

Turn The Other Cheek?

Matthew 5:38-39 has posed problems for many Christians.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'"

What would you do if :-

- You are on a train when a hoodie sitting in front of you viciously attacks the old lady next to him
- You are walking through a park when you hear screams and see a young girl being dragged along by a youth
- You awake to the sound of broken glass and hear a burglar downstairs in your home
- If you are skilled in self- defense and a mugger attempts to rob you in the street.
- Someone attempts to steal your cattle

Christ was not here abolishing the law from Exodus 21:24. The punishment must fit the crime and this principle was for the judges to determine, verse 22. But the rabbi's were teaching that it permitted personal revenge. So in the following verses Christ's purpose is to forbid revenge, not to encourage injustice or evil. ('But I tell you' verse 39)

Let's notice – God has given the state responsibility to rule and punish the evil doer.

Romans 13: 1-4 "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

In fact all the examples given below relate to the context of government laws in Israel.

1 Kings 22:24, John 18:22-23. Acts 23:2-5 Be patient, accept personal affront where you can, Proverbs 25:21-22. If it's a small matter, don't let pride rule you. Submit and keep the peace.

Matthew 5:verse 40 – clothing as a pledge for a debt, Exodus 22:25-27

Matthew 5:verse 41 – Roman couriers and officers, see also Luke 23:26

Matthew 5:verse 42 – The legal right of the poor not to repay the 7th year land Sabbath. See also Deut 15:7-9.

However, be patient, accept personal affront where you can. Proverbs 25:22

If it's a small matter, don't let pride rule you. Submit, and don't begrudge service, rather than pride and revenge. Psalm 112:5.

To sum up the conflict we have as Christians and citizens of the State with responsibilities to the laws of the land, Jesus was not here prohibiting the administration of justice, but forbidding **us** to take the law into our own hands and take personal revenge. 'An eye for an eye' should be the responsibility of the courts of justice. In our personal lives it is not that we should become doormats to muggers, wife abusers or burglars, but rather to treat even your enemies with good grace when you have the appropriate opportunity v. 44-45.

Our goal must be to serve the highest good of all, even our enemies, and the last thing we should do is, by our inaction, encourage the evil man in his evil ways. So it is that the state has given the citizen powers of arrest to deter criminals, as well as the right to self - defense, and the protection of your property. Our responsibility is not to punish the evil-doer but to hand him over to the authorities for his punishment.

What do scriptures say? Should we help the wicked by ignoring their crimes? 2 Chronicles 19:2 ‘And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.’ We should hate crime.

Psalm 5:5 ‘The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.’

Psalm 11:5. ‘The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth;’

If we have the capability to resist crime, we should, that criminals might learn to repent. I think it was the philosopher Edmund Burke who said “Evil triumphs when good men do nothing.”

Jeremiah 23:14 ‘I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness; they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.’

Lets look at the examples God has provided.

1. When Abrahams nephew Lot was carried off by invading armies did he acquiesce?
Genesis 14:14 ‘And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.’
2. How does God say burglars who rob at night should be treated?
Exodus 22:2-3 ‘If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.’
3. Should we fail to rescue those in need? Psalm 82:4 ‘Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked,’ and read also Proverbs 24: 10-12.
4. Is it OK to arm yourself- is it lawful, for self defense? Luke 22:36 ‘Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.’ Read also Nehemiah 4:17-18
5. Should God’s ministers defend even the Church temple? 1 Timothy 1:18-20 ‘This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.’ And John 2:12-17.
6. Sometimes words are not enough! 1 Corinthians 4:20-21, ‘For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?’ You can be sure there will be true justice in God’s Kingdom.

So, we see that true love, caring for both the individual and society, will take action to deter evil and promote good, but with the gentle forbearance which renounces revenge.

Pride, anger and undue self-consideration we must avoid.

So, in conclusion, it is not that resistance to evil is wrong. Christ here is telling us that retaliation is not ours to provide. Romans 12:17-19.

That is the essence of Christ's message.