



[Matthew 5:38-40](#)

(38) Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
(39) But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

King James Version

What kind of justice does [God](#) dispense? Is it based on a so-called cruel Old Testament law? The "Christian" churches of [this world](#) say that [Jesus](#) came to do away with that law. Preposterous! Without law as a foundation, there can be no justice. Jesus explicitly says, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the [Prophets](#). I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" ([Matthew 5:17](#)).

Some think that Jesus condemns the Old Testament system of justice in [Matthew 5:38-40](#). However, He is correcting, not nullifying, an abuse of the eye-for-an-eye principle, which the Romans called *Lex Talionis*. The Jews of His day were advocating it for settling personal disputes. In effect, each person was taking justice into his own hands, and Jesus says that was not His intent when He gave it to their forefathers.

Considered by many to be barbaric and primitive, the eye-for-an-eye principle is, on the contrary, the basis for God's system of judgment, of civil law, for ruling a nation ([Exodus 21:22-25](#); [Leviticus 24:19-20](#)). *It has its foundation in equal justice as provided by equal payment for damage done.* God established this principle so that a judge could be [merciful](#) in evaluating the circumstances of the crime and render a fair and just decision in cases of [sin](#) against other men.

This does not mean that if A bloodies B's nose, then B has to punch A in the nose in return. *Lex Talionis* requires commensurate payment for damage done, punishment fitting the crime. It is the basis for evenhanded justice, demanding fair compensation for damages. As implemented in [God's law](#), *Lex Talionis* was enforced with a system of fines—with the money paid to the injured party, not to the state (e.g. [Exodus 21:22](#), 28-

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Matthew 5:38-40 (<http://www.theberean.org>) 32).

Though it was to be the basic law, a judge had the power to give mercy. For instance, if he determined that B really goaded A into punching his nose, he was free to show mercy along with the payment required. In His judgment of us, God does the same. When we deserve death because of sin, God shows us mercy by allowing Christ's blood to cover our transgressions. He has decided to forgo the strict application of the eye-for-an-eye principle and extend mercy.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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