

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 12: Jesus reminds his disciples to do what is right_120604

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Jesus reminds his disciples to do what is right

Matthew 5:17-48

By Todd Still

Truett Seminary, Waco

Those who restore older homes and cars have a desire to see them as they were before years of wear and tear took their toll. Instead of consigning a rickety house to a wrecking crew or a corroding car to a salvage yard, they are willing to expend tremendous amounts of time, energy and money on repairs and replacement parts.

This lesson from the Sermon on the Mount features Jesus' instruction to his followers regarding the law. Far from wanting to jettison God-given, time-honored teachings, Jesus demonstrates his commitment to explaining and fulfilling sacred writ. He impresses upon his disciples the perpetuity and

indispensability of scriptural commandments (Matthew 5:17-20).

In verses 21-48, Jesus offers instruction on six subjects addressed by Jewish law in the Scriptures-anger (vv. 21-26), adultery (vv. 27-30), divorce (vv. 31-32), oaths (vv. 33-37), retaliation (vv. 38-42) and love of enemies (vv. 43-48). Jesus' intention does not seem to be the abrogation of the law despite discernable and even considerable contrasts between what the law required and what he demands of his disciples. Jesus' principle aim appears to be the restoration of the original purpose of the representative legislation Yahweh had entrusted to Israel.



Before we consider Jesus' instruction on these topics, it may prove helpful to observe that verses 21-48 may be divided into two sections.

David Garland points out a first series begins with the phrase "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times" (v. 21) and deals with laws from Exodus and Deuteronomy. The second series begins, "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times" (v. 33) and deals with laws from Leviticus.

Having briefly remarked on verses 17-20 and having considered the contents and structure of 5:21-48, we may now look at each of the subjects Jesus addresses.

Anger

Various Old Testament texts denounce murder and proscribe the death penalty for murderers (Exodus 20:13; 21:12; Deuteronomy 5:17; Leviticus 24:17). Jesus took the matter further and deeper. By underscoring the serious repercussions of anger and verbal assaults, he addresses the

underlying attitudes and actions that give rise to the rage and hatred that might prompt one to commit murder (v. 22). Moreover, Jesus offers practical counsel on how to reconcile ruptured relations before injurious actions transpire (vv. 23-26).

Adultery and divorce

While the sixth commandment denounces murder, the seventh commandment prohibits adultery-sexual relations outside marriage (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). Jesus opposed adultery, but his instruction extends beyond mere negation. Jesus redefines adultery not only as a lustful act but also as a lustful attitude (v. 28). Jesus stresses one must treat sexual lusts seriously lest one become enslaved or destroyed by degrading desires (vv. 29-30).

In verses 31-32, Jesus equates divorce with adultery, except in the event of unchastity. Later in Matthew's Gospel, when he is queried by Pharisees about the Mosaic legislation permitting divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), Jesus says divorce is out of sync with the divine design (19:4-6). He maintains Moses' ruling on divorce was simply an allowance for their ancestors' hard-heartedness (19:7-9). In our time as divorce rates skyrocket, it would be a positive step if Christian couples viewed divorce as a last resort and not a first recourse.

Oaths

The Old Testament instructs individuals to keep vows made to the Lord (Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21). Closing legal loopholes for those who had grown accustomed to swearing by things connected to but not equated with God (such as "heaven," "earth," "Jerusalem," one's "head"), Jesus prohibits oath-taking and promotes a standard where a disciple's simple "yes" or "no" will suffice (vv. 34-37). A

world where one's word is one's bond may seem quaint, but it is no less Christian.

Retaliation and love of enemies

Whereas the Old Testament permitted the people of Israel to retaliate in a manner proportionate to a given offense (Leviticus 24:20; Exodus 21:24; Deuteronomy 19:21), Jesus calls his followers to forego retaliation. Turning the other cheek, giving one's inner garment and going a second mile might well shame one's opponents and be a form of passive resistance. Be that as it may, Jesus stops short of advocating aggression against one's oppressors (vv. 39-41). He calls his disciples to be generous and gracious to a fault (v. 42). He enjoins them to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors (v. 44). Even as God gives indiscriminately and liberally to all, so should his children (v. 45). It is no tall order to love those who love us and to greet those who greet us; most everyone can manage that much (vv. 46-47). Those who want to mirror their heavenly Father will have to aim much higher (v. 48).

Discussion question

- ◆ Which of these teachings do you feel are most ignored?

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