

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XIII : THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART 7: TRUE AND FALSE RIGHTEOUSNESS CONTRASTED

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
5:33-48		6:27-30,32-36		

Oaths

Matt 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.

SUMMATION

THE PHARISEES: "Whoever swears by God in connection with a statement is obliged to fulfill that statement; other statements may be taken more lightly."

CHRIST: "Flippant use of oaths are not to be used; rather our character should be such that our word is binding."

THE TAKING OF OATHS WAS COMMON AMONG THE JEWS: "The practice of taking an oath was deeply rooted in Pharisaism. A man took an oath to affirm the truth of the word that he spoke. The oath involved a curse that he placed on himself if his word were not true or his promise not fulfilled. This was true of Peter when he was confronted in the courtyard of the high priest (Matt 26:69-74)." [Pentecost, *Words and Works*] "Oaths taken in the name of the Lord were binding, and perjury was strongly condemned in the law (Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12; Deut 19:16-19). Every oath contained an affirmation or promise and an appeal to God as the omniscient punisher of falsehoods, which made the oath binding. Thus we find phrases like 'as the Lord lives' (1 Sam 14:39). The emphasis on the sanctity of oaths led to the feeling that ordinary phrasing need not be truthful or binding. Jesus, however, taught that we should say and mean yes or no and never equivocate." [Ryrie, *Study Bible*]

THE PHARISAICAL PROBLEM WAS ONE OF A MISPLACED EMPHASIS: the Pharisees did stand on the letter of the law as found in the OT (Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 23:21):

- "Ye shall not swear *by My name* falsely" (Lev 19:12)
- "If a man vow a vow *unto the Lord*, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word" (Num 30:2)
- "When thou shalt vow a vow *unto the Lord thy God*, thou shalt not slack to pay it" (Deut 23:21)

The mis-placed emphasis of the Pharisees was therefore: "You shall not break your oath, but shall keep the oaths you have sworn *unto the Lord*." In other words **their emphasis was any oaths sworn "to the Lord" must be kept; an oath not expressly mentioning the Lord was of lesser significance.** Daily conversations began to multiply oaths "by heaven", "by the earth", "by Jerusalem", and (according to Matt 23:16) "by the temple" and "by the altar". **Swearing therefore became almost a contest to see who could impress others by the enormity of the oath. If something was a lie or perhaps never meant to be kept, that was not so bad as long as no oath had been sworn to the Lord.**

JESUS PLACED THE EMPHASIS UPON WHERE IT WAS FIRST INTENDED: the emphasis of each of the verses is upon truthfulness: "*You shall not break your oath, but shall keep the oaths* you have sworn unto the Lord."

- "Ye shall not swear by My name *falsely*" (Lev 19:12)
- "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; *he shall not break his word*" (Num 30:2)
- "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, *thou shalt not slack to pay it*" (Deut 23:21)

"In each case the emphasis is on truthfulness: a person must be truthful when he solemnizes his promise with an oath. He must really mean it. He must also be faithful in keeping the oath; that is, he must carry out his promise." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Other places as well in the OT emphasized the truthfulness we must have in our hearts (e.g. Ps 15:2; 24:4; 51:6; Prov 8:7; 12:19; Jer 5:3; Hos 4:1; Mic 6:8; Zech 8:16; Mal 2:6).

REGARDLESS OF THE "DEGREE OF OATHS", ALL OATHS WERE BINDING. Apparently the rabbis were in the habit of "categorizing" oaths as those absolutely binding, not quite so binding, and those not binding at all (or whatever the groupings may have been). Christ says this is meaningless because whoever swears "by heaven" must be truthful and kept for wasn't heaven

God's throne? So was not the one who swore "by the earth" because wasn't the earth God's footstool (Isa 66:1)? An oath "by Jerusalem" was just as binding because wasn't Jerusalem the city of the great King (Ps 48:3)? Those swearing "by their heads" (i.e. "may I lose my head and therefore my life if what I am not telling you the truth") were likewise invoking the Lord for who can even change their hair color but God? Therefore any oath appealing to these items were just as binding as invoking the name of the Lord along with them.

THE REAL PROBLEM IS INTEGRITY. The emphasis Christ is placing on the oath-taking is that in the heart truth should reign supreme and therefore our daily conversations should be entirely devoid of oaths altogether. Instead of relying on an oath, one should be so honest and forthright that their words should be believed as given, "yes means yes, no means no". "Let your yea or nay in *word* be a yea or nay in *deed*, be as good as your word even unsupported by an oath." [Bruce, Gk NT] **"He was telling them that their character, reputation for honesty, and word should be so true, undefiled, and without duplicity that no one would think it necessary to put them under an oath, for no one would suspect them of deception."** [Pentecost, *Words and Works*] A personal illustration: occasionally while teaching or preaching I have wanted to emphasize the importance and veracity of a certain statement, and I have said something along the lines of "As God as my witness ..." then go on to make the statement. That is not an oath in the strict sense of the word but it occurred to me while preparing for this lesson that is exactly what Christ is talking about! My word should stand as it is without such a statement, and I believe in principle I was violating this teaching (something I will need to watch in the future).

THE SOURCE OF ANYTHING OTHER BEING REQUIRED: The Greek word used may be either neuter ("comes from evil") or masculine singular ("comes from the evil one"). If the neuter sense is used (KJV, RV, RSV, NASV), the meaning would be that the origin of oaths is from evil, i.e. from untruthfulness as is found in society at large. "In a world without sin the oath would be unnecessary but now it is necessary." [Wurth; quoted in Hendriksen, *Matthew*] If the masculine is used (Amplified Bible; Beck; Goodspeed; NEB; Weymouth; Williams) the sense is that it's origin is from the evil one; i.e. the father of all lies, Satan (Gen 3:1,4; Job 1:9-11; Matt 4:6,10,11; Jn 8:44; Acts 5:3; 2 Thes 2:9-11). Either interpretation is correct doctrinally and grammatically either is possible. Wuest: *"that which is more than these things is of the evil which is in active opposition to the good."*

OATH-TAKING AND COURTS: this passage has long been used for some refusing to be placed under oaths in a court of law (it is my understanding for this reason the wording is something as "I do solemnly swear *or affirm* ..." so those with such religious convictions would take the oath). One such example I was surprised to see was Spurgeon himself: "A bad man cannot be believed on his oath, and a good man speaks the truth without an oath: to what purpose is the superfluous custom of legal swearing preserved? Christians should not yield to an evil custom, however great the pressure put upon them; but they should abide by the plain and unmistakable command of their Lord and King." [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] Is this the thrust of Christ's teaching here? I believe not because scripture gives evidence of such oaths being taken:

- Abraham confirmed his promises to the king of Sodom and to Abimelech (Gen 14:22-24; 21:23,24)
- Abraham required an oath from his servant (Gen 24:3,9)
- Isaac made an oath (Gen 26:31) as did Jacob (Gen 31:53; cp 28:20-22), Joseph (Gen 47:31; 50:5), "the princes of the congregation" (Josh 9:15), and the children of Israel (Jud 21:5)
- Ruth made an oath to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-18)
- Ittai the Gittite made an oath to David (2 Sam 15:21)
- Obadiah made an oath to Elijah (1 Kings 18:10)
- the southern kingdom of Judah when renewing their hearts to the Lord during Asa's reign (2 Chron 15:14,15)
- God Himself made oaths, swearing by Himself for there was none greater (Gen 22:16; Ps 89:3,49; 110:4; 132:11; Jer 11:5; Lk 1:73; Heb 6:16-18)
- Jesus Himself was under an oath when He testified that He was the Son of God (Matt 26:63,64)

"What we have here in Matt 5:33-37 (cp James 5:12) is the condemnation of the flippant, profane, uncalled for, and often hypocritical oath, used in order to make an impression and to spice daily conversation. Over against that evil Jesus commends simple truthfulness in thought, word and deed." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Retaliation

Matt 5:38-42 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 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 cloak 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.

Lk 6:27-30 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 cloak 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.

SUMMATION

THE PHARISEES: “Personal vengeance is justified in the law”

CHRIST: “The law of love and forgiveness should be our guide, allowing any vengeance to be left in the hands of God.”

THE PHARISEES DID OBEY THE LETTER OF THE LAW: Ex 21:23-25 says “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe”; Lev 24:20 adds “fracture for fracture” (see also Deut 19:21). “Our Lord refers here to the law of retaliation mentioned which obliged the offender to suffer the same injury he had committed. The Greeks and Romans had the same law. So strictly was it attended to at Athens, that if a man put out the eye of another who had but one, the offender was condemned to lose both his eyes, as the loss of one would not be an equivalent misfortune. It seems that the Jews had made this law (the execution of which belonged to the civil magistrate) a ground for authorizing private resentments, and all the excesses committed by a vindictive spirit. Revenge was often carried to the utmost extremity, and more evil returned than what had been received. This is often the case among those who are called Christians.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] “According to the law, they said, one who suffered injury or loss had a legal right to claim repayment in kind. But the intent of this provision of the law was to control excessive behavior. The law set a boundary on retaliation. However no person was required by the law to react in like manner toward an offender.” [Pentecost, *Words and Works*] This civil law was established to discourage seeking personal revenge. Note the reference to the judgement of the court in Ex 21:22, the civil judicial act of capital punishment in Lev 24:16, and the reference to the civil laws in Deut 19:18.

THE OT DID FORBID PERSONAL VENGEANCE: the OT repeatedly forbids personal vengeance:

- “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart ... thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.” — Lev 19:17,18
- “Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.” — Prov 20:22
- “Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.” — Prov 24:29

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK (Matthew and Luke): “Cheek: literally *the jaw*.... The blow intended is not, therefore, a mere slap, but a heavy blow; an act of *violence* rather than of *contempt*.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] **As with all these examples, what is being emphasized is the spirit behind the teaching rather than the letter of the law.** For example: Jesus was not teaching that we are to literally offer our other cheek upon being hit for even Jesus Himself did not do this when He was struck during His trial (Jn 18:22,23). When we limit ourselves to such extreme literalism we become modern Pharisees, as illustrated by a comment heard from a Baptist pastor: “Jesus told us to turn the other cheek but He didn’t tell us what to do after the other cheek was turned.” The sense is that we are forced to turn the other cheek by following the letter of the law, but after that is struck we are at liberty to act as our old sinful nature pleases. Such literalism distorts the entire meaning from Jesus’ teaching. When taken in light of what immediately follows (Matt 5:39-42, “love thy neighbor”) and with the parallel passage in Luke, the spiritual emphasis becomes more clear. **“Jesus is condemning the spirit of lovelessness, hatred, yearning for revenge.** He is saying, ‘Do not resist the evil-doer with measures that arise from an unloving, unforgiving, unrelenting, vindictive disposition. Once this is understood it becomes evident that **‘to turn the other cheek’ means to show in attitude, word, and deed that one is filled with the spirit not of rancor but of love.**” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “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; ... be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” — Rom 12:19-21.

TAKING OF COAT IN LAWSUIT (Matthew and Luke): the “shirt” being threatened to be taken in a lawsuit was a tunic worn next to the body. “Coat, cloak: the former, the shirt-like under-garment or *tunic*; the latter, the *mantle*, or ampler over-garment, which served as a covering for the night, and therefore was forbidden by the Levitical law to be retained in pledge over night (Ex 22:26,27). To yield up this without resistance therefore implies a higher degree of concession.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] “This robe was considered so indispensable that when taken as a pledge it had to be returned before sunset, since it also served as a cover — often the poor man’s only one — during sleep (Ex 22:26,27; Deut 24:12,13; Ez 18:7; Amos 2:8). In summary: **we have no right to hate the person who tries to deprive us of our possessions. Love even toward him should fill our hearts and reveal itself in our actions.**” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Jesus says if one wins the lawsuit and takes your “coat”, our attitude should not be one of hatred but one of love, so much that we should allow him to have our outer robe (the cloak) as well.

BEING FORCED INTO SERVICE (Matthew): “This word throws the whole injunction into a picture which is entirely lost to the English reader. A man is traveling, and about to pass a post-station, where horses and messengers are kept in order to forward royal missives as quickly as possible. An official rushes out, seizes him, and forces him to go back and carry a letter to the next station, perhaps to the great detriment of his business. The word is of Persian origin, and denotes the *impressment* into service, which officials were empowered to make of any available persons or beasts on the great lines of road where the royal mails were carried by relays of riders.” [Vincent, Word Studies] The word came to refer generally to any compelling into any kind of service and is used in connection with Simon of Cyrene who was compelled to carry Christ’s cross (Matt 27:32; Mk 15:21). What Jesus is saying is that **rather than fulfilling our legal obligation in such matters with bitterness or annoyance towards the one compelling you into service, our attitude should be to carry the burden with a smile.** Compelled to go one mile? — Then go with him two miles!

HELPING THOSE IN NEED (Matthew and Luke): “Once again it is the spirit of the saying that is important. If Christians took this one absolutely literally there would soon be a class of saintly paupers, owning nothing, and another of prosperous idlers and thieves.” [Morris, *Luke*] Jesus here speaks of our attitude of giving. We must not turn a deaf ear when one comes in distress and need. Moreover, **rather than just providing assistance, Jesus tells us to give with the proper attitude: not grudgingly but generously, not selfishly considering the interest but unselfishly, liberally.**

ASK NOTHING IN RETURN? The meaning of the first portion of Christ’s words is obvious but there is difficulty in the second portion as recorded by Luke: not only are we to give but we are not to expect return. Some take this to mean the person who asks is the person who takes; therefore one in deep poverty who comes to us for help is to be helped freely without the expectation of return pay. A much more widely interpretation however (according to Hendriksen, *Luke*) is that the person asking in the first portion of the verse is not the same person in the second portion. Hendriksen gives the following reasons for making these persons different:

- the person who has received a freely given gift could hardly be described as one who “*takes away*” that which is yours
- the wording “*from him who takes away*” is the same verbiage in Lk 6:29 describing one taking away the cloak in the lawsuit: forceful, unjust taking away. Logically the same verbiage in the next verse would have the same reference.

Is Jesus therefore teaching we are not to seek the return of goods stolen from us? It must be remembered many statements emphasize a single aspect of the total truth. While teaching in places we are to surrender our rights for the higher goal of God’s glory, there are other instances when we are to stand up for our rights (Jn 18:22,23; Acts 16:37-40). **The emphasis here by Christ is that our attitude should never be that of taking vengeance,** therefore there may be times when we should be willing to allow a thief to keep the stolen goods.

Love Your Enemies

Matt 5:43-48 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, 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.

Lk 6:32-36 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. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

SUMMATION	
THE PHARISEES: “There is a difference between us and them, and we are to love our own but hate those different.”	CHRIST: “We are to love all people, even those whom we would call ‘our enemy’.”

THE PHARISEES PLACED THE EMPHASIS IN THE WRONG PLACE. The basis for the teaching was Lev 19:18, “*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.*” The Pharisees took this verse and emphasized the words “*the children of thy people*” implying the right to hate those who were not “*children of thy people*”, i.e., your enemy. This misplaced emphasis placed an unjustified wall between the Jews and the Gentiles. “It was in the midst of this intensely narrow-minded exclusivistic and intolerant environment [note the author is referring to the Jews of Jesus’ day, not some modern day Baptists although there are similarities] that Jesus carried on His ministry. All around Him were those walls and fences. He came for the very purpose of bursting those barriers, so that love — pure, warm, divine, infinite — would be able to flow straight down from the heart of God, hence from His own marvelous heart, into the hearts of men. His love overleaped all the boundaries of race, nationality, party, age, sex, etc.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] It should be noted

that no place in the OT is there the additional command “*and hate your enemies*”.

THE EMPHASIS OF CHRIST IS LOVE, EVEN FOR OUR “ENEMIES”. This teaching is unparalleled among ancient writers, and some authors even stating Jesus was the first among mankind to see all people as our neighbors. This is not to teach the removal of all national barriers but it does teach our attitude towards those different than ourselves is to be that of love. This love is to manifest itself in prayer and good works towards those who hate us.

LOVE PROVES OUR KINSHIP WITH THE FATHER. Jesus did not teach this as a “works” thing that we are to do if we are to be saved; rather he taught this is evidence that the new birth has already changed us. Truly this would be an impossible command without the new birth since man naturally loves those who love them. *Beloved let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.* (1 Jn 4:7,8) “As a man’s child is called his, because a partaker of his own nature, so a holy person is said to be a child of God, because he is a partaker of the Divine nature.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

OUR SUPREME EXAMPLE IS GOD HIMSELF. Jesus continues by giving the example of the Father because in a general sense God loves and is good to even those who hate Him, sending rain and sunshine. Note the wording, not that the sun rises and the rain comes, but rather that these items are things provided by the Father. The emphasis is upon **these are works of God, evidence of His tender mercies towards all mankind.** The character of God’s creatures are emphasized as well. It does not say “on the evil and the good ... on the just and the unjust” but rather “on evil and good ... on just and unjust”. The point is that God sends these good things not on those who are the good ones or evil ones, but He sends them on those whose character is that they are evil and unjust as well as those whose character is good and righteous.

TO REFUSE TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES IS TO PUT OURSELVES ON THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL LEVEL AS THE UNSAVED. It’s interesting the example recorded by Matthew is that of the Publican (the tax-collectors) since he was once one himself. Matthew knew only too well what hatred the scribes and Pharisees held towards those in that class. Hatred abounded and the culture was fragmented among at least the Jews, the Samaritans, the Gentiles, the Publicans, the Herodians, the Sadducees, etc. Where was love? — well, the Samaritans loved other Samaritans, the Jews loved other Jews, etc. Therefore **for Christians to follow that example is to be no different than the world. There is nothing exceptional, nothing that overflows or is extraordinary. To despise our enemies is to live exactly as those without Christ live.** “Any common sort of man will love those who love him; even tax gatherers and the scum of the earth can rise to this poor, starveling virtue. Saints cannot be content with such a groveling style of things. ‘Love for love is manlike’; but ‘love for hate’ is Christlike. Shall we not desire to act up to our high calling?” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] **THE KEY TO THIS OBEDIENCE IS TO SEE OURSELVES AS THE FATHER SEES US.** The failure to obey this “law of love” is based upon our old nature, looking through self-righteous eyes in which other’s sins are great and ours is minimized. This attitude is prevalent among those who compare themselves with others rather than with Christ. When we take our eyes off the perfect Son of God we begin to see things in others which make us look pretty good. This develops unnoticed and unchecked until we are content with our spiritual condition, a sure sign of being far from the Lord. Instead of seeing other’s sins as something in which we are fully capable of doing, we see their sins as an abomination among “we who are the separated”. **If Christ were to return today as He did before, He would condemn many believers with the same accusations in which he rebuked the Pharisees.**

BE PERFECT AS OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN IS PERFECT. It should be pointed out that “perfect” here has the sense of “brought to completion, full-grown, lacking nothing” and is used elsewhere in like manner (e.g. the book of James). Following in the tradition of the OT, Jesus makes the reason and goal for the believer’s obedience to be that of the Father. “*You shall be holy, for I Jehovah your God am holy*” (Lev 19:2). **This is not to teach perfectionism, that believers may reach a point in life in which they no longer sin. Jesus continues in the same passage to teach that believers are to pray for the forgiveness of their sins (Matt 6:12), and elsewhere the scriptures teach that any who claims this perfectionism is only deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them (1 Jn 1:8). But what this does teach is that our goal is nothing short of perfection itself. Therefore to wink at our “inconsistencies” and excuse our sins as “mistakes, weaknesses” is to counter the direct teaching of Christ.** Jesus is therefore summing up the teaching of these six examples: we are not to be content with the righteousness of the Pharisees, the half-way obedience to the law; rather we are to strive to imitate the Father’s righteousness.