

CONVERSION: A study of the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus changes everything for the one who believes to live in Him.

INTRO In this series we are walking through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. **CONVERSION** means we look and listen to the One who is our Lord, remember His righteousness He has put on us in salvation, and convert our lives by faith to walk in obedience with Him. Today's topic is no exception. I implore you to listen today to all that will be said.

CONVERSION: Retaliation

Matthew 5:38-42

MPS: Christians entrust all of life to Jesus to love others and live generously for His glory and to share the gospel.

OBJ: Every person can release the demand to retaliate by three principles of conversion.

READ Matthew 5:38-42

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. **Matt 5:38-42***

Jesus continues his teaching on what it means to follow Him, to live as a citizen of God's Kingdom. He teaches that retaliation is not the character of a Christ-follower. He cites Exodus 21:24, *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* Known as the *Lex Talionis*, this law was as common throughout the ancient world as it is familiar today. It makes sense in this natural world.

INTRO Newton's third law of motion states, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." This fundamental principle of science is foundational to our understanding of all of natural science. Often, the reaction can be more catastrophic than the originating action, like a large earthquake that triggers a tsunami.

ILLUS When I was young and went to the doctor for my annual check-up, he would take a hammer, strike my knee and watch what happened. I always thought, "Wow! How did he do that? I didn't make it do that." But then when I went home and tried it on my brother, I got in big trouble for hitting him with a hammer. The world can be a very confusing place!

TRANS But the confusion and chaos for which this law was written was not that different from our world because we as people are not that different.

As much sense as this law makes according to the natural world, there is a greater problem that made this law necessary. We love justice in the theoretical sense, but seldom want justice when it becomes personal. We want to retaliate because we prefer vengeance. Our measure of righteousness is sin-skewed in pursuing justice. But vengeance is God's, not ours.

The purpose of Law was to create order and deter crime. "The lex talionis was to be imposed by the civil authorities and civil courts to protect the public, punish offenders, and deter crime. It was not to be administered by individuals (cf. Deut. 19:15–21). In fact, the civil statute was intended to discourage private revenge (cf. Prov. 20:22; 24:29), because the person offended was too liable to be biased in retaliation."¹ The law was actually written NOT to mandate what must occur in response to some wrong, but to limit what could occur in response, in proportion to the offense committed and determined by an unbiased party.

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 248.



The times had become so dark and chaotic that people took the law into their own hands. And as is natural to every person, when offended or wronged, we don't want to get even, we want to get ahead. People took the law into their own hands and retaliated to do greater wrong all in the name of justice, but in the spirit of personal retaliation and vengeance.

When someone seeks to harm us, to steal from us or demand of us, it's just natural to react. And even more so, it's even natural to over-react, to make right in our minds what was done to us. But Jesus teaches that there is a better way for us to respond. Jesus confronts this rule of the natural man to form a supernatural new in those who trust in Him.

Christian Conversion

Conversion to Jesus means we trust His perfect righteousness not only as payment for our sins against God, but for all sins and wrongs, and especially those against us. How quickly we can receive God's forgiveness at the cross for our own sins. Yet, how adamantly we can reject the sufficiency of Jesus' cross for other's sins against us.

The Christian confession begins with this, that our righteousness is insufficient. We need a Savior, a better righteousness than our own. We need Jesus' righteousness. And Jesus' righteousness is never more practically necessary than in our personal lives and dealings toward others who have wronged us. [Retaliation is wrong, no matter how small and inconsequential it may seem, it is all anti-Christian because it subverts God's justice with our personal measure of righteousness.](#)

[Christians entrust all of life to Jesus to love others and live generously for His glory and to share the gospel.](#)

Caveat: Let us be careful that we do not incorrectly skew what Jesus is saying. Jesus is in no way advocating pacifism, socialism, enslavement nor necessary impoverishment. He's not teaching that personal protection or self-defense, personal responsibility or faithful stewardship is wrong. These are all perversions of what Jesus is saying here.

TRANS We must understand the context to appropriately understand and apply the text.

Jesus addresses not simply the letter of, but deeper and weightier matters of, the very essence of the law. Jesus is teaching His followers how to faithfully follow Him, what conversion to Jesus looks like practically. Following Jesus always begins in the heart. "He's not undoing the Law or even opposing it. The Law provides a standard as a check for inappropriate punishment."² Jesus teaches about matters of the heart, where He transforms, strengthens and fills for Christians to draw from as our source of life. Retaliation says we believe that we must trust ourselves because God is either not trustworthy, insufficient and unable, or unnecessary in matters that we can address. [Jesus teaches complete trust and confident surrender to Him.](#)

Jesus gives four examples as applications for how to apply this law. The first (.39) is one who slaps in the face. He says that we can turn the other cheek. The second (.40) is the offering of one's tunic, outer coat. The giving of this layer of clothing was radical because there was no measure of law that allowed for this otherwise. Third, (.41) any forced measure of labor would be met with a willingness to give more, even double, what was required. Fourth, (.42) the one who begs from or borrows would receive to meet their need or demand. He is not mandating how one must respond in particular situations. [Jesus provides a principle to guide our responses of love and generosity that reflect the gospel in us and Jesus filling us, more than self ruling us.](#)

These Jesus-fueled responses are not intended as retaliation replacements because they "immediately equalize" the situation. As a matter of fact, they do not. What they do is this. First, the reaction is so counter to depraved human nature that most expect in response that it creates a holy awkwardness. And that holy awkwardness simply testifies that the eternal

² Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 248.



Judge, Jesus, sees and knows all, to rest in this, that in His time He will make all things right. Second, it embodies a confident hope in Jesus beyond self that is counter to human nature. Third, it offers oneself to serve the offender to point to Christ as a faithful witness.

Jesus teaches us a principle, NOT a command.³ Principles guide Christians in our thinking and living to honor Jesus. But when we exert principle devoid of relationship, we only entertain religion to strengthen self-righteousness absent of faith in Jesus and His sovereign rule of all things. The point is not the situations Jesus identify, but whatever the situation the principle of Jesus holds us. The way we live demonstrates who we trust and honor with our lives. [The gospel declares that Jesus is worthy of all our hope and trust, at all times and in all situations, and that our lives are purposed to declare our hope in Him.](#)

OBJ [Three principles of our conversion set our heart on Jesus to love others and live generously for His glory.](#)

1. As a Christ-follower, the gospel of Jesus Christ determines the identity of my life.

Jesus makes us new. Our new identity makes every Christ-follower His **servant** under His Lordship for His purposes in the world, even when personal safety, security, provision, prosperity, or reputation are threatened. All of the Christian life is lived under Jesus' Lordship. What sin made you, did to you or influenced in you is NOT you.

As long as my life is mine, I must defend at all costs in all situations. When my life is no longer my own, I am released, set free, to live fully for King Jesus. The response mechanism to retaliate is gone. And this is no easy lesson to learn. I must learn it continually in my life. The heart must be set on Jesus in order to live out from Him. [Love is now the theme of the whole Christian's life.](#)

HYMN Love is the Theme

v1: Of the themes that men have known, one supremely stands alone; Through the ages it has shown, His wonderful, wonderful love.

v2: Since the Lord my soul unbound, I am telling all around; pardon, peace and joy are found in His wonderful, wonderful love.

v3: As of old when blind and lame to the blessed Master came, Sinners, call upon His name, Trust His wonderful, wonderful love.

Refrain: Love is the theme, love is supreme, sweeter it grows, glory bestows; bright as the sun every it glows! Love is the theme, eternal theme!

Even God's Law teaches us that love is the theme of our life.

*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people,
but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. **Lev 19:18***

[Our new identity means we serve Jesus with our whole life, we convert our thinking to apply our new identity for our living.](#)

2. As a Christ-follower, the Lordship of Jesus Christ determines the direction of my life.

Conversion is the process of learning to apply the gospel to live faithfully under Jesus' Lordship. It begins by understanding His truth for our life in Christ and living by His renewal of our mind. [If your salvation in Jesus has not caused you to think differently about your whole life, then what you have is a mutual transaction, not a life-altering, new birth conversion.](#)

The wisdom of God is clear to guide our thinking in how we obey Jesus, our Lord and Master. Proverbs 20:22 states, "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you." And also, "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.'" (Prov 24:29) [Waiting on Jesus is the posture of life that guides us, trusting His righteousness for us at all times.](#)

³ Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 126. "Jesus is, of course, still dealing with great principles, not laying down rules. We must not think that he held that his followers should never right wrongs, for example, nor that he felt that they must give to every beggar who approaches them. Were this so, all Christians would live under tyranny and in a state of destitution. But the principles that we are to refrain from asserting our rights and that we should put the needs of others before our own run through all of life and mark the difference between the servant of God and the worldling."



But what about when my character or reputation is attacked?

APPL Character and reputation

Attacks cannot dent, ding or destroy character; they can only reveal what is already there. Attacks only make your character when you allow the heat and pressure from them to shape you in their image by determining how you respond. When Jesus defines the identity of your life you are free from defending your character because you point to the One who is your life. You allow the heat and hits from attacks to press you more deeply into Christ, where you are more completely forged into His image. Then, any attacks on your character, though at the moment may seem to be tarnishing, only prove to buff and shine what is already present and established. [Hard times and personal attacks are the best opportunities to show Christ through your character.](#)

Hold to Jesus and wait in the midst of the storm, Christian. Guard your character vehemently against your own sinful propensity and desire. Then, when attacked or demanded of you don't have to worry about it against other's attacks. You can point others to Jesus in love through your character. Let Jesus makes all things right in His way and time and means. You are here to love and serve, to make Jesus known so others can believe in Him. When you do, Jesus will continue to strengthen and deepen your character in His righteousness. And use you to point others to Him.

TRANS This is the battle of the heart where the gospel transforms.

3. As a Christ-follower, the Kingdom of God determines the purpose of my life.

Remembering the purpose of our life, even when we know the one attacking is evil, releases us from retaliation, even against evil. That's why Jesus begins, *"But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil."* (Matt 5:39) One commentator states, "Even when they are being abused, they must think of ways to advance the kingdom of heaven and its influence on this earth."⁴ [Christ-followers walk in freedom to love and serve others and live generously as we release our heart's the demand to mediate personal justice because we abide in the Righteous One.](#)

Peter reminds us how Jesus kept a Kingdom perspective in His own suffering.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.*

By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵*For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* **1 Peter 2:23-25**

When we give control to God, to trust and rest in His divine providence and sovereign rule, then our actions place not only our lives but the lives of our offender in His domain to work as only He can work. When we are wronged, God sees. He knows and cares. We know this and are called to trust this. When we go beyond what is required or expected or demanded, we benefit most from the extra part, even though it often costs us significantly. Doing only what is required is little more than satisfying natural order of this world. "Going the extra mile" or "giving the double portion" brings spiritual blessing to bear on natural living, where God breaks in to do the impossible among the possible, where He works the supernatural in the presence of the natural. [When we trust to love and live generously instead of retaliate we apply the work of Jesus on the cross to our lives and the lives of others.](#)

APPL Dealing with Offense and Demand from others

When I find myself under hard circumstances, I often list the offenses and demands I feel and that have been committed against me. Then, I confess to the Lord that I know He sees and knows them. I offer them to Him because I have to remind myself of what I am doing. There is always a part of me wants to make sure God completes His list, but it also reminds me each time that I must trust Him for each one of these. Because I have to confess that I do not want to, then repent of that desire. And as many times as any of these offense reappear, or new ones are added to them, I return to this practice until they are gone, and even forgotten.

⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 249.



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CLOSE

Have you been wronged or offended that remains a burden in you? Have you been demanded of in some way, asked to give more than you were prepared, to go the extra mile or give the double portion and it remains a point of anger or bitterness in you? Look at what God wants to do, Christian, and submit your life to let Him work in you by working through you.

I want to invite you today to do something in response to this message. As we talk about retaliation today, if there is a name, a face, a situation, circumstance or relationship that arises in your mind and heart, I want to ask you to identify it. That is where God by His Holy Spirit is leading you to let Him work today. In your mind and heart, take hold of it. Recollect every way that you have thought about dealing with it. List every step or action. You can even categorize those steps in columns of "right" and "wrong", or "just" and "unjust", meaning that you know it is not what you should do but you still want to, or that you believe it is what you should do. As you hold it in your hand, look at it. Scan every part. Then, slowly open your hands and let it rest there in your open hands. Look at it and make sure you, as best you know, have not failed to include any part of it.

Now, raise your hands and offer it to the Lord. Show the Lord you want Him to take it. Ask Him to deal with it. Ask Him to not let you hold onto it any longer. Tell Him what you know about it, how it has affected, hurt or harmed you, how you feel about it and what you have thought about it. Tell Him what you know of Him, Who He is, what He has done, How He can work, and why, because of what you know of Him, you want to hold this no longer. Let the Lord remove it. Don't move your hands till you sense that He has taken these things from your hands, and from your heart.

