FIFTH ANTITHESIS

*"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 stand against evil. But whenever anyone insults you by slapping your right cheek, turn your other cheek to that person. And to anyone who takes you to court to get your garment, give that person even your coat. And whenever some soldier compels you in public service to go one mile, go with him two. And give to anyone who asks anything of you; and do not turn away anyone who wants to borrow from you."*
*Matthew 5:38-42*

This fifth antithesis contrasts two patterns of conduct.

The first is based on the strict justice of the Old Testament code.

The second is based on a totally new set of priorities where the disciples sacrifice their own rights and make themselves available to the needs and demands of others.

This fifth antithesis with its sacrificial nature placed upon the follower of Christ, is setting up the sixth antithesis with its command for the followers to love their enemies.

There is much confusion and misinterpretation of these verses to the point where some believe Jesus' teaching means pacifism or anarchism. Some say that he is abolishing government and the coercion that is inherent in any form of political order. Others interpret them to mean that Jesus is limiting this antithesis to private and personal ethics divorced from public or social ethics.

It doesn't seem possible however, given that Jesus has come to operate within the spheres of not only private but public life, within an individual's morality and how that individual conducts themselves within the larger society, that he limits himself to only one sphere or the other.

Scripture doesn't acknowledge any kind of line between public and private. The individual operates within the boundaries of community thus their thoughts, actions and motivations must be addressed in both private and public life.

Therefore, Jesus intended his teaching to be followed by all his disciples in all spheres of their lives. To compartmentalize his instructions would be placing limits he never intended.

*To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your garment either.*
*Luke 6:29*

Luke reverses the order of *cloak and garment* as he envisions the event as a robbery taking place on the road where the *cloak* is taken first. Whereas Matthew has in mind a court scene or lawsuit where the garment is intended.

Matthew again gives us his patterned *three-fold* formula.

1) The Old Testament teaching.
2) The antithetical perspective offered by Jesus.
3) The illustration of the point.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, (and) a tooth for a tooth.'*
*Matthew 5:38*

*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.*
*Exodus 21:23-24*

*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.*
*Leviticus 24:19-20*

*Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*
*Deuteronomy 19:21*

What is evident in these passages is that the *lex talionis* or *law of retaliation* is presented in a way that limits the degree of personal vengeance that one may take upon another. In that sense, the Old Testament does not present the *law of retaliation* as a positive teaching about what a person must or should do.

By the time of Jesus in the First Century, monetary recompense was apparently substituted for the literal application of *law of retaliation.*

Note that the Old Testament commandment gives us two positive contributions. First, it keeps in check retaliation beyond the original injury, and secondly, teaches justice by the same limitations.

If one damaged a person's property, he had to restore what he had damaged or suffer a similar damage to himself.

Jesus does not deny the Old Testament principle, and he sometimes appeals to it as a principle of divine justice.

*Whoever is ashamed of the Son of Man, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed.*
*Mark 8:38*

Understand that Jesus is not describing situations in which lives are in peril or that one cannot offer self-defense. The law provides for one's self-defense and defense of your house, family and property. This antithesis has to do with honor and dishonor, insult and shame.

Jesus calls his disciples to bear up under retribution and receive the second slap. In a sense, Jesus is saying that whereas justice allows for a retribution slap following an initial slap, the redemption of the Kingdom appeals to the disciples of the Kingdom to not only receives the first slap but then be willing to absorb the retaliatory slap as well.

This *"double restitution"* comes back on the disciple, who bears the punishment on behalf of the one who assaulted him.

> *But I say to you, do not stand against evil (do not try to get even with the offender). But whenever anyone insults you by slapping your right cheek, turn your other cheek to that person.*
> *Matthew 5:39*

Jesus once again offers the antithesis by his statement *"but I say to you."*

One has to understand how shocking this contrast is as he personally offers his interpretation of the Old Testament text.

Jesus commands his disciples not to resist evil which may be phrased as *"do not render evil for evil."* After all Jesus resisted evil.

He resisted the devil in the wilderness.
He resists the Pharisees and the Scribes.
He resisted all the evil of the world in his death and resurrection.

Jesus spends his entire ministry resisting evil therefore, he cannot be commanding his disciples to a non-resistance to evil.

Jesus does resists evil but he resists evil by doing good. He calls us to this kind of resistance.

Jesus speaks of nonretaliation to evil rather than to compliance with evil through unreasonable requests.

> *let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.*
> *Lamentations 3:30*

> *Do not say "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.*
> *Proverbs 20:22*

> *Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done."*
> *Proverbs 24:29*

We may assume that to be struck on the right cheek would mean that the person striking would be using the back of their hand. This would make the insult more serious.

To turn the other cheek means to avoid retaliation and put oneself in a vulnerable position, which is a perspective seen in the Old Testament verses just above.

Jesus modeled this attitude in the narrative of his crucifixion.

> *Then they spit in his face and struck him. And someone slapped him, saying, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that stuck you?"*
> *Matthew 26:67-68*

> *And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.*
> *Matthew 27:30*

> *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threated, but continued entrusting himself to the one who judges justly.*
> *1 Peter 2:23*

For similar teaching in the early church, we can look at the following passages.

> *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 is thirsty, give him water 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. Romans 12:19-21*

> *See to it that no one repays evil for evil, but always seeks to do good to one another and everyone.*
> *1 Thessalonians 5:15*

These texts clearly reflect the sentiment of the Old Testament command.

> *Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.*
> *Deuteronomy 32:35*

Within the Kingdom framework Jesus is bringing the message is clear, even from the Old Testament ideal of recompense and justice, it is the Lord who will repay evil.

> *And to anyone who takes you to court to get your garment, give that person even your coat. And whenever some soldier compels you in public service to go one mile, go with him two.*
> *Matthew 5:40-41*

If the first illustration of the Kingdom command is to turn the other cheek to the one who is insulting you, the second refers to legal action, *"to be judged,"* in a court. The result of this action is that one could lose one's inner garment.

Jesus is teaching that one should not only give up what one is being sued for, but that one should also give up the more essential "outer garment" as well. Paul shares this Kingdom value.

*To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*
*1 Corinthains 6:7*

The third illustration regards one being pressed into service by military authorities to assist in bearing a load, thus being compelled to carry that load one mile. The thought here is that one should not only go the required mile but go another mile as well.

Roman soldiers could requisition a Jew for instance to carry his baggage for a certain distance. The Jews understandably, were irritated.

Jesus commands us to double the injustice on ourselves, to accept the burden of bearing the law of retaliation.

*Many have taken these instructions to be about "non-resistance," but that's inaccurate. Jesus is forbidding us to enter into the cycle of vengeance and counter-strike, but He's also forbidding us from doing nothing. Jesus doesn't want us to simply to simply accept evil and not resist at all. Jesus is not talking about a situation where you simply grudgingly trudge along beside the Roman soldier, burning bitterly the whole time. He is not talking about just gritting your teeth and taking it when someone takes your cloak from you. That's not redemptive righteousness. That's not righteousness at all. That's just realism. Doing nothing is not redemptive righteousness; taking the blow, or going a mile, or giving up your cloak doesn't do anything to redeem and reverse oppression. Jesus says we can do something about oppression. We can act, and we can act in ways that arrest oppression and undo it. In other words, Jesus is teaching a form of resistance, but a form of a resistance in which good triumphs over evil. Jesus teaches his disciples to act in a surprising way that brings and end to the cycle.*
*Leithart – Jesus as Israel, page 145-146*

Though these requests are not justifiable, the disciple of the Kingdom should comply with them, then exceed the request considerably.

Again, the perspective of the Kingdom is alien to the perspective of the world.

*And give to anyone who asks anything of you; and do not turn away anyone who wants to borrow from you."*
*Matthew 5:42*

The line of thought in the prior verse is now taken further by teaching a charitable response to all who may ask for something or who may ask to borrow.

*In these illustrations, it is no longer a matter of response to mistreatment, or even to forced conduct, but to straightforward requests.*
*Hagner – Matthew, page 131*

*If anyone among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.*
*Deuteronomy 15:7-8*

*And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*
*Luke 6:34-35*

This sets us up the sixth antithesis which is to love your enemies.

The idea here is not to just give and lend but to do so even to one's enemies, to those of whom one has no hope of repayment.

This interpretation by Jesus is consistent with both the preceding 4 antitheses and the following 6th antitheses as well.

Though difficult to receive, Jesus again expounds on the ethics of the Kingdom, and these directives are for the recipients of the Kingdom, not for governmental legislation.

*Rather than demanding strict justice, or allowing for retaliation of any kind, the disciple of the kingdom defers to others. The disciple does not insist on personal rights. Furthermore, the true disciple does more than is expected. He or she is free from society's low standards or expectation, being subject only to the will of the Father. The conduct of the disciple is filled with surprise for those who experience it. The element of surprise relates closely to and reflects the grace that is central to the gospel. It is the unworthy who experienced the good things of the kingdom; and they have experienced the surprise of unexpected grace, so they act in a similar manner toward the undeserving among them. Jesus himself provides the supreme example of the fulfillment of this ethic, and the disciples are called to follow in his path. Kingdom ethics demand not mechanical compliance to rules but a lifestyle governed by the free grace of God.*
*Hagner – Matthew, page 132*