

MAT 5:40 "And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

MAT 5:41 "And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two.

In connection with this section it is claimed that Jesus moves the biblical ethic from a lower level - retaliation - to a higher level - non-resistance.

Now it is clear that what was "said" is indeed in the Old Testament, and in three places: Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. Leviticus 24:19-20 says: "And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him."

In each of these three instances the context shows that this command was a divinely-given guide for Israel's judges. But the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day were taking passages out of the context of court procedure and using them for the justification of personal vengeance!

The Pharisees did not usually turn the other cheek! They could hardly be expected to give an extra coat to settle a matter out of court! And when Pharisees were impressed by hated Roman officers into messenger service for the government, they would not dream of going a second mile!

Thus Jesus is condemning the Pharisaic attitude of personal vengeance, which they justified by referring to rules given to Israel's judges for use in court cases -- rules which in context are proper, but out of context merely give vent to personal desires to strike back and hurt or destroy.

The rules given for use by judges in courts were never intended to be used by private persons seeking personal vengeance!

Paul shows that he is in perfect accord with Jesus and with the O.T. in this matter. In Romans 12:17, 19 he writes, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone" and "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'." In Proverbs 20:22 we read: "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; Wait for the Lord, and He will save you." And in Deuteronomy 32:35 we find: "Vengeance is mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them."

Jesus is therefore not contradicting or moving to a higher level of morality than the O.T., but is arguing against the Pharisaic misapplication of the lex talionis (the law of retaliation).

Incidentally, if this law of retaliation were to be interpreted literally it would mean that a judge in Israel would put out the eye of a criminal who had put out the eye of another person, or knock out the tooth of one who did the same to another. It is interesting to note that there is no clear case in the O.T. where a literal interpretation was made and then implemented. It is possible, as R. Laird Harris suggests, that the phrases "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" were proverbial expressions in the common law embodying the very important legal principle that the severity of the punishment must match the gravity of the crime. Thus Jesus would be emphasizing the correct