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The Sermons, Parables, and Teachings of Jesus Christ

Session 10 – The Sermon on the Mount, Part Five, October 18, 2022

Avoiding Oaths, and Loving our Enemies

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus addresses (literal) swearing.

Leviticus 19:12

And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

Deuteronomy 23:21-22

When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.

Matthew 5:33-37

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:

But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Jesus presents such swearing as a matter of arrogance and pride, because man has no ability to keep his oaths – God's world is beyond his control, and so are his own circumstances (Job ch 40-41). Likewise, Leviticus makes failed swearing an insult to God's reputation. Deuteronomy supplies a third aspect, that God will hold us accountable to our oaths made to Him, but that the oaths are not needed. It is a mark of Christian maturity to know our own weaknesses and lack of control of circumstances, which make such oaths foolish.

In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus addresses the concept of retaliation and revenge, which is expounded upon by Paul in the Book of Romans. Jesus is referencing Exodus 21, while Paul references Deuteronomy 32.

Note that there is no biblical conflict here, as the Exodus passage provides legal judgement against an individual for manslaughter or injury, while the Deuteronomy passage is God promising to judge a rebellious people.

Exodus 21:24-25

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Matthew 5:38-42 (Forgoing retaliation)

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:24-25): 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. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Romans 12:17-21

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Deuteronomy 32:35

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

In Matthew 5:43-48, and in a parallel passage in Luke 6:27-38, Jesus addresses loving our enemies.

Matthew 5:43-48 (Love your enemies)

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 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; 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.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Luke 6:27-38 (Love your enemies)

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

The concepts of turning the other cheek, and of loving our enemies, are further enlightened by Romans 5:3b-11.

Romans 5:3b-11

but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Also consider Romans 3:23, 6:23

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ALL are enemies until God redeems us – the ministry of evangelism is reaching out with love to enemies; people who hate and despise both us and God, but there are no other kinds of people who need salvation.

How are we to be the light of the world, if we do not forgo retaliation and do not act with love to those who do not love us?

Matthew 5:14a, 5:16

Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.