badal. Are you asserting your rights as a business owner over your job to win the Village officials to Me? Because this is an absolutely lousy way to witness to them." I had to stop what I was doing and I had to work with those officials instead of against them. I still have pop machines but it costs me thousands of dollars. In that situation I had to cease and desist, not because of the police but because asserting my rights would have cost me as a believer.

You might say, "That's a stupid example." Maybe but that's where I learned that my rights have to be asserted only when advantageous for the gospel. Some of you are fighting over the stupidest things in your work place. Some of you are losing your testimony with your neighbors because their fence is a little closer to your property than it should be or because they have a car parked where it shouldn't be.

When we pursue revenge, we ruin our witness. Think of it this way: when one hand is a closed fist against someone, you can never open your other hand with the gospel. You can't say, "I'm going to get you for that, but here's the love of Jesus." You have to make a choice with that person and you will be held accountable for that choice. If we are shaking our fist at someone, God is going to say, "Where was the open hand of love? You missed your chance."

Some of us are seeking retaliation in defense of our rights for the stupidest reasons. Instead, we need to stop and say, "For the love of Jesus Christ and the glory of the gospel, I am going to become less so the gospel can become more." This is huge.

3. Employing the Proper Response When Persecuted

So how do we employ the proper response when persecuted and wronged? Jesus gives four examples. I don't know if they're hypothetical or real but they help us understand the principle. As citizens of God's heavenly Kingdom we are called to four things.

This May Involve Suffering Indignity

Jesus said in [verse 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.*" You need to understand that this verse is used brutally in our culture. The issue of the slap that Jesus is talking about is not an issue of assault but one of insult. Jesus is not talking about someone coming at you ready to knock you down. In that situation, you have a choice: you can

either be hit by the person or defend yourself. You have the right not to be bludgeoned. That's not what Jesus is saying.

In the Hebrew culture there were two types of slaps: the front slap and the back slap. The front slap was a general slap meaning, "I don't like you," or "You've said or done something wrong. I've slapped you and we're done." The back slap meant, "You're worthless. You're good for nothing." That would mean someone is insulting you.

In the Hebrew culture you did not slap someone like this in private. You always did it in front of other people. Jesus is saying, "Has something demeaning been done to you by another person? Something that goes against your honor and your reputation? Has someone made you look stupid in the company of others?" The slap is the pinnacle of all demeaning actions. It says you are worthless.

If you've ever been slapped in public you know what I mean. As a caterer, I was slapped at a wedding reception in front of 300 guests because of the customer's own wrongdoing. There is not a single time in my life when I've been more humiliated—and I was in the right.

Jesus is using this example to say, "Whatever anybody does to you in word or deed, you're going to want to fight back. In that moment you're going to want to repay evil for evil but I say, 'Let them do it.'" Why? Because a gentle response turns away wrath. You don't do it silently and say, "Go ahead and put some muscle into it this time. Let me have it." You do it saying, "I am not going to hit back because I love you. I do this because Christ was reviled and He did not revile back. So that means if you have to hit me and demean me again, then I'm willing to endure it for the cause of Jesus Christ. If I hit you back it will limit my ability to share the gospel with you and I'm not willing to risk that."

This May Involve Enduring Hostility

Jesus addresses the issue of lawsuits in verse 40: "*And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.*" What is Jesus telling us here? Quite simply Jesus is asking, "Are your things more important than the example I have called you to live? Are your earthly possessions worth more?" So if you're sued, defend yourself. But if you're going to lose your testimony over a lawsuit, then it's not worth it. Just let them have it.

Hebrews 10:33-35 says that the New Testament church rejoiced when they lost their things. Why? Because it made their Kingdom work greater. It makes heaven so much more real because of what we've lost here on earth. What things are you holding onto and fighting over? One of the saddest things for me as a father is seeing my children hating one another over stupid things. Yet we do the same thing with friends, family and people we don't even know and God is grieved.

This May Involve Submitting Willingly

Jesus goes on to say in [verse 41](#), *“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”* What in the world does that mean? This is indicative of Jesus’ day. Roman authorities—officials or soldiers—had every right to call upon an inhabitant of the Roman Empire to do whatever they needed at any given time.

We don’t have to look very far to see evidence of this in the Scriptures. Just look at Simon of Cyrene. Jesus was carrying the cross to Golgotha without enough strength in His beaten body to continue. A Roman soldier said, “Hey you, get over here!” Do you think Simon had any idea that he was going to be carrying a cross that day? No. He was in Jerusalem doing his own thing. Maybe he was there for work. We don’t know. But we do know that it wasn’t his plan to carry the cross for Jesus. He was forced into service. It changed his schedule. It changed his plans. It cost him. No doubt it ruined his outfit. It was a sacrifice for him. They didn’t say, “Go take care of your kids and any other issues and then come carry this.” No, he was called into immediate service.

I don’t want to belabor this point but we need to look at it a little more. When your boss asks you to work the weekend is your response, “Man, I’ve worked a whole week and now you’re causing me to work on the weekend, too”? Do you complain about being required to do something for work?

What happens when someone comes and ruins your schedule? You’re going to a ball game or going golfing and someone needs your help. Do you say, “I don’t want to do it. I have things to do. I’ve worked hard all week and now you’re asking me to work harder”? Is your schedule more important than being Christ to people who need Him? We would have a lot more Christian bosses if we Christians were the greatest employees they have. Imagine if we all said, “Sure, Boss. I’m willing to do that because I want to honor you and serve you well. But even greater than that, I want to serve God and honor Him. I want to do what He says so if I can help you then I’m going to do that.”

There’s no better place to see this principle than the story of Paul and Silas in jail in [Acts 16:16-40](#). The doors opened up and they could have run for their lives. They were falsely imprisoned anyway. Instead, they told the Philippian jailer, “Hey, we’re all here. Don’t fret. You don’t have to worry about us. We haven’t gone anywhere.” Do you know what happened? The jailer became a Christian. Not only that but his whole family did as well.

Do you doubt that your boss can become a believer? Start living out this principle, going the extra mile for others and you’ll be amazed at what people will see.

This May Involve Giving Generously

Finally, [verse 42](#) says, *“Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”* With no real banking system, it was common for people to borrow from one another in Jesus’ day. People often became indentured servants as a result. They had to work until they paid off their debt. Jesus is saying, “Is your money so important to you that you have to hold it over people’s heads? Do you have to make people beg for it?”

A follower of Jesus Christ should be as generous as possible because God has been generous with us. Money is a valued thing in this world. Do you value it more than Christ? If you say no, then why would you use your money in a way to deny Christ to a lost world that needs your generosity?

The greatest testimony this church has had in the life of one of my employees is its generosity. This employee is relatively angry at the church. Some months ago we were driving to an event. I had the church's annual report from last year in my car—pastors have weird things in their cars. He picked it up and said, "You know Tim, I get that you like Jesus and all that but I hate the church. They're all money-hungry. It's all about getting rich and not helping people." Then he started reading through our budget and he said, "Wait a minute. What's this missions outreach? You give a lot of money to it. You give hundreds of thousands of dollars toward it. What is it?"

I said, "That's where we send people to share the gospel with others." I'm so thankful to Pastor Scott because he listed all the areas to which we give. I started going through them one by one and saying, "They're serving these people here and they're serving those people there. We're doing this and doing that to help others."

He said, "You do all of that? You mean you don't just keep all the money?"

I said, "If you know Village Bible Church at all, then you know we don't keep all the money." That man has been in our church more than half a dozen occasions since that conversation. I had invited him before but he started coming when he saw our generosity and that we are living what we're preaching.

This principle will change people's lives. It will change our lives first and then it will change the lives of those who watch.

Let me close with [Romans 12:14-21](#). Let this resonate in your heart this week when someone wrongs you or hurts you. Paul recounts Jesus' words when he says:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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." To the contrary, "if your enemy (listen, put that person in your mind that angers you, that is wronging you) is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, what a passage this is! There is so much here for us to apply. If we would just do what's explained in these verses, Your Kingdom would be a glorious one in the sight of all. But we struggle—I struggle. I assert my right and responsibility to seek revenge. You have convicted me this week that this is not the way of Christ or His followers. So I pray that we would apply this principle with discernment. This is

hard. There's tension here and we want to get the balance right. Give us discernment in our different situations. We know that You call us to love and not repay evil with evil.

Lord, help us know how to do that with our families, neighbors, coworkers, schools and even people we don't know. Let us know how to be like You, how not to revile or repay but to bless, love and evangelize for Your glory. Now send us into the world a little more in tune with Your Word. Let us apply it to those who deserve it least so that they may see You in us. It's in Christ's name that we pray and by His power that we believe we can do these things. In Jesus' name—the name above all names—we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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