



CHAPTER (5) SYNOPSIS = Jesus' Sermon On The Mount Address.

[1.- 8.] DISCUSSED

9. Consistent with His stated intention of upholding the Law (17-20), Jesus reveals that the customary understanding of six biblical injunctions is inadequate or false and seeks to correct them:

9.1. Murder Includes Unrighteous And Unresolved Displays Of Anger Toward A Covenant Brother Or Sister (21-26)

The capital crime of murder is to also be applied to those who are found guilty of displaying unresolved, unrighteous forms of anger (incl. unwarranted/abusive speech) in relation to their covenant brothers/sisters.

9.2. Adultery Includes Sexual Acts Expressed By Those Married/Betrothed Toward Someone Other Than Their Spouse (27-30)

The capital crime of adultery is to also be applied to those who are found guilty of looking upon the nakedness (i.e. naked breast[female], buttocks and genitals) of someone other than their spouse for sexual gratification or have sexually gratified themselves (masturbated) in relation to that individual.

9.3. Divorce Is Permissible Only In Cases Of Sexual Immorality (31-32)

God no longer recognizes as legitimate any divorce which does not have as its reason, "sexual immorality" (πορνεία [porneia]= a term used in the first century to refer to any/all extra-marital sexual activity -e.g. kissing, fondling, masturbation, oral sex, intercourse, viewing pornography, illicit nakedness, illicit sexual conversations, etc.). Any marriage dissolved w/o this as its grounds, is therefore seen by God as still intact. In other words, though they may be viewed as divorced by society, God still views them as husband and wife. As such, their marital union to somebody else makes them guilty of "adultery". ***These rules would apply equally to couples who are betrothed since God views this as the beginning of marriage (inchoate; e.g. Mat 1:18-19).

9.4. All Oaths Include The Judgment Of God (33-37)

God expects us to be a people of our word. Our "simple yes and no" will always carry the force of a binding oath before God (i.e. our word w/ our bond; Psa 15:1-5). As such, it is His judgment we will incur if we neglect those promises/commitments we make. ***Covetousness is probably the biggest reason Christians become guilty of this sin (Eph 5:5 – "idolater" = acting as though you were God – i.e. as though you have infinite resources or time).

9.5. Civil Disobedience/Disrespect Is Prohibited (38-42)

9.5.1. Injunction #5: (38a) "You have heard that it was said" = (As discussed), this phrase represents the beginning of an ancient rabbinic formula used to signal that the customary/current view (regarding a particular law/injunction) was about to be challenged as false or deficient. In this case, the injunction under question is **"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."** = This particular phrase – sometimes called the *lex talionis* (lit. the law of retaliation), represents not only one of most popular ancient law codes¹, but also served as the one the main principles governing the system of justice (or jurisprudence) established by God for His people under the OC. As such, its instruction encompasses far more than simply issues related to retribution/retaliation. In short, this phrase simply means that the punishment shall fit the crime. IOW: the judicial response to all offenses against a person shall not be less nor more than the degree of damage created by such offense. Put yet another way, it shall be an eye -not a tooth, for an eye, and a tooth – not an eye, for a tooth². This included (in some cases) alternative forms of punishment such as compensation being paid to the victim, or loss of income to the perpetrator (e.g. Exo 21:22-27 – Notice, both compensation and loss of income are mentioned as a fulfillment of the eye for an eye principle). Based on a correct understanding, it should be clear why God instituted it. It made sure that those enforcing the law and enacting justice for the covenant community were not abusing such power or failing to provide/protect those abused by others. It was (and is!) in every respect, a law of love for one another (or each person his neighbor) since through its practice there is the promotion of righteousness, respect, and equity or fair treatment in the covenant community. Equally so then, it is a law which demonstrates the great love, genius and general goodness of God. Ironically however, it is the very law which is oftentimes used against God -or to question His moral and intellectual competency.³ Another way in which this law is misunderstood/misused is in relation to its scope (i.e. who it is to be applied to). It is in this respect that Jesus challenges the current thinking.

9.5.2. Jesus' response: (39a) "But I say to you" = Far from serving simply as an adversative to the prior statement, this phrase was also key to identifying the conversation as part of the ancient rabbinic formula of challenge/correction ("You have heard it said" followed by "But I say to you"). More importantly however, this phrase signaled that the one speaking was doing so from a place of divine authority. Not in the sense – that they themselves were divine (though in this case that would also be true), but rather by proxy. In other words, that the authority on which such corrections were being made was the Word of God itself. As such, they came with the purpose of restoring (not destroying) the Law. This (then) was also the purpose of Jesus - restoring the Law to its original intent or ideal design (consistent w/His declaration in Mat 5:17-20).

¹ It is found in such places as the famous 18th century B.C., Code of Hammurabi as well as the Quran (7th century, B.C.).

² "In its day this *lex talionis* was, a great advance. It meant evenhanded justice without respect to persons. No matter how great the offender, he could not escape just punishment, and not matter how small, no more could be exacted of him than his offense merited." – Leon Morris (*The Gospel According To Matthew*, TPNTC)

³ For example, in 1958 the famous civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr condemns this law (and subsequently its Divine Author, God) in his book "Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story", "The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert." Similar statements and judgments against God's law have become the prized bumper-sticker of every rebellious idiot or pseudo-intellect thinking they've found legitimate grounds for bringing a lawsuit against God or drawing into question the wisdom and goodness of His ways.

9.5.3. His corrective (and restorative) instruction: **(39b) “Do not resist** (i.e. do not seek justice against) **the one who is evil”** = As already implied, identifying the specific nefarious person/entity (i.e. “the one who is evil”) is imperative to not only a correct understanding of what Jesus is actually teaching but also how it restores/reveals the correct understanding of the prior law (i.e. an eye for an eye). The number of scholars who fail miserably in this endeavor (i.e. who believe Jesus to be speaking in relation to all people who commit acts of evil against us) is in no short supply. Neither (then) are the absurd conclusions produced by this faulty assumption:

9.5.3.1. Jesus has short-term memory loss or is a raging schizophrenic.

If we are to never “resist” anyone who commits an evil act against us, then what does that say about Jesus’ prior prescription concerning how to handle those who act w/ unrighteous and unrepentant displays of anger against us (see vv 25-26)? Looks like Jesus forgot to take His meds.

9.5.3.2. Jesus also questioned the moral or intellectual validity of the *lex talionis* and called His followers to a “higher standard” of righteousness (i.e. pacifism).

IOW: it isn’t just pagans like Martin Luther King Jr who questioned the prior law of an eye for an eye (punishment shall fit the crime), but Jesus Himself! Jesus had left the old ways of justice behind (i.e. the “lower law”) and was now following in the pacifist’s footsteps (i.e. the “higher law”) of His new mentor Gandhi.⁴ This (of course), does not restore (nor take to a higher level) the prior law. Rather it destroys it. We therefore go from the promotion of righteousness/justice to the promotion of evil.

9.5.3.3. Jesus was under the impression that the best way to curb evil is by giving in to it rather than striving against it.

Never mind that this (too) stands directly against the biblical witness (Ecc 8:11; Pro 28:4; Deu 16:20).⁵

9.5.3.4. Jesus desires Christians to be a community of slap-happy, naked joggers who function as banks for bums.

However we choose to interpret “Do not resist the one who is evil”, directly affects (or determines) how we (also) interpret what follows. As such, this too becomes another absurd conclusion that must be drawn. Christians are people who: love to be slapped (**39c – “if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”**), will gladly give all their clothes away (**40 – “let him... [take your tunic] and your cloak as well”**) will never turn down a request to jog a couple of miles (**41- “if anyone forces you to go one mile...go two miles”**) or the opportunity to turn over their hard-earned money to any low-life who asks for it (**42 - “give to the one who begs from you...”**).⁶

9.5.3.5. Jesus is creating “more” impossible pious platitudes of perfection never meant to be taken seriously.

Such an absurd conclusion is understandable given that most (if not all) of these same scholars hold to similar views as it relates to the OT. IOW: This was the purpose of God’s prior acts in the OT when establishing certain rules (or laws) - to create impossible pious platitudes of perfection as the means to convincing people that salvation must ultimately be all of grace (i.e. we can never measure up to God’s perfect standard so instead do your best and look to Him for the rest). As such, it is not Jesus’ intention that we take it seriously, but instead that we figure out what version of this instruction works for us.⁷

9.5.3.6. The context should not be considered when attempting to interpret the text.

Maybe more absurd than all of the above, is the fact that such an assumption (i.e. Jesus is referring to any and all people who commit evil against us), completely ignores the obvious clues found in the remaining instruction. Consider:

9.5.3.6.1. The act of slapping or forced walking is pregnant w/historical meaning not associated w/just any person(s) (39c, 41).

Similar to modern times, slapping another person was not done to harm but to humiliate. In ancient times, this action also served as a figurative way of referring to the degradation of one’s rights in society. As such, it points not to persons indiscriminately, but rather those persons (or entity) w/the power to take such rights away. Likewise, Jesus’ mention of mileage is most certainly an allusion to Roman soldiers (i.e. not again, referring to just any person).

9.5.3.6.2. The wrong being committed against us takes place in a court of law (40 - “If anyone would sue you...”)

IOW: It is not individuals who are ultimately taking advantage of us, but some form of legal authority.

9.5.3.6.3. The kind of lending being referred to is also tied to those who have the authority to demand it (42).

The word translated “beg” (ESV) is better rendered “demand” and points to individuals (or entities) with the “legal right” to take money from others. Once more, not referring to just anybody.

⁴ Examples of such blasphemous folly among so-called Christian scholars include Craig S. Keener (*The Gospel Of Matthew A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*): “This ‘eye for an eye’ form of law, called the *lex talionis*, provides the foundation for legal ethics by making the punishment commensurate with the offense...Contemporary Jewish law sought to remedy this weakness... A Society could, however, recognize the justice of ‘eye for eye’ while its sages warned against bringing oneself down to one’s oppressors’ moral level by fighting evil with evil.” When did seeking justice become evil?

⁵ John Piper writes, “God gives by concession a legal regulation [i.e. the *lex talionis*] as a dam against the river of violence which flows from man’s evil heart.” (Love If this is true, then what does that infer when the “dam” is no longer in place? Doesn’t that mean evil prevails rather than subsides?)

⁶ “Jesus here warns against legal retribution and goes as far as to undercut legal resistance altogether with a verse that, if followed literally, would leave most disciples stark naked.” – Craig S. Keener (ibid)

⁷ “While these [verses] have powerful shock value, they were not meant to be new legal prescriptions.” D.A. Carson (Matthew, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*); “It is for each disciple to work out for themselves how this principle can be responsibly applied” – R.T. France (The Gospel Of Matthew, *TNICNT*); “Jesus provides a radical example to teach the principle of non-retaliation, not so disciples will explore the limits of His examples.” – Craig S. Keener (ibid).