

## The Christian in Two Kingdoms

LW v. 21 p.105ff - Matthew 5:38. *You have heard that it was said: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” 39. But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; 40. And if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; 41. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.*

This text has also given rise to many questions and errors among nearly all the theologians who have failed to distinguish properly between **the secular and the spiritual, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world.** Once these two have been confused instead of being clearly and accurately separated, there can never be any correct understanding in Christendom, as I have often said and shown. So far, all we have been hearing is the way Christ directed His sermon against the Pharisees, who were misleading the people in both doctrine and life and were misinterpreting and distorting God’s commandment in such a way as to produce only counterfeit saints. It is the same today. Among the preachers there is always a group—if not a majority!—of such Jewish saints, whose teaching deals only with **the sin and the piety that are manifest in outward works.**

Kingdom of Christ	Kingdom of the world
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In the preceding sections He criticized and rejected their teaching and false interpretation. Now He considers the passage which **the Law of Moses (Ex. 21:24) addresses to those who were charged with governmental authority and with the sword of punishment.** It was a matter of obligation and necessity for them to take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Thus **it was as grievous a sin for them if they failed to use the sword of punishment with which they were charged as it was for the others to seize the sword and avenge themselves without authorization.** According to the preceding sections, similarly, the man who refused to live and stay with his lawful wedded wife sinned just as much as the man who lived with another woman out of wedlock. They had taken this text, distorted it, and confused it by applying it to themselves, though **it was addressed only to the government.** They took it to mean that every individual had a right to wreak vengeance on his own behalf, taking an eye for an eye. There was the same confusion in their use of other passages. They applied to themselves that right to get angry which was appropriate and obligatory for the government. They removed desire and appetite from its context in matrimony. And so, too, they had perverted swearing for their own frivolous and abusive purposes, rather than for the purpose of showing love to those in need.

Defense, Punishment, and Revenge are appropriate tools of Government. These are not tools for how the individual Christian is to live.
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Now Christ comes along to demolish this perverted idea and false interpretation. He is not tampering with the responsibility and authority of the government, but **He is teaching His individual Christians how to live personally, apart from their official position and authority. They should not desire revenge at all. They should have the attitude that if someone hits them on one cheek, they are ready, if need be, to turn the other cheek to him as well, restraining the vindictiveness not only of their fist but also of their heart, their thoughts, and all their powers as well. In other words, what He wants is a heart that will neither be impatient nor wreak vengeance nor disturb the peace.** Such a righteousness is different from the one they taught and maintained. Still they wanted to deck themselves out with what they found in Moses, **claiming that revenge and self-defense were proper against violence, since the text reads: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”**

This saying has been the undoing of many people; not only Jews but even Christians have stumbled on it. For it seemed to them that it was too strict and severe to forbid any resistance to evil at all, since we have to have law and punishment in society. Some have cited the contrary example of Christ (John 18:22, 23). When He was struck on one cheek before the priest Annas, He did not offer the other one; instead He declared His innocence and rebuked the high priest's servant. That seems to be a violation of this text.

On that basis they said it was not necessary to turn the other cheek to an assailant, and they gave the text a helping hand by saying that it was enough for a person to be ready in his heart to offer the other cheek. They said the right thing, but they interpreted it the wrong way. They supposed that offering the other cheek to an assailant meant saying to him: "See, take this cheek, too, and hit me again," or throwing your cloak to the man who wants to take your coat. If that were the meaning, we would finally have to surrender everything, house and home, wife and children. **We say, therefore, that all it does is to proclaim to every Christian that he should willingly and patiently suffer whatever is his lot, without seeking revenge or hitting back.**

Wrongly applying these words to the individual Christian would lead to the collapse of the social order.

**But the question and argument still remain. Must a person suffer all sorts of things from everyone, without defending himself at all? Has he no right to plead a case or to lodge a complaint before a court, or to claim and demand what belongs to him? If all these things were forbidden, a strange situation would develop. It would be necessary to put up with everybody's whim and insolence. Personal safety and private property would be impossible, and finally the social order would collapse.**

To answer this, you must always pay attention to the main point, which is, that Christ is addressing **His sermon only to His Christians and seeking to teach them the kind of people they should be**, in contrast to the carnal ideas and thoughts that still clung to the apostles. **They imagined that He would institute a new realm and empire and set them up in it to rule as lords and to conquer their enemies and the wicked world.** Thus flesh and blood has always expected to find its own dominion, honor, and advantage in the Gospel, and an escape from all suffering. The pope has longed for this, too, and his realm has developed into nothing more than a secular dominion, so dreadful that the world has had to submit to him.

Now, too, we see the whole world seeking its own advantage in the Gospel. This has brought on the rise of so many sects, whose only aim is their own advancement and aggrandizement, together with the extermination of others. So it was with Münzer and his peasants, and more recently with others, too. Even real

The Christian is unconcerned with property or even living or dying. He is concerned with faith, forgiveness, confession, Christ's righteousness, the Word and Sacraments, etc.

Christians are sometimes tempted this way. They see that the world at large, and particularly their own government, is being so poorly managed that they feel like jumping in and taking over. But this is wrong. No one should suppose that God wants to have us govern and rule this way with the law and punishment of the world. **The Christians' way is altogether different.** They neither deal with such things nor care about them. They are perfectly content to leave these things to the care of those who are authorized to distribute property, to do business, to punish, and to protect. As Christ teaches (Matt. 22:21): "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." **For we have been transferred to another and a higher existence, a divine and an eternal kingdom, where the things that belong to the world are unnecessary and where in Christ everyone is a lord for himself over both the devil and the world, as we have said elsewhere.**

It is the duty and obligation of those who participate in this earthly regime to administer law and punishment, to maintain the distinctions that exist among ranks and persons, to manage and distribute property. This way everything will be in good shape, and everyone will know what he is to do and to have; no one will meddle in another man's office or pry into his affairs or take his property. That is what lawyers are for, to teach and manage such matters. **But the Gospel does not trouble itself with these matters. It teaches about the right relation of the heart to God, while in all these other questions it should take care to stay pure and not to stumble into a false righteousness. You must grasp and obey this distinction, for it is the basis on which such questions can be easily answered. Then you will see that Christ is talking about a spiritual existence and life and that He is addressing Himself to His Christians. He is telling them to live and behave before God and in the world with their heart dependent upon God and uninterested in things like secular rule or government, power or punishment, anger or revenge.**

Now, if someone asks whether a Christian may go to court or defend himself, **the answer is simply no.** A Christian is the kind of person who has nothing to do with this sort of secular existence and law. He belongs to a kingdom or realm where the only regulation should be the prayer (Matt. 6:12): "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Here only mutual love and service should prevail, even toward people who do not love us, but who hate us, hurt and harm us. It is to these Christians that He says they should not resist evil, that they should not even seek revenge, but that they should turn the other cheek to an assailant.

As far as you are a Christian, the answer is, "No."
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A related question is this: May a Christian be a secular official and administer the office and work of a ruler or a judge? This would mean that the two persons or the two types of office are combined in one man. In addition to being a Christian, he would be a prince or a judge or a lord or a servant or a maid—all of which are termed "secular" persons because they are part of the secular realm. **To this we say: Yes;** God Himself has ordained and established this secular realm and its distinctions, and by His Word He has confirmed and commended them. For without them this life could not endure. We are all included in them; indeed, we were born into them even before we became Christians. Therefore we must also remain in them as long as we are on earth, but only according to our outward life and our physical existence.

As far as you are a ruler, the answer is, "Yes."
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There is no getting around it, **a Christian has to be a secular person of some sort.** As regards his own person, **according to his life as a Christian, he is in subjection to no one but Christ, without any obligation either to**

Being a Christian in himself	A Christian-in-relation to others(vocation)
--Subject to no one	--Subject to others
--obligated to no one	--Obligated to others
--love and forgiveness	--law rules

**the emperor or to any other man.** But at least outwardly, **according to his body and property, he is related by subjection and obligation to the emperor, inasmuch as he occupies some office or station in life or has a house and home, a wife and children; for all these are things that pertain to the emperor.** Here he must necessarily do what he is told and what this outward life requires. If he has a house or a wife and children or servants and refuses to support them or, if need be, to protect them, he does wrong. It will not do for him to declare that he is a Christian and therefore has to forsake or relinquish everything. But he must be told: "Now you are under the emperor's control. Here your name is not 'Christian,' but 'father' or 'lord' or

‘prince.’ According to your own person you are a Christian; but in relation to your servant you are a different person, and you are obliged to protect him.”

You see, now we are talking about a **Christian-in-relation**: not about his **being a Christian**, but about this life and his obligation in it to some other person, whether under him or over him or even alongside him, like a lord or a lady, a wife or children or neighbors, whom he is obliged, if possible, to defend, guard, and protect. Here it would be a mistake to teach: “Turn the other cheek, and throw your cloak away with your coat.” That would be ridiculous, like the case of the crazy saint who let the lice nibble at him and refused to kill any of them on account of this text, maintaining that he had to suffer and could not resist evil.

Do you want to know what your duty is as a prince or a judge or a lord or a lady, with people under you? You do not have to ask Christ about your duty. Ask the imperial or the territorial law. It will soon tell you your duty toward your inferiors as their protector. It gives you both the power and the might to protect and to punish within the limits of your authority and commission, not as a Christian but as an imperial subject. What kind of crazy mother would it be who would refuse to defend and save her child from a dog or a wolf and who would say: “A Christian must not defend himself”? Should we not teach her a lesson with a good whipping and say: “Are you a mother? Then do your duty as a mother, as you are charged to do it. Christ did not abrogate this but rather confirmed it.”

As far as you have a duty to your vocation and an obligation to serve your neighbor, the answer is, “Yes, use force.”

This is what is told about many of the holy martyrs. When they were called to arms even by infidel emperors and lords, they went to war. In all good conscience they slashed and killed, and in this respect there was **no difference between Christians and heathen**. Yet they did not sin against this text. For they were not doing this as Christians, for their own persons, but as obedient members and subjects, under obligation to a secular person and authority. **But in areas where you are free and without any obligation to such a secular authority, you have a different rule, since you are a different person.**

**Just learn the difference between the two persons that a Christian must carry simultaneously on earth, because he lives in human society and has to make use of secular and imperial things, the same way that the heathen do.** For until he has been transferred bodily from this life to another one, his flesh and blood is identical with theirs; and what he needs to provide for it does not come from the spiritual realm but from the land and soil, which belongs to the emperor. Now, with this distinction of the boundary between the province of the Christian person and that of the secular person you can neatly classify all these sayings and apply them properly where they belong, not confusing them and throwing them into one pot, the way the teaching and the administration of the pope have done.

**So much for the person who has obligations toward other persons under the secular law, the law of fathers and mothers, lords and ladies. But what if only your own person is involved and an injury or injustice has been done to you? Is it right to use force in guarding and defending yourself against this? The answer is no.** Here even the secular and imperial law teaches: “Striking back makes a quarrel, and the one who strikes back is in the wrong.” By this action you will be interfering in the judge’s office and usurping his right for yourself, for it is his duty to punish. So it is in other cases. The fact that someone has stolen or robbed from you gives you no right to

As far as you are free and without obligation, the answer is, “No; Do not resist, suffer all things, pray and commit it to God.”

steal or rob from him and to take something from him by force. Our natural inclination is to take swift vengeance, before a person has a chance to turn around. This should not be. But if you are unwilling or unable to stand it, you can always take him to court and get what is coming to you there.

**It is permissible for you to use orderly procedure in demanding and obtaining your rights, but be careful not to have a vindictive heart.** Thus it is proper for a judge to punish and execute, and yet he is forbidden to have any hatred or vindictiveness in his heart. It is a common circumstance

that people abuse their office to gratify their own whims. Now, where this is not the case and you are simply seeking to use the law for your protection and self-preservation against violence and malice, rather than for your vindictiveness or malevolence, you are not doing wrong. When the heart is pure, then everything is right and well done. The danger here is that the wicked world, along with our flesh and blood, always seeks its own advantage and yet puts on a lovely front to hide the scoundrel within.

**Thus you are not forbidden to go to court and lodge a complaint against injustice or violence, just so long as you do not have a false heart, but one that remains as patient as it was before, one that is doing this only to maintain the right and to avoid the wrong, out of a genuine love for righteousness.** Earlier I cited the example of the saintly Joseph. He lodged a complaint with his father against his brothers when they had done something wrong and had acquired a bad reputation for it. For this the Scriptures praise him. He was not prompted by an evil, talebearing, or quarrelsome heart, as they supposed in their hostility to him, but by a friendly and brotherly heart, interested only in their good, because he did not like to see them acquiring a bad reputation. Therefore this cannot be called vindictiveness or malice, but rather helpfulness, as well as distress over their recriminations.

A Christian may make use of the government (as God's minister), but keep your heart free of hatred and revenge.
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