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# *You Have Heard... But I Say*

*By Bryan Hodge*

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount uses these words six times. Two verses are helpful in interpreting these words. (1) Matthew 5:20, "For I say to you, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." The words "you have heard" concerns the perverted approach that the scribes and Pharisees had to God's teaching. (2) Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." The law would one day be abolished (Ephesians 2:15), that is reduced to inactivity (Vine's). However, Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. He did not come to fight against it. Contextually, after making this point, it seems unlikely that this message was intended to contrast the Old Testament and the New Testament. While Jesus may expand principles taught in the Old Testament, His emphasis seems to be on the scribes and Pharisees' perversion of God's word.

**1. "You have heard it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause... and whoever says to his brother 'RACA!'... Whoever says 'You fool!' Shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-26).**

Murder is condemned in the Bible. The Old Testament taught against murder (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). The New Testament also teaches that murder is wrong (Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 3:15).

However, some deceived themselves into thinking that God only cares about "big things" like murder. The scribes and Pharisees were of this mind-set. It is said that 'RACA' was "frequently used in rabbinical writings" (McGarvey, *The FourFold Gospel*, p. 237).

In truth, God demands much more. Even the Old Testament taught, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). One cannot have a good relationship with God and hate or mistreat his fellow man (Matthew 5:23-26; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 John 3:18; 4:20; Malachi 2:13; Proverbs 21:13; 22:22-23).

**2. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-30).**

Adultery is condemned in the Bible. The Old Testament taught against adultery (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). The New Testament also teaches that adultery is wrong (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-ff; Galatians 5:19-21).

However, some deceived themselves into thinking that God only cares about “big things” like adultery. Today, some say, “It is okay to look at the menu, as long as you don’t eat,” or “It is okay to window shop, so long as you don’t buy.”

In truth, God demands more. Even the Old Testament taught, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exodus 20:17). Job said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman” (Job 31:1). Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Note: The words “to lust” denote purpose. This was no passing thought. This was an intentional lustful look. The term “looks” denotes a continuous action. It could be rendered, “keeps on looking” (present tense).

**3. “Furthermore, it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’** But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality (fornication, KJV) causes her to commit adultery...” (Matthew 5:31-32).

It is true that when divorce occurred, a certificate of divorce was to be given (Deuteronomy 24:1, 3; Jeremiah 3:8). In this, they were correct.

However, some evidently thought that so long as a certificate of divorce was given, then all was okay. But, what about the wife? The literal language is that she is adulterized. What does this mean? (a) Some have suggested that the meaning is that she is “stigmatized as an adulteress” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel*, p. 232). The difficulty with this view is that they were divorcing for many reasons. There would not have been an automatic assumption of infidelity. (b) Another view is found in her likely remarriage. Wayne Jackson, “Now the presumption is this: if a man just whimsically and capriciously throws his wife out – he divorces her – what will she likely do? Go find another man!” (*Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 34) Jonathan Edwards, “A woman so divorced found herself many times in practical necessity of remarriage to find support for herself... she was under pressure to enter into a union which was illegitimate because she was not eligible to remarry” (*Spiritual Sword Lectures on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, p. 362). Women had a difficult time without a husband, in those days (Ruth 1:8-9 cf. 3:1).

We should consider how our actions affect others. We should no longer think only of self (Philippians 2:4).

**4. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely,** but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven... nor by the earth... nor... by your head... But let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no,’ ‘no’...” (Matthew 5:33-37).

This is not forbidding any and all types of oaths. The Old Testament regulated oath taking (Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23, etc.). Furthermore, consider: God swore (Hebrews 6:13; Acts 2:30; Luke 1:73); Paul swore (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8). Every time one enters into a marriage vow or business contract he is swearing, that is – he is taking an oath.

Two other passages are helpful in our interpretation: (a) Matthew 23:16- 22. Jesus said “woe to you, blind guides, who say ‘whoever swears by the temple it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it...And whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the

gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it” (Matthew 23:16,18). (b) James 5:12, “Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.” The word “other” is not heteros (another of a different kind) but allos (another of the same kind).

The kind of oaths forbidden concern the word games played by some. Guy N. Woods, “Some rabbis held that one was bound to tell the truth only when the names of Deity were mentioned, on the ground that God became a party to the agreement... but that if His name were not included in the oath any promise made one did not have to keep... other avoided the use of God’s name in their oaths by swearing by the handiwork of God – the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars” (Commentary on James, p. 289).

We should be truthful, honest people. Consider Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8.

**5. “You have heard it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’** But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek turn the other to him also...” (Matthew 5:38-42).

The Old Testament did say, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth...” (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:19-20; Deuteronomy 19:21) This expresses a need for justice. Moreover, it seems to have been set forth to limit the punishment. Legally this is known as Lex Talionis, law of like punishment. An example: A black eye did not justify the taking of a life. The punishment was to fit the crime.

However, in time, some had abused these words using them to justify their get-even attitudes and vengeful spirits. I once saw a young man who seemed to have this attitude. His bumper sticker on his truck which read “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” I think he may have meant, “If you mess with me, I will return the favor.”

God’s word should be studied in its totality, and not cherry picked. It taught: (a) “Vengeance is mine, and recompense” (Deuteronomy 32:35 cf. Romans 12:19). Note: One of the ways that He repays is through the use of governments (Romans 13:1-7). (b) “Do not say, ‘I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work’” (Proverbs 24:29). (c) “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if his thirsty, give him water to drink. For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you (Proverbs 25:21-22 cf. Romans 12:20).

We should be a peaceful people. “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). “Pursue peace with all people” (Hebrews 12:14).

Note: The slapping of the right cheek by the back of the left hand was a personal insult. This is not speaking of a life-threatening situation.

**6. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’** But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-48).

The words “you shall love your neighbor” are found in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18 cf. Matthew 22:39), but the words, “hate your enemy” are not. It is worth noticing that Jesus did not say, “It is written” (e.g. Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 24:46) nor did he say, “The scriptures” say (e.g. Matthew 21:42; 22:29; Luke

24:27), nor does he say “Moses” said (e.g. Mark 1:44; 7:10; 12:26; John 5:46; 7:19). Instead, He says, “you have heard that it was said...”

God did not want them to be hateful of others, even their enemies. “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it” (Exodus 23:4-5). “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles” (Proverbs 24:17). Concerning foreigners, He instructed, “Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19).

Jesus asks, “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:46-47).

### **Summary**

God cares about more than murder, adultery, and divorce laws. He cares about how we treat others. He cares about our minds. He cares about our attitudes. God cares about more than a contracts wording. He cares about our integrity. God cares about more than the wrong done to us. He cares about how we respond to that wrong. God cares about more than how we treat those who are easy to love. He cares about how we treat those who are hard to love.