

Turning The Other Cheek – Matthew 5:39

This is one of a number of examples by which Jesus Christ shows that lifestyle of the Kingdom of God is more demanding than the law given by God through Moses.

Matthew 5:38-39 [New King James] *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”*

The law laid down to Israel’s earliest law-code, [Exodus 21:24] was a marked step forward, for it imposed a strict limitation of the taking of vengeance. Avoiding what could develop into a vengeance blood feud, which far exceeded the original injury. When wounded honour was satisfied with such precisely proportionate amends, life was much less fraught with hazards.

But now Jesus Christ takes a further step towards peaceful living.

Do not retaliate at all, do not harbour a spirit of resentment, if someone does you an injury show yourself as master of the situation by doing something for their advantage.

In the same way this should **not** be taken literally, as *“plucking out our right eye,”* [Matthew 5:29] it is not difficult to envisage the other cheek being turned in a very provocative manner, if this is what gave that person some pleasure out of hitting you.

Matthew 5:41 [New King James] *“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”*

The Romans could press those who were not Roman citizens to carry equipment for one mile, [Matthew 27:32]. Having done what you are to do under compulsion, you are free to offer to carry the load further, the initiative has now become yours, and you can do this extra as an act of grace.

This is the way Christians should react to violence and compulsion as Jesus Christ did in His earthly life.

This admonition given by Jesus Christ belongs to the sphere of personal behaviour, yet there are many Christians who believe this should be put into practice by any Christian fellowship in their communities and nations as well as by individuals.

Paul, who repeats and underlines Jesus Christ’s teaching of non-retaliation, regards retaliation as part of the duty of any civil ruler who is also a Christian, as some were, as the Christian Church spread throughout the Middle East.

Romans 16:23 [New King James] *“Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother.”*

Erastus was a city treasurer.

Romans 13:1-7 [New King James] *“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.”*

The words of Paul were relevant to their chronological setting. The time had not yet come, although it did come in less than ten years after these words were written, when the Roman Empire was openly hostile to the Church.

Still less additional time passed before Roman emperors began to profess to call themselves Christian, for political reasons.

The answer to the original question cannot easily be found in the pages of the New Testament. It is still asked but no single answer can claim to be the truly Christian one.