

## Jesus Disciples and the Law: Part B

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say simple be ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

### I. A Kingdom Perspective on Honesty (33-37)

a. **Quotation:** “You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn”

i. Not a direct quote, but a good summary of OT texts

1. Ex. 20:7
2. Lev. 19:12
3. Num. 30:2

ii. Principle of honesty is clear

iii. Slight distinction between Oaths and Vows

1. Oaths are made to men, Vows to God
2. Oath of office vs. Marriage Vows

iv. Rabbinic teaching makes subtle change:

1. Emphasis switches from *in vain* to *name of the Lord*.
2. From Perjury to Profanity
3. No longer about fellow men but about external righteousness
4. Elaborate rules to avoid profanity, no longer actually concerned with honesty

v. Becomes a means for clever men to exploit others with creative loopholes

1. Lucy and Football
2. Crossing fingers
3. Fine print in contracts
4. Maintaining “technical” righteousness while intending to deceive

b. **Laying Bare:** “But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.”

i. Blatant contradiction

ii. Exposes the Rabbinic teaching as inescapably faulty doctrine

1. The point was to avoid taking the Name of God in vain

2. What is “close enough” to the name of God? Those are binding.
3. What is “not close enough”? Those are not binding
4. Matt. 23:16-22
- iii. Swear by Heaven: God lives there
- iv. Swear by Earth: It’s God’s Earth
- v. Swear by Jerusalem: It’s God’s city
- vi. Swear by your head: God made your head.
  1. To swear by your head is to say “may I lose my head if I break my promise”
  2. You don’t have that kind of authority
  3. The reference to black and white hairs probably refers to the aging process
  4. You can’t make yourself older or younger: even your very self is under God’s authority
  5. To swear by yourself is blasphemy too
- vii. There is no escaping God’s authority and jurisdiction: the rabbinic games are doomed.
- c. **Instruction:** “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil”
  - i. Jesus’ alternative is simple: be honest and truthful in your speech.
    1. Do not settle for external, “technical” honesty
      - a. It is possible to speak no falsehoods and yet to deceive
      - b. Disciples of Jesus should be characterized by deep and abiding truthfulness
      - c. Psalm 15
    2. Make oath-taking unnecessary
      - a. Why does Lucy bring a signed document?
      - b. We swear oaths because we would not be trusted otherwise
      - c. If we are characterized by unflinching straight speech and integrity of heart and word, no oaths will be necessary
    3. ‘From evil’ probably refers to Satan,
      - a. If our speech is more than simple honesty, we are intending to deceive in some manner
      - b. Satan is the father of lies
      - c. Our speech shows who we are
      - d. From God, in whom there is no change or falsehood, or from Satan, the father of lies
  - ii. A few concerns:
    1. Should we never take oaths?
      - a. Anabaptists and Quakers take this approach
      - b. Simplistic application of Jesus’ words
      - c. Jesus and Paul both are put under oath and do not refuse

2. If oaths exist because of man's potential deceitfulness, why does God swear? Also, why do Jesus and Paul use phrases like "Truly I say to you" and "I am not lying"?
  - a. In general, oaths can also be to assure those who are tempted to doubt
  - b. Also a covenantal deal
- iii. Application:
  1. Love the truth in our hearts
  2. Do not think that external truthfulness that conceals a heart that desires to deceive is okay.
  3. Avoid exaggeration and embellishment
  4. Speak truly
- iv. Trust in God is the main issue here



"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 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. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to

go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”

## II. Kingdom perspective on retaliation (38-42)

### a. Quotation: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”

i. Direct quotation (Ex. 21:24, Lev. 24:20, Deut. 19:21)

ii. Part of the *lex talionis* or law governing retaliation

1. Meant to limit retribution and avoid leniency
2. Concerned with justice being done
3. Not necessarily physical harm
4. Payment for damages

iii. Civil principle: court of law

### b. Laying Bare: No specific laying bare; rather implicit

i. Reasonable to assume that the right and good principles of *lex talionis* was being taken to justify personal revenge

ii. Not “you hit my car, so by law your insurance pays for it” but rather, “you hit my car, so I’m gonna take a hammer to your car.”

iii. Difference between personal and civil justice

### c. Instruction: “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. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one would borrow from you.”

i. Do not resist the evil one

1. Be willing to be personally wronged, do not hold on to your personal dignity or belongings.
2. Not an instruction to compromise or be complicit with evil
3. Rather a reference to the disciple’s personal interaction with those individuals who oppose them
4. Not a reason to be slack in doing justice

ii. Four Illustrations:

#### 1. The Slap

- a. A right-handed man will slap another’s right cheek by a backhanded blow
- b. This is the insulting blow, with some sting
- c. Not intended to harm the body but to harm the dignity
- d. Jesus instructs his disciples to be willing to suffer further insult and abuse
  - i. Reject this: “If I let him get away with this, he might do it again! I need to protect my interests.”
  - ii. Rather: “If he does it again, so be it. I must be pure of heart.”

- e. Some qualifications:
  - i. This is not a prohibition on self-defense
    - 1. Jesus could have used any example: “If someone gauges out your right eye, let him gauge out your other also”
  - ii. Endure without personal revenge, do not invite further abuse, don’t be a doormat.
    - 1. Jesus withdrew from situations where others were trying to harm him
    - 2. Jesus protested the injustice of his own beatings, as did Paul
  - iii. Don’t neglect your duties as a member of society or properly motivated prosecution
    - 1. This is primarily about the heart
    - 2. Prohibits personal animosity, not justice.

## 2. The Lawsuit

- a. This is a legitimate lawsuit, perhaps due to actual wrongdoing on your part
- b. Terminology:
  - i. The “tunic” is a close-fitting garment worn next to the body. Extending to the angles, made of linen or wool. Valuable. Often used as payment or collateral.
  - ii. The “cloak” is an outer robe or wrap. Often used as a blanket. Very valuable. Protected by OT law.
- c. Two possible interpretations:
  - i. Hyperbole:
    - 1. Jesus is saying to be so willing to be pure in heart and deed, that you should be willing to be left naked rather than hold out on paying what is due your enemy
  - ii. Thoroughness:
    - 1. Jesus is saying we should go above and beyond the requirements of the law to be more than fair and ensure that the enemy is not cheated
- d. Regardless, the idea here is summed up in Romans 12:14-21,
  - i. Particularly in verses 18-20

## 3. The Conscription:

- a. Least familiar to us
  - i. Probably referring to Roman oppression wherein Roman soldiers could force Jews to do menial chores for them
  - ii. Requisition services for carrying things, etc.



d. "The meek will inherit the earth"

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

d. **A Kingdom Perspective on Love and Hate (43-48):**

i. **Quotation:** "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy"

1. Blatant addition to and perversion of the OT text
2. Nowhere in the law does it say to hate your enemy.
  - a. Far from it: Ex. 23:4-5 and Deut. 22:1-4
3. The omission is as telling as the addition;
  - a. Love your neighbor *as yourself*.
  - b. Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.
  - c. Changes from *how?* to *whom?*
4. Jews probably applied this nationally: I am to love my fellow Jews and I ought to hate gentiles

ii. **Laying Bare:** Again, no specific laying bare, but it is implied in the quotation

1. The intention of the Law is clearly to love both friend and foe
2. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is asked "Who is my neighbor?"
  - a. The whom rather than the how
  - b. Jesus answers that anyone you are in position to aid is your neighbor
  - c. Who do you want to be consider *you* a neighbor
3. A few concerns:
  - a. How are we to hate what God hates?
  - b. What about the Imprecatory Psalms?
  - c. We are to both love individuals and seek their good and also to long for the justice of God.
    - i. Not "Lord, may Harry be struck down in your righteous anger and his house turned into a pile of rubble and his orphaned children starve in the streets."
    - ii. But rather "Lord, may your justice be done here on earth and may all those who reject you burn in the lake of fire... and may Harry not be among them. May he repent of his evil and come to Christ."

iii. **Instruction:** "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you"

1. This is the logical conclusion of the previous antithesis
2. Our enemies here are not national enemies or even an individual enemy, though these are certainly included, but extends to the one who persecutes the Christian disciple as an expression of his hatred of the Christian God
3. What does it mean to Love?
  - a. Seek their good, not return evil for evil, willing to lay down our personal animosity, etc.
  - b. But also to pray
    - i. John Chrysostom called this the “very highest summit of self-control”
      1. Prayer is hard enough as is
      2. To pray for your enemies is about as hard as it gets
      3. Goes straight to the heart
    - ii. Chrysostom traces nine ascending steps:
      1. Don’t take evil initiative ourselves
      2. Don’t avenge another’s evil
      3. Be quiet
      4. Suffer wrongfully
      5. Surrender to the evildoer more than he demands
      6. Do not hate the evildoer
      7. Love him
      8. Do him good
      9. “Entreat God himself on his behalf”
    - iii. Praying for our enemies increase our love
    - iv. Jesus prayed for the soldiers who crucified him, probably continually
      1. This is an example for us to follow (1 Pet. 3)
4. Why should we love?
  - a. In loving those who hate us, we are loving as God does
    - i. He allows the sun to rise on those who hate him
    - ii. He showers the unworthy earth with the blessing of rain
  - b. In loving those who hate us and doing them good, we are showing ourselves to be sons of God.
  - c. Just as sons grow to look like the father, so we are to grow to look like our heavenly father.
5. If we only love those who love us, then the Spirit-indwelt, New Covenant believing, ransomed by the blood of Christ saints are no better than pagans.
  - a. We are to be Salt and light

