



BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

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SERMON SERIES

“Kingdom Living: The Sermon on The Mount”

Part 3 continued – “Beyond External Obedience: The Heart of True Righteousness”

Now Jesus speaks on where he wants his disciples to display their discipleship concerning personal relationships.

Jesus Interprets the Law Concerning Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)

It has been said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce": In Jesus' day, many people interpreted the Mosaic permission for divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1) as granting virtually any reason as grounds for divorce.

Deuteronomy 24:1 - *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*

Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality: The issue of divorce revolved around a strict or loose interpretation of the word uncleanness in Deuteronomy 24:1.

- Sexual immorality "translates porneia, the root meaning of which is 'fornication', but it is used more widely, so that it could include premarital unchastity, subsequently discovered."
- Causes her to commit adultery: An illegitimate divorce gives place to adultery because God doesn't recognize the divorce, and sees a new relationship as bigamous. It is possible for a person to have a divorce that is recognized by the state, but not by God. If that person goes on to marry someone else, God considers that relationship adultery because He sees them as still married.

In Matthew 19:8, we see how God's design of the permanence of marriage was tainted by sin. Jesus says, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." God created marriage covenants to last until death. Sadly, sin hardened our hearts, and divorce entered the world. The good news is that with heartbreaking divorce comes immeasurable grace and mercy, and this is true both for Israel and for husbands and wives. God's overwhelming faithfulness to His people reminds us that the marriage between Christ and His bride, the church, will never end (Revelation 19:7–9).

Part 4 – “Law of Retribution and Retaliation”

Now Jesus speaks on clarifying the law as it concerns the truth, retribution and retaliation

Matthew 5:33-48 KJV

33 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. 37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. 38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have [thy] cloke also. 41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. 43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more [than others]? do not even the publicans so? 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

The Law Concerning Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)

The scribes and Pharisees had twisted the law You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain (Exodus 20:7) to permit taking virtually every other name in a false oath.

Do not swear at all: Jesus reminds us that God is part of every oath anyway; if you swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even your head, you swear by God - and your oath must be honored.

To "swear falsely" means to knowingly tell an untruth while making a promise, oath, or vow; or to swear an oath and then not keep it, especially when invoking God as a witness to your words. Swearing falsely is equivalent to committing perjury or lying under oath. In biblical times, people would often swear oaths to attest to their truthfulness or to demonstrate their commitment to a particular action.

The Old Testament law warned against making false oaths: "A man who makes a vow to the Lord or makes a pledge under oath must never break it. He must do exactly what he said he would do" (Numbers 30:2, NLT; see also Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 23:23). By Jesus' day, the Pharisees had grossly stretched and obscured this command against swearing falsely, creating a system of legal loopholes that allowed them to evade God's requirement to speak the truth. Rather than using God's holy name, they would swear by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or some part of their body. Jesus overturned this dishonest mentality in Matthew 5:33–37, urging His followers not merely to avoid swearing falsely, but to be so honest that oaths become unnecessary. He insisted that a straightforward "yes" or "no" should be trustworthy and sufficient.

But let your "Yes" be "Yes": Having to swear or make oaths betrays the weakness of your word. It demonstrates that there is not enough weight in your own character to confirm your words. How much better it is to let your "Yes" be "Yes" and "No" be "No."

Some have taken this word of Jesus to be more than an emphasis on truth-telling and honesty to be an absolute prohibition of all oaths. This is misguided, because oaths are permitted under certain circumstances, as long as they are not abused and used as a cover for deception.

- God Himself swears oaths: Hebrews 6:13 and Luke 1:73.
- Jesus spoke under oath in a court: Matthew 26:63-64.
- Paul made oaths: Romans 1:9, 2 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 1:20, 2 Thessalonians 2:5.

Jesus interprets the law of retribution. (Matthew 5:38-42)

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth": The Mosaic law did teach an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:24). But over time religious teachers moved this command out of its proper sphere (a principle limiting retribution for the civil government) and put it in the wrong sphere (as an obligation in personal relationships).

But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also: Here, Jesus presents the fullness of the eye for an eye law, and how its idea of limiting revenge extends into the principle of accepting certain evils against one's self.

The concept of "turning the other cheek" is a difficult one for us to grasp. Allowing a second slap after being slapped once does not come naturally.

- When a person insults us (slaps you on the right cheek) we want to give them back what they gave to us, plus more. Jesus said we should **patiently bear such insults and offences**, and not resist an evil person who insults us this way. Instead, **we trust God to defend us.**
- "Jesus is here saying that the true Christian has learned to resent no insult and to seek retaliation for no slight."
- It is wrong to think that Jesus means a physical attack cannot be resisted or defended against. When Jesus speaks of a slap on your right cheek, it was culturally understood as a deep insult, **not a physical attack.** Jesus does not mean that if someone hits across the right side of our head with a baseball bat, we should allow them to then hit the left side.
- It is also wrong to think Jesus means that there is no place for punishment or retribution in society. Jesus here speaks to personal relationships, and not to the proper functions of government in restraining evil (Romans 13:1-4). I must turn my cheek when I am personally insulted, but the government has a responsibility to restrain the evil man from physical assault.

If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also: Under the Law of Moses, the outer cloak was something that could not be taken from someone (Exodus 22:26; Deuteronomy 24:13).

- Exo 22:26 KJV - 26 If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:
- Deu 24:13 KJV - 13 In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God.

Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two: Positively, we are told to take command of evil impositions by making a deliberate choice to **give more than we are required**. At that time, Judea was under Roman military occupation. Under military law, any Roman soldier might command a Jew to carry his soldier's pack for one mile - **but only one mile**. Jesus here says, "go beyond the one mile required by law and give another mile out of a free choice of love." This is how we transform an attempt to manipulate us into a free act of love.

Give to him who asks of you: The only limit to this kind of sacrifice is the limit that love itself will impose. It isn't loving to give into someone's manipulation without our transforming it into a free act of love. It isn't always loving to give or to not resist.

- We might say that Paul repeated this idea of Jesus: **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)**

Jesus interprets the law of love towards your neighbor. (Matthew 5:43-47)

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy": The Mosaic Law commanded you shall love your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Yet some teachers in the days of Jesus had added an opposite - and evil - misapplication: an equal obligation to hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies: Instead, Jesus reminds that in the sense God means it, all people are our neighbors, even our enemies. To truly fulfill this law, we must love, bless, do good and pray for our enemies - not only our friends.

- Jesus freely acknowledges that we will have enemies, yet we are to respond to them in love, trusting that God will protect our cause and destroy our enemies in the best way possible, by transforming them into our friends.

When Jesus said we are to love our enemies, He was creating a **new standard for relationships**. He proclaimed to the crowds listening to His Sermon on the Mount that they knew they were to love their neighbor because the command to love our neighbor was a law of God (Leviticus 19:18). That we must therefore hate our enemy was an inference incorrectly drawn from it by the Jews. While no Bible verse explicitly says, "hate your enemy," the Pharisees may have somewhat misapplied some of the Old Testament passages about hatred for God's enemies (Psalm 139:19-22; 140:9-11). But Jesus replaced this idea with an even higher standard: **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45)**. Jesus goes on to explain that loving those who love us is easy and even unbelievers can do that. Then He commands us to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

By using an illustration of the sun rising and the rain falling on both the good and the evil, Jesus shows God's **undiscriminating** love to all people. His disciples then must reflect His character and exhibit this same indiscriminating love for both friends and enemies. Jesus is teaching us that we must live by a higher standard than what the world expects—a standard that is impossible for us to attain by our own efforts. It's only through the power of God's Spirit that His people can truly love and pray for those who intend to do them harm (Romans 12:14-21).

That you may be sons of your Father in heaven: In doing this, we are imitating God, who shows love towards His enemies, by sending rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? What do you do more than the sinner? We should regard it as no matter of virtue if we merely return the love that is given to us.

- Remember, Jesus here taught the character of the citizens of His kingdom. We should expect that character to be different from the character seen in the world. There are many good reasons why more should be expected from Christians than others:

They claim to have something that others do not have; they claim to be renewed, repentant, and redeemed by Jesus Christ.

They do in fact have something that others do not have; they are in fact renewed, repentant, and redeemed by Jesus Christ.

They have a power that others do not have; they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them. They have the Spirit of God dwelling within them.

They have a better future than others do.

The conclusion to the true interpretation of the law: **be perfect.** (Matthew 5:48)

Finally, after giving us the admonition to love our enemies, Jesus then gives us this command: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). As sons of our Father (Matthew 5:45), we are to be perfect, even as He is perfect. This is utterly impossible for sinful man to achieve. This unattainable standard is exactly what the Law itself demanded (James 2:10). So how can Jesus demand the impossible? He later tells us, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). That which God demands, only He can accomplish, including the demand to love our enemies. What is impossible for man becomes possible for those who give their lives to Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts.

If a man could live the way Jesus has told us to in this chapter, he would truly be perfect.

- He would never hate, slander or speak evil of another person.
- He would never lust in his heart or mind, and not covet anything.
- He would never make a false oath, and always be completely truthful.
- He would let God defend his personal rights, and not take it upon himself to defend those rights.
- He would always love his neighbors, and even his enemies.

Just as your Father in heaven is perfect: If a man could keep just what Jesus said here, he would truly have a righteousness greater than the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20), the very thing we must have to enter into God's Kingdom. But there is only one man who has lived like this: **Jesus Christ**. What about the rest of us? Are we left out of the Kingdom of God?

- We see that in this section Jesus was not primarily seeking to show what God requires of the Christian in his daily life. True, Jesus has revealed God's ultimate standard, and we must take it to heart. But His primary intent was to say, "If you want to be righteous by the law, you must keep the whole law, internal and external - that is, you must be perfect."

What is our current relation to the law, as truly interpreted? We are exposed as guilty sinners who can never make ourselves righteous by doing good works - which was exactly the view held by most people in Jesus' day, and in our own day.