

The Sermon on the Mount
An Eye for an Eye, Part 2
Matthew 5:38-42
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Well, I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 5. I have thoroughly enjoyed our study of the Sermon on the Mount. It has fed my own soul and I hope that the Lord has used sort of the overflow of that to be an encouragement to you as well.

We have all heard, of course, of the famous feud, probably the most famous feud in American history between the Hatfields and the McCoys. I don't know how much you've read about that but, believe it or not, that feud began over accusations by one family against the other family that they had stolen their prize hog. The resulting feud spanned twelve years and took twelve human lives. But since everything is bigger in Texas, the longest and the most deadly feud in American history was not the Hatfield and McCoy feud. It occurred right here in Texas. It started in the 1820's and ran in one form or another until 1932 – over a hundred years. It was the Baker-White Feud. It actually became so bad that today some Texas historians refer to it as the Clay County War. It all started with an insult - not an insult of one of the Bakers or one of the Whites, but actually an insult of one of their dogs. And before the hundred years were over, the feud had claimed over a hundred and fifty human lives.

That feud to me is a tragic example of how harboring grudges and pursuing revenge are so utterly destructive to all human relationships. Sadly, it's not just unbelieving families where there are feuds. Every year, countless Christian families feud. Churches split. Thousands of Christian spouses live under the same roofs, but become enemy combatants. It begins with a wrong, a sin, or a perceived wrong or sin. And then one person allows resentment to grow in their soul over that wrong. And the resentment grows and festers until eventually it spills over in some act of personal revenge.

Last week, we began to study the paragraph in the Sermon on the Mount in which our Lord addresses this very issue. And He tells us that, as His disciples, we must never desire or pursue personal retaliation for wrongs that are done to us. He says grudges and revenge have no place in His spiritual kingdom. Now in this section of the sermon that we're looking at - really begins in Matthew 5:21, runs down through the end of the chapter - Jesus gives six illustrations of how His true disciples' righteousness is radically different from the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees that He mentioned back in verse 20. We've looked at four of those illustrations. We're looking at the fifth illustration where Jesus shows how His disciples respond to personal

offenses, and how that surpasses the normal response of the scribes and Pharisees and, frankly, the response of everyone. Let's look at it together. 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 there are admittedly some difficult statements in this paragraph and we're going to look at them together, but the essential message of this paragraph is this: in His spiritual kingdom, Jesus will not allow His disciples to harbor grudges or to pursue personal revenge. Now just to get you up to speed, to remind you of what we covered last time. As He had begun each illustration, Jesus begins this one by highlighting the popular misunderstanding, in this case, of the command of *an eye for an eye*.

Now last time, we began by looking at what the Old Testament law actually taught. Verse 38, you'll see that it quotes the Old Testament. You see, the rabbis used the Old Testament. They used the wording but they distorted its meaning and so Jesus mentions it here. What did it mean? Well, we looked at the three passages in the Old Testament where this expression *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* occur. And I'm not going to take you back over that at this time, but let me just give you the big picture. In the context of the Old Testament, the point of those words was crystal clear. The punishment must always fit the crime. It wasn't some sort of barbaric thing, *an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. It was, in fact, the foundation of all just legal systems. The punishment must not be too lenient where it lets the guilty go essentially unpunished, nor may it be too harsh; instead, it must exactly fit the crime. It was, in a sense, a protection. It was a protection against the outrageous penalties that overzealous family members or friends or even judges might exact against a person who had committed the crime against them or the ones they loved. At its most basic level, it was a protection against personal vengeance.

Now let me remind you as well that last time we saw in Deuteronomy 19 that this law was never, ever intended to be something that you as an individual did. It wasn't saying that if someone punched out your tooth, you need to seek that person down and personally exact your revenge by punching out one of theirs. Instead, as Deuteronomy makes very clear, this *eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth* was rather the standard that was given to Israel's judges for sentencing criminals. It was to be punishment that fit the crime.

Now that's what the Old Testament law actually taught, but what did the scribes and Pharisees teach? What did they do with that? Well last time, we noted that rather than see this - the *eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth* - as direction to judges about their sentencing, the scribes and Pharisees had made this command called the 'lex talionis' (the law of retaliation) about personal retaliation. In other words, they turned the whole thing on its head. What God intended to be a protection against abuses in the legal system they had twisted into His permission, in fact even His authorization, to exact personal revenge. That's what the people listening to Jesus there on the hillside on the north side of the Sea of Galilee that day had been taught by the scribes and Pharisees. That's what even those who had become now His disciples had been taught. And so Jesus has to correct this and He absolutely demolishes that popular misconception. Not the Old Testament law - it was just and good and helpful and fair. He demolishes that misunderstanding. And He told His disciples that their righteousness, their obedience to the Scripture in this area of personal offenses, must far surpass that of the scribes. How? Well, that brings us to the second part of this passage and this illustration. This is where we left off last time.

Let's look at Jesus' revolutionary teaching about personal revenge. We've seen the popular misunderstanding of that Old Testament law, *an eye for an eye*. Now let's look at Jesus' revolutionary teaching about personal revenge. In these verses, Jesus gives us, first of all, a general principle. And then He gives us four specific examples to see what that principle looks like fleshed out in real life.

So let's look at it together. In verse 39, Jesus first lays out the general principle. Look at how it begins: "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person." Jesus says, listen. The rabbis misconstrued the Old Testament law and they told you it was okay for you as an individual to seek personal revenge. But I'm telling you, Jesus says - instead don't resist an evil person. Now the Greek word translated *resist* literally means to set one's self against. It means to oppose, to withstand, and it includes the idea of hostility, of being hostile or showing hostility. In fact, in the Septuagint - that's the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that the Greek speakers of the first century had. It was the Bible of the first century, the Bible the apostles used primarily. The Septuagint uses this word *resist* in two ways. It uses it most frequently of armed military opposition. It means to set one's self against in a military sense. That's the most frequent use in the Old Testament. It's also used four or five times of opposition in court.

So what's Jesus saying then in this general principle? He's saying we are not to return hostility to the evil person who wrongs us. Now, by the way, notice here that Jesus is not denying that sometimes evil people do bad things to us. Nor is He denying that even people who maybe know the Lord do evil things to us. Jesus doesn't ask us to condone the person's behavior, but He doesn't allow us to retaliate in kind.

So what does Jesus mean here in this general principle? Well, you have to take the statement in its context. Verse 38 deals with response to wrongs and offenses. Verses 39 to 42 provide specific examples of personal wrongs. So the context then of Jesus' statement is when you have been personally wronged, when you have been personally sinned against. That's when this text comes into play. When that happens, if you're a Christian, you are not to set yourself in hostile opposition to that person who has sinned against you. You are not to declare war as it were. You are not to harbor a grudge and you are not to seek revenge.

Now I've used those expressions several times and we'll use them again a number of times before we're done today and the next time we turn to this text so let me define them. Let's just make sure we understand each other. What does it mean to harbor a grudge? To harbor a grudge is to maintain a persistent feeling of resentment because of a past insult or injury- to maintain or nurse a consistent feeling of resentment because that other person has injured you or harmed you in some way. It is an internal attitude. It is what goes on in the heart. It is anger and bitterness and resentment in the heart because that person has wronged you.

To seek personal revenge is to act on that feeling. To seek personal revenge is either to desire to act or actually to act to inflict harm on someone because of that past insult or injury. So to harbor a grudge is to bear and nurse resentment over that past injury. To seek revenge is to act on that resentment and try to get the other person back. 'They'll pay for what they've done to me. I want them to know what they've done to me. I want them to experience it. I'll give them what they deserve.' That's seeking revenge. Now folks, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament allows us to hold grudges or exact revenge. Last time, we looked, I won't have you turn there, but last time we looked at Leviticus 19:18 - very familiar verse for the second half of it which says "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." But here's how the rest of the verse goes: "You shall not take vengeance, *(there's taking revenge, acting out, actually acting on the resentment)* nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, *(there's the attitude of the heart, the seething resentment and anger and bitterness of the heart)* instead you shall love your neighbor as yourself; *(and if you want to know who's telling you this, the verse ends by saying)* I am Yahweh." In other words, this isn't optional. I'm your God. This is what I'm telling you to do. Proverbs 20: 22 says: "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; *(how many times is that exactly what we say? I'll get that person back. I'll show them. Do not say, 'I will repay evil')* wait for the Lord, and He will save you." Proverbs 24:29 – "Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me.'" Let me read that again: "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me." Ever heard yourself thinking that or saying that? Proverbs says do not say that and don't say, "I will render to the man according to his work." I'm going to give him what he deserves. She's going to get what she deserves.

Let's go to the New Testament. I Thessalonians 5:15 – "See to it that no one repays another with evil for evil, *(Paul couldn't be more comprehensive. See to it that no one repays another with*

evil for evil) but always seek after that which is good for one another (*that is, for fellow Christians*) and for all people.” So no matter who does you evil, don’t repay them evil for evil; instead, always be seeking that which is for their good. So then, when people sin against you – and, of course, this is hypothetical cause I’m sure this never happens to you. But when people sin against you, when they treat you badly, not only is it not right to retaliate, listen carefully, it is sin. It is sin against that person and it is sin against God because that person is made in whose image? God’s. That’s why James says don’t use that tongue you’ve been given to bless God in one sentence and curse that person in the next, because they’re made in the image of God.

Now all of this sounds good. I mean, the general principle’s pretty clear, right? Don’t respond in hostility to the person who has treated you evilly. But how does this flesh out in real life? Well, to help us see what this general principle looks like, Jesus goes on to show us what He’s demanding of us in several real life illustrations when someone sins against us. He follows that general principle, “do not resist the one who is evil”, with four specific examples. You see this beginning in the middle of verse 39 down through verse 42 – four specific examples. Now the details of each of these examples are bound inextricably to life in the first century. If you look at the first one at the end of verse 39, the first example is a formal Jewish insult. The second example in verse 40 has to do with a lawsuit intended to take the long robe that a man wore next to his body. The third example has to do with a Roman soldier conscripting a Jewish man to help carry his load. And the final example is a Jewish borrower trying to take advantage of the lending requirements of the Old Testament Mosaic law.

Now you may be tempted to look at those examples and think, ‘Well, this is pretty much irrelevant to my life.’ Listen. As we will see, nothing could be farther from the truth. Because, while it’s true that the details are tied to life in the first century, the categories of personal offenses that Jesus shares here are absolutely timeless. They translated perfectly in the first century. They translate perfectly in the twenty-first century. And if Jesus tarries, they’ll translate perfectly in the thirty-first century. So what are the four categories of personal offenses that Jesus uses in these examples? Let me give you all four of them and then we’re going to go back and look at the first one. Here are the four categories of personal offenses. Number one: intentional attacks on our personal dignity. Intentional attacks on our personal dignity. Number two: intentional attacks on our personal property. Number three: governmental attacks on our personal liberty. Number four: intentional attacks on our personal generosity. And by the way, that last one – that’s where I’ve landed for now on this last one, but I reserve the right to change it next time we come to this text because I’m still thinking that through. I’ve got the idea of it. I’m just not sure how I want to word it, alright?

Now because I want to do a special message next week for communion, Lord willing in two weeks we’ll study the last three of the examples here. But in the time remaining this morning, I want us to look at just the first specific example Jesus gives. What does it mean not to resist an

evil person when there are intentional attacks on our personal dignity? Look at verse 39. Here's the general principle: "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; (*here's the first specific example*) but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Now even if you weren't raised in the church, you are very familiar with that expression. You hear it all the time. Turn the other cheek. Turn the other cheek. It has been so terribly abused and so misrepresented that I think we need to start by clarifying what this does not mean. What this does not mean. These words have been abused in a variety of ways and I'm not going to deal with all the different ways that non-Christians have abused them.

Let me just deal with two ways I think even Christians are tempted to abuse them. Number one: this does not mean non-resistance, or non-violence we could say. Those who hold to non-resistance argue (essentially, this view argues) that all forms of physical violence are totally wrong in every circumstance. This can absolutely go to seed. In fact, the most bizarre example I've ever read is from the writings of Martin Luther. Martin Luther said he knew a man "who let lice nibble at him and refused to kill any of them on account of this text, maintaining that he had to suffer and could not resist evil." I'm glad it doesn't mean that. That's not where most Christians will go. For most Christians who embrace non-resistance, well-meaning Christians, they believe that what our Lord is teaching here precludes the use of all force not only in war but even in one's self-defense. This is a view, by the way, that has traditionally been held by Quakers and Mennonites for example. And there are some who believe in non-resistance who have gone so far as to say it's even wrong for government to use force against criminals. Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist, came to this conclusion in his book *What I Believe*. He explains how he came to believe it was wrong for a Christian to resist evil violently in any way. For Tolstoy, this meant that no Christian could serve in the army, no Christian could be a policeman, and he even wrote that no Christian should serve anywhere in the judicial system because it is a party to violence against fellow human beings.

Tolstoy's writings heavily influenced another major figure of the twentieth century who didn't claim to be Christian. His name was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi loved the Sermon on the Mount. He sort of took this basic teaching of Jesus and blended it with his own religions and other things he had absorbed. But he said of this passage: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." But Gandhi believed in non-resistance to such an extent that it was ridiculous. Listen to what he said to the British people in 1940 when they were facing the onslaught of the blitzkrieg and the attack on Britain, the Battle of Britain. Here's Gandhi: "I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You should invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves, man, woman and child, to be slaughtered." That's non-resistance and that's not what this passage is teaching as we'll see in a moment.

Most Christians don't go to non-resistance, but there are many Christians who take these words as Christian passivism, Christian passivism. For the Christians, and perhaps you have embraced passivism or you know someone who has, or it's something you've been influenced by in the past. For the Christians who hold this view, it dictates that the Christian must never engage in killing of any kind, but especially in warfare. This was the view, by the way, of the Anabaptists during the Reformation and it's still the view of some Christians today.

The question for us is how do we know that this passage is not teaching either non-resistance or passivism? How do we know that? Well, let me back up and remind you of the bigger picture. We would all agree that all of Scripture is breathed out by God. It is the product of the breath of God. That means it all comes from one source and collectively it is true and internally consistent. Practically, that means Scripture never contradicts scripture. So when we look at a passage to interpret it, one of the first things we can say is, if the interpretation we think is right contradicts the Scripture elsewhere, we know it can't be the right interpretation, because that's not how Scripture works. That means we can clearly rule out both the interpretation of non-resistance as well as passivism from Matthew 5. Why? Well, because both of those interpretations, both of those views, contradict other passages of Scripture.

Now I don't want to get bogged down here, but I just want to ease your mind on this so let me make a couple of quick points. Point number one: Scripture allows true believers in the true God to be soldiers. Scripture allows true believers to be soldiers. You see that obviously in the Old Testament, but you might argue, 'Well, that's because it was the army of Israel and they were under specific orders.' Okay, so what about the New Testament? Well in Luke 3:14, and you can turn there or not, but let me just read it to you. Luke 3:14. John the Baptist is baptizing, he's calling people to a baptism of repentance to prepare for the Messiah. The Messiah is coming. You need to repent. You need to prepare. You need to have a proselyte baptism as if you weren't a Jew because you're so far from what God intended you to be. And people came out in droves to be baptized by John and repented. And Luke 3:14 says some soldiers came. These would've been Roman soldiers. "Some soldiers came, questioning John the Baptist, and they were saying, 'What about us, what shall we do?'" That is, what shall we do to demonstrate the fruit of repentance? We want to be prepared for the Messiah. How do we do that? What does that look like in our case? Now if John the Baptist were a pacifist, this would have been a perfect place for him to say, 'Well, there's only one thing you can do. You have to get out of the military because you cannot take another human life in military combat.' But that's not what he says. What he says is: "Do not take money from anyone by force (*in other words, don't use your position of authority for extortion*), or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages." Ouch. From the time of Augustine until today, most Christians have embraced Augustine's idea of a just war. That's a different message for a different time, but the bottom line is, most Christians have agreed with what I've just shared with you that Christians, that believers, are allowed to be soldiers.

Secondly, Christians are allowed by Scripture to engage in self-defense, even deadly self-defense - the use of deadly force in the defense of your person and your life. Obviously, we would all agree that we could practice self-defense by running, by fleeing, and sometimes that's the better part of wisdom. You see this in the Old Testament. You see this in First Samuel 19:10. David eluded Saul's attempt to pin him to the wall with a spear by fleeing. Three times in Jesus' ministry we're told that the crowd wanted to seize Him or kill Him and He escaped from them. The implication is He miraculously escaped from them because it wasn't yet His time. In II Corinthians 11, Paul describes the time when they wanted to seize him and kill him in Damascus and the disciples let him down by a basket out of the window, a window in the wall so he could be saved. So we would all agree that you can defend yourself by fleeing, but what about the use of deadly force? Well, the Scripture affirms that as well in both testaments. Again, I won't have you turn there, but jot them down, read them on your own, study them: in the Old Testament, Exodus 22:2, 3. In the law, the scenario's drawn up. What if you're at home sleeping, it's nighttime, and someone breaks into your house? And by the way, the law was different during the daytime because you were in a better position to assess the danger that person was, what weapon they have and how seriously you might be harmed. But at nighttime, you're awakened. In the confusion of that, you don't know what he intends to do. The assumption is there may be the idea of violence implied. And so the Old Testament law in Exodus 22 says if that happens at night, then you may use deadly force and take that person's life.

What about the New Testament? Well, and again, I challenge you to study it and read it, but Luke 22:36-38. In that passage, Jesus is sending His disciples out again and He says to them: 'Unlike before when I sent you out, this time I want you to take money and I want you to take a knapsack. I want you to take staff and I want you to take a sword.' Now there's some debate among scholars about whether He meant a literal sword or not - doesn't really change the point. His point is you're going to have to protect yourself. Be prepared to do it. I think He means a literal sword because everything else in that section is literal. And so I think, and not necessarily a sword in, you know, kind of the broad sword sense; maybe it was more like a knife. But the point is be prepared to defend yourself. And with a weapon like that, it was intended that that would be deadly force.

Thirdly, the Scriptures allow believers to submit to and respect the use of force by government and I think therefore even allows, by extension, Christians to be involved in government and in the use of force by government. God has given government the authority to use force to apprehend and punish criminals. Read Romans 13. In Romans 13, Paul says God has given government the sword to punish evildoers. You don't slap someone's hand with a sword. It was intended as an instrument of death, of execution. Paul was saying God has allowed government to use deadly force to punish criminals. And so it's perfectly acceptable for Christians to serve in that field.

So Jesus' command then to turn the other cheek is not a command to embrace non-resistance or passivism. This passage has nothing to do with whether or not a Christian should be involved in the military or in government. It's not even dealing with the question of self-defense. It's about personal revenge. So let's look then at what this passage does mean. Verse 39 again: "whoever slaps you on your right cheek..." That expression is referring to a specific cultural circumstance. The Greek word for *slaps* means to strike someone with an open hand. In Jewish thinking, to slap someone was an insult. And there are countless, not countless, there are many examples of this. You can go back and look at them – I Kings 22:24, Job 16:10. Lamentations 3:20 speaks of giving your cheek to be slapped and therefore being filled with reproach. The word for *slaps* can mean either with the palm of the hand or the back of the hand. Stay with me though. This is important. Since ninety percent plus of the people on the planet are right-handed and Jesus specifically says that this person strikes you on your right cheek, He is probably not describing a situation where a right-handed person awkwardly tries to slap someone with the palm of his left hand. That's a very awkward motion for most people. Most people are right-handed. That's not a common motion. And so almost certainly then, Jesus is describing a back-handed slap with the right hand across the right cheek. Now why is that important? Because in the Jewish culture of the first century, to slap someone with the back of your hand was not primarily about inflicting personal injury, but making a personal insult. In fact, it was such a serious insult that the Jewish Mishnah said that if someone slapped you with the back of their hand, you could take them to court. And if they were proven guilty in court for having done that, they could be fined up to more than a year's wages. It's interesting too. In the Mishnah, it says that if a person slapped you with the palm of their hand, that was only a half year's wages. But if they slapped you with the back of their hand, that was more than a year's wages because it was considered an extreme insult. So to be back-handed on your right cheek was to be grossly and intentionally insulted. Your personal dignity and honor had been violated.

Now most of us don't walk around getting slapped as an insult, but there are different forms that we are all too familiar with in our culture. Most of the insults we experience are verbal, occasionally obscene gestures and other things. We know what it means to be insulted. So how should we as Christians respond when we are insulted? Look at verse 39 again: "whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Now again, understand this is not about defending yourself or those you love from physical harm or death. We've already dealt with that. This is about how to respond when you are insulted. When your personal dignity is attacked, how should you as a Christian respond? Jesus says don't return the slap. Don't slap him back; instead, turn the other cheek. Let me tell you exactly what Jesus is saying in simple terms. He is saying don't return insult for insult. That's what He's saying. Don't pay back personal violations of your own dignity by returning equal insults or, more likely as it usually happens, escalating insults to the one who sinned against you. Don't defend your honor by responding in kind. Jesus' point in this first example is crystal clear. He is saying don't harbor grudges. Don't pursue personal revenge when someone violates your personal dignity.

William Hendriksen writes: “To turn the other cheek means to show in attitude, word and deed that one is filled not with the spirit of rancor, but the spirit of love.” Here’s what Jesus is saying. Let me put it to you in the simplest terms. Jesus is saying we should be willing to be insulted again if necessary rather than returning the insult. We should be willing to be insulted again rather than returning the insult. John Stott writes: “In each of the four situations, Jesus said our Christian duty is so to completely forebear revenge (so completed, have nothing to do with revenge) that we even allow the evil person to double the injury.” This is really what Paul is saying in Romans 12. Turn over there with me – Romans 12. This is kind of his commentary on our Lord’s words. Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” Verse 17:

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, *(verse 18)* so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. *(But regardless of what happens)* Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, *(you know what God is saying? I’m the only one that can carry out righteous revenge. It belongs to Me. Keep your hands out of it)* I will repay,’ says the Lord. *(So how do we respond?)*. . . If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he’s thirsty, give him a drink; *(in other words, think, instead of returning the insult, how you can do good to that person. And he says)* in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

That doesn’t mean this is just another way to get even. He’s saying by doing the right thing, what you do will become burning conviction and he’ll feel the weight and guilt of his sin when you just do the right thing. Verse 21: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Listen, folks. When you are insulted, and let’s think about this for a moment. For most people, where do the insults most frequently come from? From their circle. For some of you, it’s in your home from your spouse or from your child or from your parent. And if you’re the insulter, understand how serious this is to God. But if you’re the one receiving the insults, don’t respond in kind. Maybe it’s in the workplace. Maybe it’s in your extended family. Maybe there are people who aren’t Christians who ridicule you and insult you for your faith. Maybe it’s in the workplace where people resent your attempts to work hard and do the right thing and they insult you in various ways. Maybe it’s at school. Jesus is saying when we are insulted, we must not harbor a grudge. We must not nurse a feeling of resentment and anger and bitterness for what that person has done and we must not retaliate. We must not retaliate even in our minds and hearts. You know, there are people who never carry out their revenge, but spend their lives thinking it up. I had a friend in college whose wife divorced him for another man. And on several occasions, he told me how he had planned these elaborate schemes where he thought he could actually kill his wife and the police would never know. He never acted on it, but he carried the spirit of revenge in his heart. We’re not even to retaliate in that way. And how do we most

normally retaliate when our personal dignity is attacked? With more insults. We respond in kind: ‘Well, you say that to me. Well, let me tell you what I think of you. Well, listen to this. This person deserves some of what they’re paying out. They deserve to feel the hurt that I’ve been hurt with.’ Jesus says, ‘Not if you’re My disciple, not if you belong to Me.’ And we’re not to pay back in our actions either. We must never respond with harboring a grudge or personal revenge. We must give up the desire to defend our dignity and to avenge ourselves when others injure it, and even when they do so sinfully. Instead, we must love them in response. That’s the message of both testaments. Leviticus 19:18, listen to it again: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” Now how can that be done? That is just so out of human character. The answer is by following the perfect example of our Lord.

Look at I Peter 2. I Peter 2: 21: “For you have been called for this purpose, (*Peter writes; in other words, you have been effectually called through the gospel and here’s one of the reasons*) since Christ also suffered for you, He left you an example to follow in His steps...” In other words, part of the reason you’ve been called is to imitate Jesus Christ. You have, according to Romans 8, been predestined to be conformed to His image. God wants you to reflect His Son, even in those difficult relationships. You’ve been called for this purpose – to follow in His steps. Oh, and by the way, verse 22: “He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.” In other words, He didn’t deserve even a little bit of the insults He got. Some of the insults we get are totally wrong, but some of them have a little grain of truth in them. Not for Jesus. But how did He respond? Verse 23: “and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats.” You say, ‘I don’t think I can do that. I mean, how do you do that when someone’s insulting you, when they’re attacking you, when they’re attacking your personal dignity?’ Here’s how: “He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” You know how Jesus did it? He kept reminding Himself that it wasn’t His job to exact revenge. Instead, He kept reminding Himself that there is a righteous Judge, a righteous God on His throne and vengeance belongs to Him. He will repay where repayment is needed. And He kept on entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. So in light of that, go over to I Peter 3:8:

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; (*turn the other cheek. When you are back-handed with an intentional insult, don’t slap back. If necessary, take another insult. But instead, return good to that person*) for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

You know what Peter is saying? Live up to your calling. You weren’t called to grovel in insults like unbelievers do or even perhaps like a sinning Christian around you is. Instead, be like Christ and don’t revile when you’re reviled. Don’t return insult for insult, but entrust yourself to God

who judges righteously. He will vindicate you in His time – maybe in this life or maybe not till you stand in His presence. Follow the example of Christ. When your personal dignity is attacked, don't attack in return. If necessary, turn the other cheek and let another insult come. That's how those who belong to Jesus' kingdom live. Let's pray together.

Father, this is not how we are by nature. And Lord, I pray for those here today, undoubtedly some, who are absolutely eaten up with anger and bitterness and resentment for past hurts – maybe rehearsing decade-old hurts, living in the anger and resentment of that and nursing it. Father, help them to see that that's not how Christians respond. And Father, perhaps even they need to see that they're not truly in Christ. Help them to experience the kind of forgiveness that You give so that they're open and willing to extend forgiveness to others. May this be the day when they truly repent of their sins and put their faith and confidence in Christ and experience forgiveness and offer that forgiveness to others.

But Father, for the rest of us who are in Christ, Lord, we experience what it means to be insulted often because we live in a fallen world. Father, forgive us for our constant temptation and actions of responding in kind. Lord, help us not to follow the examples around us, not to follow our own heart, but to follow the example of our Lord, who when He was reviled, reviled not again, who didn't return insult for insult, but kept entrusting Himself to You, the righteous Judge. May we do so for Your glory and to resemble Your Son, to reflect His glory to the people around us. We pray in His name. Amen.