

Don't Resist an Aggressor

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an aggressor.

MATTHEW 5:38-39

Written by Bill Perkins

For everyone listening to Jesus,
these words belonged to the familiar language of justice.
An “eye for eye, a tooth for tooth”
was never about permitting revenge—
it was about limiting retaliation.
The law ensured restraint:
exactly one eye, not two.

Imagine two men in a fight.
One throws a punch
and the other loses an eye.
Everything inside the injured man
wants more than justice.
He wants the other man
to suffer more than he has suffered.
But the law steps in and draws a boundary.

And you may not know this about Jesus,
He takes His listeners deeper.
“Do not resist an aggressor.”
He is not commanding someone
to remain in abuse or stay in danger.
He is confronting the moment
when another person's anger tries to recruit our anger—
to pull us into revenge.
He's teaching us not to answer harm with greater harm.

Think of a driver cut off at an intersection.
A horn blares.
A door swings open.
A man storms toward the other car,

ready to fight over a moment that lasted three seconds.

No thought.

No pause.

Only a surge of anger demanding control.

This is the moment Jesus is addressing.

A disciple doesn't let an aggressor

dictate their reaction.

Instead of a reflex,

they choose a response—

de-escalating the chaos

and refusing to let retaliation rule their heart.

Solomon expressed the same wisdom long before Jesus spoke:

“A gentle answer turns away wrath,

but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

— Proverbs 15:1

Meekness isn't weakness.

It's strength under the King's rule.

The disciple doesn't rise or fall

with another person's hostility.

He can remain steady under the Father's hand—

choosing a response instead of a reflex.

A response that flows from Jesus.

Where is Jesus inviting me

to answer anger with meekness?

I do not have to mirror another person's anger.

Under the rule of the King,

I won't return harm for harm.

Father, steady my heart when anger approaches.

Teach me to answer with meekness,

and to walk as a peacemaker in the name of Jesus.

Amen.