

Matthew 5:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

Analysis

The lex talionis (law of retaliation) was a just principle limiting vengeance to proportional response—only an eye for an eye, not escalating violence. But Jesus calls His followers to go beyond justice to grace, beyond fair treatment to sacrificial love, beyond rights to mercy.

Historical Context

The 'eye for eye' law (Exodus 21:24) was actually a limitation on vengeance in ancient cultures where family feuds escalated endlessly. It established proportional justice. But Jesus calls His disciples to transcend even just retaliation, choosing to absorb evil rather than return it.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does insisting on your rights prevent you from showing Christ-like grace?

2. When has someone's willingness to absorb wrong rather than retaliate impacted you powerfully?

Interlinear Text

Ἦκούσατε	ὅτι	ἐρρέθη,	ὀφθαλμοῦ	ἀντὶ	ὀφθαλμοῦ	καὶ
Ye have heard	that	it hath been said	An eye	for	An eye	and
G191	G3754	G4483	G3788	G473	G3788	G2532
ὀδόντος	ἀντὶ	ὀδόντος				
a tooth	for	a tooth				
G3599	G473	G3599				

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 19:21 (Parallel theme): And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Deuteronomy 19:19 (Parallel theme): Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.