

# Spitting Images

The Gospels

Matthew 5:33-48

## Introduction

Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5. In your mind's imagination, unfurl your blanket on the hillside as we slip in to join the masses that have come to hear what is in scripture, the first sermon of Jesus Christ in His ministry.

We have studied, up to this point in Matthew chapter 5, the fact that Jesus' teaching has been revolutionary and dramatic. His teaching has been deep and yet, very practical.

Jesus has tried to remove the blinders from people who think that righteousness comes as a result of keeping regulations; as a result of keeping all of the rules. He is making it clear that righteousness is the result of a heart that is right with God.

## Telling the Truth

Let us hear what Jesus has to say, beginning at Matthew 5:33-37. Jesus deepens the understanding.

*Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord."*

*But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,*

*or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.*

*Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.*

*But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No, no"; anything beyond these is of evil.*

The implication is that anything beyond these statements comes from an evil heart.

It is impossible to understand this paragraph without going back in time to the world of the Pharisee. Let me give two types of oaths that were current during the time and ministry of Jesus Christ.

- The first oath was called the "frivolous" oath.

It was the custom during Jesus' time to greet people with statements that included oaths. For example, when a person would tell someone they would pick them up at a certain time, they would attach to this statement an oath or vow. As a result, it had become a frivolous, mundane thing that had absolutely no meaning.

- The second oath was called the "evasive" oath.

This oath was even more common during this time. The people would actually attach a statement that they made to an oath in order to lie. By the time of Christ, they had made lying a finesse; a practice that they did with great skill.

In this evasive oath, the people would say, "If we don't attach the name of God to the oath, then the oath really does not bind us."

In other words, "We really don't have to keep it."

So they would swear by Jerusalem, they would swear by their heads, they would swear by the heavens, but then, if someone tried to pin them down as to the reason they did not keep their word, they would say, "Oh, I didn't put the name 'God' in it."

Do you remember the little trick when you were a kid of crossing your fingers? You would have them crossed behind your back as you said you would do something that you had no intention of doing. If you were really skillful at this trick, you would cross your toes and show your hands to prove that your fingers were not crossed! When you would break your promise, or whatever, you would say, "Oh, my fingers were crossed behind my back."

You may have made the ultimate oath when you were a kid. After you said you were not lying, you would say something like, "Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye."

This is exactly what the Pharisees were doing. They were saying, "Oh, I didn't say the name of God, so I don't have to keep that promise."

Jesus has to come along and wake them up. He says, basically, “Listen, heaven is God’s throne, so even though you don’t use the name of God, He’s still there. And Jerusalem is His city, so if you swore by Jerusalem, even though you didn’t include the name of God, have you forgotten that it is the city of God? . . .”

Jesus is saying, “You cannot separate God from your life simply by not using His name.”

The Pharisees had become so concerned about appearing to be truthful – and they had ceased to be truthful.

You know as well as I that our society, for the most part, has its fingers crossed behind its back. As a result, when you give your word to someone now, it does not really matter. In fact, if you enter into a contract, you had better have a panel of attorneys there, just to make sure that the person, who says they will do it, will indeed do it.

Daniel Webster wrote, “There is nothing as powerful as truth and nothing so strange.”

When we speak of honesty today, and really mean honesty, we put the words “old fashioned” in front of it – saying, “old fashioned honesty.” We are betraying the fact that our culture has learned the art of deception, so that now, a handshake no longer means anything.

We say, “Yes” – “Yes, I will help you, if you need help,” “Yes, I will pray for you,” “Yes, I will be involved there,” “Yes, I will show up,” etc., but have the feeling that because our culture accepts these mundane promises, we do not need to keep them.

God says that in even the small, seemingly insignificant vow, just because His name is not attached, you still need to tell the truth. When you have said, “I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” and left out, “so help me God,” you still need to tell the truth.

This paragraph, by the way, is not particularly a prohibition against oaths, although it could be misunderstood in that way. If this were so, God would be inconsistent because He made oaths. Jesus Christ made oaths. Paul also made oaths.

This paragraph is more of a proposition. Jesus is suggesting a couple of things.

- First, making an oath does not make you an honest person. Whether you use the name of God or the heavens, it will not create honesty.

- Secondly, I think Jesus is also suggesting that God is not impressed with verbal promises – He wants internal honesty.

So Jesus says, “Just let your ‘Yes,’ be ‘Yes.’”

If you are around someone who is constantly having to say, “I promise I will do this, cross my heart,” there is the possibility that they really have no intention of doing it.

Let your “Yes” mean “Yes,” and let your “No” mean “No.”

Jesus is asking the question, “How good is your handshake?”

This is an issue of the heart.

### **Principles concerning honesty**

Let me give two principles concerning honesty, according to Christ.

1. Honesty is not *appearing* truthful; honesty is *being* truthful.
2. Honesty is not the *best* policy; honesty is the *only* policy.

I read in a 1979 issue of the *Dallas Times Herald* of a boy who was walking to school and found two sacks that had in some way fallen off the truck of the Princeton Armored Services. In the two sacks was \$415,000. He took the sacks back to Princeton and was given a reward of \$1000. The boy was interviewed and was quite upset. He was expecting a much bigger reward than just a measly thousand dollars. The boy told the newspaper reporter, “If it were to happen again, I would keep it all.”

Why did the boy say this? To him, honesty really was not the best policy.

This thought is not what Jesus suggests about honesty. In fact, by telling the truth, we may not get ahead.

Jesus says that honesty is the *only* policy. It is an issue of the heart.

## **Giving Up Rights**

Let us continue to the next paragraph, beginning in Matthew 5:38, that has to do with giving up rights.

*You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”*

This is a shortened version of the Old Testament law that also says, “a bruise for a bruise, and a burn for a burn,” and so on (Exodus 21:24-25).

This was a national principle, not a personal thing. In other words, if you knocked my tooth out, I was not supposed to slip up on you when you were not looking and knock your tooth out. This was to be regulated by the courts and was not to be personally regulated. Basically this statement restrained vengeance and it was proper.

The truth is, if you knocked my tooth out, I would want to knock your head off, not just knock your tooth out, right? That is human nature. If you cut off my ear, I would want to cut off your head!

God basically restrained vengeance to things of like nature.

However, what happened in the Old Testament was not a literal application of this. The judge did not say, “Okay, you choose which tooth is coming out of your mouth and give it to him.”

The judge would determine the value of a tooth; the value of a burn, etc. The value may be a crop or a couple of bushels of wheat or a horse.

The point that Jesus is making, which deepens the meaning of this, is that even though the courts allowed for some form of retaliation, people who were involved in the kingdom were not to get involved in making sure that their rights were justified and that they got even.

### **Things we should be willing to lose**

Jesus goes on to give four things that we should be willing to lose. Let me give them to you.

1. Number one, we should be willing to lose our dignity.

As the Orientals would say, we should be willing to “lose face”.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:39,

***But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.***

What is Jesus talking about in this verse?

I have often heard that this means if someone punches you in the right jaw, you are supposed to say, “Okay, you’ve got one more, so you’d better make it a good one.”

This is not at all the meaning of this verse. I would rather illustrate the meaning of this verse than try to explain it verbally. I need a volunteer. I do not see any hands going up! Dan has a big smile. Come and be a volunteer, Dan.

Let me share a dream that I had some time ago. The theological implications of this dream are disastrous, by the way. I dreamed that I went to heaven – for a tour, not to stay. Peter met me and took me, and some other people, on a tour. He took me into a huge room in which the walls appeared to be covered with what looked like little clocks. However, when I got closer, there were arms on the little clocks. I asked about the arms and Peter explained that these clocks with arms were “sin meters” and when anyone on earth sinned, the arms moved. I thought I could get some information about church members, so I started asking to see the sin meters of church members. He showed me the sin meter for one of our church members and I watched it and watched it. After about five minutes, it moved, but it did not move much. Then, I asked about Dan’s sin meter, but his was not in the room. About that time, an angel came into the room, so Peter asked the angel where Dan’s sin meter was. The angel said, “Oh, we took his sin meter downstairs and hung it in the kitchen to use it as a ceiling fan.”

Now Dan, I have offended you and you want to hit me – in biblical fashion!

Look at the text for this verse because I do not think it is talking about what you think it is talking about. Dan is going to hit me on the right cheek. It is important that it is the right cheek because 90% of the world is right handed. Dan is right handed and is going to hit me with his right hand on my right cheek. Thank you, Dan.

It was a backhand, not really a punch. It was a personal insult. In that day, the worst insult someone could receive was a slap across the right cheek.

Jesus Christ is saying, “If you are insulted to the maximum degree, stand and be willing to be insulted again.”

Let me give three implications of Jesus’ words.

- First, we have to stay where we are and not run away.
- Secondly, this assumes we will be hurt.
- Thirdly, by staying and hurting, we will be able to help the offender.

Let us move on to the second thing that Jesus said we should be willing to lose.

2. Number two, we should be willing to lose our power.

Jesus goes on to a second scenario, as He says in Matthew 5:40,

***If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.***

This was a loss of power. The people had the legal right to defend themselves. In that day, they did not have cash on hand to reimburse someone who sued them, so the payment was often made in clothing. The Jews typically had one coat and several tunics to wear underneath.

Jesus said, “You should be willing to lose your one coat, even if it means being defrauded.”

Jesus did not say this so we would say, like Mark Twain, “Always return good for evil because it will drive them crazy.”

The intention of this is to be willing to lose the power and the right to defend yourself, so do whatever is necessary to make it right.

3. Number three, we should be willing to lose our liberty.

Continue to Matthew 5:41, which is the third scenario.

***Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.***

What does this mean?

This is the loss of liberty. We have the right to complain, but we are not to use it.

Understand that this word is a Persian word that could be translated “courier”. The Persians had an amazing postal system. They had the stages of the postal system marked out in days. They would use slaves to travel each day length. At the end of the day, similar to our western mail courier system in days gone by, if there was no slave available, due to sickness or death or whatever, they could compel a citizen to take the mail for the last stage.

Also, during this day, and perhaps this is what this verse is referring to, the Romans, who occupied Palestine, had a law that the Jews hated. A Roman soldier could force a private citizen – a Jew – to carry his pack for one Roman mile. This was literally one thousand steps. At any time, the Jews could be forced to carry a Roman soldier’s gear. The Jews would loudly count out the steps, “One, two, three, four . .

..,” and when they got to a thousand, they would take the soldier’s pack and throw it down on the ground – their duty was done.

What is Jesus saying to people living in an occupied territory? He is saying, “Be willing to lose your liberty. Don’t just go a thousand steps, complaining all the way, but go two thousand steps.”

Jesus is saying then, “Do not count the steps or do the bare minimum.”

4. Number four, we should be willing to lose our property.

Look at Matthew 5:42, which is the final scenario.

***Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.***

This is the loss of property. There is a loss of dignity, a loss of power, a loss of liberty, and a loss of property.

This is a reference to the truly needy, not to the individual who comes over and wants to borrow your hedge clippers and you know you will never see them again until the Millennial Kingdom. This is a reference to people who indeed are in need.

The interesting things about borrowing and lending is that every seventh year, the Jewish nation had to forgive all of the debts according to the Old Testament Law. So let us say that we live in that economy and with only six months to go before the seventh year, you come to me and ask to borrow a certain amount of money. I know we only have six months to go and it is highly likely that you will never give the money back and I have to forgive that debt. Because of this type of situation, the Jews would become “tight-fisted”.

Jesus Christ says, “Be willing to open yourself up – be willing to give instead of grasp.”

Let me summarize these rights to give up.

- When we are insulted, we have the right to retaliate, but we do not exercise it.
- When we are treated unjustly, we have the right to our possessions, but we are to give them up.
- When we are imposed upon, we have a right to set limits, but we are not to insist on claiming this right.
- When someone has a need, we have a right to our money and property, but we are not to be

tight-fisted, and instead of claiming our rights, we are to consider being generous.

## Loving the Unlovely

Now let me turn your attention to the last paragraph of Matthew 5. Look at Matthew 5:43.

***You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”***

Notice that the last half of this verse, “and hate your enemy,” is not bold or italicized in the text.

There are two problems with this passage.

- The first problem is that there is an omission.

The Pharisees were teaching this law and they were leaving a very important phrase out; that is, the two words, “as yourself”. It should say, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The Pharisees very conveniently left this out because these self-righteous, pious religious people would never love anyone like they loved themselves. So they overlooked this phrase in their oral tradition.

- The second problem is that there is an addition.

The words, “and hate your enemy,” were not in the original text. The Pharisees had thrown these words in because they could not conceive of loving a Gentile. In fact, they defined “neighbor” to be, “anyone related to them; anyone close”. It was very convenient.

The Pharisees had a statement that the rabbis even taught, “If you should see a Gentile fall into the sea, by no means lift him out.”

It is no wonder that the Romans accused the Jewish nation of hating the human race.

Jesus comes along and says, in Matthew 5:44.

***But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.***

### Three reasons to love

Let me give three reasons to love in this way.

1. Number one, this kind of love, which is “agape,” shown toward even our enemies, reflects the model of God’s love.

Romans 5:5 and 5:8 say,

***. . . the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. . . .***

***But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***

While we were sinners – enemies of God – Christ died for us. So, this kind of love reflects His model.

2. Number two, this kind of love reveals the character of God’s children.

Look at Matthew 5:45.

***So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.***

The words “sons of your Father” is the way of saying that we are like that person. “The son of the Father” means that we are God-like.

The fact that we love does not mean we become believers or that we will enter the Kingdom. However, Jesus says, we will be observed as children of God. Others will say, “That individual is the spitting image of their Father, God.”

Why will others say this? They see this person loving their enemies.

3. Number three, this kind of love represents the distinctiveness of God’s people.

Matthew 5:47 asks a very interesting question.

***If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?***

This is a good question. How much more do we, who belong to the Father, love our enemies than our neighbor next door who is moral and upright and gracious and kind? This represents the distinctiveness of God’s people.

Jesus asks a hard question, “How different are you?”

Have you ever noticed that Matthew 5:45 tells us that God sends the rain and the sunshine on His enemies. We may wake up in the morning and it is raining, and we needed the rain. We say, “Thank the Lord – we needed this rain.”

The rain is watering your grass and you are thankful to the Lord. However, you notice that the rain is also watering your neighbor’s grass – and he does not even know or love God and may even hate God.

If I were God, I would sort of carve out the clouds to just rain on the saints. But God says, “My love extends even to those who do not follow Me.”

How do we treat our enemies?

George Wishart, whose last days are recorded in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, was a Scottish reformer and a friend of John Knox who was condemned to die as a heretic. His executioner knew him and his ministry and knew he would have to sever his head with an ax – and hesitated. History records that the Wishart saw the executioner recognizing him and walked over to him, embraced him, and said, “Let this embrace be a token that I forgive you.”

This is a spitting image of God the Father.

Now we do not have people waiting to literally take off our heads, do we? We are not facing that kind of thing. Our enemies are those that we just do not like. Our enemies can be those who insult us; who betray us; who use us; who irritate us. It would be these enemies that we would love.

## Conclusion

Look at Matthew 5:48, which is the summary statement.

***Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***

Do you remember the two bookend verses on this chapter of Matthew? Matthew 5:20 says paraphrased, “your righteousness needs to exceed the Pharisees”; that is, “this is a deeper standard”. Then Jesus ends by saying, “you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

Let me give a brief definition of the word “perfect”. In the Greek mind, this word was functional, not sinless. In other words, something that was perfect was able to do the job it was created to do.

For example, a clock is perfect when it keeps time. A tool that you need when working around the house – one tool that is going to do the job – when you get it, you say, “That’s perfect; that’s just what I need.”

Something is perfect if it is functional. Jesus Christ is saying, basically, “Your Christianity should work; it should fit; it should be perfect.”

This is the idea in this verse. So we close this portion of this sermon by asking the question, “Does your Christianity work?”

How does our Christianity work? By:

- telling the truth;
- giving up rights;
- loving the unlovely.

By the way, we can never do this on our own apart from the grace of an indwelling Christ who is allowed to live through us.

This kind of righteousness begins on the inside. These are issues of the heart.