

**The Sermon on the Mount
An Eye for an Eye (Part 1)
Matthew 5:38-42
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I know you enjoyed as I did Bruce Ware's message on the sovereignty of God. Most of us here this morning would say that we believe that God is sovereign. That we believe God rules over the events of this life. And that's relatively easy to say when those events or those circumstances are beyond human control. When there's a health problem that comes into our lives. When there's what we would call an accident that endangers us in some way, or even in the death of someone we love. But it's much more difficult to affirm God's sovereignty when the event that occurs in our lives, the circumstances that come, are caused by someone doing something evil to us, wronging us personally in some way.

How do most people respond when they are wronged by others? Well essentially, for most people they will respond in one of two ways or both and that is either by holding grudges against that person who's wronged them, or by trying to get even; either by harboring resentment and bitterness or by actively pursuing revenge. This is a very old problem. It's a problem as old as the human race when there were only four people on the planet this happened. Read secular history and it reads like a manual on revenge. For example 400 years before our Lord was born the Greek philosopher Euripides wrote this, "This is sweet, to see your foe perish and pay to justice all he owes." This is sweet. Aristotle wrote, "Men regard it as their right to return evil for evil and if they cannot, they feel they have lost their liberty." That same theme of revenge not only permeates ancient history, it also permeates so much of western literature.

I remember when I was in high school being deeply affected by reading Edgar Allan Poe's little short story called *A Cask of Amontillado* in which he describes the carefully plotted, bizarre and as only Poe can do, macabre sort of revenge that was exacted against his enemy. Or there's Shakespeare's villain Shylock who in *The Merchant of Venice* gives those immortal words, "I will have my pound of flesh." Revenge permeates so much even of modern entertainment. Many of the movies are about revenge. The general consensus of humanity is this, revenge is sweet. And yet exactly the opposite is true. Francis Bacon wrote, "A man that studies revenge keeps his own wounds green." Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* describes the sense of revenge. She writes, "Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time-- as aromatic wine it seemed on swallowing, warm and racy. It's after flavor, metallic and corroding gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned."

Harboring personal grudges and pursuing personal revenge are rooted inextricably in the human heart, in your heart and in my heart. And if you doubt that, let me just invite you to a little exercise. After the service is done this morning I want you to just stroll past our nursery, and I want you to watch those kids who are able to interact with each other and you will see active revenge after active revenge. Right? As soon as our children are able to talk, and they don't have to be taught this by the way, nobody had a class on this, as soon as they're able to talk, what do they say? He hit me first. Now as parents what is the logical inference we're to make from that statement? Think about it. The implication is they hit me first; therefore I had a right to hit them back. Revenge is my personal right. That's what that child is declaring. And unfortunately that tendency doesn't go away when we reach adulthood. It only becomes more subtle and in some cases far more dark. It's how the world usually responds to personal wrongs. A person is wronged and they make a conscious decision to hold a grudge, to resent that person's wrong. And then some people take the next step and they wait for or plan for and prepare for an opportunity to get even. And then eventually the time comes and they make them pay for what they did. Can we just be honest with each other and say this is how we're all tempted to respond to personal wrongs?

In fact I want you to do this exercise, I want you to think for a moment about the one person or the two people or the group of people who have most hurt you in your life. Who are the people who have hurt you in such a way that you still bear the wounds, the scars of those hurts? I think if you're honest with yourself again you know that you are tempted to harbor a grudge against them, to harbor resentment in your heart, to nurse that and allow it to fester. And perhaps you're even tempted to contemplate revenge, even if you would never carry it out, to consider it or perhaps even to pursue it.

As we continue our study through the Sermon on the Mount, today we come to a passage in which our Lord tells us that as His disciples we must relinquish all our supposed right to personal retaliation. Grudges and revenge have no place in His spiritual kingdom. That's the Lord's message to us today. Let's look at Matthew 5. Now it's been several weeks since we've studied together and so let me remind you briefly of the flow of our Lord's argument in this wonderful sermon. Jesus introduces this most famous sermon of His by describing the character of those who actually belong to His spiritual kingdom. What we call the Beatitudes. Jesus is describing the character of those who are truly His. You see everyone here this morning, every person in the world belongs to one of two kingdoms. There's no neutral ground according to God. Either you belong to the kingdom of Jesus Christ or you belong to the kingdom of Satan, that's it. You say how do I know? Well, Jesus describes those who belong to His kingdom in what we call the Beatitudes. It begins by being a beggar in spirit. Have you ever come to the place in your life where you've acknowledged before God that you are a beggar before Him and you have nothing He wants and that your only hope is if He will reach out to you in mercy and grace? That's

where it begins and Jesus goes on to describe us, those of us who belong to His kingdom in the Beatitudes.

Then in verses 13 to 16 of chapter 5, He describes the influence of those who belong to His spiritual kingdom. They're like salt and they're like light. And we looked at all of that in detail. But then that brings us to the body of the sermon, all of that was really introduction. He gets to the body of the sermon beginning in Matthew 5:17. And here He describes how the citizens of His spiritual kingdom actually live. This is what kingdom living is and He begins by identifying the essence of kingdom living. Here's the heart of it. It is whole hearted obedience to the Scriptures. If you belong to Jesus, you have a heart that longs to obey Him. In fact He goes on to say His disciples' obedience to the Scripture is radically different from the obedience of the scribes and Pharisees. Look at verse 20, "unless your righteousness surpasses (*or overflows far beyond*) that of the scribes and Pharisees, you (*absolutely*) will not enter the kingdom of heaven." You're not a part of My kingdom. Now in the verses that follow, really through the rest of chapter 5, Jesus gives six illustrations of how the righteousness of His true disciples surpasses that or goes beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees. The righteousness of His disciples starts in the heart. It's not about external conformity. It's not about just doing the right thing so you look good, or so you can be satisfied with yourself. It's a heart that longs to obey God and from that flows obedience. That's what His disciples are like. It's obedience in the heart and from the heart that flows out and affects the conduct.

Now in each of the six illustrations Jesus gives, He first shows how the scribes and Pharisees had misinterpreted the Scripture, the Old Testament, that they had at that point. And He explains then its true meaning. And we've looked at four of those illustrations so far. Today we come to the fifth illustration in which He shows His disciples and how they differ from the scribes and Pharisees in the issue of how they respond to personal wrongs and personal offences. So let's look at it together. Let me read the paragraph for you and remember these verses are interconnected. There's a central theme. See if you can discern it. Matthew 5:38

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'
But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two, Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Now folks these verses are some of the most hotly debated and frankly almost completely misunderstood verses in all of the New Testament. These verses have been and are used to argue for passivism, for complete non-resistance and even in some cases for anarchy as Tolstoy did. At the same time this passage contains some of the most familiar expressions in the English

language. Expressions like *an eye for an eye, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile*, because it is such a powerful passage of Scripture. The problem with this text is not the text itself. The problem is only a problem when the verses are ripped from their context and made to say what Jesus never intended them to say. You see when we study the Bible just as when we study any piece of literature we must always remember the context.

Sinclair Ferguson describes what can happen when you ignore the context or when words are taken out of their context. He tells the story that 20 or 30 years ago a colleague of his had gotten ahold of the what was at that time new software that you could use to translate from one language into another. You could enter language in English and it would translate it into Russian. And as they were enjoying this new software someone decided to type into the program the words of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane in which He said, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Pretty straightforward, right? The problem was that because the program couldn’t recognize context and therefore the different sense of words, it used the wrong sense. So, the word spirit became the word whiskey, you see the connection. And the word flesh became beef. So when you translated the Russian version then back into English it came out like this, “the whiskey is stronger than the beef.” That’s the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Ferguson’s point was that the new technology at that time was not yet able to interpret language based on its context. And context is absolutely crucial to understanding.

So when we look at this passage, when you look at these verses, it’s a paragraph. This paragraph has one central idea and all of the verses connect back to that idea. You cannot wrest them from their context and just use them however you want. So with that in mind, what is the context here in which Jesus delivers these radical words? We’re going to unpack this today and next week but let me just give you the big picture. The essential message in this paragraph, the big idea in this paragraph is this: in His spiritual kingdom, Jesus will not allow His disciples to harbor grudges or to pursue personal revenge. If you belong to Jesus Christ He says you are not permitted, you have no right to harbor grudges or to try to exact revenge. Now just as He’s done with the previous illustrations, in this fifth illustration Jesus is correcting not the Old Testament, but instead He is correcting the popular misunderstanding that has come because of the scribes’ teaching.

So let’s look first at the popular misunderstanding of *an eye for an eye*. You see the scribes’ explanation of that Old Testament expression completely distorted its true meaning. Now before we look at what the scribes taught, I want us to go back, and by the way the misunderstanding to what the scribes taught caused, among the people Jesus was teaching, I want us to go back first and consider what the Old Testament law actually taught. Look at verse 38, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’” Literally an eye in place of an eye and a tooth in place of a tooth. Now notice in the second half of verse 38 most English translations use all small capitals. That’s the way English translations use to tell you that this is actually taken

from the Old Testament text. The Old Testament command to which these words refer is often called (and this is important for you to understand because I'm going to use this expression several times this morning) is called the *lex talionis*. That's a Latin expression. It simply means the law of retaliation. The law of retaliation, the *lex talionis*.

The scribes were right in one thing. They were right that the Old Testament did require an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The question though is what does that mean? What was God trying to say by that expression? That expression 'an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth' is only used three times in the Old Testament, in three passages. What I want us to do is go back and look at those three passages in their context so that we understand what the Old Testament actually taught so that we understand how Jesus is correcting them. Okay? So, let's go back and look first of all at Exodus 21. Here's the first place this expression occurs, Exodus 21. Now again to get the context, remember in Exodus 20, God actually spoke from Mount Sinai. He spoke in His own voice, people heard Him and He gave His summary of His moral requirements for humanity we call the Ten Commandments. What follows in chapters 21 to 23 really has to do with the application of those moral requirements in the context of that new nation. In essence then, chapters 21 to 23 are a series of case laws and many of them deal with damage either to one's person or one's property. Alright now one specific case law I want us to look at occurs in Exodus 21:22.

If men struggle with each other (and so you have two men fighting, and in the midst of that fight)) and strike a woman with child (So a woman who's pregnant)so that she has a miscarriage" Now, notice there's a marginal note in your New American Standard, go over and look at that marginal note, 'or an untimely birth occurs.' Literally the Hebrew text says, 'her children come out.' I think that's probably the better idea. That's how the English Standard Version (the ESV) translates it. It means not so much that there's a miscarriage--the child dies, but rather that the child is born prematurely) "yet there is no (and notice the word further, the NAS has supplied that word. The fact that it's in italics means it's not there in the original language) and yet there is no injury,(So, the baby's born prematurely, but neither the mother nor the child are injured) he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is injury, then you shall appoint life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Now what's going on here? In context the point of these words is crystal clear. The punishment must fit the crime. The punishment must be severe enough to secure justice for the victim, but the punishment must not be so severe that it abuses the guilty. In other words, listen carefully, the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation defined true justice and at the same time it restrained

personal vengeance because if you were the relative of that person who had been harmed, or if you were the person who would be harmed and you could exact your own penalty, what would you tend to do? It wouldn't be an eye for an eye. It never is. You see revenge take place, what happens? It accelerates each time. God says, I'm going to have none of that. The penalty is going to fit the crime. I'm not going to allow personal vengeance.

Now there's a lot of debate among scholars about whether this lex talionis was ever carried out literally or not. In other words there's a lot of debate about whether if someone broke another person's tooth if the judges said break that person's tooth. It's possible, and there's one passage we'll look at that would be the strongest to imply that. However many scholars, (and I personally think I agree with them) that that is not how this law was normally practiced. It is simply a principle. It's a principal statement that says let the punishment fit the crime because even in this chapter if you go down to verse's 26 and 27, you have a man striking the eye of his male or female slave--And by the way let me just stop here and say, God regulated slavery in Old Testament Israel but it wasn't the kind of slavery we had in America. The law of God absolutely forbid that kind of slavery and in fact if someone kidnapped another person and made him a slave, God said put him to death. The slavery that's in the Old Testament was slavery where someone had been captured in war or a person had indentured himself or herself into slavery. So in in that situation God regulates it. And He says if someone is struck and that eye is destroyed let him go free on account of his eye, if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave he shall let him go free on account of his tooth. This principle of a monetary, in this case the freedom of the slave, a monetary penalty levied against the criminal is in other places as well. So I think that's what usually happened. A financial penalty was levied for the injury that was commensurate with the crime. The Jewish Mishnah also says that's how the law was usually practiced; an appropriate financial penalty that fit the crime was levied. For example here's one quote from the Mishnah. "If a man blinds his fellows eye, cuts off his hand or breaks his foot, his fellow is looked upon as if he was a slave to be sold in the market, they will assess how much he was worth before the injury and how much he is worth now and the difference would be the financial penalty that would be paid the person who was injured." So it was a financial penalty that was exacted. I think that's probably how this was carried out practically. But regardless what I want you to see is that the lex talionis was a just sentence that fits the crime.

Now folks this is obvious to us as we sit here today, right? But that's only because we enjoy a legal system that actually has its foundations in the lex talionis. Our entire legal system is built on the concept that the punishment must fit the crime. We don't always carry that out perfectly but that's the idea behind our criminal system. But in the cultural context of the ancient world, the Mosaic Law and this lex talionis was absolutely radical. The law at Sinai as you remember was given shortly after the Exodus. That was in about the year 1445 BC. Now if you remember your history there's another ancient law code that was in a similar time frame, the eighteenth century Babylonian law code that you learned about in school, called the code of whom,

Hammurabi, the Code of Hammurabi. There are a few similarities between the Mosaic Law and the Code of Hammurabi. But there are radical differences. And one of those radical differences is in how the lex talionis, the idea of a just penalty is carried out. Let me give you an example. Code of Hammurabi said if you stole, this is how you should be penalized. Listen to the code of Hammurabi. If a man hires a man to oversee his farm, and furnishes him the seed grain and entrusts him with oxen and contracts with him to cultivate the field and that man steals either the seed or the crop and it be found in his possession they shall cut off his hand. What does the Old Testament law says is to be done to a thief? He is to repay the money with interest. You see the difference of the crime and punishment matching. So it was radical. You know unfortunately there are many who are ignorant of the times and of the Old Testament who think that this eye for an eye was actually barbaric. And so they attacked the Bible in that way. When the truth is, not only was the Biblical version of lex talionis radical for its own cultural context, but for thousands of years it has served as the foundation for just legal systems, including our own.

Okay let's look at the second passage, Leviticus 24 and I won't spend as much time on each of these, I just want you to see these three passages before we go back to Matthew 5. Leviticus 24 :17

If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.
The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life.
If a man injures his neighbor, (*here we go*) just as he has done, so it shall be done to him; fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him. Thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. (*Now verse 22*) There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the Lord your God."

Now here the only thing that's really added to our understanding is that this standard of lex talionis of justice is to be carried out for everyone alike, both the Jewish people and the foreigners living among them.

Now look at the last passage. Turn over to Deuteronomy 19. Here we discover an absolutely crucial fact to our understanding of our Lord's words. Deuteronomy 19:15

A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he's committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do

to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, (*By the way, there is a deterrent to punishment of criminals*) and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Now the crucial point this passage adds is this, the stipulation of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was never intended to be carried out by individuals. Instead it was the standard for sentencing that was to be used by judges in the legal system in Israel. William Hendriksen the great Presbyterian commentator writes, “This was a law for the civil courts, laid down in order that the practice of seeking private revenge might be discouraged. The Old Testament passages do not mean take personal revenge whenever you were wronged. They mean exactly the opposite. Do not avenge yourself but let justice be administered publicly.” That was the point. J A Motyer writes, “This absolutely equal apportionment of justice promotes a wholesome society and acts as an effective deterrent. Far from being a charter for excess the *lex talionis* guards the rights of the guilty and maintains the dignity of the law. Far from being a piece of ancient barbarism it should still apply and God help the state where it does not.” So what the Old Testament taught, what I want you to see, is what the Old Testament taught was good and just and helpful. It laid down the foundational principle for the rule of law. Tragically though, the scribes and Pharisees had completely distorted that divine intention behind this extraordinary law.

Let’s briefly examine what the scribes and Pharisees taught. We’ve seen what the law itself meant in its context, so what did they do with it? How did they teach it? How did they mess it up? Well in each of the six illustrations that Jesus uses in chapter 5, He’s not challenging the Old Testament, but how the scribes has distorted the true meaning of the Old Testament Scripture. How do we know that? I don’t want to recover all the ground we’ve covered but let me just summarize it for you. We know this is what He’s doing, first of all because of the unique way in which Jesus introduces each of these six illustrations. Look at verse 38 “You have heard that it was said,” Now that unusual expression is our cue to see that Jesus is not quoting the Old Testament directly but the scribes’ misinterpretation of it. Because how does Jesus ordinarily begin a quote from the Old Testament? Well if I were to take you back to chapter 4, to the temptation, three times Jesus responds to the devil and He says to him, because what? It is written. It is written. This is what God said or Isaiah the prophet said. Here He uses this ‘you have heard that it was said.’ And that’s because the scribes were using the words of the Old Testament text but they were radically misinterpreting their true meaning. So Jesus makes it clear then that He’s not referring to the Old Testament directly but to the scribes flawed interpretation of it by using that strange expression, ‘you have heard that it was said.’

But there’s another way we know that Jesus is not dealing with the Old Testament directly and sort of changing it, but rather correcting the misinterpretation. It’s because He makes it

absolutely explicit in the last illustration. Look at verse 43, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor’” Notice that’s in all caps. That’s from the Old Testament. “and hate your enemy.” Folks do a concordance search, do it however you want you won’t find that expression in the Old Testament. That’s not from the Scripture. That was what the scribes taught. That was the logical inference they drew from *you shall love your neighbor*, but you can hate your enemy. So understand then Jesus is correcting what the scribes did in misinterpreting.

So exactly how then did the scribes misinterpret the *lex talionis*? What did they do with it? Well, it’s implied in Jesus’ correction. We can see what they did by what Jesus has to say here. And let me sort of summarize it this way. They made *lex talionis*, not about a judge’s just sentence of a criminal but about personal retaliation, personal revenge. The very law God gave to protect against personal vengeance, they had twisted into a divine authorization for personal vengeance. John Broadus writes the Jews held that this law justified personal retaliation of private wrongs. It’s ironic because elsewhere the Old Testament’s very clear. Leviticus 19:18 says, ‘you shall not take vengeance.’

So understand then the big picture, when God said, *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*, He was establishing a foundational principle for a just legal system and that is, the punishment should fit the crime. But the scribes had taught that an *eye for an eye* really wasn’t about the judicial system, it was primarily about you as an individual and that you were justified in holding a grudge because of personal wrongs and even in acting to exact revenge for that personal wrong. In fact they argued that it was an expression of God’s justice for you to do so. So what God had intended to be a protection against abuses and personal vengeance, they twisted to be His permission, even His authorization to harbor grudges and to pursue personal revenge.

Now we’re going to look at how Jesus applies that in a specific way, how He expands on that idea next week. But I want as we finish our time together today; I want us to ask what can we do, what do we do in applying what we’ve learned so far? How should you respond to what you’ve learned today? Let me give you three very specific applications that just jump out at me. Application #1, we, this is more on the political civil side of things, we’re going to get personal in a moment. But on the civil political side we must be concerned not only with punishing criminals and protecting our communities, but as Christians we must be concerned that the punishment handed out truly fits the crime. I think I see around me in conservative evangelical Christians a tendency to change that and turn it on its head. Listen, don’t let your conservative politics and your rightful anger at criminal behavior cause you to think more like the Koran than the Bible. Or cause you to think more like the scribes and Pharisees than Jesus. Criminals ought to be punished, but in God’s court punishment should be carefully meted out so that it fits the crime, so that it doesn’t give too much ground to the criminal, but nor does it give too much ground to the victim. It’s balanced.

Let me get more personal though in our application. Application #2, this principle of God's justice and it is that. It is a bedrock principle of how God operates. This principle of God's justice that the punishment fit the crime should drive every single one of us to seek refuge in Jesus Christ. Think about this with me for a moment. If you have never truly repented of your sins and you've never put your faith in Jesus Christ, some day you will stand before God. You can put your head in the sand, you can deny it, you can ignore it, you can pretend it's a long way off, you can do whatever you want but it's coming – God's promised. And you will stand before God your Creator, not merely as your Creator but as both the Scripture and our Lord Himself said, as your Judge. And the punishment that you will receive for your life of rebellion against Him and His careful commands toward you, that punishment will perfectly fit your crimes. I don't know about for you, but that is a terrifying thought because the last thing in the world you really want is God's justice. You will personally experience from God Himself the foundational principle of His justice which is *lex talionis*. The punishment will perfectly fit the crime.

Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, (*He's not even just looking at your behavior, He's looking at what goes on in the heart*) Even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds." Look at Romans 2 Paul is dealing with the reality that God's judgment is utterly impartial, doesn't matter in chapter 1 whether you're a pagan who's never heard the truth, or whether you're a religious person in chapter 2. Notice what he says in verse 3, Romans 2:3. "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things" He's referring back to the sins at the end of chapter 1. We're all judges, did you know that? Every single one of us are judges. We are always sitting in judgment on other people's behavior. We read that list of sins and we look at some of those sins and we go pshuu, can you believe that? How could anyone ever do that? And then we just sort of skip over the ones that we struggle with. That's what Paul's saying. He's saying you think you're going to get a 'get out of jail free card'? Do you think God is going to say, well okay your list is okay? No he's saying, listen how do you think you're going to escape the judgment of God? Verse 4, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience," Listen, the fact that God has been good to you and given you things and given you a good life, that isn't a sign that God is perfectly happy with how things are going in your life. That's a sign that God is good and that He is (notice the end of verse 4) he intends for all that kindness and goodness to lead you to repentance. But don't think it's always going to be that way with God, verse 5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." And here's the real terrifying part, verse 6, "who will render to each person according to his deeds:" *Lex talionis*. The punishment will perfectly fit the crime. Folks if you understand that then it should drive you to flee from God's justice to His grace found in His Son. That's your only hope, that's my only hope. If I get God's justice as the psalm says, 'if You should mark iniquities, who could stand.' Who could stand before You? If you kept track of them and treated us as they deserved not a single person could stand before You and not be swept away. I hope if

you're not in Christ this morning, the reality of lex talionis, the reality of the future judgment will drive you to your knees today to plead for God's grace in Christ.

But what if you're already a Christian? How should you apply what we've learned today? Let me give you a third application. You must be willing to forgive those who have wronged you. You must be willing to forgive those who've wronged you. You remember that little mental list I asked you to create at the beginning? Those people who have most hurt you and the wounds of whose comments or whose conducts still mark you and scar you? Jesus says if you're my disciple you have no right to harbor grudges against them. And you have no right to seek personal revenge. You must forgive them. How should you respond to personal wrongs? Jesus is going to explain this more fully, He's going to exegete this in a sense, but He's really pulling from an Old Testament text. Turn back to Leviticus 19. One of the most famous verses in the Old Testament, but we only know it for half of the verse, Leviticus 19 :18. "You shall not take vengeance," God says no revenge. Now perhaps you have carried out revenge. All of us have at some measure. Maybe you have in large measure. You've found a way to get even with the person who's hurt you. But for many of us, we're not tempted to go that step. We're not tempted to actually act on the feelings of revenge. But as our Lord does with all of those sins in Matthew 5--you know, you have the sin of murder, He's concerned about what goes on in the heart – anger. You have the sin of adultery. He's concerned about what goes on in the heart – lust. Same thing with this sin. So notice the rest of verse 18. "You shall not take vengeance," That's the external act, "nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people," That's the heart, that's the heart attitude, the spirit. God says it's not okay. It's not okay to think revenge is your personal right. It's not okay even to stop short of that and to say I'm never going to act on those feelings of resentment but I will nurse and cherish that anger and resentment against that person who hurt me as long as I live. Why? Here's the famous part of the verse. Verse 18, but in contrast to either bearing an attitude of grudge or carrying out revenge, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord." God says just like I love my enemies and care for those who hate Me, if you're going to be Mine, Jesus says in Matthew 5, if you're going to be My disciples, you're going to follow Me, you're going to have to mimic My behavior, not the behavior of the people around you. And what did our Lord do to those who wronged Him? You can't ever forget those words. He's hanging on the cross, nailed there as a criminal which He absolutely did not deserve and in the middle of that He prays, "Father, forgive them for they didn't know what they were doing." Listen, if you and I are going to be followers of Jesus Christ, that's what He demands of us. That little list you have of those who have hurt you the most deeply and the most profoundly, if you're going to follow Christ, you've got to be willing to let it go and to forgive them in the way you have been forgiven. Next week, Lord willing, we'll examine Jesus' revolutionary teaching about personal revenge in verse's 39 to 42, but let's pray together.

Our Father we admit to You that this is not who we are by nature. We confess that we find it easy to nurse personal wrongs, to nurse resentment, to harbor grudges. And Father sometimes to think about ways to get even, even if we're not planning actually to do it. And Lord sometimes we're even tempted to take the next step and to carry out that plan, to pay back the person who's hurt us. Father forgive us. Help us to remember that that is so unlike You. That You don't harbor a grudge, that You are forgiving by nature, that You will carry out vengeance some day but it will be just and righteous vengeance unlike ours. But for so many You show grace and mercy that is undeserved. You show love to all even those who hate You and who will never come to know You. Father help us to follow You and to follow Your Son. Lord I pray for the person here today who doesn't know Jesus Christ, who has never truly repented of his sins and put his faith in Christ. Lord help him or her to see how it will be at the judgment, that they will face Your unfailing foundational principle of Your moral universe, lex talionis, and the punishment they receive will absolutely fit the crime of their rebellion against You. May they flee for refuge in Jesus today. We pray it in His name, Amen.