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The Gospel According to Matthew

The Law is Spiritual (3)

May 27, 2018

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:31ff

Scripture Reading:

Mat 5:38-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' (39) But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (41) And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (42) Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

(43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate

your enemy.' (44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (48) You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Some Christians, such as the Quakers, are pacifists. Their take on Scriptures like this one is that a Christian is never to kill another human being under any circumstances. Others say that self-defense is wrong for a Christian. Still others oppose capital punishment for any reason. And we know in our ministry in the arena of domestic violence and abuse that many times victims have been told by their pastors and other Christians to quietly submit

to the abuser, and in fact submit even more than they have been.

These conclusions lead, however, to non-sensical, anti-biblical, and even cruel responses to evil. For example:

- Romans 13 says that the civil magistrate “bears the sword” so that evildoers might fear. The pacifist necessarily re-invents the meaning of “sword” here
- A Christian is forbidden from being a police officer
- A Christian is not to fight in any war. When Hitler, for instance, was slaughtering millions of people, a Christian nevertheless was forbidden from using arms to defend his country
- When we are assaulted, it is wrong to defend ourselves
- No Christian should own a firearm for self or home protection
- A Christian is never permitted to file a lawsuit to right a wrong suffered
- A Christian then is either prohibited from or very limited in defending others who are being attacked

All of these positions and other very similar ones will often point to Jesus’ words here in the Sermon on the Mount. Love your enemies. If

someone strikes you, just turn the other cheek.

Not only do such conclusions leave us very unsettled, they fly in the face of the actions of Godly people that we see in Scripture. For instance:

Gen 14:14-16 When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. (15) And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. (16) Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

And again:

Neh 4:6-14 So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. (7) But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. (8) And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. (9) And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection

against them day and night. (10) In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." (11) And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." (12) At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us." (13) So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. (14) And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

Neh 4:15-18 When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. (16) From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, (17) who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his

weapon with the other. (18) And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

And more:

Luk 22:35-36 And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." (36) He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.

When it comes to giving to those who ask, we know that the Lord instructs us clearly that we are NOT to give to certain kinds of people:

2Th 3:8-10 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. (9) It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. (10) For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

Pro 21:25 The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

And then we must also carefully notice that Jesus includes this:

(44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

In other words, Jesus is instructing us to deal with our enemies and with those who persecute us *in the same manner as God does*.

Here is a very good insight from Lloyd-Jones (and remember, he lived in London during the Nazi Blitz in which some 50,000 British citizens were killed by bombs which were built *over the years that the pacifists refused to take action against Hitler's violations of the Treaty of Versailles*)-

“Clearly we are face to face here with a subject which has often been debated, which has been frequently misunderstood, and which has always been the cause of much confusion. There is possible no passage in Scripture which has produced as much heat and disputation as this very teaching which tells us not to resist evil and to be loving and forgiving. Pacifism is the cause of much wordy warfare and it often leads to a spirit which is as far removed as possible

from that which is taught and inculcated here by our blessed Lord. It is of course one of those passages to which people rush the moment the Sermon on the Mount is mentioned. Many people, no doubt, have been longing for us to arrive at this point and now at last we have reached it, yet nothing is more important than that we should have taken all this time to come to it, because, as we have seen in these expositions, this kind of injunction can only be understood truly if it is always kept in its context and setting.

...we must never regard the Sermon on the Mount as a code of ethics, or a set of rules to cover our conduct in detail. We must not think of it as being a new kind of law to replace the old Mosaic law; it is rather a matter of emphasizing the *spirit of the law*. So that we must not, if we are in trouble at as to what to do at a particular point, rush to the Sermon on the Mount and turn up a particular passage...these teachings are never to be applied mechanically or as a kind of rule of thumb. It is the spirit rather than the letter....And if our interpretation ever makes the teaching appear to be ridiculous or leads us to a ridiculous position, it is patently a wrong interpretation...if our interpretation makes the teaching appear to be impossible, it also is wrong.” [Sermon on the Mount, MLJ]

Alright then, listen to Jesus' words once more and then let's go through them carefully-

Mat 5:38-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' (39) But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (41) And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (42) Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

(43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (48) You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

You Have Heard that it was Said:

Once again we have Jesus' words which tell us He is exposing the false teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. In this case, the Law in question is not one of the 10 Commandments, but rather a principle of practical Law which is found in several places in the Old Testament. The so-called "Lex Talionis." On the surface of this quotation, it sounds like they were correctly quoting Scripture:

Mat 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

But Jesus did not say "it is written" as he does with Scripture, indicating that the Pharisees were distorting what was written *in its application*.

Exo 21:22-24 "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. (23) **But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, (24) eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,**

Lev 24:19-20 If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, (20) **fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth;**

whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.

Deu 19:18-21 The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, (19) then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (20) And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. (21) **Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**

Now, do not miss the fact that each one of these Scriptures, one each from Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, is Law given to the nation. That is to say, people who broke these laws (criminally or civilly), were to suffer consequences *pronounced by the officials invested with authority to render judgments*. These are not cases of personal vengeance taken by the individual. The severity and kind of penalty is specified and it was to be proportionate to the crime or wrongdoing committed.

Apparently the Pharisees and scribes had taken these Laws and turned them into a code of personal vengeance. Rather than a legal process in a court with a proportionate, just penalty, they had their own code and claimed that this is what the Law meant. Jesus, in

contrast, is saying that the Law is to be applied justly AND that we are to approach wrongs suffered with a the spirit He describes in vss 43ff.

Here is Lloyd-Jones on this:

“As far as the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes is concerned, their main trouble was that they tended to ignore entirely the fact that this teaching was for the judges only. They made it a matter for personal application. Not only that, they regarded it, in their typical legalistic manner, as a matter of right and duty to have an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. To them it was something to be insisted upon rather than something which should be restrained. It was a legalistic outlook which thought only of its rights...They were interpreting it and carrying it out for themselves, and teaching others to do so, instead of seeing that it was something that was to be carried out only by the appointed judges who were responsible for law and order.”
[Sermon on the Mount, MLJ]

Let's take a look at verse 42 briefly before we move on to the principle of loving our enemies in 43ff –

(42) Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

This verse actually supports our interpretation of what Jesus is saying. In this case, there is no wrong suffered. Someone is simply begging or asking to borrow. Now, how are we to respond in accordance with the Law? The Pharisees' "eye for an eye" practice would respond "what's in it for me?" In other words, the Pharisee's philosophy of applying the Law was self-centered, not "love-for-my-neighbor" centered. As usual, the Pharisees conveniently turned a blind eye to other Laws:

Exo 22:22-27 You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. (23) If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, (24) and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. (25) "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. (26) If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, (27) for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

Let me read one more quote to you from Lloyd-Jones that is particularly helpful regarding that opening

statement in this section by the Lord –

"Do not resist the one who is evil" –

"For the world, and for a nation, and for non-Christians the law still applies, and it is the law which says 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' These people are still under that justice which restrains and holds man back, preserving law and order and controlling excesses. In other words, that is why a Christian must believe in law and order, and why he must never be negligent of his duties as a citizen of a State. He knows that the 'powers that be are ordained of God,' that lawlessness must be controlled, and vice and crime kept within bounds – 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' justice and equity. In other words the New Testament teaches that, until a man comes under grace, he must be kept under the law.

It is at this point that all this modern muddle and confusion has entered in. People who are not Christian talk vaguely about Christ's teaching concerning life, and interpret it as meaning that you must not punish a child when it does wrong, that there must be no law and order, and that we must love everybody and make them nice. And now we are seeing the results! But this is heresy. It is 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' until the spirit of Christ enters into us. Then, something higher is expect of

us, but not until then. The law exposes evil and keeps it within bounds and it is God Himself who has ordained this, and all the powers that be that are to enforce it.’

Secondly, this teaching which concerns the Christian individual and nobody else, applies to him only in his personal relationships and not in his relationships as a citizen of his country. This is the whole crux of the teaching.

What then is taught here? Surely there is but one principle in this teaching, and that is a man’s attitude towards himself. We could discuss the Christian in terms of the State and war and all these things. But that is something very much easier than that which the Lord Jesus Christ asks us to face here. What He asks you to face is yourself, and it is very much easier to discuss pacifism than to face His clear teaching at this point. What is it? I suggest that the key is to be found in verse 42: ‘Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.’ That is most important.

As you read this paragraph, your first feeling when you come to vs 42 is that it should not be there at all....we feel like asking, ‘What has this question of borrowing to do with resisting evil and not hitting back, or with fighting and

killing? How does this come in? There, we are given a clue to the understanding of the principles our Lord is here inculcating. He is concerned the whole time about this question of the ‘self’ and of our attitude towards ourselves. He is saying in effect that if we are to be truly Christian we must become dead to self. It is not a question of whether we should go into the Army or anything else; it is a question of what I think of myself, and of my attitude towards myself.”

[Sermon on the Mount, MLJ]

MLJ goes on to summarize:

1. I must be right in my attitude towards myself and the spirit of self-defense that immediately rises when any wrong is done to me.
2. I must deal with the desire for revenge and the spirit of retaliation that is so characteristic of our flesh.
3. What is my attitude toward injustices done to me?
4. And what is my attitude regarding my personal possessions?

“The tragedy of the Pharisees and scribes was that they interpreted an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in a purely legal manner.” (MLJ)

The Law is spiritual. Do you see it? This is what Jesus is teaching here in this Sermon on the Mount. If we take His words and deal with them as some kind of code just like the Pharisees did with Scripture, then we become Pharisees in our thinking and in our practice. With all the sad and harmful results.

We leave off at this point until next time when we will examine in more detail this matter of loving our enemies. Still another word from Christ that is so often twisted and wrongly applied, to the great harm of many.