

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 18, Chapter 5 Conclusion

Despite the happy fiction that in Yeshua's day the Jewish people practiced a religion that was rather pure and Torah driven, in reality what they practiced was a religion based mostly on Tradition. Naturally the Jews were not a monolithic culture; they weren't several million bodies that shared one religious mindset. Two major divisions of the Jewish religion and culture existed that for the sake of simplicity we could call Judaism: one, which was observed by the small minority of Jews who lived in the Holy Land, and the other, which was observed by the overwhelming majority of Jews that lived in the Diaspora (that is, the 95% of all living Jews at that time who chose to reside in foreign nations). There were numerous debates and arguments over which Traditions taught by the various Jewish religious authorities ought to be obeyed, and so where one lived and who one listened to had much to do with the specific Traditions that were taught and accepted.

Christ dealt primarily with the Holy Land Jews. On the other hand Paul, the most prolific and influential writer in the New Testament, dealt primarily with Diaspora Jews. So what they each said, and how they each approached the matter of who, exactly, Yeshua was, what He represented, and how that might affect one's life and decisions, was tailored to their audience. In no way am I implying that what they each taught was in conflict. Rather when reading the Gospels and then the Epistles it can, at times, seem so because the way things are worded and what issues are dealt with had everything to do with where they were and who they were talking to. In the Sermon on the Mount Yeshua was speaking to a mixed audience of Jews, but most were Holy Land residents (and I am defining the Holy Land as mainly Judea and the Galilee although in a sense Samaria perhaps should be included). Thus what we see Christ doing in His speech is trying to

straighten out centuries of teaching and beliefs that were based on doctrines (traditions) that had arisen, which had essentially pushed aside actual biblical Torah teaching. This had resulted in a number of wrong understandings and thus wrong behaviors and attitudes. This same reality is so very applicable to the Church in our time.

Recently I listened to a podcast in which the author of a new book "A Church of Cowards: A Wake-up Call to Complacent Christians" spoke to the moderator about the serious decline of Christianity in the West; a decline that began in Europe and has now infected America coast-to-coast. I was struck far less with what Matt Walsh said (most of which I applauded) than with what he didn't say. He spoke of an endemic pessimism in the Church that only offered what he called a cheap hope. Rather than focus on the joyful future God has ordained for Believers (in the eternal realm), the sermons of today focus on modern cultural and social justice issues, most of which are politically motivated. According to the author this cheap hope is also embodied in the infamous Prosperity Doctrine championed by such famous TV evangelists as Joel Osteen. He went on to say that the main problem lies with those who man the pulpit; and yet that, itself, is a reflection of the many who form the congregations. And, in his most pointed comment, he said the issue of marriage in general, and gay marriage in specific, has greatly damaged the Church perhaps beyond the ability to repair it. But he never once mentioned or even alluded to the place and authority of the Bible in modern Western Christianity. Never did he use the Holy Scriptures as his source for his own beliefs nor did he discuss how the words of the Bible are taught or interpreted among various Church branches and denominations, especially as concerns gay marriage and gay ministers. And there-in is the elephant in the room that is either ignored or denied by the Church at large such that the Bible isn't even on the radar of a writer whose honest concern is the demise of the Church in America. The sad reality is that the Bible is either not taught, or passages are often lifted and quoted completely out of context, or its words are given a spin that negates their actual plain meaning in order to uphold a particular denomination's faith doctrines or social worldview.

My point is this: Traditions are merely another way of saying doctrines. Traditions and doctrines are two ways of saying the same thing. But what they are **not** is Holy Scripture. Christians enjoy criticizing Jews for basing their faith around Traditions, while at the same time passionately defending their Christian faith that is based around doctrines. And in both cases doing so has led the Church and the Synagogue far off the mark because the Holy Scriptures are not only little

known by the congregations or the leadership, it has also weakened both institutions and now the basis for decision making has more to do with the Church maintaining its existence and being accepted by the secular world than in dispensing and standing up for God's truth. The result is devastating and indeed has led us into the abyss.

The most powerful of ocean going vessels become vulnerable and perhaps useless when they lose their rudders. The rudder for the Christian Church has always been, and must always be, the Bible...the whole Bible, and not just favored sections of it. But today that rudder has been traded in for a steering mechanism of manmade doctrines, and the preaching of politically based principles that come and go with the seasons. Yeshua, in His Sermon on the Mount, was dealing with the same problem, and it is the reason that He spoke to His fellow Jews in the manner that He did, and on the subjects He chose.

Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW 5:38 - end**

Beginning in verse 38, in rapid sequence Christ speaks to 4 issues that are all interrelated. First, a person is insulted. Second, a person is taken to court. Third, someone insists that a person is to be involuntarily pressed into service to them. Fourth, a person is asked to give something to another who asks for it. Before we discuss the first issue, notice something critical: none of these issues involves criminality and in most cases, sin is not the issue. In fact every one of these cases is about a relatively small personal matter.

The initial thing we must address is the reading of verse 38 itself. Notice the CJB version.

**<sup>CJB</sup> Matthew 5:38 *"You have heard that our fathers were told, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.***

Now here is how we find the same statement in nearly all other English Bible translations:

**<sup>KJV</sup> Matthew 5:38 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:***

The words "our fathers" that we find in the CJB are not there in the Greek. Rather it is a rather ambiguous source that Christ refers to who has said "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". "Our fathers" is an assumption that David Stern assigns from some earlier passages and I don't think such an assumption should be made. Rather Jesus seems to be speaking of the issue of an eye for an eye in the form of it being a well known and common saying as opposed to a formal Torah law. It is not unlike the typical Christian saying that cleanliness is close to Godliness. It sounds like something from the Bible, but it isn't. In general it is accepted among Christians as authentic and true without much thought and so Believers tend to follow the concept in whatever way seems good to them.

So the saying and the common understanding among the people about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is general belief about the biblical principle of proportional justice. However the issue is: in what life situations is this principle to be applied? The next words of the passage say that the life situation is when someone does you wrong. Most other Bible versions will refer to a person who is, or is doing, evil. The Greek word being translated as evil is **poneros**; it means bad, or troublesome, full of annoyances or hardships. So we shouldn't equate the use of the word as meaning the same as wicked in the spiritual sense (such as being in league with the Devil). Rather this is more like the troublesome neighbor next door who always seems to be causing some kind of upset or another. Then Christ gives an example of what He means (that is of itself also a principle) when He says one of the most memorable and regularly quoted lines in the Bible. He says if someone hits you on the right cheek, then let him also hit you on the left. And for the most part sermons on this passage are about Jesus being a pacifist and therefore what Christ wants is for us to not resist a criminal act upon us. This is an incorrect interpretation.

First; the context is not about criminality but about not taking personal vengeance. In that day taking personal vengeance for many perceived wrongs done against you was rather usual. A person couldn't call 911 and make a complaint if they were being harassed or threatened. Today in the West one cannot handle the simplest of wrongs done against us in any other lawful way but by calling the police or perhaps hiring a lawyer. Let me remind you once more: this is not about criminal acts. This is not about getting stabbed, or having an animal stolen. The example given of being slapped on the cheek in our day would amount to assault and battery. It is considered an aggressive attack. But in Jesus's day it was not seen as an act of criminal violence so it was not something unlawful. Rather a man having his face slapped was done to inflict shame upon

him.

Middle Eastern society then and now is based on the fundamental concepts of shame and honor. It is about a culture being built upon societal status. In a shame and honor society maintaining one's social status of honor is paramount. How one can be muddied and reduced to a status of shame is complex because to our Western minds many of these reasons for being shamed make little sense to us. What we have to keep in mind is that a person who has been shamed will stop at nothing to regain a status of honor. Personal revenge is built into the shame and honor system. It is expected that a person who has been shamed will do harm, and they will murder if need be to remedy the problem.

We have all heard of the term "honor killing"; this is precisely about an act of murder perpetrated within the cultural system of shame and honor. Often a person who is living in a status of shame will kill the one perceived as having caused them to lose their honor knowing they may pay the ultimate price for it. But it doesn't matter because if that act relieves their shame and restores their honor in the eyes of their family, peers, and community then it was worth it to them. They are even admired for it. That is the high level of importance placed upon it in a shame and honor society of Christ's day and continuing until today in most Muslim societies.

Interestingly the Law of Moses was designed to create a society based on guilt and innocence, and not on shame and honor. Therefore the Torah does not allow personal retribution because of the loss of social status.... of being shamed. Still Israel was heavily influenced by their past and especially by their neighbors who had no such restrictions on personal vengeance for the sake of restoring honor. God ordained what was sin and criminal, and He ordained the proper punishment (if any) for it. In Leviticus 19:18 we find the law to love your neighbor as yourself; this formed the basis for disallowing revenge for being shamed. Proverbs says:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Proverbs 24:29 *Don't say, "I'll do to him what he did to me, I'll pay him back what his deeds deserve."***

And in another place in the Torah we read:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Deuteronomy 32:35 *Vengeance and payback are mine for the time when their foot slips; for the day of their calamity is coming soon, their doom is rushing upon them'***

What these Old Testament verses tell us is that the concept of turning the other cheek (not seeking revenge for being shamed) was not at all new. Rather it was a basic Torah concept. So why did Yeshua see the need to address such an ancient concept? Because Jewish society had become a Tradition based society that ran on the manmade precepts created by the religious authorities. Precepts that they said were interpretations of the Torah. And because the Romans had inflicted their cultural ideas of justice upon Jewish society for more than a century by the time Yeshua was born, much of it simply became the norm for the Jews without them really thinking about the source. The Jews didn't have a reservoir of Torah knowledge to draw upon. They didn't have Bibles in their homes. They mostly knew what their society said was traditionally right and wrong, and what the doctrines taught by the Rabbis said.

The next example of the behavior that Yeshua expects from His followers is in verse 40. It is the case of someone being sued in court. The person wants your shirt in payment; Christ says to give it to him and your coat as well. The principle is to achieve reconciliation rather than to exact revenge even if it means giving up more than one should reasonably have to give in order to reconcile. Why use the illustration of being sued for one's garments (a rather unlikely occurrence)? In Yeshua's time a Jewish commoner wore two basic garments; an inner and an outer. The inner was a tunic-like article of clothing that was standard. The outer was called a **simlah** in Hebrew; it was the more valuable and important of the 2 garments. While its use evolved over the centuries, in Christ's day it served as both an overcoat and a blanket. Generally speaking a man's outer garment could not be confiscated for non-payment of a debt, or for punishment. However there were situations when the **simlah** might be used as collateral for a short term loan. In that case then it could be held by the lender during the day but it had to be returned to the borrower in the evening. The point being that this outer garment was an especially important one to its wearer because among the common and poorer Jews it was what kept them from exposure to the elements. So the answer to the question of why Yeshua chose this particular case example is that it was not a new law, but rather an ancient one. We find it in the Torah, in the Book of Exodus.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Exodus 22:25-26** <sup>25</sup> *If you take your neighbor's coat as collateral, you are to restore it to him by sundown,* <sup>26</sup> *because it is his only garment- he needs it to wrap his body; what else does he have in which to sleep? Moreover, if he cries out to me, I will listen; because I am compassionate.*

The bottom line of what Yeshua is teaching is that His followers are to obey the Law of Moses by acting as the Father acts: with compassion towards humanity.

In verse 41 is the third example of what a follower of Yeshua is supposed to look like and behave like. It is that if a follower is pressed to go a mile, they should go two. What the exact context of this is, is not stated. David Stern inserts the word "soldier" to describe the person who is demanding something. That word soldier is not in the Greek manuscript. Rather it is in Greek *hostis*, which means whoever or whatever; so it characterizes no one in particular. Even so the idea is of being compelled to do something that would normally be against your will. Something that is perhaps unreasonable or unfair.

Even though the word "soldier" is not there, the circumstance of the times when a Roman soldier could force a Jew to do pretty much whatever he wanted done, is either what Yeshua had in view or at least it provided a good illustration of the principle. Later in Matthew we get an excellent example of this in chapter 27.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 27:30-32** <sup>30</sup> *They spit on him and used the stick to beat him about the head.* <sup>31</sup> *When they had finished ridiculing him, they took off the robe, put his own clothes back on him and led him away to be nailed to the execution-stake.* <sup>32</sup> *As they were leaving, they met a man from Cyrene named Shim'on; and they forced him to carry Yeshua's execution-stake.*

If this is indeed about a Roman soldier ordering a Jew to carry something for him, certainly it meant even more. This principle is also about an authority over you (of any kind) compelling you to do something that from a government or legal standpoint they may have the right or the clout to do no matter how unfair it might be. Rather than rebelling against it as most might (and who would blame them?), we as Christ's followers must not only graciously comply but do more than the minimum that is being required. Why is this? Because just as the innocent Yeshua hung on the cross and had compassion for those guilty parties who hung next to him, and just as He also did not utter a sound or accuse or condemn those Roman soldiers who wrongly beat and whipped Him, what an impression Yeshua's behavior and response must have made on all who witnessed it and likely on the very perpetrators of the cruelties as well. How many sinners have come to faith and an eternal salvation because of the witness of courage and grace shown by an innocent follower of Jesus in the face of pain and evil; the number may never be known.

The fourth and final case example is verse 42. What might seem like 2 examples (if someone **asks** you for something and if someone wants to **borrow** something) is really just one synonymous expression. As I have demonstrated to you, none of these cases represents any kind of a departure from the Torah. But they must have represented a departure of a current mindset from the Tradition-based Judaism that most Jews practiced and believed to be right.

The Law of Moses states:

<sup>CJB</sup> **Deuteronomy 15:7-8** <sup>7</sup> *"If someone among you is needy, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which ADONAI your God is giving you, you are not to harden your heart or shut your hand from giving to your needy brother. <sup>8</sup> No, you must open your hand to him and lend him enough to meet his need and enable him to obtain what he wants.*

So in this example we move from the realm of a person forcing you to do something involuntarily, to the realm of voluntarily giving to the needy as essentially a knee jerk reaction. Generosity was supposed to be a mainstay of Hebrew society. Having an evil eye, or shutting your hand meant to be stingy. As in all ancient societies most people were poor, and so the needy were everywhere; some because of illness or lameness, some because they were born into poverty, and others because of financial misfortune. Regardless of the reason, the needy were to be given charity and cared for. Yeshua was encouraging the practice of giving.

Verse 43 takes up the subject of love and of course uses one of the two fundamental commandments of the Torah..... the two that Yeshua calls the greatest commandments.... as the basis for His discourse on the subject. As with verse 38, when we find in the CJB the statement: "You have heard that our fathers were told", in fact in the Greek manuscripts the words "our fathers" are not there. Rather the literal translation is: "You have heard that it was said". Saying "our fathers" serves up the concept that these were the people who heard Moses speak. That is not what is meant here. The idea is that what follows is a general expression that has been woven into the fabric of Jewish society; an expression that Jews believe is taken from the Torah, but in fact it is not. The expression Yeshua quotes is: **"You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy"**. No where in the Law of Moses, the Torah, or the entire Tanakh (the Old Testament) are God's people taught to hate their enemies. So essentially what Christ quoted was a common belief and saying, but it was not true and it needed

correction.

Let's be clear about the issue of hating enemies. While the Jews, and we as Believers, are not to hate our personal enemies, we are to hate God's enemies. If we were to love the enemies of God, we would be giving up our loyalty to Him. How can we love what God hates; or as Yeshua is teaching, how can we hate what God loves? The context and theme of the last several verses is personal vengeance. Since through 4 case examples Christ has illustrated how His followers are to behave with our fellow man, He is showing how this behavior is to be based upon love as opposed to accepted social customs. A person's personal enemy is so far in chapter 5 defined as someone who has offended or shamed him. And Yeshua says that we are not to hate the offender or the one who has shamed us. Why is Christ addressing this? Even though clearly Leviticus 19:18 teaches us that we are to love our fellow man and not hate him. Because Jewish Traditions and social customs had perverted and overtaken biblical Torah commandments and the people had been wrongly taught; so He needed to straighten it out.

**CJB Matthew 15:9 *Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.*"**

Even in this statement of Jesus that came in another setting, He was not creating a new command of God but rather re-establishing an old one that had been overthrown by manmade doctrines.

**CJB Isaiah 29:13-14 <sup>13</sup> *Then Adonai said: "Because these people approach me with empty words, and the honor they bestow on me is mere lip-service; while in fact they have distanced their hearts from me, and their 'fear of me' is just a mitzvah of human origin- <sup>14</sup> therefore, I will have to keep shocking these people with astounding and amazing things, until the 'wisdom' of their 'wise ones' vanishes, and the 'discernment' of their 'discerning ones' is hidden away."***

When will my beloved Church ever learn and accept the truth of Jesus and the inspired words of Isaiah? We are a horribly fractured institution because of a failure to discern and obey. It seems to be our human instinct to love the words of human doctrines while we ignore or shun the Word of God..... the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. And what is our reward for doing this? Churches shutting down by the hundreds. Denominations splitting and then

splitting again usually not over biblical truth but over manmade doctrines. But worse, the effectiveness of personal witness has become largely ineffective because we prefer to speak hollow words and hand out Christian tracts rather than to live and behave as Messiah has commanded us. People are turning away from Christ instead of running to Him. And that is on us.... all of us.

So when Yeshua says in verse 4, "but I tell you, love your enemies", He is trying not to establish His own new doctrine but rather He is trying to bring back the God-given biblical ordinance. And the first thing that such love does is to pray for those who persecute you! Remembering our discussion on the multi-dimensional word "persecution", for those in Christ's audience this more means to pray for those who offend, harass, shame, and ridicule and not so much those who do harm or violence. Although ideally it includes all of these levels of persecution.

I wish to quote to you something from Davies' and Allison's commentary on Matthew that is most poignant concerning what Yeshua is teaching.

***"What does love mean? For Jesus it is no longer primarily a quality of relationships within the fold....within the walls, which hold the dark and threatening powers at a distance. It is something which must prove itself in the engagement with that which is inimical (hostile) and threatening. This is why Jesus can seek out the tax collectors and the sinners".***

And yet even this was not new. It was always God's will that all would see such love and be drawn towards Him. There are numerous passages in the Tanakh that set the basis for what Christ is teaching. Isaiah 30:18, Ezekiel 18:23, Exodus 34:6, and so many more. Perhaps my favorite is Ezekiel 18:32.

**<sup>CJB</sup> Ezekiel 18:32 *I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," says Adonai ELOHIM, "so turn yourselves around, and live!***

And what will be the result of obeying this God-principle of loving even your enemies? Yeshua says in verse 45 that it will be that you will become as sons of God. The CJB says it this way:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Matthew 5:45 *Then you will become children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun shine on good and bad people alike, and he sends rain to the righteous and the unrighteous alike.***

Where the CJB and a few other translations say "children of your Father", others correctly say "sons of your Father" because the Greek is *huios* and it means son and not children. This is an important distinction because Yeshua is once again reciting a Torah principle taken from Deuteronomy 14:1 and it is not something new and novel.

I once heard it put this way: To return evil for good is the devil's way; to return good for good is man's way; to return good for evil is God's way. Therefore just as God provides the light and power of the sun upon all mankind, and not just a certain few, and because He provides life giving rain upon those who are righteous in Him as well as those who are not, then we must follow that example and give love to those who don't love us. After all, says Jesus, what great reward will we receive for only giving love back to those who love us? Even the hated tax collectors (considered by the Jews as among the greatest sinners and most despised enemies) are capable of returning love for love. And what good is it to be friendly only to our friends? That is, it doesn't take much virtue to love and be friendly to those inside your established family and social circle, but it does take more determination and humility to love and be friendly with outsiders.

Chapter 5 ends with a command that essentially is the summation.... the bottom line.... to what Christ has been teaching: "Be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect". A new commandment of Jesus? No.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Leviticus 20:26 <sup>26</sup> *Rather, you people are to be holy for me; because I, ADONAI, am holy; and I have set you apart from the other peoples, so that you can belong to me.***

Without doubt the meaning of Christ's words "to be perfect" attends to moral perfection. Yet no doubt nearly all the Jews listening to Yeshua would have thought they were attempting to practice moral perfection by following Jewish Law. Most members of the Church, today and throughout Church history, think they are attempting to practice moral perfection by following their particular Church's faith doctrines. But that moral perfection has been a moving target because the definition of what amounts to moral perfection has shifted and changed with the winds of time. This is because the leadership of Christianity and Judaism have paid the most attention to the customs, doctrines and traditions of men, while minimizing the Word of God. Therefore the source and definition of moral perfection for followers of Christ can only be devotion to doing the biblical Law as led by the Holy Spirit He has empowered us with, and by basing our

every thought and action on loving God with all our essence and might, and loving our fellow human beings as we love ourselves.

We'll begin Matthew chapter 6 next time.