

**Freedom From the Cycle of Retaliation**  
**Context is a College Campus Gospel Presentation**  
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We live in a world of tit for tat reciprocity. When we are wronged we feel we have the right and possibly even the duty to respond in order to right the wrong. If we can't respond ourselves, then we get someone else to do it for us, for example the police, the legal system etc. Sometimes we are the ones who wrong others and then we live with the fear of what their response will be or else we play the blame game and blame someone or something else for our actions. This is nothing new. We can see it from the lives of Cain and Able all the way up until now. It is as if we are caught in this relentless cycle of retaliation.

I can see this very clearly in my life when I am driving. Some of you may be able to relate to this. I find that I get very irritated when someone cuts me off in traffic, or when they won't move out of the fast lane when I want to pass them, or when they won't let me merge as I am entering the freeway. Has this ever happened to you? I immediately feel that I have been wronged. I don't know these people but it is as if they are intentionally trying to disrupt my day, make me late, or be just be downright mean. There is not much you can do in retaliation in these situations other than shoot the driver of the offending car a dirty look, honk your horn, or offer some obscene gesture. When I think about it I find it amusing that this is somehow supposed to right the wrong that was committed. Or, I suppose, if you are like me you can take your frustration out on some other driver who you think is breaking the imaginary drivers' codebook that we are all supposed to follow. For example, another thing that bugs me is when people assume that it is ok to bypass the long line of cars waiting to exit the freeway and then force their way in line at the last possible second. In this case we often take it upon ourselves to become the enforcers and to prevent these perpetrators committing such a heinous offense, or at least I do. So we drive blocking two lanes and thereby preventing anyone from passing. Or if you are like me you simply prevent them from merging and force them to miss their exit. I actually did this recently and needless to say the occupants of the other car were not too happy. In fact I am pretty sure by the gesture that I received that they thought that they had been wronged. So I simply act to perpetuate the cycle of wronging and retaliation on the roads. Can any of you relate to this?

Jesus lived a life outside of this cycle of tit for tat reciprocity. When Jesus was wronged he refused to seek to restore his honor or to appease some arbitrary moral code through reciprocating. Rather he would choose to interrupt the cycle by offering forgiveness, even if it were not asked for. Also Jesus stood up for those who were frequently wronged or cast out. Jesus stood up for women and children, he stood up for the sick and the crippled and the unclean people. Here again he interrupted the cycle of tit for tat reciprocity and the arbitrary moral code. Jesus himself experienced the ultimate wrongdoing. He died a humiliating death on the cross precisely because he would not buy into or participate in the cycle of reciprocity and wrongdoing. He sought to expose the cycle for what it is and overthrow it. However humans were so invested in this

system that they killed Jesus in order to save it. Like them we today continue to choose the system over life and relationship.

Ironically Jesus' death on the cross and subsequent resurrection dealt the final deathblow to our system. Jesus accepted his death when he could have surely responded in anger, called down legions of angels to save him and destroyed the people who nailed him to that cross. Instead he accepted his death, was raised from the dead three days later, and offered forgiveness to those who put him on that cross. By doing so he broke the cycle of tit for tat responses and thus we can choose to do the same. We can choose to join Jesus in his plan to rid the world of reciprocal escalating violence. We can choose to respond with forgiveness and not retaliation. We can choose life and relationship over retaliation and death. I can choose not to honk my horn, shoot dirty looks, or wrong others while driving. Instead I can put the other person first, I can put relationship first over tit for tat reciprocity, because Jesus has broken the cycle once and for all. I invite you to leave behind the tit for tat cycle of retaliation and join Jesus in a life free from bondage to this broken system.

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