Matthew
Holding Grudges, Getting Even (Part 1)
Matthew 5:38-42
June 21, 2026
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

I think most of us would agree that God is sovereign over every event in life, but frankly, it's easy to affirm that, or at least easier to affirm that, when what happens to us is largely beyond human control. Like the diagnosis of cancer, for example, it's somewhat easier when you know that this happened and no one, except God himself, could be behind it. It is much more difficult, however, to affirm God's sovereignty when another person does something evil to us, when we are the victim of personal wrongs. In fact, the reality is, when wronged by others, most people on this planet respond by harboring bitterness and trying to get even by holding grudges or seeking personal revenge.

This is a very old problem. You'll remember that it happened when there were only four people on the planet. And it has become the widely accepted human response to personal wrongs. In fact, some of history's great philosophers defended certain expressions of revenge. Four-hundred years before Christ, Euripides wrote, “This is sweet, to see your foe perish and pay to justice all he owes.” Aristotle wrote, “Men regarded as their right to return evil for evil, and if they cannot, feel they have lost their liberty.” Western literature often illustrates the pervasive human tendency to seek revenge. One of the most chilling things I've ever read was a short story by Edgar Allan Poe called “The Cask of Amontillado.” If you've never read it, you ought to read it; it is a study in personal revenge.

In The Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare has his villain, Shylock, make this famous statement, “The pound of flesh which I demand of him is dearly bought. Tis mine, and I will have it.” Revenge also permeates modern entertainment. Personal retribution lies behind famous

Copyright © 2026 Tom Pennington. All rights reserved.
Unedited transcript for personal use only.

movie lines like Clint Eastwood's, “Go ahead, make my day.” Or Schwarzenegger's, “I'll be back.” Revenge, personal revenge, fuels the plot of more recent movies like John Wick, *Kill Bill*, Volumes 1 and 2, and even *The Gladiator*. Such movies encourage the audience to celebrate when the movie's hero finally gets even. You see, the general human consensus is that revenge is sweet, but that's simply not true.

Francis Bacon was right when he said, “A man that studies revenge keeps his own wounds green.” In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë writes, “Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time (And then describes it like this.); as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy.” And then she says, “Its after-flavor, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned.”

Regardless of that reality, holding grudges and seeking revenge are rooted inextricably in the fallen human nature of every heart. You say, “Wow, Tom, that seems a bit cynical!” Well, listen, if you doubt what I just said, let me challenge you to do this. After the service is over, go visit our nursery. And you will witness one act of revenge after another. In fact, as soon as they can talk, one of the first expressions out of our children's mouths is (What?) “He hit me first!” Now think about the logic of that statement; there is a logic there. They didn't have to be taught this logic. It's part of who they are. The logic is, “Since he hit me first, I have every right to hit him back–revenge is my personal right.” Tragically, that attitude doesn't go away with childhood. It remains into adulthood. In fact, most adults typically respond to personal wrongs by making a conscious decision to hold a grudge, looking for an opportunity for payback, and eventually actually taking personal revenge.

And we need to be honest with ourselves that this is even how we as believers can be tempted to respond when we are personally wronged. I mean, think for a moment about those who have hurt you, those who have most wronged you. If you're honest with your own heart, then you have to admit that you are at least tempted to hold a grudge, and you are tempted to seek personal revenge. But as we continue our study through the Sermon on the Mount, we come today in Matthew, chapter 5, to a passage where our Lord tells us that, as His disciples, we must renounce all such personal retaliation. Grudges and revenge have no place in His spiritual kingdom.

Now, it's been a couple of weeks since we've studied Matthew together and "The Sermon on the Mount," so let me remind you of the flow of our Lord's argument in this sermon. In chapter 5, He introduces the sermon by describing "The Citizens of His Spiritual Kingdom." He describes "Their Character" in verses 3 through 12; that's "The Beatitudes." And then He describes "Their Influence" in verses 13 to 16. They are like salt, and they are like light. Then He begins the body of this sermon, beginning in chapter 5, verse 17, and Jesus, in the body of the sermon, describes how citizens of His spiritual kingdom actually live. And He begins by identifying what I would call, "The Essence of Kingdom Living." They are marked by "A Right Relationship to the Scripture," that is, by wholehearted obedience to what God has revealed in His Word. In fact, Jesus explains that His disciples' obedience to Scripture is actually radically different from that of the scribes and Pharisees.

But notice verse 20. He says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses ('overflows,' literally, or 'surpasses to a far extent') *that of* the scribes and Pharisees, you (absolutely) will not enter the kingdom of heaven (you are not going to be in My kingdom, now or ever, if this is not true)." And then from that verse, through the rest of chapter 5, Jesus gives

us six examples to illustrate how the righteousness of His disciples surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. Their righteousness, that is, His disciples' righteousness, is from the heart and in the heart.

Now, in each of the six examples, in the second half of chapter 5, Jesus points out, first, how the scribes had misinterpreted the Old Testament, and then He explains its true meaning. Today, we come to the fifth of the six examples in which Jesus shows us how His disciples, contrary to the rest of the world, respond to personal wrongs, personal offenses. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 38 to 42. You follow along in your copy of God's Word. This is our Lord. He says:

> "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, two things immediately jump out as I read that passage. The first is that some of our most familiar English expressions come from this paragraph; expressions like an "eye for an eye," "turn the other cheek," "go the extra mile," all come from this paragraph. But the other thing that strikes me as I read that is these verses are among the most hotly debated, and I would add, completely misunderstood verses, in all of the New Testament. As we'll discover, these statements are often ripped from their context and made to say what Jesus did not intend to say. In fact, this passage reminds us that the number one rule when we come to interpret the Scripture as this, "Context is always king!"

In fact, Sinclair Ferguson tells the humorous story of a friend of his to show what happens when words are taken out of context. He tells a story that years ago, he had a colleague who had one of those early computer software's that translated English into Russian. And he decided to test the program, to see how effective it was, by using Jesus' words, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." So he ran it into the program to see how well it would translate it into Russian. The problem was, the computer software program translated the word 'spirit' as 'whiskey,' and the word 'flesh' as 'beef.' So, translated back into English, it read, "The whiskey is stronger than the beef." Ferguson's point was that the new software wasn't yet able to interpret based on context and obviously, context is crucial to human understanding and to the meaning of what has been written. So we have to interpret the meaning of Jesus' words here in keeping with their context.

Now, let me give that to you, and then over the next couple of weeks, we're going to see this unfold. But let me give it to you in summary. When we look at Jesus' words here, this paragraph in context, the essential message of the paragraph is this. "In His spiritual kingdom, Jesus forbids His disciples from holding grudges or seeking revenge." Let me say that again, "In His spiritual kingdom, Jesus forbids His disciples from holding grudges or seeking revenge."

Now, in this paragraph, there are two instructions that sort of fill that out. Today, we're going to examine just Jesus' first instruction in verse 38. Lord willing, in the next couple of weeks, we'll look at the other instruction that is in verses 39 to 42. So let's look at the first instruction. Here it is. This is what we'll learn today. Jesus calls us to "Reject the Popular Misunderstanding of 'An Eye for an Eye,'" He calls us to reject the popular misunderstanding of "an eye for an eye." You see, in the first century, the scribe's explanation of that expression had completely distorted its true Old Testament meaning.

So, before we examine what they taught, and the misunderstanding their teaching caused among the people of the first century, I want us to first consider "What the Old Testament Really Taught," what the Old Testament really taught. Look again at verse 38, "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'" Now, you'll notice that the second half of the verse is in small capitals. That's our translator's way of telling us that it's quoted directly from the Old Testament. Literally, in Greek, this reads, "AN EYE IN PLACE OF AN EYE, AND A TOOTH IN PLACE OF A TOOTH."

Now, this command, that is quoted from the Old Testament, is often referred to as the *Lex Talionis*, *Lex Talionis*. I'll use that expression several times today; it is simply a Latin expression that literally means "The Law of Retaliation," but it's a shorthand way to refer to this idea of "AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH," the *Lex Talionis*. Now, the scribes were right about this. The Old Testament law did require an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," but that invites the really important question, and that is, "What exactly did God mean by that?" Now, that expression occurs only three times in the Old Testament Law, and I want us to look at all three of them in their context, so we are clear on what the Old Testament really taught.

Let's start with Exodus 21, turn back there with me, Exodus 21. Now, in Exodus 20, the chapter before, God summarized the moral law in "The Ten Commandments." God Himself, with His own voice, actually spoke out, and the two-million Jews gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, heard God's voice actually speak what we call "The Ten Commandments." Then, in chapters 21 to 23, God applies that Moral Law in the context of the lives of the people of the nation. In fact, we could say this, "Chapters 21 to 23 contain a series of case laws, and many of them deal with damage either to one's person or one's property in light of, and in application of, 'The Ten Commandments.'"

Now, one specific case law deals with the *Lex Talionis*, and it's Exodus 21, verses 22 to 25. Let's read it together, Exodus 21, verse 22:

> If men struggle with each other (So there's a fight, and inadvertently, while they're fighting, they're not careful.) they strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, 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 *any further* injury (or any injury), then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

So there's the first occurrence of this expression. Now, this is a really important text for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is it lays out the reality that God values life outside the womb and life inside the womb at the same level. In fact, notice in verse 22, you have the first circumstance. There are men who are fighting, and they're not careful, they're careless, in fact, negligent, we could say, and in doing that, they strike a woman with child so that she has a premature birth. But in verse 22, neither the mother nor the child is injured. What is to happen? There's to be financial compensation.

In verses 23 to 25, the same scenario, but in this case, one or both, the mother or the child or both of them are injured. What was to happen? There was to be punishment, and the punishment was to be an “eye for an eye.” Now, clearly, this shows that God treated the unborn child, at any stage in the womb, as a person. I further developed this in my book on abortion. You can go read about that, but this is a huge point. But let's come back to what we're looking at.

In context, the point of “an eye for an eye” is very clear. And that is, “The punishment that is exacted must fit the nature of the crime.” It must be severe enough to secure justice for the victim, but not so severe that it abuses even the guilty person. So let me summarize it this way,

The *Lex Talionis*, this principle of “an eye for an eye” has two basic purposes: one, to define true legal justice, and the other, to prevent legal abuse on the guilty, and even to prevent revenge, as we'll see.

Now, there is a debate among scholars about whether this law was to be carried out literally. In other words, was it actually true that if a court found that a man had punched out another man's eye, that they then punched out an eye? That is certainly possible, and several of the texts seem to imply that it was carried out literally. Certainly, that was true with life; a “life for a life,” the person was killed, their life was taken. But there is some indication that this law wasn't always practiced literally. You can see in Exodus, chapter 21, verse 26:

> If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, (And in Jewish culture, this would be someone who was captured in war.), and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.

This, by the way, doesn't justify slavery, it regulates it, and it makes it clear that in that context of someone who had not been kidnapped, that's American slavery, and that was forbidden by the Old and New Testament, the death penalty for such slavery, but this is a prisoner of war. Even in this case, that prisoner was not to be abused, and if they were injured, then they were to be set free. So what you have in this situation is a financial penalty levied for the injury. In this case, it was the slave's freedom. The Jewish *Mishnah* says that's how this law, “an eye for an eye,” was often practiced with an appropriate financial penalty that fit the crime. But regardless, whether it was carried out literally or not, the point of *Lex Talionis* is that a just sentence must fit the crime.

Now, as you sit here today, that just seems obvious to us, right? But it's only because we enjoy a legal system that is built on the foundation of *Lex Talionis*. Our entire system is built on this biblical concept. But in the cultural context of the ancient world, when this command was given, this principle was absolutely radical. Now, remember when the law of Moses was given. The Law at Sinai was given shortly after the Exodus from Egypt in about the year 1445 BC. Now, you may remember from school that there was another law code from that same basic period of time, the 1700s BC, the Babylonian Law Code, the Code of Hammurabi. There are a few similarities between the two, but they are radically different in a number of ways, including on this issue of punishment fitting the crime. For example, what did the Code of Hammurabi call for in the case of stealing? "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 fingers." So, the punishment for stealing was to cut off a portion of the hand or the hand itself. What did the Mosaic Law call for in the case of stealing? It called for financial restitution with interest. It called for a penalty that fit the crime. Sadly, today, those who are ignorant of the real purpose behind the *Lex Talionis,* accuse the Bible of being somehow barbaric. But the truth is, not only was the *Lex Talionis* radical in its compassion in its own cultural context, but for 3,500 years, it has served as the foundation for just legal systems, including our own. That's Exodus 21.

There's a second key passage in the Old Testament that has this phrase that we need to look at, and it's over in Leviticus, chapter 24; Leviticus 24, verses 17 to 22. You follow along as I read. Again, Moses writes:

> 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, 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.

This is one of those passages that sounds like it was carried out literally–thus, the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. Now watch 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 (YAHWEH) your God." Now, this passage adds one really important idea to what we've seen already, and that is this standard of *lex talionis*, the punishment has to fit the crime. This standard of justice is for everyone–it is for the Jewish people, the native citizens, and it is for the foreigners living among them.

Now, that brings us to the third Old Testament passage, and that's Deuteronomy 19. Turn over to Deuteronomy 19, verses 15 to 21. Again, you follow along as I read. Deuteronomy 19, verse 15:

> A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. (Now watch this, verse 16.) 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 (YAHWEH), 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,

> 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, this passage adds one more really crucial point, and that is that God never intended *Lex Talionis* to be carried out by individuals. I'm about to date myself here, but when I was growing up, there was a long-running television series, a Western series called *Gunsmoke*, and I liked it as a kid, enjoyed it very much. But I remember being struck how often the villain in the episode, who was trying to track somebody down and take their life, would use this verse, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for tooth." "I'm chasing down this person who hurt me or hurt my loved one, and I'm going to exact revenge, 'an eye for an eye,' it's what God said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'" Listen, that's not what God intended with *Lex Talionis*. It wasn't to be carried out by individuals. This text is clear. It was for judges. This was the sentencing standard that judges were to use in the legal system, the established legal system of the nation. William Hendriksen writes:

> This was a law for the 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're wronged." They mean the exact opposite, "Do not avenge yourself, but let justice be administered publicly by the courts."

J.A. Motier, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, commenting on the *Lex Talionis*, writes this, he says:

> 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, ancient or modern, where it does not.

That's exactly right. This is the foundation for a just legal system. So, what I want you to see is that what the Old Testament really taught was good and just and reflected the perfect justice of God Himself. Tragically, however, the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day had completely distorted God's intention behind this extraordinary law. In fact, I would say they had completely reversed its meaning.

So, let's go back to our text and let's consider or examine "What the Scribes and Pharisees Wrongly Taught." We've seen "What the Old Testament Really Taught;" now let's consider "What the Scribes and Pharisees Wrongly Taught." Now in each of the six examples, including this one, Jesus disagreed, not with the Old Testament, but with how the scribes taught it, how they had distorted it. And we know that's true for two reasons. We know He is taking issue, not with the Old Testament, but with their distortion for two reasons–number one, because of the unique way that Jesus begins each of these six examples. Look, for example, at verse 38. This is how He always starts these, "You have heard that it was said." that's a really strange phrase, and that unusual expression is the clue that helps us see that Jesus is not refuting the Old Testament, but the scribes' misinterpretation because when Jesus goes to quote the Old Testament, what does He say? Go back to chapter 4 in the Temptation. Three times He says, "It is written," "It is written," "It is written!" So, the scribes were using the words of the Old Testament, but they were radically misinterpreting their true meaning. And Jesus makes that clear by using this unusual expression, "You have heard that it was said."

A second way we know that Jesus is refuting their misinterpretation is that in one of the examples, He explicitly quotes their misinterpretation. Look down at verse 43, the last, the sixth

example. Notice how He begins here. Verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.'" Notice that is in all caps; that's our translators telling us that comes from the Old Testament. "And (You have heard this.) hate your enemy." That is not in all caps, why? Because that is not in the Old Testament; that is nowhere in the Bible! That's unacceptable! Where did that come from? That was what the scribes taught. This is their misinterpretation. So clearly then, Jesus was quoting their misinterpretation. And the same thing is true with the other five examples. That's what He is confronting, not the Old Testament. No! Remember He said He came "to fulfill the Old Testament, that not a single letter, not the smallest stroke of a letter would pass away" (Summary Paraphrase–Matt. 5:17-18). He's not taking issue with the Old Testament; He's taking issue with their misinterpretation.

So, that brings the question then, "How did the scribes distort the meaning of the *Lex Talionis*? And the answer is, "It's implied in Jesus' correction in verses 39 to 42." We're going to see that unfold starting next week. But let me give you the sort of summary statement, "They made *Lex Talionis* about personal retaliation rather than a judge's sentence." Let me say that again, "They made *Lex Talionis* about personal retaliation rather than a legal sentence." So ironically, the very Law that God gave as a protection against personal vengeance, they twisted into divine authorization for personal vengeance. John Broadus, in his commentary writes this,

> The Jews held that this law justified personal retaliation of private wrongs and in general, justified revenge. The teachings of our Lord on this subject are therefore not in antagonism to the Law of Moses but serve to carry out more fully its spirit and design, because elsewhere in the Old Testament and in the Old Testament law, God explicitly forbids revenge. Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance."

So when God said “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for tooth,” He was establishing a foundational principle of a just legal system–The punishment must always fit the crime. But the scribes had taught the people of that day that “an eye for an eye” wasn't about the legal system and what happened in the courts. Instead, it meant that you, as an individual, because of personal wrongs, were justified in holding a grudge and even in seeking revenge. They even argued, by the way, that to do so was an expression of God's justice, as if God was sort of implicitly demanding that we pursue revenge. That's what Jesus is correcting in verses 39 to 42.

Now, when you have that in your mind, you reread those verses, it makes a lot of things a lot clearer. Some of the more radical interpretations don't fit the context, we'll see that. But now that we understand what the Old Testament law really taught and we understand what the scribes wrongly taught, there are a couple of practical implications that for me just jumped out of the Old Testament law of *Lex Talionis*. Let's look at them together, Some “Practical Implications of *Lex Talionis*.”

Let's start with the wider scope. Number one, “We should be concerned not only with protecting our communities and punishing criminals, but also that their punishment truly fits the crime.” This, friends, is the heart of God. Our God is a God of perfect justice, and this is what He demands. Now when you understand it, this means two realities are true. First of all, “God wants the guilty convicted and punished.” There's no question about that. But secondly, it also means that “God wants the punishment to be just and to fit the nature of the crime.” He's the One who reacted against, or I shouldn't say reacted, God doesn't react, but He's the One who

spoke to the extremities of some of the laws like *Hammurabi's Code* where the penalty was excessive.

Let me stop and say this first, "I love our country. I love that we are a nation of laws. I love that we attempt to carry out true justice. There are many countries where that doesn't happen, so I'm grateful, alright?" Take it in that context. At the same time, the truth is there are some penalties in our justice system that are too lenient by biblical standards, I believe. For example, under the laws of many states, the average prison sentence for rape is eight to twelve years. The penalty in the Old Testament was death. Now, I'm not arguing that death should always happen. I'm just saying I think our penalties tend to be much too lenient on that issue. Other examples of lenient sentencing include the sexual abuse of a child. We've all sadly heard stories of how, and I've had to deal with some as a pastor interpersonally, where it's shocking how soon people who commit such crimes are out of prison, repeat violent offenders, DUI-related deaths when there have been previous DUI convictions, and certainly this would be true with human trafficking. Again, tragic how light the sentences for that can be.

Unfortunately, I also believe that other penalties in our legal system have been too harsh. For many years, for example, under the "Three strike laws," people were given extremely long sentences even though the third offense was a minor offense. Now, listen, I believe that repeat offenders do deserve a harsher penalty; I think that's a biblical concept, but no one should get fifty years in prison for a minor theft–that's not a just penalty. And fortunately, that's beginning to change. Another example of harsh sentencing is that, increasingly in our culture, Christians are being imprisoned for practicing what is long held to be their First Amendment-protected religious beliefs in their workplaces. We have also witnessed lengthy imprisonment for long-term, hardworking immigrants whose only crime was entering the U.S. illegally. Now, before

you have a heart attack, let me say this. We can all agree that our immigration system is broken. And we can all agree that our government's leaders need to fix it wisely. But we should also all agree that ordinary people who are here illegally need to be treated both justly and compassionately. The punishment needs to fit the crime. And I would add, by the way, that we have to stop changing the rules with every new administration–that's not just! Here's the point I am trying to make; forget the details, remember the big picture. Beloved, on the one hand, don't let your compassion as a Christian make you soft on the just punishment of lawbreakers; but on the other hand, don't let your conservative politics or your rightful anger at criminal behavior cause you to think more like the Code of Hammurabi or the Quran than like a follower of Jesus Christ.

A second application is that understanding this basic principle of God's justice, that the punishment must always fit the crime, number two, "We should not only pursue human justice, but we should also expect God's justice at the judgment, and we should, therefore, seek refuge in the Gospel." You know, as humans, let's be honest with ourselves, we want God to execute justice, as long as it's on everybody else, but we want God to grade, in our case, with a curve. That's not going to happen! Let me speak to you this morning. If you're here and you've never repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ, and you know that's true. Listen, someday, Jesus said it clearly, the Scripture says it again and again, someday, you will stand individually, personally, before Jesus Christ as your judge. And on that day, He is not going to grade you on a curve. The punishment that you receive for your life of rebellion against Him will perfectly fit your crimes. And if you're honest with yourself at all, that should be a terrifying thought to you. You're going to get exactly what God thinks you deserve. You will personally experience, from God Himself, this foundational principle of *Lex Talionis*, perfect

justice for your crimes. And the Scripture's clear what that means–that means eternal suffering. Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I, the LORD (YAHWEH), search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds." Romans 2, verse 6, Paul says, in the day of judgment, "who (God) WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS." In other words, what you're getting at the judgment, apart from Jesus Christ, is *Lex Talionis*, "AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH." You're going to get exactly what you deserve. That should drive you, like it should drive all of us, to seek refuge from God's justice in God's grace in Jesus Christ. Because you see on the cross, God satisfied His justice by punishing His only Son for the sins of all of those who would believe in Him so that He could be just and forgive those crimes, forgive those sins. It comes down to this. Don't ever forget this, "Somebody's getting justice for your sins." Let me say that again, "Somebody's getting justice for your sins." It'll either be you forever, or it'll be because you repent and believe in God's Son, and God allows Jesus to endure the justice your sins deserved on the cross. Those are the only two options you have got. My plea with you today is to repent and believe in Christ.

For us who are already Christians, there's a third implication, and that is, "We must not only desire and seek justice under the law," that's right; it's right that we pursue justice, "but we must, at the same time, also have a spirit of forgiveness toward those who have sinned against us." Both need to be true; it's just like our Lord, right? I mean, think about it, on the cross, He prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," (Luke 23:34). Some of those there that day were truly forgiven; they repented and believed. We'll meet them in heaven, the Centurion and those who were with him, others who were at the foot of the cross. But there were plenty of people there who Jesus exercised a spirit of forgiveness who one day will stand before Him and because they have not repented, they will receive *Lex Talionis*, exactly what

they deserve. But we are responsible like Christ to exercise a spirit of forgiveness. So let me ask you, “Has someone sinned terribly against you in a way that changed the course of your life?” Maybe it was a parent or a relative, a spouse, a child, a friend, a coworker, a boss, a fellow believer, maybe a total stranger. How should you respond to those personal wrongs, even the worst of personal wrongs?

Turn back with me to Leviticus again. Here is a foundational, seminal passage. Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 17, “You shall not hate your fellow countrymen in your heart.” Now, what is the context here? We're going to see the context is you have been wronged; you have been sinned against. And how do you respond to that? “You shall not hate your fellow countrymen in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.” In other words, you can deal with making it right if it's a personal wrong, you can confront that person about their sin. If it's a legal wrong, you can take them to the authorities–but you can't hate them! And verse 18, you can't make this about personal revenge, “You shall not take vengeance,” there's the external act, but that's not all it says, “nor,” here's the internal attitude, “nor (shall you) bear any grudge against the sons of your people.” In other words, listen, not only is it not okay to get even; it's not okay to want to get even. It's not okay to harbor that wrong and not have a spirit of forgiveness toward that person who wronged you. Instead, notice verse 18, “but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD (YAHWEH).” One way we love the people around us, this is the second most important, greatest commandment Jesus said. One way we love the people around us is when they wrong us, yes, we seek to make it right. We confront personal wrongs. We take it to the judge if there are legal wrongs that need to be addressed, there have been crimes that have been committed, it's okay to pursue those things; God is a God of justice. But what isn't okay is letting that become a point of hatred in your heart

toward that person, or a desire to get even with them at a personal level, or to harbor a grudge against them because of what they've done. Instead, we are, like God, to love our enemies. This is revolutionary. And next week, Lord willing, we're going to begin to examine Jesus' revolutionary teaching about how you and I should respond to personal wrongs instead of revenge and grudges.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this incredible, incredible truth. Lord, we are amazed at Your wisdom that You established as the God of perfect justice, You established this foundational principle of human justice. Father, help us as citizens of this great land to be concerned not only that the guilty be punished, but that that punishment be in keeping with fairness, that it be in keeping with the nature of the crime. That's Your heart, help it to be ours.

And, Father, I also pray that for those here who don't know You, that You would arrest their attention with this truth today, that they would see that this is the principle, they are going to stand before You and be judged by, *Lex talionis*, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” They're going to get exactly what their rebellion deserves. Lord, may they run to Christ even today and find the forgiveness that's found in Him, that Your justice is satisfied in Jesus' death for their sins. Lord, may they repent and believe today.

And Lord, for the rest of us who are in Christ, help us to rightly be concerned about justice, interpersonally, legally, in our courts, when crimes are committed. Lord, help us to care about all of that, but help us at the same time to have a spirit of forgiveness, not to develop hatred for that person in our hearts, not to seek revenge, and not even to harbor a lingering grudge, but to love them as You have commanded, and as You and our Lord Jesus have so beautifully modeled, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.