

"RESIST NOT EVIL": THE SUPREME TEST OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

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The teachings of Jesus Christ provide profound understanding and distinct direction concerning the relationship of good and evil in God's plan for the redemption of his children. In addition to discussing the origin of evil and its meaning from a variety of scriptural, prophetic, and scholarly sources, this paper includes an examination of the Savior's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount concerning humankind's response to evil. The manner in which a disciple of Christ responds to evil has been described by Elder Dallin H. Oaks as "the supreme test of Christian behavior."¹

THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

Many scholars, theologians, and members of the clergy from a majority of religious traditions believe that mankind's first experience with evil is found in what St. Augustine defined as the "original sin" of Adam and Eve.² From what has become the traditional Christian perspective, the doctrine of original sin does not simply refer to Adam and Eve eating

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from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17), but also to the consequences of our first parents’ sin, guilt, and depravity being imputed to their posterity. Describing the origin of evil in his own life, St. Augustine said, “It was not I, therefore, who caused it, but *the sin dwells in me*, and, being a son of Adam, I was suffering for his sin which was more freely committed.”³ Theologian and pastor John MacArthur provides a more recent description of the traditional view of the relationship between Adam and the origin of evil in the following: “Adam passed to all his descendants the inherent sinful nature he possessed because of his first disobedience. That nature is present from the moment of conception (Ps. 51:5), making it impossible for man to live in a way that pleases God. Satan, the father of sin (1 John 3:8), first brought temptation to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1–7). . . . When Adam sinned, all mankind sinned in his loins ([Rom. 5:18]; cf. Heb. 7:7–10). Since his sin transformed his inner nature and brought spiritual death and depravity, that sinful nature would be passed on seminally to his posterity as well (Ps. 51:5).”⁴ The belief that evil has been inherited from Adam by all mankind explains a wide variety of religious and familial practices, including the baptizing of infants and the severe discipline of some children, whose parents believe that harsh discipline is necessary to exorcise the devil from their supposedly “evil-natured” children.⁵

Latter-day Saint theology is significantly different than the teachings of every other religion and philosophical tradition concerning the origin and nature of evil. Latter-day Saint theology differ not only from Augustine’s doctrine that man is evil from conception but also from other teachings such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophy of “the natural goodness of man”⁶ and John Locke’s argument that a child is neither good nor evil but comes into this world as a “white paper, void of all characters.”⁷ While the scriptural canon of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints acknowledges that the Fall of Adam and Eve brought physical and spiritual death to humankind and that all mankind is in a fallen state, Latter-day Saint scripture also teaches that man is not born evil but is *innocent* at birth. The Savior taught the early Saints, “Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God” (D&C 93:38; see also Mosiah 3:16).

Latter-day scripture and the teachings of modern prophets also teach that evil had its beginning, at least for "this earth, and the inhabitants thereof" (Moses 1:35), not in the Garden of Eden but in the premortal world. From the Book of Abraham we learn that the spirit sons and daughters of God assembled together in a heavenly council, where they were presented with God's plan for the salvation of his children. The premortal Jesus fully embraced the Father's plan and accepted his role as Savior and Redeemer (see Abraham 3:22–26; D&C 121:32), but Lucifer rebelled. From the Book of Moses we learn that Lucifer opposed God and his plan, saying, "I will redeem all mankind. . . . wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1). The Lord then explained, "Because . . . Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, . . . I caused that he should be cast down" (Moses 4:3). "And, at that day, many followed after him" (Abraham 3:28). Indeed, Lucifer and "a third part of the hosts of heaven" used their agency to reject God's plan and were "thrust down, and thus came the devil and his angels" (D&C 29:36–37).

As a means to bring about his eternal purposes, God allowed Satan's acts of evil to be used for the benefit of humankind: The Lord revealed, "And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet" (D&C 29:39). With that said, it is important to point out President Joseph Fielding Smith's statement that "no person was foreordained or appointed to sin or to perform a mission of evil."⁸ However, God responds to evil by turning it to the good of those who love him. Elder John A. Widtsoe taught:

Our Father in heaven makes use of the evil designs of the devil. God allows His fallen son to tempt the children of men, so that they may more deliberately choose between good and evil. The Lord could banish Satan and his angels from earth, and remove temptation from men, but in His wisdom He permits His wayward bodiless children to come upon earth. Thus, despite their intentions, the followers of Satan are so used as to help accomplish the divine purpose. Whether understood by the evil one or not, in his efforts among mankind he is made an instrument to secure the very plan that he opposed in the Great Council.⁹

Elder Orson Pratt taught that Satan's rebellion in the pre-earth council might not have been the first instance of evil: "I do not suppose that this was the first origin of evil. We do not consider that this creation on which we dwell was the first one that was made. We do not consider that the rebellion which took place in heaven prior to this creation was the first rebellion that had ever existed. We do not consider that those beings who rebelled [were] the first ones that ever had their agency; but we believe that God has always been at work, from all eternity; and that the creations which he has made are innumerable unto men."¹⁰

Latter-day Saint theology includes the doctrine that Lucifer became the devil as a result of his evil choices. The Savior explained, "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Latter-day Saint teachings differ from traditional Christian theology in teaching that at the outset God did not create Satan. Lucifer, as he was known before he rebelled, existed (as did all mankind) as a form of intelligence. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is [coeternal] with God himself."¹¹ Lucifer later became Satan by his evil choices. Thus God did not create Satan nor did God create evil, but all who become evil do so by their exercise of moral agency.

Our experience with good and evil began before we came to earth, and our birth confirms that in the premortal world we supported the Father's plan.¹² President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, "God gave his children their free agency even in the spirit world, by which the individual spirits had the privilege, just as men have here, of choosing the good and rejecting the evil, or partaking of the evil to suffer the consequences of their sins."¹³

EVIL DEFINED

Elder Widtsoe stated, "What is Evil may be determined by their effects on human life, and their conformity to God's will." He continued: "Man is on earth under a plan provided by God, the Father of the spirits of men. This plan is for the good and welfare of man. The ultimate purpose of the plan is to enable every person to develop his every power, and thus to progress eternally. Imbedded in every part of the plan is the right of every man to act for himself, to choose one or the other of the

opposites which present themselves before him. If he chooses to do that which is for his welfare, which enables him to progress, he chooses the good. If he chooses that which retards his progress, he chooses the evil." Elder Widtsoe then provided a succinct definition of evil: "Whatever conforms to the plan of God for His earth children is good; whatever is in opposition to the plan is evil."¹⁴

This definition of evil echoes the words of the ancient Book of Mormon prophet Moroni: "Whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him" (Moroni 7:17).

RESPONDING TO EVIL

Jesus Christ's direction to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount concerning evil begins with this statement: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Matthew 5:38–39). The phrase "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was commonly known among those to whom Jesus was speaking; it is found in three places in the Hebrew Bible: Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. The significance of the phrase is both personal as well as theological and is as relevant today as it was in the past. Who among us has not, to a greater or lesser degree, experienced or even participated in acts of retaliation or revenge in response to an offense? The original intent of the Mosaic mandate, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," was to mediate the degree of retaliation taken by those who were victimized. The natural man's response to any harm done to him, whether small or great, is to retaliate—mentally, emotionally, and perhaps even physically—often beyond the magnitude of the original provocation. It may be instructive for each of us to consider the last time we were treated unjustly, unkindly, or disrespectfully. What were our thoughts? How did we feel? How did we choose to respond?

A common misunderstanding of the phrase "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" was that it constituted God's standard by which individuals and families should measure their chosen response to an evil act. The

directive was a well-known part of the law of Moses that was recognized by the general populace; however, it was not intended to be used by the public. Instead, it had been specifically been given by God to *judges* who were authorized to make impartial and inspired judgments. British pastor and scholar D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: “This enactment was not given to the individual, but rather to the judges who were responsible for law and order amongst the individuals. The system of judges was set up amongst the children of Israel, and when disputes and matters arose the people had to take them to these responsible authorities for judgment. It was the judges who were to see to it that it was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and no more. The legislation was for them, not for the private individual.”¹⁵

The prophet Moses explained such third-party judgments to his father-in-law, Jethro: “When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws” (Exodus 18:16). We also learn that as time went on, Moses selected others to assist him in making such judgments: “And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves” (Exodus 18:25–26).

Although the “law of retaliation,” or *lex talionis* in Latin, may appear to be somewhat brutal in practice, it “actually represented an advance over earlier legal thinking both because it allowed no favoritism and because it guaranteed that the punishment could not exceed the crime.”¹⁶ It also appears that in many cases among the Israelites the exchange of “eye for eye, and tooth for tooth” was not always applied literally. Anglican clergyman and scholar John R. W. Stott wrote, “It is almost certain that by the time of Jesus literal retaliation for damage had been replaced in Jewish legal practice by money penalties or ‘damages.’”¹⁷ Evidence of such alternative compensation is also found in the writings of Moses. From Exodus we read, “And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye’s sake. And if he smite out his manservant’s tooth, or his maidservant’s tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth’s sake” (Exodus 21:26–27).

It appears, however, that the scribes and Pharisees transposed the implementation of the law of retaliation from the authorized and impartial courts of law into the illegitimate and prejudiced realm of personal relationships. They used the law to justify personal and familial revenge, even though doing so was prohibited in scripture. The law of Moses as stated in the book of Leviticus reads, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:17–18).

"RESIST NOT EVIL"

Like so many people living in the present, those living at the meridian of time often used the evil actions of others to justify their own evil thoughts, feelings of resentment, and acts of resistance and retaliation. The Savior rebuked the scribes and Pharisees of the present and the future and invited all to live by his words, "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" (Matthew 5:39). Alternate translations of the Savior's words in Matthew 5:39 sometimes include an emphasis on the embodiment of evil, but they all echo the same instruction found in the King James Version. A sampling of some alternate translations of Matthew 5:39 (emphasis added) is contained in the following table:

TRANSLATIONS OF MATTHEW 5:39

King James Version (KJV)	"But I say unto you, That ye <i>resist not evil</i> : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."
New International Version (NIV)	"But I tell you, <i>Do not resist an evil person</i> . If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	"But I say to you, <i>do not resist an evil person</i> ; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."
English Standard Version (ESV)	"But I say to you, <i>Do not resist the one who is evil</i> . But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

 TRANSLATIONS OF MATTHEW 5:39 (CONTINUED)

New Living Translation (NLT)	“But I say, <i>do not resist an evil person!</i> If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.”
Douay-Rheims Bible (D-R)	“But I say to you <i>not to resist evil</i> : but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other.”
New World Translation (NWT)	“However, I say to you: <i>Do not resist him that is wicked</i> ; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other also to him.”

The Savior’s command to “resist not evil” was not intended to introduce a new or higher law but to clarify the command he (as Jehovah) had given centuries before to the ancient Israelites to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18). The Savior’s charge to “resist not evil” has motivated a wide variety of interpretations from individuals and institutions. These range from those who support a passive response to war to those who argue that the phrase is an “absurdity” that takes away “the right of self defense.”¹⁸ In the words of one scholar, “There is possibly no passage in Scripture which has produced as much heat and disputation as this very teaching.”¹⁹

The invitation to “resist not evil” is a distinctive and demanding invitation to respond to evil in a way that is in direct opposition to the cultural norm of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” Consider how humankind generally responds to being treated with disrespect or even abuse. The natural man’s desire for retaliation or revenge in response to an offense is often the direct cause of contention, ranging from international conflict to familial and other interpersonal strife. The anger and contention that are often part of giving and taking offense—and typically at the heart of resisting evil—are directly connected to many of the physiological and psychological ills faced by mankind.²⁰

The negative temporal and spiritual consequences of anger and contention are no doubt a part of the reason for the Savior’s direction given earlier in the sermon that “whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment” (JST, Matthew 5:24).²⁴ The Savior provided similar counsel against anger in his sermon to the ancient Nephites: “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:29). The Savior also taught

that when we are angry with others, although we may not immediately see the direct consequences of such negative emotion, we are “in danger of” experiencing serious consequences (Matthew 5:22).

The Savior’s teachings about anger in the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew contain another doctrinal point not found in other translations of the Bible. Consider the following comparison (with emphasis added):

ANGER IN THE BOOK OF MORMON	
Matthew 5:22	3 Nephi 12:22
“Whosoever is angry with his brother <i>without a cause</i> shall be in danger of <i>the</i> judgment.”	“Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of <i>his</i> judgment.”

In addition to not including the phrase “without a cause,”²² the 3 Nephi account contains the phrase “*his* judgment” as opposed to “*the* judgment,” which is found in traditional translations. The Savior’s words in 3 Nephi clarify that when we are angry with someone, we are in “in danger of *his* judgment,” meaning the judgment of the person with whom we are angry. In contrast, the Matthew account implies that it is the judgment of God one is in danger of experiencing. Both accounts warn of the judgments of God and his servants; however, only the 3 Nephi account makes it clear that when we are angry with a neighbor, we are in danger of our anger being used against us. Often it is not the content of our concern that provokes our neighbor; instead it is the anger with which it is delivered.

While the phrase “an eye for eye, and a tooth for a tooth” accurately describes the attitudes many people have as they interact with others, styles of interacting vary. For example, Thomas Jefferson once gave the following counsel concerning anger: “When angry, count ten, before you speak; if very angry, an hundred.”²³ Such a stoic reaction to anger was characteristic of President Jefferson’s day. Many years later, famed writer and humorist Mark Twain responded to Mr. Jefferson’s counsel by writing, “When angry, count four; when very angry, swear.”²⁴ These sayings represent two of the prevailing paradigms concerning anger that exist in many cultures today. While many theologians, philosophers, clinicians, and others agree with the counsel of Thomas Jefferson, there has been a cultural shift toward the idea that anger ought to be expressed. One

popular author counseled: “Punch a pillow or punching bag. And while you do it, yell and curse and moan and holler. . . . Punch with all the frenzy you can. If you are angry at a particular person, imagine his or her face on the pillow or punching bag, and vent your rage physically and verbally.”²⁵ While this practice is not supported by legitimate research or inspired theology, such statements are typical of the collective wisdom of the day and have influenced how many have learned to resist evil in their families, communities, and even the interactions between rival nations.²⁶

Elder Oaks shared the following insight from a colleague, which illustrates the specific meaning of the phrase “resist not evil” in relation to anger and the common frustrations of life:

In a stimulating analysis of the application of this commandment in the circumstances of our day, Leonard E. Read, the long-time editor of *The Freeman*, concluded that [the phrase “resist not evil”] meant “not to argue with anyone. . . . In a word, away with confrontation!” He gave this illustration: “Now and then we experience shysterism: a broken promise, overcharge, underquality, an attempt to ‘get the best’ of one. Resist not this evil; that is, pay no heed; not a scolding word; simply walk away and fail to return. While resistance will harden the malefactor in his sins as he rises to his own defense, nonresistance leaves him alone with his soul, his shop, and his jobbery, a plight even a malefactor will ponder and understand.”²⁷

Most scholars and clergy agree that the Savior’s command to “resist not evil” was intended to be applied interpersonally rather than politically or militarily. Others believe that the phrase should not have any qualifications and should be applied literally and globally in every situation. Professor Dale C. Allison Jr. observed, “Many Christian interpreters have found here the justification for pacifism. Before Constantine, Christian leaders rejected participation in the Roman army and cited [Matthew 5:38–42] as sufficient reason.” Professor Allison continues by describing the argument made by historian Edward Gibbon, the celebrated author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, that the pacifism inspired by the command “resist not evil” was a major factor in the fall of the Roman Empire. Professor Allison’s specific words are as

follows: "Edward Gibbon could even argue that the Roman Empire fell in part because Christianity eviscerated the military spirit. Much later, many early Anabaptists, the Quakers, and other groups insisted, on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, that one cannot be both a disciple of Jesus and a soldier, for a soldier cannot turn the other cheek."²⁸

Professor Martin Hellman suggested that as difficult as it is for warring nations to follow the Savior's command, it may be even more difficult for spouses in times of conflict: "It is easier to 'resist not' when the perceived evil is distant and abstract, but much harder when it is an angry spouse in the same room!"²⁹ The Savior taught there are times when, instead of simply walking away from conflict, we should seek reconciliation. The Savior taught the ancient Nephites, "If ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you" (3 Nephi 12:23–24).

Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon include the Savior's teaching about not resisting evil, but each has a slightly different wording. Matthew 5:39 reads, "Resist not evil," while 3 Nephi 12:39 reads, "Ye shall not resist evil." The Book of Mormon also contains a phrase that initially appears to contradict the charge in 3 Nephi. In the book of Alma, Chief Judge Pahoran counsels Captain Moroni to "resist evil, and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, yea, such as rebellions and dissensions, let us resist them with our swords" (Alma 61:14). While this passage may appear to oppose the Savior's admonition to "resist not evil," the context of each statement provides an important key to understanding when it is appropriate to overtly respond to evil. In Matthew 5, the Savior is speaking to those (such as the scribes and Pharisees) who were using the law of retaliation as an excuse for revenge in day-to-day relationships with family, neighbors, and even strangers. On the other hand, Pahoran is speaking as an agent of the Nephite government to the highest-ranking Nephite military commander, Moroni. Both Pahoran and Moroni had been authorized by God and by those who had elected them to resist evil in defending the freedom of the people (see Alma 43:47). The contrast between the words of Jesus and the interchange between Pahoran and Moroni underscores the principle that resisting evil must be done at the

right time, in the appropriate way, and with the proper authority. One of the plain and precious truths taken from the Bible but restored through the Book of Mormon may very well have been the Lord's direction concerning the resisting of evil.

"TURN THE OTHER CHEEK"

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ provides several examples of what he means by his counsel to "resist not evil." The first illustration reads, "But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). It is significant that both the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Mormon include the detail of the *right* cheek being smitten. In Jesus' culture, the left hand was commonly used for unclean tasks, and only the right hand was considered appropriate for such actions as striking another person. To strike someone on the right cheek with your right hand would require a backhanded slap; in New Testament culture, this would be more consistent with an insult rather than a fistfight. Walter Wink, professor emeritus at Auburn Theological Seminary, wrote: "The intention is not to injure but to humiliate, to put someone in his or her place. . . . A backhand slap was the usual way of admonishing inferiors. Masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. *We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation would be suicidal.* The only normal response would be cowering submission."³⁰

Turning the other cheek would be neither an indulgent response (like running away) nor an aggressive reaction (like striking the person who first struck you); instead, it is a calculated response intended to invite the aggressor to consider his or her actions. Professor Wink explained further: "This action robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, 'Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status (gender, race, age, wealth) does not alter the fact. You cannot demean me.'"³¹

The Savior's responses to the abuses and unjust judgments of Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod shortly before his crucifixion are inspiring demonstrations of the following the direction he had given earlier in his ministry to "resist not evil" (Matthew 5:39). Both Matthew and Mark

reveal that instead of verbally or physically responding to the accusations made against him, Jesus "held his peace" (Matthew 26:63; Mark 14:61). Only to the question "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" did the Savior give a direct response, stating simply, "I am." Then he added, "And ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61–62). There were no angry words of retaliation, defensive stance, or even the silent seething so common to the natural man's responses to evil.

In addition to including the direction to "turn . . . the other cheek," the writings in the New Testament provide additional counsel concerning when and how we are to formally resist evil. In a classic discourse on retaliation and revenge, the Apostle Paul counseled the Saints in Rome:

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give [God] place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:17–21)

Paul explained that it is the responsibility of individuals to exercise mercy toward those who have offended them and to leave justice to God and his authorized servants, allowing "God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (2 Thessalonians 1:6). The Savior taught, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). When we take matters into our own hands and seek justice on our own terms, we make things worse for ourselves, for those who have offended us, and for those who are attempting to bring about reconciliation.

The Savior's words in the Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament contain significant doctrinal detail that furthers our understanding concerning seeking retaliation and revenge. The JST additions have been italicized:

 RETALIATION IN THE JST

KJV, Luke 6:29

And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.

JST, Luke 6:29; Bible appendix

And unto him *who* smiteth thee on the cheek, offer also the other; *or, in other words, it is better to offer the other, than to revile again.* And him *who* taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also.

The phrase “It is better to offer the other, than to revile again” is significant. It clarifies that retaliation can be more damaging to the victim’s well-being than the original assault. President James E. Faust was once taught, “Your criticism may be worse than the conduct you are trying to correct.”³² The Savior taught, “There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man” (Mark 7:15). Among the greatest lessons of life I have been privileged to learn are those I have been taught by individuals who have been victims of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. I have observed, from the perspectives of both a clinician and a Church leader, that those who heal from such horrific abuses are those who are able to refrain from retaliation and revenge. These noble souls have learned to exercise mercy and to allow those who are authorized by the Church and the state to mete out the appropriate justice. They also recognize that the ultimate judge is God. Elder Richard G. Scott counseled: “As a victim, do not waste effort in revenge or retribution against your aggressor. Focus on your responsibility to do what is in your power to correct. Leave the handling of the offender to civil and Church authorities. Whatever they do, eventually the guilty will face the Perfect Judge. Ultimately the unrepentant abuser will be punished by a just God.”³³

The Apostle Peter taught the early Saints about the importance of submitting themselves to civil authority and allowing the Lord to use the government to bring the wicked to judgment. Peter taught, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers” (1 Peter 2:13–17; see also D&C 134:1). Just as religious leaders have a solemn responsibility to exercise justice on behalf of the Lord and his Church upon those guilty of sin and parents have the authority to discipline their children, civil authorities are

responsible for maintaining order and appropriately dealing with those who have broken the law. Writing of both civil and religious leaders, the Apostle Paul taught: "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:3-4).

It is natural to want to punish those who have sinned against us, but it is the natural man we are invited to overcome. In addition to being angry with those who have offended us, it is also natural to fear that if we do not punish our offenders, no one will. One of the problems with this reasoning is that as we nurture feelings of anger and harbor the desire for revenge, we lose the comforting and directing influence of the Holy Ghost. The Lord has counseled, "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste" (Deuteronomy 32:35). By transforming the Lord's words "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" into a cultural creed and thus a justification for revenge, we interfere with the Lord and his servants in exercising justice in the Lord's own way and according to his timetable. While often attributed to Gandhi, it was Martin Luther King Jr. who taught that "the old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind." Reverend King said the personal implementation of retaliation is immoral "because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding. It seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers."³⁴ Justice belongs to God and his authorized servants, both civil and religious, and is not something we force upon those who have offended us.

"LOVE YOUR ENEMIES"

In addition to the Savior's counsel to "turn the other cheek," the Sermon on the Mount contains additional illustrations of ways that

we can follow the Savior's counsel to "resist not evil." The first example states, "If any man will sue thee at law, and take thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (Matthew 5:40). The second is, "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (Matthew 5:41). The third, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matthew 5:42).³⁵ Finally, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:43–44). From this text it appears the people believed that the command to love their neighbor applied only among those who shared common beliefs and that they were justified in hating those who believed differently. This belief is typical of the natural man, but nowhere in Hebrew scripture is found the authorization to hate. The legitimization of hate, however, was and is commonly taught and practiced by those who feel they are superior. An ancient example is found in the records of Qumran, a community established near the Dead Sea during the second half of the second century BC. These records, commonly referred to as the Dead Sea Scrolls, contain the statement "Love all that He [God] has chosen and hate all that He has rejected"; also, "These are the rules of conduct for the Master in those times with respect to his loving and hating. Everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy for the men of perdition!"³⁶ The teaching of Jesus Christ to "love your enemies" may have been a rebuttal of these teachings of the Essenes at Qumran, as well as other teachings that provided justification for feelings of hate and acts of vengeance.

In our own day there continue to be organizations, religious and otherwise, that condone hate and bigotry. A recent study identified 708 active extremist and hate groups operating in the United States alone.³⁷ Ironically, these organizations are often affiliated with Christian ministries in addition to the more predictable black separatist groups, paramilitary organizations, white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and ecoterrorist/animal rights organizations.³⁸ President Gordon B. Hinckley taught the following concerning racial divisiveness: "Racial strife still lifts its ugly head. I am advised that even right here among us there is some of this. . . . I am told that racial slurs and denigrating remarks are sometimes heard

among us. I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ."³⁹ He also taught that, "political differences never justify hatred or ill will."⁴⁰ Speaking of unchristian attitudes towards those who experience same-gender attraction, Elder Oaks warned, "Our doctrines . . . condemn those who engage in so-called 'gay bashing'—physical or verbal attacks on persons thought to be involved in homosexual or lesbian behavior."⁴¹

The Savior's command to "love thy neighbour as thyself" was once questioned by a lawyer of his day who asked, "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). The lawyer's question was intended to find grounds to justify hating those who were different than himself. He acknowledged the command to love God and his neighbor, but he wanted to be the one to define just who his neighbor was. The Savior's reply is now known as the "parable of the good Samaritan" and clearly includes the command to love those of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people (see Luke 10:25–37).

The Savior's invitation to "love your enemies" clearly identifies not only those who may be considered enemies but also specific ways we are to love them. The Savior does not command his disciples to somehow generate warm feelings for those who oppose them but rather to actively love their enemies by serving them and praying for them. The Apostle Paul taught a similar doctrine to the Saints in Rome: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink" (Romans 12:20). These commands serve as inspired invitations to each of us. Do we actively pray for those who could be considered our enemies? In what specific ways can we bless and serve them?

In the October 2005 general conference, President Hinckley quoted extensively from a newspaper article about a woman whose response to evil was extraordinary. The story is a dramatic illustration of the Savior's command to resist not evil. The article reads in part:

How would you feel toward a teenager who decided to toss a 20-pound frozen turkey from a speeding car headlong into the windshield of the car you were driving? How would you feel after enduring six hours of surgery using metal plates and other hardware to piece your face together, and after learning you still face

years of therapy before returning to normal—and that you ought to feel lucky you didn't die or suffer permanent brain damage?

And how would you feel after learning that your assailant and his buddies had the turkey in the first place because they had stolen a credit card and gone on a senseless shopping spree, just for kicks? . . .

This is the kind of hideous crime that propels politicians to office on promises of getting tough on crime. It's the kind of thing that prompts legislators to climb all over each other in a struggle to be the first to introduce a bill that would add enhanced penalties for the use of frozen fowl in the commission of a crime.

The *New York Times* quoted the district attorney as saying this is the sort of crime for which victims feel no punishment is harsh enough. "Death doesn't even satisfy them," he said.

Which is what makes what really happened so unusual. The victim, Victoria Ruvolo, a 44-year-old former manager of a collections agency, was more interested in salvaging the life of her 19-year-old assailant, Ryan Cushing, than in exacting any sort of revenge. She pestered prosecutors for information about him, his life, how he was raised, etc. Then she insisted on offering him a plea deal. Cushing could serve six months in the county jail and be on probation for 5 years if he pleaded guilty to second-degree assault.

Had he been convicted of first-degree assault—the charge most fitting for the crime—he could have served 25 years in prison, finally thrown back into society as a middle-aged man with no skills or prospects.

But this is only half the story. The rest of it, what happened the day this all played out in court, is the truly remarkable part.

According to an account in the *New York Post*, Cushing carefully and tentatively made his way to where Ruvolo sat in the courtroom and tearfully whispered an apology. "I'm so sorry for what I did to you."

Ruvolo then stood, and the victim and her assailant embraced, weeping. She stroked his head and patted his back as he sobbed, and witnesses, including a *Times* reporter, heard her say,

"It's OK. I just want you to make your life the best it can be." According to accounts, hardened prosecutors, and even reporters, were choking back tears.⁴²

The *New York Times* described the scene in the courtroom when victim embraced assailant as "a moment of grace."⁴³

Most of us will not experience the dramatic kinds of evil described in the story of Victoria Ruvolo, but we will have many less dramatic and less public opportunities to follow the Savior's counsel to "resist not evil." Pastor David Jeremiah tells of driving his car in front of another car as they entered the parking lot of a McDonald's restaurant. The other driver became angry and began to scream and make obscene gestures. Instead of responding in kind, Dr. Jeremiah simply drove forward and decided to pay for that person's meal too. The dialogue between him and the employee went something like this: "I want to pay for her food, too." The McDonald's employee said, "You do? This has never happened here before." I said, "That's all right. I want to pay for it." So I paid for her food. And then, of course, you have to wait . . . While I'm waiting . . . she pulls in the line . . . to try to pay for her food and I see her talking to [the server] trying to explain, and she's looking at me. . . . All I could think about . . . was how she was going to explain [this] to her husband when she got home . . . [something like:] "You aren't going to believe what happened to me today! I insulted some guy and he bought me lunch!" Dr. Jeremiah concluded, "I wonder what would happen if we had random acts of kindness . . . when [ever] we have been insulted."⁴⁴

We may not be able to call up feelings of love and compassion for those who offend us, but we can serve them. We can pray for them. We can attempt to make restitution for any harm we may have contributed to the situation. Responding to evil with love is a part of what it means to truly be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"BE THE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER"

Following the Savior's words in the Sermon on the Mount to love, bless, do good, and pray for our enemies, he made a revealing comment about the ultimate purpose for his command. The Savior stated that the central purpose for loving as he loved is "that ye *may be* the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:45; emphasis added). In the

Gospel of John we read, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons [and daughters] of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12; see also D&C 39:3–6). While it is true that every person born into mortality is a child of God, only by fully accepting God and striving to follow his commandments can we truly become as he is. Speaking of the principles of the gospel taught in the Sermon on the Mount, President John Taylor taught: “These were principles worthy of a God; these were feelings that if cherished by the human family, would elevate them from that low, grovelling position in which they are laboring, would place them on a more elevated platform, would bring them into communion with their Heavenly Father and prepare them for an association with the Gods in the eternal worlds.”⁴⁵

The principles concerning mankind’s response to evil, and each of the doctrines contained in the Sermon on the Mount, are embodied perfectly in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only are these teachings intellectually elegant, spiritually edifying, and divinely inspired, but they also describe the character, perfections, and attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Eternal Father. Victoria Ruvolo’s and David Jeremiah’s responses towards the acts of their assailants are representative of the attitudes and behaviors consistent with the character of God. In similitude of God extending his grace and mercy to his children, Ms. Ruvolo and Pastor Jeremiah treated their enemies in the same manner; they extended both grace and mercy. Victoria Ruvolo worked with the legal authorities to see that her assailant received mercy. She was also part of extending justice as she cooperated with authorities in Mr. Cushing’s apprehension, judgment, and sentencing. Dr. Jeremiah’s response is consistent with the Apostle Paul’s words: “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:20–21).

CONCLUSION

The fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew concludes with four sobering questions and a stunning command. The Savior stated: “If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father

which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:46–48). It is relatively easy to love those who love us, but what of those with whom we have differences? How do we respond toward political adversaries, athletic rivals, members of our own families with whom we experience conflict, unkind neighbors, insensitive friends or acquaintances, business associates who speak evil of us, insensitive and incompetent leaders, or critics of our religious or moral beliefs? Do we resist what we perceive to be their evil acts, or do we strive to be true disciples of Jesus Christ and love as he loved?

While there are times and places when evil should be resisted, the Savior has taught that, especially in interpersonal relationships, we are to resist not evil by turning the other cheek, giving our coat and cloak, going the second mile, giving to him that asks something of us, loving our enemies, blessing them that curse us, doing good to them who hate us, and praying for those who despitely use and persecute us (see Matthew 5:39–44). By following the Savior's command to love as he loves and by accepting his grace, we become the children of our Father and one day become "perfect, even as [our] Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

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