

Do Not Resist an Evil Person; but Whoever Slaps You on Your Cheek, Turn the Other to Him Also

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*Give Life for Life, Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth,
Hand for Hand, Foot for Foot, Burning for
Burning, Wound for Wound, Stripe for Stripe
(Ex. 21:23-25).*

*Do Not Resist an Evil Person; but Whoever
Slaps You on Your Cheek, Turn the Other to
Him Also (Mt. 5:39).*

There are two completely different subjects being addresses in the so-called contradictory scriptures listed above. The first is dealing with compensation for injury or death. The latter is dealing with those who are being persecuted for doing God's work. By ignoring the context, it is easy to lump these scriptures together and state they contradict each other.

God would not have to enact the legislation in Exodus 21:23-25 if everyone loved each other. However, in the real world, people have to be shown how to love one another and sadly, in many cases, this means making them compensate those they have harmed because otherwise they wouldn't.

But if any lasting harm follows (i.e. not a mere slap on the cheek; cf. Mt. 5:39), then you shall give life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:23-25; Ed. note in parentheses; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Insurance companies today have varying amounts of money that are paid for the loss of an eye, or limb, and this is the principle of God's legislation. (See: www.bankrate.com/brm/news/insurance/body-worth/.asp; cf. www.syracuse.com/news/index.sst/2009/01/loss_of_vision).

The scriptures that follow confirm that revenge, or reciprocal harm, was not the purpose of God's legislation.

And if a man strikes the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maidservant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. ²⁷And if he knocks out his servant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth (Ex. 21:26-27; emphasis added).

If Exodus 21:24 was meant to be taken literally, the servant would be able to knock out his master's tooth. However, it is clear that this was not allowed, and the intent was to compensate whoever was harmed in a manner commensurate with their injury. In the case of premeditated murder, providing the evidence is without any doubt (cf. Dt. 17:6; 19:15), the murderer is to be executed because no monetary value, or compensation, can be placed on another person's life.

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his (the murder's) blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man (Gen. 9:6; Ed. note in parenthesis).

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. ¹³But if he (the killer) did not lie in wait (premeditated murder; cf. Ex. 21:14), but God delivered him into his hand (did not intervene to prevent the death), then I (God) will appoint for you a place (city of refuge; cf. Jos.

21:13, 21, 27, 32, 38) where he may flee (Ex. 21:12-13; cf. Lev. 24:17; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The second scripture in the heading of this study is dealing with those who are doing God's work and being persecuted for it (cf. 1Pet. 2:18-23). Instead of seeking physical compensation from those who are trying to harm them, God expects His people to pray that their enemies repent.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you (no mention of any compensation for this in Exodus 21:23-25), do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Mt. 5:44-45; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Christ made it clear that his servants were not to retaliate when anyone wished to attack them verbally, or physically, for the work they were doing as God's representatives.

And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I (Christ) say to you (his disciples), it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment (second resurrection; cf. Rev. 20:4-6) than for that city (Mk. 6:11; cf. Rom. 12:19; see study: The Fruit of God's Spirit Is Vengeance and Fury; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Remember the word that I (Christ) said to you (his disciples), 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you... (Jn. 15:20a; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

It is in this context that Christ's comments in Matthew 5:39 must be viewed.

But I (Christ) tell you (his disciples) not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Mt. 5:39; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Christ was not commenting on someone breaking another person's tooth, or taking someone's life. Instead, he was explaining the rigors of doing God's work and how his disciples were to react when those they were trying to teach and help resisted their efforts.

In conclusion, the scriptures that some people claim are contradictory are actually dealing with completely different subjects that are not comparable at all. The first text deals with compensation for injury, and not revenge as many claim. The phrase "eye for an eye" is used quite often and, in most cases, people apply it literally. However, that is not what God intended. The second scripture is a confirmation that God's servants will suffer various forms of persecution when they do His work, and this will continue until Christ's return (Jn. 16:1-4; cf. Lk. 11:47-51).

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