

The Sermon on the Mount
Class Notes
Session 10

Matthew 5.33-37 Recall: Jesus is summarizing teachings found in the law. He sets forth the ideal and “spirit” behind God’s commands.

Jesus now turns to “vows” and “oaths.” How would communication be for “Kingdom People”?

In the A.N.E., an oath invoked a deity’s witness that the individual was telling the truth.

(v.33): Here, Jesus is summarizing several Old Testament laws...*Exodus 20.7...Leviticus 19.12...Numbers 30.2...Deuteronomy 23.21–23.*

(vs.34-36): Jesus’ command: No oaths at all! Fearing that they would defile God’s name, many people would substitute other significant holy “places” to “swear by.”

The understanding was that by swearing by an object other than God lessened their need to keep/fulfill the oath or vow.

However, Jesus points out that these other “places” were closely related to God (His “throne” “footstool,” “city”).

Even the hairs of the head belong to God and under His control!

(v.37): Jesus’ direction...A simple “yes” or “no” is enough—if you are a trustworthy person.

This saying of Jesus seems to have been repeated in the early church...

...*2 Corinthians 1.18-19...James 5.12.*

Jesus strongly affirms this with His “anything more than this comes from evil...”

In other words, whether by swearing to God or by something “less” than God, with the intention to deceive, follows from only one source...Satan himself!

John 8.44.

The presupposition behind oaths is that there are two types of communication...

...One which Demands commitment (oaths).

...One which Expects commitment. (Statements without oaths).

Disciples should be committed to every statement. If so, there would be no need for oaths!

Oaths...like divorce...is a concession to our sinfulness/brokenness.

Matthew 5.38-42 Revenge...Retaliation...and Jesus’ “Third Way.” Jesus is speaking here about interpersonal relationships. How can Kingdom people find alternative, non-violent resolutions.

In Jesus’ day, the events described were common experiences...Again...Jesus is “awakening” the moral imagination to unexpected possibilities.

Context is important to remember...Many of the people Jesus was teaching/speaking to were the poor/powerless/peasants.

(v.38): “You have heard that it was said ... Jesus is referring to... *Exodus 21.23–25...Leviticus 24.19...Deuteronomy 19.21.*

This is the principle of *lex talionis*...“law of kind.” This was meant to *restrain* vendettas and to compensate victims *fairly*.

(vs.39-41): Yet Jesus calls for something different/more. “Do not resist”...The Greek word is ἀνθίστημι (*anthistēmi*)...“To set up against” (Someone) “Engage.” This is a military term.

Jesus says not to mirror or violently engage the enemy or oppressor. Now...Jesus gives *every-day* examples...

The Right Cheek... A slap on the right *cheek* was a back-handed slap meant to shame and dishonor (and hurt!)

Turning the cheek would render the attacker unable to slap *again*...Thus subverting the power of the oppressors to Humiliate!

The Garment... *Exodus 22.25-27...Deuteronomy 24.10-13, 17.* The setting is in a court of law.

If the debt could not be repaid...you have to go to court. Only the poorest would have nothing but a garment to give as collateral.

The tunic was the basic garment, a long-sleeved inner robe similar to a nightshirt. The “cloak” was the outer robe which was an indispensable clothing...especially for the poor.

Surrendering both the inner and outer garments might leave one naked (Is Jesus using hyperbole?) To “strip” in a public court would shame those looking on—especially the aggressor!

The situation is reversed. The power is in the hands of the powerless.

The Second Mile... Jesus is referring to the Roman practice of “*Angareia*” ...the forced imposition by Roman soldiers compelling citizens to carry something.

However...Roman law allowed this for only one mile!

In all these situations...the oppressed recover the initiative...without further hurt, punishments and dishonor! Human dignity as God’s image bearers is reasserted!

In these (and other) ways, evil is overthrown by the “force” of its own momentum! The rules are Caesars...but how one responds to the rules are God’s!...Caesar has no power over that!

(v.42): Within the context of retaliation...Here Jesus is likely prohibiting disciples from seeking vengeance against others by refusing to help them in their time of need.

By giving the necessities of life even in the midst of conflict, disciples of Jesus could possibly restore the relationship!

My life and Jesus’ “Third Way” ... ?

Going Forward: “Jesus instructs His disciples not to resist evil people, a teaching that has provoked much debate over the centuries. As with some other statements Jesus made in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, there is a degree of exaggeration in what He says. We need to grasp His essential point. Jesus provokes self-examination in every Christian’s heart: have I always been generous in sharing with the needy, whether they are good or evil? Jesus was totally generous in giving His life for us. In Him, we receive forgiveness and renewal.” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*. (Concordia Publishing House).