

LESSON 9: RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE KINGDOM (PART 3: Matt. 5:38-48)

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Today we continue our study of the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher that ever lived...Jesus' sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; cf. Lk. 6:20-38; 11 & 12).
2. **3** Recall last time we began considering Jesus' statement: *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 5:20)
3. Jesus gives 6 concrete examples of the superior righteousness required in His kingdom.
4. In the process Jesus gets to the "heart" of true righteousness, because true righteousness begins in our hearts! Matt. 15:17-20

"If that does not make a person squirm, then he probably is not understanding what he is reading."
 (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 34)
5. Recall the contrasts Jesus is making, six times He draws a contrast between:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,"

(vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43)

versus

"But I say unto you"

(vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)

- A. Jesus isn't contrasting the Old v. New; the contrast is between how the "spin doctors" of the day (scribes & Pharisees) interpreted and applied God's law versus what God's word teaches.
- B. Through these contrasts, Jesus sweeps away the "spin" and gets to the heart of the true righteousness kingdom citizens must possess.
7. **4** We've already addressed the first four of six concrete examples contrasting kingdom righteousness with the unacceptable righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - A. In verses 21-26 Jesus tells us that murder begins in the heart (**1 Jn. 3:15**: *"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."*).
 - B. In verses 27-30 Jesus tells us that adultery begins in the heart.
 - C. In verses 31-32 Jesus discusses MDR ("One man for one woman for life with only one exception.").
 - D. In verses 33-37 Jesus discusses "swearing" (i.e., the taking of oaths).
8. **5** As we continue this morning let's remember:
 - A. What Jesus teaches here (i.e., the concept of what standard our righteousness we must rise to) should challenge us to the very core of our being and permeate how we view every aspect of our lives; every thought as well as every action.
 - B. After we come to an understanding of the righteousness Jesus requires of kingdom citizens it should forever put to rest in our minds the notion of looking for "loopholes" to participate in such things as social drinking, smoking, dancing, mixed swimming, immodest dress, etc.
 - C. ****** We must realize sin originates in the heart long before it manifests itself in overt action!!
Jas. 1:14-15: *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

II. Discussion: (continued from Lesson #8)

5. 6 Jesus teaches on personal retaliation:

Matt. 5:38-42: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

- A. This is another passage of Scripture where many jump to conclusions unwarranted by the text (e.g., absolute passive resistance, no civil and/or military service, unreserved loaning of money to others, etc.).
- B. We must keep in mind several key principles before attempting an exegesis of these verses.
- (1) Basic principles of Biblical interpretation (must be applied lest we jump to false conclusions).
- (a) God’s word is truth (Jn. 17:17), therefore, one passage will not contradict another (i.e., we must harmonize the Scriptures).
 - (b) The first point being true it is demanded that we consult the “*whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27; Psa. 119:160).
 - (c) In Scripture, “...universal affirmations and negations are not always to be universally understood, but are to be limited by their occasions, circumstances, and the subject matter treated” (Pink, p. 108).
 - (i) For example, consider **I Cor. 9:22b**: “*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*”
 - (ii) If we took Paul’s language without limitations in this case it would mean Paul:
 - ☛ Became a thief to save thieves, or
 - ☛ Became a drunk to save alcoholics.
 - (d) “...when anything is absolutely prohibited in one passage, but allowed in another, not the thing absolutely considered is spoken unto in either case, but rather some particular mode, cause, end, or reason is intended” (Pink, p. 108)(e.g., **Matt. 7:1**: “*Judge not, that you be not judged.*” vs. **Jn. 7:24**: “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*”).
 - (e) Last week we saw that Jesus’ statement “*But I say to you, do not swear at all*” (Matt. 5:34) was limited by the context (righteousness of the kingdom vs. unacceptable righteousness of scribes and Pharisees). Other passages showed us that “swearing” (i.e., taking of oaths) was done by Paul (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8), Jesus (Matt. 26:62-64), and God Himself (Gen. 22:16; Lk. 1:68, 73; Acts 2:30; Heb. 6:17-18; 7:20-26).
 - (f) Likewise, when Jesus said, “*But I tell you not to resist an evil person*” His words are limited to the contrast He’s making between the unacceptable righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and the acceptable righteousness of His kingdom.

“In what is now before us we may perceive once more the deep importance of observing the *scope* of a speaker or writer, of ascertaining the meaning and relation of the context, before attempting to expound a passage.” (Pink, p. 109)

- (2) *Nature of contrasts*: Recall the six contrasts Jesus makes is not OT vs. NT, but the *unacceptable* righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees versus the *acceptable* righteousness of His kingdom.
- Recall the scribes and Pharisees had put their “spin” on murder, adultery, MDR, and the swearing of oaths.
 - They had perverted the Law of Moses to only apply to the ‘letter of the law’ and not the ‘spirit of the law.’
 - Only taking the law that far makes one popular with men, because it greatly reduces personal responsibility and gives people a wide latitude to harbor worldly thoughts, ideas, attitudes, etc.

“...there is a very strong desire for revenge in everyone’s heart by nature; and as the Jewish leaders sought to ingratiate themselves with the people rather than please God, they pandered to this evil lust.” (Pink, p. 113)
 - Their “spin,” their standard of “righteousness” allows people to feel comfortable in their sin!

7“It is failure at this very point (i.e., to understand the true nature of contrasts Jesus is making, cvt) which has resulted in some commentators of renown quite missing the force of our present portion. They suppose that our Lord here announced a higher standard of spirituality than Moses did, that He introduced a more merciful code of conduct than that which was required during the Old Testament economy. ...It does seem strange that men who have no slight acquaintance with the letter of Scripture should err so flagrantly. Yet nothing is more blinding than prejudice, and when a pet theory is allowed to dominate the mind everything is twisted and forced to conform to it. Surely it is perfectly plain to every unbiased soul that, as the same God is the Author of old and new covenant alike, there can be no vital conflict between them, that the fundamental principles underlying the one and the other must be and are in full accord.” (Pink, p. 109)

- C. **8** Just as they had perverted God’s word on these other issues (murder, adultery, MDR, swearing), they had done the same thing with “*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*”
- D. They taught that it was an individual’s **personal right** to exact “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*”.
- E. **9** Such was **NOT** the teaching of the Law of Moses!
- The taking of “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” is found three times in the Law of Moses (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21).
 - In each case this principle is **NOT** applied to matters of *personal retribution*, but is a principle to be applied by judges when handing down sentences in court proceedings (Read **Deut. 19:15-21** after quote).

“The word ‘judgments’ (Ex. 21) signifies judicial laws. The statutes recorded therein were so many rules by which *the magistrates* were to proceed in the courts of Israel when trying a criminal. The execution of these statutes was not left to private individuals, so that each man was free to avenge his own wrongs, but they were placed in the hands of the public administrators of the law.” (Pink, p. 110)
 - 10** The teaching of the Old and New Testaments on personal retribution is not different!
Lev. 19:18: “*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*”

Prov. 20:22: “Do not say, ‘I will recompense evil’; wait for the LORD, and He will save you.”

11 “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil.’ There are many who err in supposing that such a precept as this is peculiar to the New Testament. A comparison of the two Testaments will show that identically the same rule of duty obtained in both economies.” (cf. Prov. 25:21-22 and ****Rom. 12:20-21** and Ex. 23:4-5)(Pink, p. 116)

- (4) **12** The essence of the law’s principle was “equivalent retribution”; it served at least 7 purposes:
- (a) **** 1:** It held people responsible for the harm they inflict (A seeming novelty in our weak, watered-down criminal justice system today! Sweden: 18 years max!).
 - (b) **** 2:** It served as a deterrent for other potential lawbreakers (**Deut. 19:20:** “And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.”),
 - (c) **** 3:** It upheld the plaintiff’s right to compensation or justice (example).
 - (d) **** 4:** It took vengeance out of the hands of the plaintiff and put it in the hands of civil authorities (**Ex. 21:22:** “...he shall pay as the judges determine.”). No vendettas!
 - (e) **** 5:** It mandated that punishment fit the crime (**Heb. 2:2:** “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;”) and was a good judicial code (**1 Tim. 1:8:** “...the law is good...”; **Rom. 7:12:** “...the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”). This rule of law is called *lex talionis* (the law of equitable exchange).
 - ☛ If someone puts out your eye, the death penalty is not equitable punishment!
 - ☛ If someone reneges on a contract, the settlement must be in proportion to the actual damages caused (no exorbitant lawsuit awards! *quid quo pro*: fair exchange).

“What is more equitable than an exact *quid pro quo*? Surely it is a most elementary and unchanging principle of sound jurisprudence that the punishment should be made to fit the crime—neither more nor less. So far were the ancients in advance of our moderns that we find a heathen owning the righteousness of such a law” (cf. Judges 1:6-7; Gal. 6:7; Matt. 7:2) (Pink, p. 111)
 - (f) **13 6:** Such laws provided for equity in society, the law applied to servants, to masters, and to all Israelites; and in the process, it protected the weak from the strong, the poor from the rich, etc.
 - (g) **** 7:** Such laws provided for evenhanded justice and prohibited the spirit of revenge that fuels feuds and vendettas (i.e., vengeance that tries to “get more” rather than “get even” and in the process, starts a vicious, unending cycle of violence).
- F. Thus, the scribes and Pharisees perverted the Law of Moses to allow for personal retaliation.
- G. But, the righteousness the kingdom requires does not allow for personal retaliation and retribution (**Rom. 12:19:** “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”; Deut. 32:35).
- H. **14** But, just as “swear not at all” is not an absolute, neither is “resist not evil.”

“But now we must face the question of *how far* this precept ‘Resist not evil’ is binding upon us. Is it to be regarded absolutely? Does it recognize no limitation and make no allowance for exceptions? Is the Christian passively to endure *all* wrong? Here is where we must seek the guidance from the Analogy of Faith, or in other words, ascertain the teaching of collateral

passages. If this be done, it will be found that while our text enunciates a principle of general application, it is not a universal one. To deduce from it the doctrine of unlimited non-resistance to evil is to pervert its teaching, and to exalt the letter above the spirit; just as to insist that the plucking out of a right eye which offends or the cutting off of an offending right hand (verses 29, 30) must be understood and obeyed literally, would be to miss entirely our Lord's meaning in those verses." (Pink, p. 117)

I. **15** Five reasons why "*resist not evil*" is not unqualified and thus **NOT** universal in scope:

- (1) **** First:** The nature of the example Jesus cites, "*But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*" (Matt. 5:39) Jesus is dealing with personal insults, not life-threatening attacks!

"Disciples should restrain from retaliating or responding when the insult or ill-treatment is a matter of honor or pride. I do not believe that Jesus is forbidding his disciples from defending their own life when it is threatened. A slap on the cheek is a mere personal insult, a challenge to one's honor, not a life-threatening blow. Jesus seeks to remove from one's heart the anger, hate, resentment and pride that leads him to want to get even." (Smith, p. 45)

- (2) **** Second:** Christians have a specific duty towards those who have wronged them (Matt. 18:15-17).

- (a) This is a very definite resistance of evil, and requires us to challenge the wrong-doer, examine the offence, and for the wrongdoer to be punished.
- (b) It is certainly possible to abuse and misuse this scriptural principle, but God did not design this process as an outlet for personal revenge or retribution.

- (3) **** Third:** Offering no resistance to evil may cause us to fail to support and cooperate with divine-appointed authorities.

- (a) God sanctions civil government as "*God's minister*" "*to execute wrath on him who practices evil*" (Rom. 13:4).

- (b) Thus, we have the obligation and duty to call the authorities and report crimes (in doing so we are certainly "*resisting evil*"!).

"When the injury received is a personal and private one it is the Christian's duty to bear it in the spirit of meekness, so long as by so doing he is not encouraging evil-doers and thereby rendering them a menace to others. If I am walking on the pavement and a drunken motorist mounts the kerb, knocks me down, and then drives off, it is plainly my duty to take the number of his car, report the offence to the police, and if required bear witness in the court." (Pink, p. 118)(I would also unhesitatingly add: If the opportunity presented itself and I could prevent the drunken driver from continuing on, I should do so!)

"What right have we to enjoy the social and civil privileges of a community if we ignore its obligations? Even though we may forgive an offence against our property, have we no responsibility to our neighbours? If I corner a burglar in my house am I at liberty to turn loose upon society one who will plunder its property and imperil its security? There are times when it is the clear duty of a Christian to hand a law-breaker over to the law." (Pink, p. 119)

"People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf." (George Orwell, 1903-50, British writer)

- (c) Civil law also gives us the right to use force (even deadly force) when our lives or the lives of others are in imminent danger from a law-breaker. Such is not without scriptural precedent (Gen. 14:14-16; Heb. 7:1).

- (d) When we follow the laws of the land (i.e., as long as they are not anti-scriptural, cf. Acts 5:29) and allow the civil authorities to perform their God-appointed duties in punishing evil-doers we are allowing God to avenge us (Rom. 12:19).
- (4) **16 Fourth:** A literal interpretation of this passage would destroy civilized society and allow evil to operate without constraints.
- (a) Clearly if “*resist not evil*” was taken literally by every citizen **all** crime would go unreported.
- (b) The chaos that would reign would be unimaginable!
- (c) God’s purpose in providing civil government would be nullified! Cf. Rom. 13:1-7
- (5) **** Fifth:** Godly men of the Scriptures “*resisted evil*”:
- (a) Paul “*resisted evil*” (Acts 16:37; 25:9-11).
- (b) Jesus “*resisted evil*” (Jn. 2:13-16, this was not passive resistance but vigorous aggression; 18:22-23, note that here Jesus definitely did not “*turn the other cheek*!”). “He did not answer force with force and return blow for blow, but He exposed and rebuked the wrong.” (Pink, p. 118)
- J. When Jesus and Paul “*resisted evil*” they weren’t driven by selfish motives of personal revenge.
- “That which He was refuting was the taking of *private* vengeance on those who wrong us.” (Pink, p. 114)
- “He is not teaching that evil doers are to go unchecked to assault over and over again. He is not suggesting that we passively endure evil treatment or sit idly by while evil triumphs. Jesus is simply seeking to abolish the desire to retaliate or seek vengeance for personal satisfaction.” (Smith, p. 45)
- “Resist not: think not of taking the law into your own hands, requiting the adversary as he has done to you. Cherish not against him the spirit of revenge, but be actuated by nobler principles and more spiritual considerations.” (Pink, p. 115)
- K. At the heart of Jesus’ teaching in this section is our attitude toward self.
- (1) To be Christ’s true disciple we must die to self...completely! Cf. Lk. 9:23; Gal. 2:20
- (2) Therefore, this discussion is not concerning whether a Christian can serve in the Army, be a policeman, or defend himself against a life-threatening attack.
- (3) It boils down to what do I think about myself. Is my opinion of myself so high that I have to avenge myself of every slight and insult, regardless of how minor? **NO! 1 Pet. 2:21-23:** “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*”
- L. **17** I feel compelled to address an important issue this passage always raises: Is it a sin to participate in civil government, to serve as a policeman, or to be in the armed forces?
- (1) It is clearly not a sin for a Christian to serve in civil government.
- (a) God ordained civil government and it “*is God’s minister*” (Rom. 13:4; cf. Dan. 4:25; Jn. 19:11).
- (b) If it is a sin to serve in civil government, then God is responsible for causing those serving in something He “*ordained*” to sin (Jas. 1:13).
- (c) There are notable cases in the Bible of saints serving in civil governments:

- (i) Joseph (Gen. 41:39-41),
 - (ii) Nehemiah (Neh. 1:11),
 - (iii) Daniel (Dan. 2:48, “chief of the governors”),
 - (iv) Mordecai (Est. 8:1-2, 9),
 - (v) Cornelius (Acts 10 & 11),
 - (vi) Erastus (Rom. 16:23, “treasurer of the city” (i.e., Corinth)),
 - (vii) “saints...of...Caesar’s household” (Phil. 4:22, “most likely the imperial staff, both slave and free” TDNT).
- (2) Forbidding civil or military service makes Christians into hypocrites (Acts 23:16-35, see note below).

Note: Paul would have sinned when he requested the protection of the Roman government when his enemies plotted to take his life (Acts 23:16-35). He surely knew that the Romans would protect him to the point of killing if necessary. If the soldiers (Christian or non-Christian) who protected him sinned in doing so, then Paul sinned in calling on them. If Paul acted properly in asking for their protection, the soldiers did a moral thing in answering his plea. It is irrelevant that the soldiers did not have to use force in this case. The relevant issue is that Paul acknowledged their right to do so and still requested their services.

- (a) Is it ever wrong to kill in service to the state? Yes!
 - (i) Being an agent of the state does not give one a “license to kill” (Jn. 19:11).
 - (ii) God ordained and approved the institution of marriage, but God’s marriage laws are abused.
 - (iii) In like fashion, God ordained and approved of civil government, but He does not approve of abuses of government (e.g., anti-scriptural laws, immoral wars; Dan. 4:25; Jn. 19:11).
 - (iv) It is conceded that it is not always easy to ascertain when a governments actions “cross the line” and would involve a Christian in sin.
 - (v) Therefore, we should not make matters a test of fellowship, but leave everyman free to examine his own conscience.
- (b) **18** Some will respond, “But aren’t we supposed to love our enemies? Wouldn’t the use of force and/or the taking of life be irreconcilable with the command to love our enemies?”
 - (i) ****** If it is a sin to serve in civil government and fulfill its God-given functions, then God is responsible for causing those serving to sin (Jas. 1:13).
 - (ii) The exercise of any form of discipline does not necessarily preclude love (Prov. 13:24; 2 Thess. 3:14-15).
 - (iii) Does “love your enemies” overrule our love for God, for righteousness, for justice, etc.?
 - (iv) Would it be love to sit idly by while a family member is raped or murdered? A neighbor? A total stranger?
 - (v) If “love your enemies” extended that far, how would one explain the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), or Paul blinding Elymas (Acts 13:8-11), or that

impenitent sinners “shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8)?

(c) Scripture must be harmonized otherwise we are wresting the them! 2 Pet. 3:16

III. CONCLUSION: 19

1. Time has gotten away, Lord willing, next time we'll consider the rest of Matt. 5:38-42 and finish Jesus' discussion on kingdom righteousness.
2. In the introduction I said Jesus' teaching here would:
 - A. Help those with good and honest hearts to see themselves as God sees them. Are you beginning to see some things about yourself that God sees?
“If that does not make a person squirm, then he probably is not understanding what he is reading.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 34)
 - B. Should challenge us to the very core of our being and permeate how we view every aspect of our lives; every thought as well as every action. Do you feel challenged?
 - C. And, after we come to an understanding of the righteousness Jesus requires of kingdom citizens it should forever put to rest in our minds the looking for “loopholes” so we can engage in things like social drinking, smoking, dancing, mixed swimming, immodest dress, etc.
3. **20** Are you getting Jesus' point? (Eccl. 12:13-14; Matt. 22:37; Isa. 66:2)
4. Remember Heb. 4:12-13
5. Invitation (Matt. 11:28-30)

IV. REFERENCES:

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