



Saturday 9 July 2016 was a wonderful day for the monthly LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast which included 10 gents, our Pastor, as well as our special guests consisting of four lovely ladies from the morning devotion group. Why all these folks you may wonder? Well, through a series of oversights and misinformation from yours truly, we ended up with three gents bringing food for the gathering. We had a better menu than IHOP I believe (well, almost). First off, we had world famous golden brown French toast with bacon and sausage; we had two wonderful breakfast casseroles; a bevy of

donuts, bagels, spreads, fresh fruit including beautiful cherries, and probably some other delights I simply can't remember, but I'm sure were excellent. So one big thanks to all the chefs, a bigger thanks to the ladies from our prayer group who helped us eat from our banquet bar, and a big THANK YOU to our scribe who made sure no one went away hungry for this particular Men's Prayer Breakfast gathering (notice how he found the silver lining in this cloud!).

There was not a lot of idle chatter this month, probably because the guys had their mouths full most of the time, or possibly out of respect for our pastor who was present (but c'mon, Pastor Darcy is more like one of the boys than most), or quite possibly due to the presence of the ladies from the devotions group (some of whom are spouses of some of our most notable and widest contributors to this newsletter). So all those great stories about the home front and how the better half keeps our lives interesting and full of target material went on a hiatus, at least for this month. Seems we had no surgeries, rare exotic diseases, or new aches and pains to explore. And politics just isn't worth talking about – sad.

We did find time to listen in on a group of gents discussing vintage automobiles, and I didn't quite catch all the names, but it is possible Kaisers, Studebakers, Willys, Packards, and a 1931 Deussenberg Torpedo were among them (or quite possible I just tossed a couple in to evoke memories of days gone by and classic cars). No one talked about having to ride horses to and from school or the old country store, walking 5 miles to and from school without shoes, legs or feet, going uphill both ways in 10 feet of snow and howling winds (and you know who you are!). There was also discussion about the sites for a new Krispy Kreme shop as well as Duck Donuts. Funny how this group always knows about the new donut or coffee shops moving in. Rumor has it the Duck Donuts is going in over by Wegmans close to the Not Your Average Joe's restaurant, and one of their featured donuts (which are build your own flavor combos) includes bacon topped donuts. Believe it's called *Homage du Cholesterol* or something like that.

Mark had the lesson for the day, and his topic was *An Eye for an Eye or Turn the Other Cheek*, based on articles he researched on the internet such as www.gotquestions.org. With the killings of police officers by a sniper, police officers killing folks they had apprehended for one reason or another, there just seems to be more and more widespread, and senseless, violence that one has to wonder why these incidents occur, and if there will ever be a peaceful end to it. Too many times we read killings are "justified" as an "eye for an eye" exchange between people, communities and even nations. But just what is the basis for an "eye for an eye"? The concept of "an eye for eye," is part of the Mosaic Law used in the Israelites' justice system. The principle is that the punishment must fit the crime and there should be a just penalty for evil actions: "*If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise*" (**Exodus 21:23–25**). Justice should be equitable; excessive harshness and excessive leniency should be avoided. Is that what is truly happening in our world today?

There seems to be no indication that the law of "an eye for an eye" was followed literally; there is no biblical account of an Israelite being maimed as a result of this law. In **Leviticus 24:19-20** we read: "*If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him*". "An eye for an eye" was thus intended to be a guiding principle for lawgivers and judges; it was never to be used to justify vigilantism or settling grievances personally. God established a judicial system to hear cases and determine penalties (see **Exodus 18:13–26**)—a system that would be unnecessary if God had intended a literal "eye for an eye" penalty. Although capital crimes led to execution in ancient Israel, most other crimes were repaid with payment in goods—if you injured a man's hand so that he could not work, you compensated that man for his lost wages. In the New Testament, the Pharisees and scribes had taken the "eye for an eye" principle and applied it to everyday personal relationships. They taught that seeking personal revenge was acceptable. If someone punched you, you could punch him back. The religious leaders of Jesus' day ignored the judicial basis of the giving of that law. Perhaps the most commonly felt difference between the Old and New Testaments relates to the balance between justice and mercy. Old

Testament law emphasized justice and punishments for crimes committed. The New Testament and Jesus' teachings stressed mercy and forgiveness as we read in **Matthew 5:38-39**: "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also*".

Perhaps the biggest difference remaining between the two eras relates to law and enforcement. The Law of Moses contains many prescriptive laws about how life should be lived, together with a set of punishments to be applied against those who broke the laws. To the contrary, the New Testament demonstrates how Christianity is not about the obedience of laws, but rather in a faith to God. A key to understanding the shift in focus is to recognize the context of the teachings in the New Testament. The Israelites under Moses were in a very different position to the Christians in the apostolic era. Under Moses, it was a nation of people, complete with a system of governance, policing, and justice system. However, in the case of those under Christ, it was always assumed that those elements are supplied by an external power. The basic rule of justice was outside the realms of Christian life, because Christians were instead told to come out of the secular world and leave it to govern itself (sound like separation of church and state?). In the context of Christ and the apostles, justice was administered by the Roman empire and its provincial powers. The believers were additionally told that their new-found freedom in Christ did not remove the responsibility to obey this form of justice ("*render unto Caesar what is Caesar's...*").

In Paul's letter to the **Romans 13:1-4**, he is endorsing the role of the Roman justice system to preserve basic law and order. The Christian teachings did not include these law-and-order elements characteristic of the Mosaic Law because they were to be administered by the secular national powers. Additionally, these were no less severe, to the extent that Roman law was in many ways more harsh and decisive than that in the Law of Moses. In Peter, the brutalities of Roman law enforcement are depicted as the vengeance of God - **1 Peter 2:13-14**: "*Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or to governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to those who do well*". This may raise the question of how we are to obey a law that may be contrary to the teachings of God. The principle shown is that God is our first master, and following Him takes first precedence. When the Jewish religious rulers questioned the Apostles about teaching of Jesus, they stated this principle found in **Acts 5:28-29**: "*Didn't we strictly charge you not to teach in this name? Behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood on us.*" But Peter and the apostles answered, "*We must obey God rather than men.*"

This nature of the New Testament also implies something of the role of Christianity through the generations following Jesus. The principles were laid down on the basis that Christian worship would be something independent of national governance. Christianity was to remain a body of believers motivated out of genuine faith, and the aspects of criminal justice were to stay outside of its bounds. This is consistent with the idea expressed in the New Testament in how the faithful in Christ would remain a minority of among the people of the world. Jesus speaks of this in terms of it being entering through a narrow gate, rather than the wide gate of the worldliness as found at **Matthew 7:13-14**: "*Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it*".

Jesus' limiting of the "eye for an eye" principle in no way prohibits self-defense or the forceful protection of the innocent from harm. The actions of duly appointed agents of the government, such as police officers and the military, to protect citizens and preserve the peace are not in question. Jesus' command to turn the other cheek applies to personal relationships, not judicial policy. The principle of "an eye for an eye" is meant as a judicial policy, not as a rule for interpersonal relationships. The believer in Christ is guided by Jesus' words to forgive. The Christian is radically different from those who follow the natural inclination to respond in kind.

Our next LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast is Saturday, 13 August 2016. I can't promise you we'll have a similar buffet of breakfast delights, but the food we do have is always a treat, the fellowship superb and enlightening, and we just flat out enjoy each others' company and have some fun. So please consider joining us.