BIBLICAL STUDIES JOURNAL (BSJ)

http://www.biblicalstudies.in/ Rev. Nuhu Mutah Abba BSJ.2026; 8(3):85-106

Research article ISSN 2582-0214

EXEGESIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF MATTHEW 5:38-48: ANTITHESES FOR RELATIONSHIPS BUILDINGS AMIDST CHIBOK CHRISTIANS' RESPONSES TO PERSECUTIONS IN NORTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.54513/BSJ.2026.8306

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 27-7-2026

Accepted: 27-8-2026

Available online 23-9-2026

Keywords:

Antithesis, Relationship building, Persecution, non-violent, non-retaliation

ABSTRACT

Christian Persecution is a growing wonder worldwide that had great effect on the relationship building, religious, economic and social life of North-eastern Nigeria especially in the Chibok area. Matthew 5:38-48 offers guidelines for building relationships in suffering Christian communities. Most scholars maintain that Matthew 5:17-48, which is situated in a larger narrative popularly known as the Sermon on the Mount, encompasses Jesus' account of the New Law, which have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Besides, they agree that the passage provides an antithesis to the Mosaic Law, yet Jesus was inspiring his followers to build non-violent and non-retaliation relations as well as striving for cordial relationships that empower them. However, the antitheses constitute an interpretive challenge, which causes confusion in Chibok area due to the Islamic Boko Haram militia attacks. The issue is on whether they engender suitable ground for resolving affected relationships. The motivation for applying Matthew 5:38-48 in relation to the context of Chibok Christians' responses to persecution; reinterpreting the antitheses for relationship building, which the antitheses' encourage was motivated by increased violence amongst the Chibok area in North Eastern Nigeria which is alarming despite the several Kibaku's traditional efforts applied to mitigate the broken relationship building in the context. Matthew 5:38-48 contains cultural hints, which may either inform or deconstruct the culture of masculinity, which leads Chibok Christians to view the antitheses as inspiring cowardliness, which contradicts the logic of Jesus. The findings will argue that the Chibok Christians in persecuted context in Northeast area will make use of the outcome of this research on nonviolence. This will then lead to an effective reconciliation and sustainable peace is realized. The study will reflect on societal relationships building in the antitheses, which should inform the building of the same in Chibok's situation. The study will demonstrate the importance of the antitheses in curtailing the challenge of frigid relationships in the Chibok area. It is expected that various bodies of peace buildings will use the findings of this paper to enhance contemporary efforts of fighting against cultural beliefs of manliness that hindered Chibok Christians from fully adhering to the antitheses in relationships buildings.

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Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), addressing Jesus' followers under Roman occupation; which this article seeing it as a new Antithesis of the Torah and its potency for addressing problems faced by the Chibok Christians' misunderstanding of antithetical forgiveness, peace-making, reconciliation, non-retaliation that guides Christians' responses to persecutions. The Sermon is found scattered in Luke's gospel as the sermon on the plain (6:17-49). Mark and John do not include the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety. At the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is a message of love, compassion, and selflessness. Jesus encourages his listeners to love their enemies, to forgive others, and to care for the poor and the marginalized. The idea of Matthew 5:38-48 requires a hermetical shift from *lex talionis* (retaliation) to transformative love and reconciliation. The objective of the study is to construct relationships model or design, which can be applied in suffering contexts.

Introductory Background of the Study

Violence has become the major problem for all Chibok people; there has never been a period of more than ten years of uninterrupted peace in Chibok right from the period of the pre-colonial era to the post-independence era that spanned up to date. Concurrently building peaceful relationship is essential in human society since conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interpersonal relationship. And this necessitates the need for conflict resolution in human societies; Christian society is inclusive.

Matthew 5:38-48 was preferred to this essay since it contains cultural hints, which may either inform or deconstruct the culture of masculinity, which leads Chibok Christians to see the antitheses as inspiring cowardliness, which contradicts the logic of Jesus. The text also offers guidelines for building relationships in suffering Christian communities.

In the antitheses, some words and deeds of Jesus could be construed as a setting aside of the Law, though what Matthew seems to be communicating is probably the rampant misinterpretation of the Mosaic Law. In Matthew 5: 17, Jesus said that he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it. However, destroying and fulfilling were Hebrew idioms, which were used to refer to rabbinic interpretation of the law. When a rabbi misinterpreted the law, he was said to have destroyed the same law and when a rabbi interpreted the law correctly, it was said he had fulfilled the law (Bivinin, 2007: 93–102). Jesus was not asking for the abrogation of the Mosaic Law, but its "fulfilment" or rather, correct interpretation (5: 17).

This bold claim, in apparent defiance of the simple facts, is defended and developed in the verses that follow (18-48).

Yet the antitheses constitute an interpretive challenge, which causes confusion as to whether it is suitable ground for resolving broken relationships in Chibok area, which arises from the Islamic Boko Haram militia attacks. The reality that the Antitheses express has not been well received or understood in Chibok area, which is predominantly Christian, albeit co-existing with a Muslim minority. When the Muslim minority attacks the Christian community, Christians undertake different approaches, which contradict the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This dilemma is enhanced first, by various interpretations that have failed to seriously consider the *Sitz im Leben* in which Jesus uttered the antitheses. Secondly, Chibok Christians believe in the Bible, yet due to the influence of their cultural beliefs, they regard the antitheses as cowardice.

The church in Northern-Eastern Nigeria and generally Northern region according to Kamal-deen Olawale Sulaiman (2016: 86 ,88), Shafa Somboka Salma (2014: 91), and Adrian Davieson (2014: 45), is experiencing trials, harassment, and suffering. Nigerian newspaper, "*THIS DAY LIVE,*" Abu Shekara (2019: 1) explains that the North-Eastern Nigeria is right now the most challenging part of the country to live in due to insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and ethno-religious bloodshed as a result of Boko Haram and Fulani herders is alarming. Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen are seen as tools that are used to try to achieve the goal of Islamization. These occurred because of increasing irresponsibility of the Nigerian Federal Government to tackle the on-going Boko Haram killings in the North Eastern Region of Nigeria (Andoni,1997: 33–45; Anderson, 2001: 53–60).

Chibok is a Local Government area of Borno State located in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Its headquarters is in the town of Chibok, few kilometres away from the Sambisa forest which is the strong hold of the Boko Haram militants. Chibok was established around AD 1500 (CAPRO Study Office, 1993: 96). The Kibaku people were believed to have entered the area they are now occupying from 1700 CE. They remained independent of any group and kingdoms until towards the end of the first decade of the 20th century when they were finally attacked and conquered by the British in February 1907 (CAPRO Study Office, 1993: 96). Kibaku people were dogged fighters and warriors who could not be easily conquered by British colonial masters. This doggedness still flows in their blood streams that even after

becoming Christians; some find it difficult to accept any form of ill treatment meted on them. This made some not to take the Jesus' Antithesis seriously. Cowardice is associated with *salkur* (manliness) and *mwalakur* (womanliness). If a man is afraid to fight, then it will be said that he is a woman, not a man. Traditionally, it was said that cowardice belonged to women; but a woman who was a coward was not desirable (Neher, 2011: 71). Vengeance and prestige are both factors in fighting. Fighting is said to be won by being *masuku* (expert) and not by luck. There is no material gain that comes from fighting. This concept of manliness among Kibaku people has posed a great challenge towards understanding of Jesus' Antitheses of "turn the other cheek."

According to Mbuvi (2010: 756), the ancient Mediterranean world was characterised by a constant and on-going "challenge-riposte" game. It was a game of equals and played in public space and it was a game for males only. This is the same principle in Kibaku culture whereby a man is not expected to fight with a woman, especially in public. On the other hand, for a woman to beat a man in public is considered taboo act. Mbuvi (2010: 758), argues that need to safeguard honour was one possible reason for vicious cycle of violence in the ancient Mediterranean community. This echoes the similar as being the major reason why Kibaku tribe always engaged in battles and attacks. This is the same reason why the natives fought the colonisers and is also the same reason why Chibok Christians are reluctant to welcome Jesus' antitheses. In both the Matthean Jesus' society and the Chibok area, defeat in a war brings shame to the entire community and the only way to restore the lost honour was to re-strategize and then fight back. The Kibaku culture taught that whoever murders deserves judgment, and this judgment was a death penalty on the perpetrator, for life was to be paid for by life. Thus, because of this cultural belief during the insurgency period, some Chibok Christians have drifted away from the correct interpretation of antitheses of Jesus as found in Matthew 5:21-48. Typical Kibaku persons rejoice when they hear about the death of someone they classified as their enemy (especially one who killed one's relatives, kidnaped one's children, married one's wife, and burnt one's farm products and houses). Rather than being sad that someone had died, they delight and jubilant that so and so persons are no longer alive! The Boko Haram wants to be sure that Christianity is reduced to nothing in the Chibok area. Their action was seen first by the abduction of 276 Chibok School girls that are mostly Christian in 2014, kidnappings and targeted killings persist. After the abduction of the schoolgirls, several attacks were launched to weaken the community. In Chibok area; on 8th

July 2024 a displaced Christian farmer, Mr. Yohanna Bata, was murdered on his farmland in Kautikari, leaving behind his wife and three children. Njilang (Chibok LGA, Borno State); on first January 2025 suspected Boko Haram insurgents invaded Njilang community, leaving a trial of destructions. The attackers set fire to several properties, including the EYN LCC Njilang Church and pastor's residence, displacing several members of the congregation. Bamzir (Chibok LGA, Borno State); on 12th January 2025, at approximately 2:10 a.m. Boko Haram insurgents invaded Bamzir community, killing two brothers, destroying church properties, and displacing several innocent Christian families. All victims were members of EYN. Shikarkir (Chibok LGA, Borno State); on 13th January, 2025 insurgents attacked the EYN Local Church Council (LCC) Shikarkir, burning the church auditorium, the pastor's residence containing eight rooms, and ZME (Zumunta Matan Ekklesiya) store (Mbaya, 2025: 2). Many other people have been abducted from 2014 up to first quarters of 2026. The continuous attacks on Chibok community have changed the worldview of Christians in the area. The Chibok Christians are gradually drifting from the teachings of Christ as seen in Matthew about retaliation, vengeance and turning the other cheek. Inferentially, or from all indications Chibok Christians seemed to be tired of turning the other cheek. To their understanding it seems that there is no longer cheek to turn. For this reason, they are resorting to other alternatives to protect themselves and their faith. In doing that, the biblical teaching of loving the enemy is relegated to the background. While looking for alternative means, Chibok Christians are drifting from the main teachings they know.

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of contextually grounded hermeneutics guiding Christian responses to persecution in Chibok, leading to theological inconsistency and ethical ambiguity.

Objective of the Research

To critically examine the interpretation of Matthew 5:38–48 and develop a contextually grounded hermeneutical framework that can inform ethical Christian responses to persecution and relationship building among Chibok Christians in North-eastern Nigeria.

Exegesis of Matthew 5:38-48

The Gospel of Matthew is a foundational New Testament text, written likely in the late 50s to 70s A.D. for a largely Jewish-Christian audience (Tokunboh, 2006: 1105). Traditionally attributed to Matthew the Apostle (Levi), a former tax collector (Jerry, 1982: 689; Walter,

2005: 304). Warren supported the Matthean authorship and said the name Matthew means a "gift from God" and he represents the many tax collectors and sinners with whom Jesus interacted with Matthew 9:10-13 (Warren, 2004: 23). The book focuses on presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the King of Israel, and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies.

Internally, there is nowhere in the First Gospel that evidently and openly he is named its writer. We know nothing of his work except his call and farewell feast (9:9-10), and that he was with the apostles on the day of Pentecost. We know nothing of his death. External evidence like the early scholars of the church who debate the authorship acclaim it to Matthew: Eusebius (c. A.D. 325) quotes Papias (c. A.D 100) as saying that Matthew had his collection in Aramaic the truths of the Lord, which were interpreted into Greek by each man as he was capable. Irenaeus, about a century and a half earlier than Eusebius, stated that "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church" (Tenney, 1985: 149). The purpose was to convince Jewish readers that Jesus is the long-awaited Son of David and Abraham who fulfils the Law and Prophets. Matthew was seeking to show to these Gentile converts of the church at Antioch, where they first came together in large numbers. He was also seeking to show to these converts the meaning of Jesus' ministry in terms of the Old Testament that their Jewish colleagues believed, and from which they themselves had been taught (Tenney,1985: 157). The message of Matthew is this that "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). "The Kingdom of heaven" is the great theme of Matthew's Gospel, but for Matthew its importance rests on the identity of Jesus.

Accordingly, the New Testament world which the Gospel of Matthew unfolded seems to be a distant world for the contemporary world but can be brought nearer by the study of archaeology and history. It is also a complex world because of the variety of different People and civilization which mingled within it (Bruce, 1987: 456). This can be described in four fragments; political, economic, social, and spiritual milieus that prevailed during that time (*Sitz im Leben*).

The political structure of this world around the Mediterranean Sea was provided by the Roman Empire. Matthew 5:41 shown that Jesus' community was characterized by vicious

circle of violence; Jesus at this time was a wanted citizen by the Pharisees. They were looking for reason to arrest him. To be declared wanted by the Pharisees; means death. They were the religious authority of the land. They also have great influence in the governance of the land, not just within the temple court alone. Even the people were surprized to see Jesus' walking around freely among the persecutors and publicly teaching with the ban over his head by the authority. Even amidst these dangerous threats to life Christ had the motivation to keep the ministry going. He somehow chose to think and act differently from his contemporaries and as a result he managed to transform his community. What complicates the ministry of Jesus was the fact that his community was a transitory community hence striking a balance between ancient Jewish customs and the incoming Greco-Roman influence was not that easy as he was interpreted shiftily with both communities. The power of Rome had been steadily extending Eastwards in Asia minor, Syria, Egypt, and Judea was conquered by Pompey in 63 BC, putting an end to Jewish Independence. The Romans administered their Empire by provincial governors appointed by the senate or in more troublesome areas the emperor himself reigns. Roman Soldiers would be stationed in frontier provinces to maintain law and order but there were still, parts of the empire which were ruled by the client kings, local monarchs who were indebted to Rome.

Spiritually, there were diverse ways of worship due to interactions ranging from Judaism who depend on Mosaic Laws and the main promoters where the Pharisees and Sadducees who loaded it over the commoners to practice every single law in Torah and those they extrapolated and some of them could not even fulfil such a command. A case in point is in Matthew 12: 2, which says, "But some Pharisees saw them do and protested, by saying look your disciples are breaking the law by harvesting grain on Sabbath"(John, 2016: 1396). These people who called themselves teachers of law were adherent watch dogs of Mosaic Law. Besides this, there were worship of other gods and personalities of high social status like emperor of Rome introduced by both the Hellenistic Greek which colonised the region first and later their successor Roman Empire in whose conquest and administration Jesus lived, served, died, resurrected and ascended to Heaven.

Socially, Palestine was a commercial centre highly populated with people of all calibres and the majority lived in a concentrated zones or slums and here they was inadequate social needs like water, and even food could have been scarce, thus violence easily aroused and slapping or even fighting was common (John, 2016: 1396). For examples, Greek, Romans, Jews,

traders and opportunists from different part of the Romans' empire were living in this state because of its booming trade and would compete for the resources. Besides that, the Jews have poor social network with the gentiles whom they see them as unclean and not worthy of God's grace.

Meaning of Matthew 5:38-48 briefly

Teaching about Retaliation

38 Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη, Ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος. **39** ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ· ἀλλ᾽ ὅστις σε ῥαπίζει εἰς τὴν δεξιὰν σιαγόνα [σου], στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην· **40** καὶ τῷ θέλοντί σοι κριθῆναι καὶ τὸν χιτῶνά σου λαβεῖν, ἄφες αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον· **41**καὶ ὅστις σε ἀγγαρεύσει μίλιον ἕν, ὕπαγε μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ δύο. **42**τῷ αἰτοῦντί σε δός, καὶ τὸν θέλοντα ἀπὸ σοῦ δανίσασθαι μὴ ἀποστραφῇς.

Love for Enemies

43 Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη, Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου καὶ μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου. **44** ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν5 καὶ προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς, **45** ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς, ὅτι τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους. **46** ἐὰν γὰρ ἀγαπήσητε τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας ὑμᾶς, τίνα μισθὸν ἔχετε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ τελῶναι τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν; **47** καὶ ἐὰν ἀσπάσησθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν μόνον, τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ ἐθνικοὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν; **48** Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν [(LXX/GRK-Septuagint (PT7)/UBS Greek New Testament (PT7)].

Teaching about Retaliation

"*38"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth's 39But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic let him have your cloak as well. 41If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

Love for Enemies

43"You have heard that it was said 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on

the righteous and the unrighteous. 46If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (NIV)

Key Greek Words, Terms and Parsing's for the Study Insight

The key Greek terms that best explain the context of the researcher are parsed in the way that easily conveys meaning to the Christian within the context of the research. The verbs are selected within the research text of Matthew 5:38-48. The verbs show the shift from legal retaliation (*lex talionis*) to proactive love; Jesus shifts from *lex talionis* (eye for eye) to radical non-retaliation by focusing on the heart's posture in legal disputes, for instance, "sue you" κριθῆναι: aor. inf. pass., of κρίνω to separate, to judge, pass., to dispute, quarrel, debate, to go to law with someone, and forced labour; within this context it has to do with retaliation that fits the punishment by evaluating what had happened. But Jesus' is an antithesis of that understanding. ἀγγαρεύω "to compel", forcibly to impress someone to service, to compel him to serve whether he liked it or not, it also means to force someone against their wish. This explains the context better. ἀγγαρεύσει fut. The key insights come from parsing Αντιστηναι (not resisting evil), ῥαπίζει (striking/insulting), and Τελειοι (being mature/perfect), which together advocate for non-retaliation, radical generosity, and loving enemies as a reflection of divine perfection. These key themes include challenging Roman-era oppression through non-violent resistance and setting a higher, perfection-oriented ethical standard for Christian community identity. The Greek key terms like Αντιστηναι (resist), ῥαπίζει (slap), and στρέψον (turn), emphasizing that Jesus is not negating the law, but demanding a superior righteousness that breaks cycles of violence. He here establishes the principle that we are not to live by the motive of revenge, resentment and evil retaliation for wrongs done to us. Non-retaliation or resistance is an antithesis. This is against the context of Christians within the area of research. Retaliation as seen within the teaching of the Law (OT) resonates with those who have vengeance in mind.

Αντιστηναι: Aorist Active Infinitive of ἀνθίστημι "to resist, to set against, to set oneself against, to oppose, to withstand" (Matt 5:39) (Rienecker, 1980: 16). This term signifies not just a passive lack of resistance but refusing to set oneself in a posture of violence, retaliatory opposition against an injurious person. Αντιστηναι (resist) combined with στρέψον: aor. imp.

στρέφω to turn. ἄλλος other. στρέφω (turn) shows Jesus advocating a proactive, non-violent, and dignifying response to indignity, rather than passive submission. This seems to be one of the hard teachings to be observed by the Christians within the setting of the research.

Ραπιζει: "to hit, to slap, to strike" (Matt 5:39). Parsing: Present Active Indicative (3rd person singular) of ῥαπίζω. Indicates a continuous or iterative act of insult, often a backhanded slap on the right cheek, suggesting humiliation rather than simply physical damage (Rienecker, 1980: 16). Accepting humiliation is not acceptable for a person that has the strength to react or revenge. That makes the antithesis difficult to be observed by Christians though it is the standard requirement.

Τελειοι – "Perfect/Mature". ὡς as. Οὐράνιος heavenly, belong to heaven, living in heaven (Matt 5:48). Parsing: Nominative Masculine Plural Adjective from τέλειος. Refers to moral maturity, integrity, and wholeness in love, rather than sinless perfection. It indicates maturing into the character of the heavenly Father (Rienecker, 1980: 17). Maturity can easily make a Christian to easily accept the antithesis as presented within the context of the text. This is what is expected from the Christians within the context of the research.

Το Πονηρῷ: "The Evil (One)" (Matt 5:39). Parsing: Dative Singular Masculine/Neuter Article plus (+) Adjective. Often understood as "the evil person" rather than just "evil" abstractly. The instruction is to not meet an evil person with similar violence (Thayer, 2009: 530).

Ἀγαπήσεις: future, ἀγαπάω, "to love". This future is used for injunctions in the legal language of the OT. Αγαπατε: "Love" (Matt 5:43). Parsing: Present Active Imperative (2nd person plural). An on-going, active command for disciples to persistently love, as an act of will rather than emotion (Rienecker, 1980: 16).

Contextual Parsing Insights; Εσέσθε (Matt 5:48): Future Indicative Middle (2nd Person Plural) of εἰμί "you will be". Used here with an imperative force, implying that because of the grace of God, disciples will and must grow into this mature love (Thayer, 2009: 175). Κριθηναι (Matt 5:40): Aorist Passive Infinitive. In the context of "wanting to sue you," this refers to being brought before a court or a judge (Rienecker, 1980: 16).

"You have heard it was said" (*Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη*)**:** *Ἠκούσατε* Verb, Aorist Active Indicative, 2P. "You heard." It refers to traditional teaching. *ἐρρέθη* (Verb, Aorist Passive Indicative, 3S): "It was said." Often used as a "divine passive," referring to the Mosaic Law

(Exodus 21:24). "Divine Passive": *ἐρρέθη* suggests Jesus is addressing the divine origin of the law and is clarifying its ultimate intent, not abolishing it (Thayer, 2009: 22-23).

"An eye for an eye" (*ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ)*: *Anti* (Preposition): Literally "opposite," "in place of," or "in return for." In this context, it signifies equivalent, proportional retribution.

"But I say to you" **(***ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν***):** *ἐγὼ* (Pronoun): Used emphatically to set Jesus's authority as the interpreter of the Law.

"Turn… the other" **(***στρέψον... τὴν ἄλλην)***:** *στρέψον* (Verb, Aorist Active Imperative, 2S): A command to turn or twist. This action of turning the other cheek is designed to force the oppressor to treat the person as an equal rather than a subordinate (Rienecker, 1980: 16). Proportionality, not authorization; the original law (*anti* - in return for) was to prevent excessive vengeance, limiting it to "one for one".

The phrase "*You have heard*" (Matthew 5: 38a)

The setting of the sermon on a mountain side with disciples and crowds sitting attentively around Jesus (Matthew 5:2) is correlated to Moses and Israelites receiving the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:17-18) though here Jesus is revising the Mosaic laws to enable his disciples and the committed crowds to embrace a non-retaliation approach to violence (Matthew 5:38-48). This calm and accommodative setting laid the platform for Jesus Christ to begin his exhortation in verse 38 with the Greek Word ἐρρέθη which is literally translated "heard", implying that Jesus did not come to abolish the Mosaic laws but to fulfil it. In fact, Jesus was quite aware of their acquaintance with the traditional customs, laws and regulations as dictated by Judaism. He used this phrase to indicate the inadequacy of their Old Testament understanding and to offer them more enlightened and creative interpretation of the Torah(Onono, 2006: 13). Besides that, by using this phrase, he presented himself as unique teacher with divine authority who wants his hearers to adopt his new teachings (Antitheses). This statement is concretized by the subsequent phraseology of, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω, "But, I say" in the beginning of verse 39 signifying finality and authority of Jesus' teaching and its supremacy over the Mosaic laws which ultimately find its fuller interpretation in him. Thus, both the disciples and crowds gathered were to abide by the new interpretation of the laws which postulated a non-retaliation approach to violence.

***An eye for eye and a tooth for the tooth* (Matthew 5:38b)**

As discussed in the background earlier, the Mosaic laws were strictly followed, and the Pharisees and Sadducees loaded it over the masses to practice every single law in Torah. Thus, in Verse 38 Jesus began the amendment of the retributive Mosaic Law to conform to his new teaching of repentance, forgiveness, and love for one another. He began with the phrasing of; an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth which is mentioned three times in the Pentateuch though the original context needs consideration because number three signifies completion or perfection. For example, Exodus 21:24-25 had a long list of what could be used in the Jewish courts as the basic for justice for premeditated injury such as; an eye for eye, a hand for hand, a tooth for a tooth, a bruise for a bruise and a wound for a wound, when a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him. Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deuteronomy 19:21).

This declaration comprises of a standard manifestation, the supposed *lex talionis*, that acts in more than detail three periods in the Law (Exod. 21:24; Lev 24:20b; Deut. 19: 21, LXX). This specific reference comes from the setting of Deut. 19:21, LXX, just as it is expressed in 5:39 below. The *lex talionis*, arising as far back in the history as the code of Hammurabi, formerly set the limits for the level of retaliation and protected individuals and their families from unjust revenge. The extent to which this principle was symbolically followed in Jesus' day remains uncertain, although there is evidence in the Mishnah showing that financial adjustments were all right at times. In whatsoever maybe, it guaranteed the injured person legal justice while protecting the offender from undue punishment (Guelich, 1982: 219). Thus, Jesus appears to contradict the command by commanding that a person who is slapped ought to allow the offender to slap the other cheek rather than giving an equal retribution. There are three more examples given in vv. 40–42 (giving one's coat to the one suing for the shirt; going two miles when pressed into service to go one; giving to the one who asks). Accordingly in Jewish Law, a person could not take an outer cloak as a pledge for a loan because it was needed as a sleeping garment (Exod. 22:26-7; Deut. 24:12-3) (1992: 29). Schweizer agrees, noting that demanding only a tunic was originally intended to protect the poor (Exod. 22:25-6); however, the teaching in v.40 is not analysed for a deeper principle, but the spiritual benefits of following it literally are articulated. It is interpreted as promoting absolute faith in God: that it is better to go naked than utilize one's legal rights (Schweizer,

1975: 130). Likewise, the imperative to carry an oppressor's pack two miles in v.41 is taken as a literal instruction, through which edification is obtained. Going the extra mile is seen as taking back one's own power from the oppressor (1975: 130). Lapide concurs, viewing the voluntary service of the second-mile as a disarming love (Lapide, 1986: 111): "Here the initiative is taken away from the superior, evil is repaid with good, and, in all probability, in the course of the second mile a friendly conversation will begin to develop" (1986: 112). Thus, for these scholars the commands of the fifth antithesis are a means of nonviolent resistance intended to overcome evil with gentle goodness and possibly win converts: "Jesus' third way relied neither on passive powerlessness nor on militant counterforce, but on a completely new course of human interaction that would invert all dominant relationships and deprive them of power" (: 104).

There seem to be three approaches that most scholars take in dealing with these verses. They tend to see Jesus as revoking the Mosaic Law and setting up a "new law" (Banks, 1975: 199). But then again, Moo quotes and here disagrees with John P. Meier to the effect that this antithesis is "perhaps the clearest and least disputable case of annulment in the antitheses" (Moo, 1984: 22). Then we may conclude that here once again Jesus brings a new norm which altogether transcends that embedded in the Law and reiterated, in however qualified a manner, by its interpreters, or simply dealing with a perversion in which a public method of administering justice was brought into private disputes and used with vindictive motives, "The *lex talionis* was part of the Mosaic jurisprudence; it was one of the measures instituted for the penalizing of injury inflicted. It was part of the order of public justice and not of private revenge. Likewise, Lapide eventually moderates total pacifism to cite an obligation to just violence in certain circumstances as a reason that Jesus would not and could not have ordered this. He may have taught resisting evil in kindness; yet, as a good Jewish rabbi, he would have known that one is obligated to defend a helpless victim out of the love of neighbour (Lapide, 1986: 135).

***But I say, do not resist an evil person* (Matthew 5:39a)**

Jesus denounces any form of retaliation with the words ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ (Do not resist an evil person) (Mt 5:39a). Followers of Jesus must refuse to sink to the level of the aggressor by returning evil with evil (Viljoen, 2013: 9-10). However, evil does not remain unopposed; it must be answered with good in a surprising manner (Osborne, 2010: 208). This opposition

sound like 5:34a as an apodictic command by use of the negative aorist infinitive contains two rather unclear terms, ἀντιστῆναι (to oppose) and τῷ πονηρῷ (evil). To oppose or resist translates the root meaning of the verb. Taken in a general way, the command and its following illustrations (5:39b-41) have become the basis for advocating a "Christian" view of non-resistance. Yet to understand this verb in this manner is to separate it from its antithetical context, a context which requires a more specific interpretation. One's view of *to oppose* also conditions to an extent whether πονηρῷ is a neuter substantive meaning of *evil* in general or a masculine substantive meaning an *evil person* (Guelich, 1982). Consequently, the personal use of πονηρῷ would be the more natural, although one could also maintain the somewhat awkward abstract meaning. Paraphrased, then 5:39a would read: *you shall not oppose an evil person in court*. This understanding becomes most clear when one studies the Old Testament background of the statement; precisely the Old Testament parallels: Deut. 19:21, LXX, fit 5:38-39a as though made-to-measure. All four elements found in Deut. 19:16-21 constitute the premise and antithesis of 5:38, 39a.

Thus, Matthew wanted his Jewish audience to abide by Jesus' challenge to his hearers to do the most difficult task ever in Jewish tradition to love your enemies and this vividly indicates that Jesus is against spirit of hatred and revenge. Yet, this phrase does not necessarily mean one should submit to oppression or be passive pretending to be humble, when aggression is directed to you.

Therefore, when Jesus said you must not stand against evil doers and love your enemies, it was a complicated obligation for the Jews. Though in a nutshell, Matthew wanted the Jewish believers to submit to Jesus' exhortation for believers to stand against the deeds of evil doers in love to enable them to see their good characters and create veins in them for the gospel message. This made it harder for people to forgive those who hurt and offend them and even they became bitter of the system in power.

***If someone slaps, you on the right cheek* (Matthew 5:39b)**

Jesus follows the imperative not responding with violence, with three specific examples (Mt 5:39b-41) and a general principle of how one should respond instead: ἀλλ᾽ ὅστις σε ῥαπίζει εἰς τὴν δεξιὰν σιαγόνα (*σου*), στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην, καὶ τῷ θέλοντί σοι κριθῆναι καὶ τὸν χιτῶνά σου, λαβεῖν ἄφες αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον, καὶ ὅστις σε ἀγγαρεύσει μίλιον ἕν, ὕπαγε μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ δύο (If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also; and

if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, hand over your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles) (Mt 5:42). A slap on the right cheek by a right-handed person implies that the person would be hitting with the back of the hand, which was regarded as extra insulting, with the insult even worse than the pain. In the second example, Jesus instructs his followers to also offer one's garment when an opponent claims one's tunic. The third example resembles the Roman practice of demanding transportation of goods from subordinates (Gundry, R . H., 1994: 94). In all three cases the absolute opposite of violent resistance is proposed (Luz, 1990: 328). It is important to note that this does not mean that unfair aggression remains unanswered, but that acts of aggression must be overcome with contrasting non-violent reactions (Foster, 2004: 125). Jesus' followers should not only avoid retaliation but be surprisingly kind (Osborne, 2010: 206). The clause *"who slaps your right cheek*." It starts a chain of examples mostly with Lucan parallels (Luke 6:29-30). Yet Matthew and Luke differ in immediate context, in the stylistic and grammatical structure, and in content. Luke, by way of contrast, has no sign of the Contrast and encloses the unit within the Love Your Enemy complex (Luke 6:27-36). Again, the second person singular of this unit betrays the unit's earlier existence separate from either 5:38-39a or Luke 6:27-36, since both passages use the second person plural otherwise.

Matthew 5:39b is the core of this paper, from the use of second person "σε" meaning "you" in Greek and implying that, personal provocation may result into further injury or violence. The only possible way to hit the right cheek is either to use the back hand of the right or use the left hand. In Jewish Community the left hand was reserved for unclean tasks. While the back of the hand was meant to humiliate, degrade and insult (Lamentation 3:30, I king 22:24, Isaiah 56:4, 2 Corinthian 11:2). As this research stated earlier on social life of the Jews during the time of writing the Gospel of Matthew, Palestine a commercial centre and was highly populated with people of all calibres and the majority lived in a concentrated zones or slums and here they was inadequate social needs like water, and even food could have been scarce, thus violence easily aroused and slapping or even fighting was common (Jagersma, 1985: 109). This created strife among the people and the believers were inclusive. Matthew urged his Jewish audience to abide by Jesus' exhortation for believers to respond in love by not counteracting towards their offenders in order to avoid more violence and he demonstrated this on his way to the cross when he willing handed over himself to the authority to be sacrificed for our sins (Matthew 26:52-59). Besides that, Matthew wanted the Jewish

Christian community to evangelize the gentiles as this research did mention earlier on the purpose of writing the gospel by extolling Jesus' non-retaliation approach to violence.

***Offer the other cheek also*, (Matthew 5:39c)**

In saying this, Matthew agitating for a hermeneutical approach to reconciliation and wanted his audience whom this research have identified as Jewish Christian believers based on the fact that Matthean gospel limited Jesus' mission to Israel only (Mt. 10:5-6, 15:24) and is formed in Judaism patterns of thinking, used Jewish categories and Jewish methods of augment to appreciate what Jesus said that even if a man should direct at you the most deadly and calculated insult, you must on no account retaliates (Leslie, 1960: 707). Cadbury expounded this statement that, Jesus' intended meaning of this verse is that the mere fact that wrong has been done to a man does not guarantee him to do wrong because God will that they should emulate his humble characters and it should blended in their daily life (Cadbury, 1997: 53). This bring forth the tenets of non-retaliation approach to violence which Jesus admonished the disciples and the crowds sitting around him to extol, proclaim and practice among them and outside their circle to create a new pattern of thinking about violence and enable his message love, peace and forgiveness which are the indicators of the kingdom of God at hand to gain momentum and transform the Palestine people and beyond.

***To the one who desires to take you to court* (Matthew 5:40)**

This verse opens with the plain reference to a jurisdictive procedure (κριθῆναι = to be judged). Again, the evangelist redaction ally adds θέλω (to want) twelve times into his sources (10x to Mark, 2x to Q besides 5:40, 42) *to get your body shirt; give him also your coat.* The *shirt* (χιτῶνά) represents one's basic, form-fitting garment. The *coat* (ἱμάτιον) was a loose wrap, more like a small blanket or an afghan worn as an outer garment during the day and used as bedding during the night. The *coat*, according to the Old Testament Law, belonged inalienably to an individual and could not be held even as a deposit overnight (Exod. 22:25-26; Deut. 24:12-13). Therefore, commensurate with the abdication of one's rights to retaliation in 5:39a, 5:40 demands that one foregoes even the Law's provision for the poor by voluntarily offering one's adversary the one item that the Law forbids another from taking by legal recourse. The saying of 5:39b-40 demanded the foregoing of one's legal rights to redress and protection appropriate to the antithesis of 5:39a prohibiting the opposing of one's

adversary in court. The next sayings of 5:41-42 no longer fit the judicial scene but represent a descending order of obligatory requests.

Who commandeers you to go one mile **(Matthew 5:41).**

The word *commandeer* (ἀγγαρεύσει) represents and custom stemming from Persian origins that required one to perform or to grant services according to another's wish. The Roman soldiers apparently maintained the detested practice in using Jewish civilians for their purposes. For example, the Romans commandeered Simon to bear Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21). *Mile* (μίλιον) was a Roman measurement of about 1000 paces, just less than a mile. This request was legally binding, but one was to go beyond even the requested limits, to go the "extra mile" (Guelich, 1982).

The Sixth Antithesis: ***Love your enemy*** **(5:43–48)**

The sixth antithesis is like the fifth one. The theme of higher δικαιοσύνη (righteousness) amidst animosity is addressed in the final antithesis, picking up this topic from the final beatitude (Mt 5:11-12) (Viljoen, 2013: 10-11). Jesus responds to two rulings: "love your neighbour" and "hate your enemy" (Mt 5:43). Love of enemy is the redefining neighbour and to expanding love beyond friends to persecutors. Praying for the persecutors mean active goodwill or blessing, rather than passive tolerance. The motive is limitation of God's indiscriminate grace; "Sons of your Father". The command to "love your neighbour," in v.43 comes from Lev. 19:18 (Albright, 1971: 71). This is in keeping with various areas of the Old Testament wherein love toward enemies is depicted as righteous behaviour (Exod. 23:4-5; 1 Sam. 24:19; Prov. 25:21-2) (Schweizer, 1975: 132). The rest of the verse references oral traditions in later periods that make clear distinctions between Jew and Gentile (Albright, 1971: 71). Lapide interprets the "hate your enemy" saying as a polemical interpolation by the author of Matthew to further slander the Jews (Lapide, 1986: 86). That it might come from the Qumran tradition is denied due to time-frames (: 85); Convention in Jesus' time was to hate your enemies, and especially those labelled "unrighteous enemies of God" (Schweizer, 1975: 132). This mentality is precisely what is objected to by commanding that love and goodness be shown to enemies, just as God is good to all (Matt. 5:44-7; Luke 6:27-36) (1975: 133-134). It is noteworthy that, when examining these teachings in Matthew, Reiser and other commentators on the text join loving enemies with the pacifist ethic (Reiser, 2001: 427; Schweizer, 1975: 130). This illustrates a tendency to neglect the unity of the entire passage

of Matt. 5:17-48, as it stands in Matthew, as one of extreme commands, even among some scholars; instead, teachings are isolated for scrutiny.

Jesus emphatically instructs the alternative to the second ruling ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν (love your enemies) and προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς (pray for those who persecute you) (Mt 5:44). He counters attitudes of hate towards one's enemy. The love commandment is not limited to one's neighbour but includes one's enemies and persecutors. Jesus combines love with prayer, which suggests an honest desire for the well-being of one's enemies. Jesus offers two reasons for this instruction;

The first reason is ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς (that you may be sons of your Father in heaven). This promise links with the seventh beatitude which promises that peacemakers will be called sons of God (Mt 5:9). The blessings of God's kingdom are related to the instruction to love one's enemy (Piper, 1979: 173). God's sons and daughters are those who partake in the Father's character (McNeile, 1980: 71). Second reason for this instruction is this that; for if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that)? (Mt 5:46-47). These two questions reflect Jesus' requirement for greater righteousness (Mt 5:20). Greeting goes along with loving, as ἀσπάσησθε (you greet) stands parallel with ἀγαπήσητε (you love). The Jews greet with 'shalom', which implies a prayer for the one being greeted. The idea that loving only those who show love to you deserves no reward in v.46, is also present in the Didache (Lapide, 1986: 120). Referring to a "brother" in v.47 most likely implies a member of the same fraternal religious community (Schweizer, 1975: 134); thus, the passage is, once again, extolling the Christian to show benevolence to those outside of the "in-group." Loving enemies was a trademark characteristic of early Christians which astonished non-believers. This command highlights love as the foundation of the higher righteousness which is summarized with perfection (Luz, 1989: 340; Nolland, 2005: 270-271).

Matthew 5:48 concludes the series of six antitheses; be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. This call echoes Leviticus 19:2: 'be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy', and Deuteronomy 18:13: 'you must be blameless (LXX: τέλειός) before the Lord your God'. Being 'righteous' is paralleled with 'being perfect'. Clearly, these instructions cry out against the standard dehumanising spirals of force and violence that rule the world. It turns

typical human behaviour on its head. Such challenging renunciation of force expresses the true meaning of love. This instruction poses another dimension of higher δικαιοσύνη that should distinguish Jesus' followers from their enemies.

Implications of Matthew 5:38-48 to Chibok Christians

Largely through the text of this research, we were made to understand that forgiveness as a covenantal obligation is not optional, but a requirement based on experiencing divine mercy, and peace-making in the face of violence is an active non-violence responding to evil with good rather than yielding to hatred. It is disrupting the oppressor's narrative through unexpected grace which is like the concept of moral transformation. It is not condoning evil but refusing to let evil define the victim's future. It is an imitation of God, essential for maintaining faith identity in crisis. The goal of reconciliation is moving beyond coexistence toward restoring broken relationships. Then, reconciling actions involves the difficult work of restoring humanity; seeking justice without taking personal vengeance. Chibok Christians should view persecutions through the lens of early Christian endurance. Choosing non-retaliation to break the cycle of violence fostering community's relationship building; its redefining strength; moving from violent retaliation to patient endurance and spiritual warfare through prayer. Contextualized non-violence; applying "turning the cheek" and "second mile" to local on-going traumatic interactions with Boko Haram/insurgents and hope for eschatology; trusting God to rectify injustice at the final judgment.

The antithesis of Matthew 5:38a by Jesus Christ that victims should freely release their perpetrators therefore, implies that the Kibaku people who are mainly Christians as discussed should willingly release their offenders from their minds and hearts as some Jewish believers did in order to become stress free and find new hope in him who will ultimately reconcile them with their perpetrators. Next Matthew 5:38b which says "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"; Jesus Christ after critically analysing this situation, admonished his hearers to avoid the act of demanding compensation for the wrongs done to them to reconcile with the perpetrators and to selflessly make peace with them. Thus the Chibok Christians should therefore note to the message of Matthew 5:38b as urged by Jesus Christ and accept to reconcile with the perpetrators without any demand of compensation as this would bring lasting peace and build good relationships in the area and enable the impoverished offenders to be forgiven and reconciled, reintegrated among his or her community. Still, Matthew 5:

39a which says, "do not resist an evil person" or μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ· in Greek literally implying stand not against an evil doer or aggressor and is much wider than do not retaliate. Besides that, Matthew 5.39b urged the Jewish audience and believers to respond in love towards their offenders to avoid more violence. The message of Matthew 5:39b should therefore help the Kibaku people to respond in love and forgive the Boko Haram, Government of Nigeria and their neighbours who offended them to avoid new outbreak of violence. Hence, amicable peace relationship and harmony will be established in the area.

Finally, Matthew 5:39c which says, "offer the other cheek also", according to Jewish Rabbinic Law to hit a man with the back of the hand was a great disgrace to him. But Jesus in this text used that analogy of turning the other cheek also to encourage the Jewish believers and the audience who were being forced to pay taxes to the Romans government among other pain they always afflict on them to pay evil with good through willingly initiating reconciliation with their offenders. Thus, Jesus urged in Matthew 5:39c, as in responses; they victims (Kibaku community) should willingly take a step and go to the Sambisa forest under proper arrangement with the authority and pronounce forgiveness to the militias for taking their wives from them. They should also through Kibaku Area Development Association (KADA) and Local government authority go to the formers Boko Haram militias who abducted their daughters, took their wives and forgive them. This African hermeneutical approach to reconciliation elucidated by Matthew 5:39c will therefore catapult reconciliation within this Kibaku community in North-eastern Nigeria and reduce on the many pending cases being handled by the KADA and Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) Kibaku movements since victims will take the responsibility to seek the perpetrators, forgive them and reconcile with them without seeking for their confession and repentance for the past wrongs done to them.

Conclusion

Summary of the radical nature of the passage echo that Christian responses to persecution must reflect the kingdom of God's character. Thusly, having logically applied the exegetical meaning of Matthew 5:38-48 written by Matthew based on his personal experience of danger of violence and hazardous impacts that it generates to the said context discussed, the following resolves have been made: (i) They Kibaku people as sign of positive response, should release the perpetrators from their minds and heart under compulsion of Jesus gracious love (Matthew

5:38a), (ii) They Kibaku people in Chibok area should accept to reconcile with their perpetrators without compensation (Matthew 5:38b), (iii) They Kibaku people in Chibok area should not retaliate (Matthew 5:39a) and finally (iv) They Kibaku people should emulate the African biblical hermeneutical approach to reconciliation elucidated in Matthew 5:39c. These are the fundamental elements of biblical reconciliation that Matthew introduced into the context of Kibaku to transform and complement the already existing reconciliation efforts such as Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) for a sustainable peace to be realized in the aftermath context of the Kibaku people in Chibok area.

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