

Jesus' Teaching in Matthew 5:38-42 and its Implications for the Contemporary Christians in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State

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Abstract

Conflicts between Jesus' teachings on retaliation and some church traditions have resulted in misinterpretation of some Bible passages and wrongly premised church doctrines. Some denominations believe in unlimited retaliation, some limited retaliation, others replaced retaliation, while some do not believe in replaced retaliation. This study, therefore, examined Jesus' teaching on retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42 to determine the extent to which it aligns with church traditions and the effects of these on the Christians. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered to Christians' resident in Ibadan North Local Governments area in Oyo State, Nigeria. Matthew 5:38-42 was exegetically analysed. Quantitative data were subjected to percentages. Jesus prescribes no retaliation, but forgiveness. A total of 150 (84%) of the respondents claimed that Jesus teaches no retaliation and that the Old Testament teaching on retaliation is not contradictory to Jesus' teaching. Paradoxically, in practice, only 46 (25.6%) respondents would not retaliate. To keep within Bible-based prescriptions, Christians should align completely with the teachings of Jesus in theory and in practice.

Keywords: Retaliation, Church Traditions, Jesus' Teaching, Church Doctrines, Matthew, Christians

Introduction

Developments in recent times call for a real understanding, affirmation and application of Jesus' teaching on retaliation. On pages of daily newspapers and social media, one hears cases of spouses and siblings killing one another; and parents killing their own children because of one offence or the other, which the offender refuses to forgive (Odeyemi, 2020). This is not peculiar to Nigeria, but it's an event that's happening all over the world.

The commandment, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (*LexTalionis*), is found in the law of Moses (Exodus 21:22-25; Lev. 24:19, 20). The question that comes

into one's mind when one reads this passage is whether Jesus found a fault with this law. While some Christians would say that Jesus did not find a fault but was speaking as one with authority, others would say that Jesus had no experience of the enemies. Yet, some aver that Jesus also retaliated when he entered the Temple and upturned the table of the money changers. These schools of thought developed into different interpretations of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5: 38-42 among Christians. Some Christians believe that Christians should not pay evil for evil while some believe that one can pay evil for evil as long as it does not exceed the evil done to the victim. This poses a serious challenge to the contemporary society, because it is difficult to hold to any of the interpretations when need arises.

Jesus knew that his followers would be persecuted, oppressed, have enemies and at times physically attacked. In such situations man is bound to react, and this may lead to a state of retaliation. Most times retaliation breeds violence which to some is the most natural response, produces results, communicates and becomes useful where dialogue and diplomacy fails (Clifford, 2017:416). Nevertheless, violence begets violence, and produces more casualties and bloodshed (Clifford, 418).

Invariably, since every Christian is a product of his or her traditional environment, these environments have the tendency to influence Christians' view about retaliation. The three major tribes in Nigeria, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, for instance have sayings/proverbs that leans towards the *LexTalionis*. The Yoruba of Southwestern would say, "*Bi adie ba da mi loogun nu, maa fo leyin*" (if the hen spills my drug, I will break its egg). The Hausa in the Northern part would say, "*duk wanda yayi maka kankara kayi masa na itace*" (if anyone hits you with bunches of soft wood, hit back with a bundle of hard sticks). Hausa people would also say, "*Rama chiuta ga mai chiuta, iba da ne*" (to return evil for evil is a praiseworthy action). The Igbo in the Southeast would say, "*O bulu na i taa m aru n'ike, ma i zeghi nshi; mu taa gi aru n'isi, agaghi m ezere uvulu*" (If you bite me on the butt, despite the danger of sinking your teeth into fecal matter, then if I bite you on the head, I will disregard the danger of sinking my teeth into cerebral matter).

These proverbs are saying that the offender should and have the right to retaliate. Hence, in situations where the church is teaching no retaliation, the traditional background serves as a leeway for non conformity to Jesus' teaching since societal law is also a source of morality. This eventually gives rise to the issue of what should be the relationship of Christians with non adherents of their faith. The non-adherents become confused in the face of the proliferation of interpretations given to Jesus' teaching on retaliation.

The mode of retaliation is also an issue. A group of Christians would go for the physical retaliation on the offender; some believe that cursing the enemy or the oppressor is the best. Yet, others would say, it is not good to curse the person, rather the offended should curse the spirit that is causing the offender to misbehave. All these need to be examined if the message being spread by the Church would have any impact in the contemporary society.

Review of Relevant Literature

There are different views about the ethics Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). *Interim ethics view* holds that the Sermon on the Mount was intended for a particular time when the followers of Jesus felt that the world was coming to an end. According to Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss, Jesus thought that the kingdom of God would come in his lifetime. Jesus therefore saw the need for a new and radically eschatological sermon that was meant to deal with the catastrophic situation of Jesus' time.

Schweitzer and Weiss conclude that the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount have no validity today since the end did not come immediately. The problem is that this view is putting up a claim that Jesus' teaching was valid up to the time of Jesus and not after his time. It also means that the disciples of Jesus need not worry about the events after the cross. There is a continuous tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' aspects of the kingdom in the New Testament, and it will continue to be till the consummation of the kingdom (Parrent, 1999:180).

The existentialists deny that the specific ethical teachings of the Sermon are normative. Rather it points to God's absolute claim on the individual. They are more as tentative probing which challenges us to be open to tensions within us. Gerhard Kittel and Alec Vidler' claim that the Sermon is intensifying the claims of the law and thus issuing a terrifying call to repentance and surrendering to the authority of Christ (Green, 2000:111). However, this surrenders the message of Jesus to the speculative presuppositions of existential philosophy (Friesen, 1981:19). The sermon contains principles of the kingdom which God expects us to live.

Hans Windisch and Adolf von Harnack (Crump, 1992:8) represent *the liberal approach* which claims that salvation can be attained by "doing" and individuals are guided by his heart. There shouldn't be any form of legalism in the application by individuals. Truly, the Sermon on the Mount is basically an ethical message where Jesus taught a higher righteousness and the commandment of love and these teachings were aimed at the individual's disposition and intentions, but does it mean that only 'doing' God's will lead to salvation? What of the grace of God?

The fourth approach is the dispensational approach. This divided history into a number of time periods, or dispensations, in which God dealt with humanity on a different basis in each period. The Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the Church and lacks the teaching on grace. Hence, if the Sermon on the Mount is pure law, and if the Christian is under grace, then, the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to the Christian now. The demands of the law can only be met at a future age, the millennial kingdom. Apart from these approaches some have concluded that that the sermon is made compulsory for the church leaders and not the laymen; or, to relationships within the church and not outside the church. Invariably there is either a toning down or an explaining away of the Sermon on the Mount? (Allen, 1969:102).

Important as the sermon is, it has exerted great influence and challenges to Christians and non-Christians alike. The Anabaptists insisted that the words of Jesus in this sermon are so absolute, must be interpreted literally, applied universally and their obedience demands Christian participation in social and political institutions (Parrent, 1999:178). It is the divine will and must be followed. Some scholars reacted against analysing and interpreting alone, but emphasise doing the sermon. Liberal Protestantism sees it as Jesus' programme of reforming the society. Lawson (2009:31) notes that scholars like Dale Allison and Justin Martyr believe that the sermon presents impossible ideal which cannot be realised. The sermon presents a new way of seeing reality: the language changes the disciple's perspectives, disposition, intention, and motivation. Therefore, God enables human transformation.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:31-48 forms part of the periscope called ethics of the Kingdom in Matthew 5: 21-48. In the ethics of the Kingdom, Jesus juxtaposes what the disciples have heard, and what he says using six contrasting statements (Matera, 2007:32). "The first half of the contrast recalls a moral injunction from the Scriptures, whereas the second offers Jesus' prophetic interpretation of the law" (Matera, 2007:32). In Matthew 5: 21-48, Jesus repeatedly says, "You have heard, but I say". This pattern, according to Bonnie Bowman, "presumes the authority to correct a previous interpretation" and that Jesus went up the mountain and sat down is the posture of an authoritative teacher (2008:19).

The antitheses are directed towards shaping the perspectives, disposition and the character of the disciples in such a way as to bring a healthy relationship among God's people. Therefore, if the disciples cannot see beyond the Mosaic Law, they cannot be transformed. Jesus knew that there were laws guiding the character and ethics of the people at that time; the Pharisees were even there to ensure that the Mosaic Law was strictly adhered to. In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus teaches how to respond to insult (39b), how to respond to a "Rip-Off" (v. 40), how to respond to forced labour (v. 41) and how to respond to borrowing in verse 42 (McDowell, 2015:211).

Jesus brought his disciples to a level beyond and above the law (Talbert, 2008:14). The contrast is formulated in a way that "reflects how the love commandment was often practiced: love for the neighbour was extended to those within the community of Israel, whereas those outside the community were treated as enemies" (Matera, 2007:32). The sermon is more than external conformity to imposed rules; rather, it is emphasizing that true righteousness is found in the heart of a person (Matera, 2007:20).

However, David Sim (2010) avers that in spite of Jesus' teaching about forgiveness and non-retaliation in the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew depicts Jesus as unforgiving and retaliating. He sees this in two ways in the book of Matthew. One, Jesus did not forgive the scribes and Pharisees. Many times he attacked them verbally and called them various names using insulting and abusive languages on them (6:2, 5, 16; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27-29; 15:14; 23:16, 19, 24, 26; 23:17; 23:15; 12:34; 23:33; cf. 3:7; 23:3; 27-29; 23:4; 23:5-7; 15:2-3; 23:15-26). Two, in Matthean

eschatology, Jesus is depicted as the Son of man who will come with power and glory. He will come with his legion of angels (26:53). This according to Sim shows Jesus not as a meek, humble and forgiving personality but one who retaliates and fights back if this is linked with Jewish eschatological thought in Isaiah 18:3; Jer. 6:1; 51:27 and the Qumran war Scroll (1QM 2:15-4:17). The righteous will receive positive rewards (19:28; 25:31, 25:32-46, 22:30; cf. 13:43, 19:16; 19:29; 25:46, 8:11-12, and 5:8; 18:10) while the wicked will receive harsh punishments ((12:41-42, 7:13, 25:46, 8:12; 22:13 and 25:30). Gehenna, of fire is the abode of the wicked (5:29, 30; 10:28; 23:15, 33, 11:23; 16:18, 5:22; 18:9, 3:7-12; 7:18:8; 25:41; 7:19 and 13:42, 50). The wicked servants (Matt 24:45-51) will suffer eternally (8:12; 13:42, 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

To Sim, Mattheans Jesus “fails to provide the perfect role model for his readers and for Christians today” (2010: 20). Also, Mayo, in agreement with Martin Luther and John Calvin, opines that Jesus’ statement in Matthew 18:21-22 and Luke 17:3-4 are antithetical. Jesus in Matthew 18:21-22 advocates forgiveness without limits while in Luke 17:3-4 emphasizes conditional forgiveness (2015). This is a serious argument as some christians would retaliate if the offender refuses to repent, show any sense of remorse and repent, doing otherwise would mean that the offended is playing the fool.

Honore Sewakpo (2018:118), however, opines that Jesus fulfilled the Law in His teachings and His selfless service. He is of the opinion that Jesus was always in conflict with the scribes and the Pharisees because they practiced the Law outwardly as against the inward attitude taught by Jesus. Desmond Tutu (2010:2) avers:

We should not be scared with being confrontational, of facing people with the wrong that they have done. Forgiving doesn’t mean turning yourself into a doormat for people to wipe their boots on.... Forgiveness doesn’t mean pretending things aren’t as they really are. Forgiveness is the recognition that ghastliness has happened.... Forgiveness is like opening the curtains, opening the window, letting the light and the air into the person’s life that was like that dark room, and giving them the chance to make this new beginning. You and I as Christians have such a wonderful faith because it is a faith of ever-new beginnings. We have a God who doesn’t say, “Ah...Got you!” No, God says, “Get up.” And God dusts us off and God says, “Try again.”

Mayo (2015:69) corroborates Tutu’s claim. He says, “In popular usage today, forgiveness is defined as giving up resentment, anger, or negative actions against the offender and *may* include, but not always (or necessarily), the offender’s expressions of remorse or repentance. Reconciliation refers to the restoration of right relationship between victim and offender.”

Walter Wink asserts that Jesus did not tell his hearers not to resist evil because the Greek word *antistenai* does not mean “resist not evil”, but that Jesus is saying react but not in a violent way. The word is made up of two parts *anti* meaning “against” and

histamine (verb whose noun form is *stasis*) meaning violent rebellion, armed revolt, sharp dissention (2003:110). In other words, Wink is saying that Jesus does not mean sit down, be passive, allow people to cheat you. Rather, Jesus knows you are a human being; you are bound to react. Jesus is saying react, but not violently. Besides, Wink is training Christians on non-violent struggle against moral decadence in our society.

However, Wink's assertions, though logical must be followed with caution. Non-violent reaction must be carried out rightly. There are instances whereby non-violent reactions may lead to more sufferings, heavier burdens and, at times, death. Besides, this non-violent reaction, at times, may result to a double standard. This is a situation in which, if the non-violent reaction is not yielding any good or positive result, the oppressor turns to violent reactions. Sibani and Ndimafeme (2017:442) note that Jesus in John 18:10-11 asked Peter to put his sword into the sheath for any need of self-defense.

Asumang (2011:38) avers that "the weapons of resistance are very different from what the world would imagine. They are weapons of holy character, peaceful non-retaliation, and Spirit-empowered witness. Far from being weak, these and other Spirit-filled qualities are spiritual weapons of the holy war that Christ has fought and won." Lawson (2009:42) opines, "This approach suggests that we are not to practice violence for violence, but it does not suggest that we are to give up nonviolent resistance, nor does it suggest that we are to give up our rights in complete submission. Romans 12:17-21, Luke 6:27-36, and 1 Thessalonians 5:15 are passages that also support this interpretation."

Joe Jones, while debunking the United States' war against Iraq, especially because of the September 11, 2001 attack, observes that "Our Jesus ... is so thin and thread bare in ethics and Theology that we can easily put him on the shelf and do our warring on the grounds of other Lords and principalities and powers"(2004:119). He is bothered by why Christian's citizenship in the church and the kingdom are not the decisive determinants of how we (Christians) live our lives. In other words, Christians should be able to confess Jesus Christ even in times of war, not only in appearance but also in substance. To Jones, wickedness and violent actions result in famine and diseases.

Stephen Graham, while commenting on Stanley Jones' (1884-1973) "Christian pacifism", notes that Jones emphasised "the moral and the physical power of non-violent resistance to overcome and defeat evil" (2004:363). Stanley Jones asserts that non-violent resistance work because it uses faith in Jesus' redemptive suffering which has defeated the evil that is the source of terrorism" (Graham, 2004:370). He notes that Christians are citizens of two kingdoms: that of the nation state and that of the universal body of Christ. To him, the universal body of Christ must always supersede the former in case of conflict and war. Landon Fulmer corroborates Grahams' claim. He believes that Christ is the model for Christians in times of war and persecution. The Scriptures must be the basis for Christian's lifestyle. Though Christians live in a world that is controlled by sin, they should transcend it by living according to the teachings

of Christ. Christians should respect constituted authority, but they must avoid all forms of killing (2004:85).

However, Archibald Robertson's view that Jesus is not necessarily talking about defensive war or defence against robbery and murder must be taken seriously. He opines that Jesus is talking about judicial rules that have not been extended to private conducts (1930: 48). Wierzbicka (2001:135) observes that in the Sermon on the Mount, what is in the hearts of men are much more important than the deeds. Luther (1892:111) opines that Jesus calls for a heart that is patient and not revenge, but be willing to suffer and endure for the sake of peace.

That the kingdom of God is the ultimate goal and target of a Christian is not debatable; the problem is how to behave and live here on earth in order to reach that ultimate goal. The authors reviewed have said nothing about the peculiar problem posed by the right interpretation of Jesus' ethics of the kingdom especially Matthew 5:38-41 among Christians, thus, necessitating the use of Christians in Ibadan metropolis as a case study to determine their views on the subject matter.

Jesus' Teaching on Retaliation (Matthew 5: 31-48)

The simple understanding of *lex talionis* is "tit for tat" as conveyed by the phrase "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This is taken from Exodus 21:24, where there is addition of "a hand for a hand" and "a foot for a foot." The Mosaic Law allows for diverse ways of retaliation such as "burning for burning" "wound for wound," "stripe for stripe" (Exo. 21:25ff). In other words, the Mosaic Law empowered the people to inflict the same measure of evil that was done to them to the one who had done it.

However, Jesus gave a reinterpretation of this idea by asserting that instead of retaliation there should be accommodation. According to him, "Do not resist the one who is evil." The use of *mh* as a particle of negation is for emphasis' sake to convey strong prohibition. Also, the infinitive *avtisthnai* from *ivsthmi* is very important because the preposition *avtiis* emphasizing the contrast idea of *ivsthmi* "to resist" or "to oppose."

Avtisthnai as a verb has two roots namely *sthw* and *ivsthmi*. *sthw* is from the Hellenistic stem *evsthkai* which is used intransitively to mean "to stand." *ivsthmi* on the other hand, is one of the verbs that are concerned with position where they stand. It involves the place where a person is set or stand as well as the changes that may be associated with it. In that case, it is interpreted as "to set up" "to appoint," or "to make valid." When used of God, it means that God's words and works are established fact and valid. It can be relied upon. It can be used to signify the end of movement as in "to stand still" (Matt. 2:9; 20:32).

Jesus called that the idea of resistance or opposition or retaliation should be dropped. Jesus' use of the adjective in this context refers to people and not the devil. In other words, it refers to people who might have offended another person either through infliction of wound, or pain. Hence, Jesus called for the fact that such people should not be subjected to the kind of pain that they have caused. Furthermore, he moved on

to give examples of how such can be demonstrated. First, he used the example of body pain through slapping by saying “if any one strikes you on the right cheek. This situation created by Jesus would require that the one who slapped be given the same number of slaps on the same cheek in the Mosaic Law. On the contrary, Jesus said, “turn to him the other also.” This is a radical departure from the Mosaic law and a new perspective of the kingdom ethics. In the second instance, Jesus used the example of material possession to illustrate his teaching. He said, “If anyone would sue you and take your coat.”

This statement presents a picture of conflict between a believer and another person concerning material object. In that case, the desire of the accuser would be to get the outer coat. The outer coat is usually short sleeved and does not get beyond the ankle. In Jesus’ opinion, the outer coat should be willingly released to the one who had demand for it to prevent trouble or chaos. The inner cloak is the one closest to the body. It is usually long up to ankle and with long sleeve. In Jesus’ understanding the inner cloak should also be given in order to satisfy someone who intends to cause trouble.

The third example deals with time and energy. In other words, an opponent or accuser may be interested in taking someone’s time and energy. In that instance, the Christian should not hesitate to give it even more than required. According to Jesus, “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”. Jesus used a strong verb *avggareuw* which has the understanding of compulsion or force to emphasise that situation may warrant that a Christian be asked to do certain things. In this context, it has to do with trekking a distance of one mile, which may be considered as a long distance.

However, Jesus not only called for the satisfaction of such request, he asserted that there should even be readiness to go two miles just to satisfy such opponents and foreclose any trouble. There is uniqueness in the three examples that Jesus used. He deliberately used the idea of duality in the choice of objects, two cheeks, two clothes and two miles. This is to emphasise the fact that there is always an extra length that a believer can go in any circumstance. In other words, the dual use of those objects points to the fact that a believer could manifest extra grace, when dealing with his opponents.

The use of *streyw* emphasises self-will. This verb occurs about 21 times in the New Testament with the sum of 20 times in the Synoptics, 6 in Matthew, 10 in Luke-Acts, 4 in John and none in Mark. However, the usage in Matthew is unique and unparallel in the other Gospels. Jesus gave another command about generosity. He emphasised that anyone who begs should be given. The idea of begging is that of a beggar who has no power to pay back. In other words, those who are in need of material should not be ignored. Rather, they should be given. Secondly, Jesus talked about *danisasqai* from *danisw* “I borrow” to refer to an idea of lending something with the mindset of repaying back. Such people should not be deprived of such opportunity if one is in the capacity to help them.

Contemporary Christian Attitude to Jesus' Teaching on Retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42

The questionnaire copies were administered randomly to Christians within the Local Government area. Ibadan North Local Government Area is one of the 5 Local Government areas in Ibadan, Oyo State, South West, Nigeria. It has noticeable percentage of Christians scattered through various denominations. It is an enlightened area due to the location of the University of Ibadan, the Polytechnic Ibadan, the Oyo State Secretariat, Oyo State Governor's House and the main market in Ibadan, Bodija. Hence the research has a wider representation of Christians spread across different cultures, ethnic and educational backgrounds.

Findings revealed that the respondents spread across Christian denominations which are grouped purposely for this work: the Roman Catholic Church (29); African Indigenous Denominations which includes the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Cherubim and Seraphim denominations, the Celestial Church of Christ and the Christ Apostolic Church (57); Pentecostal denominations which includes the Living Faith Church, the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Church, the Foursquare Church, the Gospel Faith Mission International and the Apostolic Faith(48); the Protestant Denominations which includes the Baptist of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, the Methodist Church Nigeria, the Anglican Church (33); and the Evangelicals such as the Evangelical Winning All and the Presbyterian Church (12). These churches gave a wide range coverage and ensured objectivity since this work is not intended for a denomination but to assess the application of the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:38-42 among Christians in the study area. Their biodata is given in the tables below:

Table 1: Respondents Spread According to Church Denominations

Churches	Freq	%
RM	29	16.2
AIDs	57	31.8
PD	48	26.8
PC	33	18.4
ED	12	6.7
Total	179	100

NOTE: The Roman Catholic (RM); African Indigenous Denominations (AIDs); Pentecostal Denominations (PD); Protestant Churches (PC); Evangelical Denominations (ED).

Table 2: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Sex	Freq	%
Male	84	46.9
Female	95	53.0
Total	179	100

Table 3: Age Distribution of the Respondents

Age Range	Freq	%t
15-20	14	7.8
21-30	27	15.0
31-40	43	24.0
41-50	60	33.5
Above 50	35	19.5
Total	179	100

The following questions were asked to determine people's understanding of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5: 38-42.

1. **What Is Retaliation?** There were 179 respondents. One hundred and forty-two (142 or 79.3%) respondents viewed retaliation as action taken in return for an injury or offence. Some of them said that it is a counteraction taken against somebody who has in a way or the other harmed one. It is waiting for a payback day. This set of people said that there is nothing bad in paying evil for evil since God also said he will avenge the sin of father from son. Only 10 (5.8%) respondents saw retaliation as lack of forgiveness. It is only a forgiving spirit that would do what Jesus commands in Matthew 5:38-42.
2. What does **“Don't resist one who is evil” mean?** One hundred and thirty-one (131 or 73.1%) respondents viewed “don't resist one who is evil” to mean live a sacrificial life, accommodate the evil doers and love your enemies, while 32 (7.8%) saw it to mean rebuke the evil in him.
3. **What are the likely effects of retaliation?** Thirty-three (33 or 18.4%) respondents opined that retaliation leads to anger, hatred and eventually conflict. There will always be the feeling to be judgmental, unforgiving, hypercritical and even being indifferent to other people's opinions and feelings. The view of 142(79.3%) respondents is that retaliation affects man's relationship with God. To them, only the person with a pure heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). Many believers have not experienced God's manifestation in specific ways. This is why they continue to pay evil for evil. Forty-six (46 or 25.6%) respondents said that their churches do not belief in retaliation and so would not engage in any form of retaliation. One hundred and thirty-three (133 or 74.3%) belief that Jesus' teaching on retaliation may not be good enough for the contemporary society that is full of “evil and wicked people.” They attested to the fact that they do contravene Jesus' teaching especially by raining curses on their enemies through imprecatory prayers. To them good retaliation is their priority. Theirs is exactly a tooth for a tooth. In other words, they do exactly the wrong that has been done to them. They don't go beyond it. Some of them indicated that they retaliate gently.

4. **Does the Bible contradict itself on the issue of retaliation?** One hundred and fifty (150 or 83.7 %) claimed that the New Testament is not contradicting the Old Testament. To them the Law as given by God on Mount Sinai is intact and does not contradict any other Word or Law of God. It is only the tradition that men added because of the hardness of people's heart that must be removed.
5. **Does Jesus command of “Do not resist an evil person” mean that I should not defend myself until my enemy gets rid of me?** One hundred and thirty-six (136 or 75.9%) said no while 33 (18.4%) said yes. The remaining 10 (5.5%) were indifferent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that majority of the Christians in Ibadan Metropolis knew what retaliation is; only few are ready to forgive as Jesus teaches. The implication is that most people that we think are Christians are not Christians because they find it difficult to forgive. Majority of the respondents would retaliate if given the opportunity.

Retaliation is not biblical. In the Old Testament times, there were even cities of refuge where a 'sinner' could run to for safety (Numbers 35; cf. Joshua 20 and 21). Joseph, the son of Jacob, forgave his brothers in spite of all that his brother did for him (Genesis 50:16-25). King Saul hated David, sought his life and even killed eighty-five priests of the LORD. He destroyed everything in Nob, the city of the priests, all because he wanted to kill David (1 Samuel 19: 1-24:16). He could not. David later had the opportunity to revenge and kill Saul, he didn't revenge. He honoured Saul again by bowing down with his face to the ground and prostrated for Saul. Saul declared of David in 1 Samuel 24:17-19:

“You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and *yet* you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day?”

If David had taken revenge, he would have become a murderer that day. Joseph and David had the opportunity to retaliate, claiming the *LexTalionis* (Exodus 21:22-25; Lev. 24:19, 20), but they did not.

The theme, no retaliation is a recurring one in the New Testament and the claims about limited and unlimited forgiveness in Luke 17:3-4 and Matthew 18:21-22 respectively would not hold. Apart from the passage under study, there are many

references to Jesus' unlimited forgiveness. In Matthew 5:45-47 while teaching on love for enemies, Jesus says about God, "... for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

In Luke 22: 49-51, Jesus restored the ear that was cut and healed the man. He even prayed for his enemies while still on the Cross (Luke 23:34). Jesus, in John 18:36 answered Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm." Events in the life and deeds of Jesus reveal that he had the power to fight physical battles and prevail over the enemies, but he did not apply physical methods to fight his enemies. Reid (2010:386) seems to proffer a possible solution on the 'loving Jesus' and the 'harsh Jesus' in Matthew. He says:

“ Another method is to understand Matthew as a wise teacher who offers different scenario for believers who are at diverse levels of ability to apprehend the gospel. He aims the frightening scenarios of dire consequences for evildoing at disciples who are at a stage of moral development where they are best motivated by reward and punishment. For more mature disciples, he offers the advanced teaching of love of enemies in imitation of an ever-gracious God. One difficulty is that the gospel itself does not closely distinguish which way the more is advanced. Might one misunderstand that violent punishment is warranted if love of enemies doesn't work, since that is the narrative sequence of the gospel?”

In Romans 15:7, Paul encourages believers to accept one another, as Christ has accepted the sinners to the glory of God. Jesus accepted the sinners in that while they were still sinners, Christ died for them (Romans 5:8). Paul admonishes Philemon not to avenge Onesimus (Philemon 1). James warns that the anger of man does not achieve righteousness (James 1:20). He also admonishes believers to shun all sources of conflict and quarrel (James 4:1).

Christian believers should suppress cultural bias and embrace Jesus' teaching on retaliation. Though cultures have proverbs and sayings that emulate retaliation, they also have lee ways. The Yoruba people would say, “*eni ba seun to dun ni, le se ohun to tun dun mo ni*” meaning he who does something wrong towards one can still do something good towards one. They also say, “*a kii ja aja diju*” meaning you don't fight closing your eyes. The interpretation is that do not look down on your offender because he can still do you good at some other times. More so, you may harm an innocent man, including you, with much anger. The Igbo would say “*Eleta àghàrà kà di nà nwuny ì èbi*” (Forgiveness is a

tunic for friendship). They also believe that, *O bù etinye nzuzù nà ànàmiheò wèrè zùò òkè* meaning foolishness complements wisdom (Egenti & Okoye, 2016:63). The Hausa would say, “*Kadda ka yi fasshi' n majibaari, wonda ya yi fasshi ya fadda wutta*” (don't be (foolishly) angry, like a moth the man who gets angry falls into the fire). They also encourage paying good for evil: “*En mutum ya yi maka rana, ka yi masa derri.*” By implication, the three ethnic groups are saying that forgiveness is the best.

There is no doubt that some offences are so painful that the offender may find it difficult to forgive. Yet Jesus insists that Christians should forgive. The Lord's Prayer vividly declares this. It says, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors;” (Matthew 6:12). This implies that the believers' forgiveness is premised on his forgiving others and without forgiveness the believer may not enter the kingdom of heaven which is the hallmark of the Christian faith.

Theological Institutions in Nigeria must intensify efforts in upgrading their curriculum by developing courses that would be addressing biblical themes that are generating controversies. This becomes necessary in view of the many strands of interpretation the passage under study has generated. There will be the need for Christian denominations to come together and have one voice on the right interpretation and handling of Matthew 5:38-42.

Christians must follow Jesus' teaching to the letter. He is the model for them. Jesus' ethical standards for Christians are very high and they cannot be softened. He gave the 'Golden Rule' (Matthew 7:12) and the 'Greatest Commandment' (Mark 12: 28-31) as guides to Christians' ethical behaviours which he taught in the Sermon on the Mount. This equally applies to the issue of retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42.

Jesus followed and practiced what he teaches to the last extent. This reaches its peak at the moment he was on the cross. He prayed for His enemies, even the Pharisees and the scribes (Luke 23:34). The evil man has to be weakened not by wickedness. He must be disarmed by kindness and generosity. To do to the evil man as he has done only confirms and supports his evil. Christians need to live godly lives all the time and be willing to do the Master's will. Jesus is not asking them to fold their arms and allow the enemy to override them. If need arise, they must resist the devil.

Clifford (2017:431) avers, only love for enemy and the determination not to use force or violence will win conflicts and win the enemy. These attitudes provide a theological base or framework within which to carry on the vital task of building structures that can eventually eliminate war and its causes in our society.

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