

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7

A Christian’s Righteousness – 5:17-48 (Part 2)

As mentioned in *A Christian’s Righteousness* Part 1, the Bible speaks of two types of righteousness: the perfect righteousness of salvation that can only come from Jesus ^{Romans 3:21-26} and the post-born-again righteous life ^{2 Timothy 2:22-24} Christian’s are called to, through the power of the Holy Spirit ^{Ephesians 3:16-19}. It is the behavioral righteousness that Jesus addressed in this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

Also, in using contrasting statements like: “**You have heard it was said...**” and “**But I tell you...**”, Jesus was not disagreeing with Moses and the law, but against the false teachings of scribes, Pharisees and Rabbis.

FIDELITY IN MARRIAGE (5:31-32) DIVORCE ^{Deuteronomy 24:1}

The foundational Biblical verse about divorce is: “*I hate divorce,*” says the LORD God of Israel ^{Malachi 2:16}.

5:31 “**It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’**” Divorce: *apōstasiōn*, from the same root as the word apostasy (which indicates a walking away from the truth).

5:32 Divorce is “allowed” by Jesus only for the reason of marital unfaithfulness (*pōrnēia*: fornication).

See Matthew 19:3-12 for a more complete passage on divorce. The question the Pharisees asked Jesus in Matthew 19:3 was a test designed to find out which rabbinical school Jesus agreed with.

Rabbi Shammai (rigorist line): must be an unseemly or indecent act for divorce.

Rabbi Hillel (lax view): any trivial reason for divorce would be accepted.

Jesus ignored their question and instead addressed 3 points:

1. Pharisees were interested in grounds for divorce; Jesus the institute of marriage.
2. Pharisees considered the Moses provision as a command; Jesus called it a concession.
3. Pharisees treated marriage lightly; Jesus treated it very seriously.

Married couples must change priorities by leaving (old life behind) and cleaving (becoming one) ^{Genesis 2:24}.

FIDELITY IN HONESTY IN SPEECH (5:33-37) OATHS ^{Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:1-2, Deuteronomy 23:21-23}

5:33 “**Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’**” This quote is a paraphrase of the above OT passages about oaths.

5:34-35 Jesus taught that believers should not swear by heaven (God’s throne), by earth (*gē*: the part of creation denoting man’s domain) (God’s footstool) or by Jerusalem (God’s capital city).

5:36 Also, man should not give an oath by their head (in their own power), because man has very little power.

The Pharisees had shifted the attention away from the vow itself (and the need to keep the vow) and put the emphasis on the form of the oath. Later, Jesus made this point clear as part of a series of

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rebukes against the scribes and the Pharisees ^{Matthew 23:16-22}. Here, Jesus emphasized the formula of a vow as irrelevant, because for Christians, every word they speak is a reflection of how they feel + what they think about God - every utterance they make is a witness to the world, to other saints and to God.

5:37 The simple truth is disciples should let their "Yes/No" statements mean exactly what they say ^{James 5:12}. Saying a vow implies Christians lie at other times, and lies are from Satan, the "father of lies" ^{John 8:44}.

In conclusion, vows are unnecessary, because the words of a genuine believer should always be good.

This concept can be simply summarized: **Christians should say what they mean and mean what they say.**

If swearing is forbidden, why has God Himself used oaths in the past? ^{Genesis 22:15-19, Jeremiah 22:5, 44:26, 49:13}

God used divine oaths not to increase His credibility ^{Numbers 23:19}, but to confirm man's rather weak faith.

In the upcoming final 2 lessons of contrasting statements ^{v.38-48}, Jesus called Christians to the very challenging task of showing an attitude of total love toward an "evil person" ^{v.39} and toward "enemies" ^{v.44}.

NON-RETALIATORY LOVE (5:38-42) Passivity ^{Exodus 21:22-25, Leviticus 24:17-20, Deuteronomy 19:16-21}

5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'" In this statement, Jesus quoted directly from three verses in the Mosaic Law ^{Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21}.

Exodus 20 contains the Ten Commandments (essence of the moral law); Exodus 21-22 contain a series of ordinances that applied the standards of the Ten Commandments to the life of the young Hebrew nation. The type of judgement Jesus mentioned is called the principle of exact retribution (*lex talionis*: the law of punishment identical to the offense [lit]). This legal principle was designed for use in the civil courts to define justice and restrain revenge, but the Pharisees improperly applied it to personal relationships.

5:39-42 Jesus said Christians should not resist an evil (*ponēros*: evil in a moral or spiritual sense) person.

His message taught that the duty of Christians is not only to completely refrain from revenge (or even responding), but to allow the 'evil person' to double the injury. He illustrated this with three examples:

(1) if struck (slap of insult) on the cheek, offer the other cheek; (2) if someone takes a tunic (shirt), also give him a cloak (coat); and (3) if forced to travel a mile, go an additional mile (Simon ^{Matthew 27:32}).

Summarizing, Jesus said to give to anyone who asks, and not reject anyone who asks to 'borrow'.

The context of Jesus' message can be better understood by looking at other Biblical uses of the Greek word translated "resist" (*anthistēmi*). Man is exhorted not to resist God's will ^{Romans 9:19}, God's authority delegated to the state ^{Romans 13:1-2} and God's truth ^{Acts 6:8-10, 13:8, 2 Timothy 3:8, 4:14-15}; however, man is told to "hate" the general concept of evil ^{Psalms 97:10, Proverbs 8:13, Amos 5:15} and to resist the devil ^{James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8-9}.

Therefore, the lack of resistance Jesus spoke of here is limited to personal relations with evil persons.

Jesus demanded His followers to have a personal attitude toward evildoers prompted by the principle of grace ^{Romans 12:17-21}, which renounces retaliation so completely as to risk further costly suffering and is never governed by the desire to do harm, but always by the determination to serve the highest good.

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ACTIVE LOVE (5:43-48) Perfection ^{Leviticus 19:18}

5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’” The blatant perversion of the law Jesus quoted narrowed the standard of love (*agapao*: God-type, sacrificial love) by leaving out the phrase “as yourself”, by eliminating enemies from the category of neighbors and by adding the concept of hating a group of people: enemies.

The rabbis undoubtedly used Scripture to rationalize their tradition of narrowing the definition of “neighbor” to a fellow Jew ^{Leviticus 19:17-18}; however, at the same time, they would have been ignoring other passages that spoke against that interpretation ^{Leviticus 19:9-10, 33-34}, because God stated there was only one law for all people ^{Exodus 12:49}. Also, kindness to an enemy was not just an NT concept ^{Proverbs 25:21}.

Jesus perspective on loving a neighbor is simply when a human being becomes aware that any other fellow human has a need, and, having some means to meet that need, helps the person in need ^{Luke 10:29-37}.

5:44-45 Jesus said that when Christians love enemies and pray for persecutors, they will be called sons of God, the One who created the sun and the rain for both the righteous (*dikaios*: characteristic of justice) and the unrighteous (*adikos*: from *a*: negative and *dike*: justice).

Divine (God-like) love is indiscriminate love, shown equally to good men and bad. And, that love should be expressed not only in deeds (by physical action), but also in prayer (by spiritual action).

5:46-47 Believers who love and greet only those who are close to them act no differently than the worldly Gentiles, and should expect no Heavenly reward (*misthos*: wages).

Jesus exhorted His followers to have virtue (holiness ^{1 Peter 1:15-16}) far exceeding that of a non-believer.

5:48 Jesus stated that a Christian is to “be perfect” (*teleios*: complete, mature) as God the Father is perfect. At the moment of salvation (justification ^{Romans 3:21-26}), the Christian begins sanctification, which is the process of being “transformed” into the likeness of Jesus ^{Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18}. Since Jesus and the Father are the same (in essence) ^{John 10:30, 14:9-11} and the core of the Father’s character is love, then the aim of sanctification is to make each disciple perfect in love, and the goal from the moment of salvation.

The key for a Christian to understand their need to embrace these demanding principles involves three issues. The Christian must (1) recognize how Jesus was treated by mankind and how He responded during His First Coming: in prophecy ^{Isaiah 50:4-7} and in reality ^{Mark 14:65, 15:16-20}; (2) understand that all humans, in their sin nature (fallen state), are “evil” ^{Luke 11:13} and “enemies” of God ^{Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21} and (3) realize the challenging call of Jesus upon their life ^{Matthew 16:24, 1 Peter 2:20-23}. In essence, Jesus said to Christians they should follow in His footsteps, by expressing Godly love in discipline, action and prayer toward “evil” people ^{v.39} and toward “enemies” ^{v.44} – just like He does toward all mankind.

In the six lessons of contrast ^{v.21-48}, Jesus made it clear that the “greater” righteousness Christians are called to is a deep inward righteousness of the heart, where the Holy Spirit has written the law of God. Born-again believers must not imitate the world, but the Father. And when they do, they will reflect the Christian counter-culture Jesus expects, and His followers will impact the world by being Salt and Light.