

***Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeover --- Resentment & Retaliation***

***Exodus 20:1-2; 21:23-25 & Matthew 5:38-42***

***“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;”***

***Matthew 5:38-39***

Exodus 20:1-21

*Then God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. <sup>7</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. <sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. <sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>13</sup> You shall not murder. <sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery. <sup>15</sup> You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. <sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. <sup>18</sup> When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.” <sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.” <sup>21</sup> Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.*

Exodus 21:23-25

*<sup>23</sup> If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. <sup>26</sup> When a slaveowner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye. <sup>27</sup> If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.*

Our New Testament reading comes from Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. We have been working our way through this message week-by-week, taking a slow drink from God’s message of love that calls us to a new way of life. Let us listen to God’s Word for us today.

Matthew 5:38-42

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; <sup>40</sup> and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; <sup>41</sup> and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also*

*the second mile.*<sup>42</sup> *Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.*<sup>i</sup>

Let us pray --- Lord may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The mother ran into the bedroom when she heard her seven-year-old son scream. She found his two-year-old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip and said comfortingly to the boy, "There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts." He nodded his acknowledgement, and she left the room. As she started down the hall the little girl screamed. Rushing back in she asked, "What happened?" The little boy replied, "She knows now."<sup>ii</sup>

Resentment, retaliation and revenge, this is the reality of life. Isn't it? Jesus' next message to us in the Sermon on the Mount is only 4 verses--roughly 87 words, depending on your translation. In the original Greek language it is only 67 words. We have a hard time trying to translate Greek words into English. We tend to write more and more to explain the meaning of a word and then expand that meaning so people will understand it. On a side note, this is the stack of books (12 books) that I have been reading in preparation for this week's sermon. This does not include my readings on my computer through my Bible software programs. Needless to say, most of these Bible Commentaries are a lot more than 60 to 80 words--more like five to ten pages to explain these four verses.

In this short message, Jesus challenges his followers, the Pharisees, and the teachers of the law that had gathered around Him with one of the oldest law ever written. Of the entire Sermon on the Mount, no ideas are more frequently alluded to than the ones that follow: an eye for an eye; turn the other cheek; go the extra mile. Much has been written through the years on this teaching. The great Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, who had a powerful influence on Mahatma Ghandi, produced a revolutionary effect with his theology of pacifism. This thought of an eye for an eye is one of the oldest laws ever recorded. This law is found in the Code of Hammurabi, written by the Babylonian king during his reign 2285-2242, some 100 years before Moses and the Ten Commandments.

This law was recorded three times in the Old Testament: Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. This law was always to be used in the justice system, never in personal revenge or retaliation. The principle of the punishment was simple. The punishment was to match the crime for two reasons: 1) to curtail further crime, 2) to prevent excessive punishment.

The problem in Jesus day is that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees had changed the laws and interpreted them so that revenge, retaliation, and retribution was not left to the justice system but administered in their private sector.

After 125 years, the infamous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys is finally history. Sixty descendants of the original clans gathered on Saturday, June 14, 2003, in Pikefield, Kentucky, to sign a document declaring an official end to more than a century of hatred and bloodshed. Most think the feuding between the McCoys of Kentucky and Hatfields of West Virginia began in 1878 when Randolph McCoy accused one of the Hatfields of stealing a hog. The Hatfields won the "hog war" when a McCoy cousin sided with the opposing clan.

Feelings festered and other incidents occurred that finally resulted in the shooting death of Ellison Hatfield in 1882. Retaliation begat retaliation until the feud claimed 11 more family members over the next ten years. Subsequent conflicts between the two clans have involved court battles over timber rights and cemetery plots.

The treaty calling for peace reads: "We do hereby and formally declare an official end to all hostilities, implied, inferred, and real, between the families, now and forevermore. We ask by God's grace and love that we be forever remembered as those that bound together the hearts of two families to form a family of freedom in America."

Reo Hatfield, who first thought of the ceremony said, "We're not saying you don't have to fight, because sometimes you do have to fight. But you don't have to fight forever."

Although the treaty was largely symbolic, both the governor of Kentucky and the governor of West Virginia were present for the nationally televised ceremony.<sup>iii</sup>

We need to revisit Jesus' time—what he was teaching was radical. The Code of Hammurabi is the oldest law in our written world—written by King Hammurabi of Babylon—about 4,000 years ago! Moses' 10 Commandments came 100 years after the Code of Hammurabi. The trouble is that the religious people had taken the judicial law out of the hands of the courts and they ruled over the people. In Jesus' day, to be struck on the right cheek was the biggest insult of all. You see, you have to back hand a person to use your right hand on their right cheek. Compare it to spitting on someone in our day. And here is Jesus—telling them to give them the other cheek, too. In those times, you had several tunics (or shirts) and only one cloak. Your cloak is what you used for your bedcover at night. Here is Jesus saying go ahead and give your shirt and your coat. Also, Israel was under the oppression of the Roman rulers in Jesus' time. A Roman soldier could tap you on the shoulder and make you carry his load for a mile. It was an insult and a huge humiliation when that happened to you. (Remember the man asked to carry Jesus' cross? Same thing.) Here is Jesus saying, "This mountaintop makeover is not going to be easy. When the soldier taps you on the shoulder—give him two miles, not one." Jesus is trying to teach us that being a humble servant is very worthy in God's Kingdom.

Resentment, retaliation and revenge led to the deaths of family members between the Hatfields and the McCoys. Resentment, retaliation and revenge led to over 125 years of conflict between two families. How much has resentment, retaliation and revenge stolen from your life?

**PRECEPT--- PRINCIPLE --- PERSON**

We don't have a lot of time to break down the four lines in this message plus I have been hearing pretty consistently how the services are going over—with all of the new members joining, minutes for mission, and baptisms! I surely don't want to build up any resentment, retaliation or revenge--so I am going to keep this message short. Here is your one point! Behind this short teaching is the principle by which every Christian is called to live: ***DO NOT MAKE YOUR RIGHTS THE BASIS FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.***

***DO NOT MAKE YOUR RIGHTS THE BASIS FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.***  
***In essence "Give up your right to be right!" This is what Jesus is teaching from the mountain!***

The Ten Commandments that we read from Exodus are **precepts**. God's Word is filled with "Precepts." Precepts are commands put there for our own good. Principles are the "why" behind the precepts and the "Person" behind the principle is God. Think of it this way --- if we move from precept to principle we come to the person of God.

**Precept** --- You shall not commit murder --- **Principle** --- the sanctity of life --- the **Person** of God who gives life.

**Precept** --- You shall not bear false testimony --- **Principle** --- Honesty --- the **Person** of God is honest and holy.

**Precept** --- turn the other cheek, give your cloak, go the extra mile --- **Principle** --- humility, self denial, servanthood --- **Person:** Jesus Christ!

This teaching is simple, but quite difficult to fulfill. Personal revenge, retaliation and retribution are deeply seated in our hearts.

In one of the old "Amos and Andy" television programs, Andy was angry. There was a big man who would continually slap Andy across the chest every time they met. Andy finally had enough of it. He told Amos, "I'm going to get revenge. I put a stick of dynamite in my vest pocket. The next time he slaps me on the chest he's going to get his hand blown off." But Andy forgot that the dynamite would also blow his own heart out. Revenge may hurt the other person but it always blows our own heart out.<sup>iv</sup>

The principle that Jesus is teaching is that we are not to make our rights the basis for our relationship with others. Seriously, we need to give up the right to be right!

So What?

"So what" would happen in our lives if we gave up the right to be right? What would happen in our lives if we learned to turn the other cheek? What would happen in our lives if we would go the extra mile?

In John MacArthur's writing on this passage, he ended his thoughts with these words. I thought that they were rather profound. MacArthur challenged me with his words and I think they may challenge you. "The only person who is non-defensive, non-vengeful, never bears a grudge and has no spite in his heart is the person who has died to self. To fight for one's rights is to prove that self is still on the throne of the heart. The believer who is faithful to Christ lives for Him and, if necessary, dies for Him (Romans 14:8). It is impossible to live for self and for Christ at the same time."<sup>v</sup>

So what --- or who-- are you living for? Are you one of the Hatfields or McCoys living with revenge, retribution and retaliation in your heart? Are you more like Amos and Andy allowing your hurt, revenge, and retaliation to hurt your heart?

How about coming to the Cross and dying to self like Jesus Christ? How about going the extra mile and turning the other cheek? It isn't easy to give up your right to be right. It isn't. But it's the Kingdom way. We will struggle with this precept, and principle—but we won't struggle with the person behind it. The person behind this precept and principle—Jesus Christ—hung on a Cross so that we would know for

certain that in God's Kingdom you can't serve God and self. We must choose. Our Lord and Savior did. So can we.

Let us pray ---Lord, we give up our right to be right. We give up to you all the times we've been resentful, all the times we've want to take revenge and all the times we've retaliated. Our hearts are not whole when we behave this way. Help us. Change us. Show us the road less traveled. The road to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> *Joke a Day Ministries Group; submitted by Keith Todd, [www.sermonfodder.com](http://www.sermonfodder.com)*

<sup>iii</sup> *Stephen Leon Alligood, "American Profile," CBS News.com (6-14-03);*

<sup>iv</sup> *Gaylord Goertsen in The Christian Leader (Feb. 26, 1991). Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no. 7.*

<sup>v</sup> *MacArthur, John, The New Testament Commentary Matthew 1-7, 1989 Chicago, Moody Bible Institute*