

**Exposition of Matthew**  
**Retribution and Non-Resistance**  
**Matt. 5:38-42**

“Nowhere is the challenge of the Sermon greater. Nowhere is the distinctness of the Christian counter-culture more obvious. Nowhere is our need of the power of the Holy Spirit (whose first fruit is love) more compelling” (John Stott).

**I. The *Lex Talionis* and Tradition (38)**

A. *You have heard that it was said*  
*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*

B. The *Lex Talionis*

1. The context of Ex. 20-23
2. The law - Ex. 21:22-25 (cf. Lev. 24:17-21)
3. This section focuses on assault and bodily injuries (21:18-32)

C. The tradition of the Rabbis

**II. The Antithesis (39)**

A. But I say to you

B. Do not resist the evil

1. This is not some absolute, passive, non-resistance that becomes a doormat for every kind of evil.  
Rom. 12:9; Eph. 6:13
2. We have already seen that Jesus uses hyperbole in the Sermon on the Mount.
3. Do not resist the evil -  
Note Matt. 5:45; Rom. 12:17

“Jesus produced hyperbole precisely to challenge his hearers, to force them to think about what they valued” (Keener, 195).

### III. Examples (39-42)

A. Whoever slaps your right cheek

“A disciple must be so secure in his or her status before God that he or she can dispense with human honor. Such a person need not avenge lost honor because this person seeks God’s honor rather than his or her own” (Keener, 198).

B. Whoever sues you for your tunic  
(Exo 22:26-27; Deu 24:12-13)

C. Whoever forces you to go one mile

D. To those begging and borrowing

### Conclusion

1. Think about the cliché, “I don’t get mad, I get even.” Where does that come from?
2. Is retribution wrong? Is vengeance wrong?

“Retribution is never for the pursuit of placating vindictive revenge but for the purpose of satisfying justice. Justice is not vindictive through it is vindicatory” (Murray, Principles of Conduct, 174).

Rom. 12:19-21

3. Jesus calls us to value his kingdom and people over our own honor, rights, pride or possessions. He calls us to return good for evil.