

But I Say to You . . .

Introduction

When Jesus began what we call the “sermon on the mount” He made a series of statements that began with “but I say to you”. This followed statements about “you have heard it said” or “it was said of old”; in other words, He first gave what others had said then He said “but I say to you”. I believe that we should pay particular attention to these types of statements from Jesus. In the end it doesn't matter what others have said about anything. What matters is what Jesus has said and how much attention we have given to His words. Let's examine His “but I say to you...” words in the sermon on the mount.

But I Say to You

First let's just list the Scriptures where Jesus said “but I say to you...”

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. (Matthew 5:22 NASB)

but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28 NASB)

but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32 NASB)

"But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, (Matthew 5:34 NASB)

"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. (Matthew 5:39 NASB)

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Matthew 5:44 NASB)

Just reading this list of Scriptures tells us that we are basically failing to live up to what Jesus said. Why is that? Let's look at these in context and one at a time.

But I Say to You—Do Not be Angry with Your Brother

Jesus begins with what had been said previously, of old, and was basically what was said by the Mosaic Law.

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and

'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' (Matthew 5:21 NASB)

We know this as one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus states the commandment and the results of violating it by one's actions—the one would be subject to the judgment of the court. Jesus then changes this from an outward action to an inward heart condition, which actually made the requirement more stringent than the Law.

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

**"Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.
(Matthew 5:22-26 NASB)**

What was said under the Law was that if you murdered someone, you are liable to the court. Jesus said that if you are angry with your brother, you are already guilty before the court. Jesus presents three stages of a progressively worse attitude: 1) anger in your heart toward your brother; 2) contempt for your brother's mental abilities—*raca*, as the King James Bible says, in today's language means “you stupid idiot”; 3) contempt for your brother's heart and character—you fool means “you scoundrel” or, as we would say, “you shyster”. Let's put this into a table so that we can see how the different pieces relate to each other.

ATTITUDE	RESULTS	REASON
1) Anger in heart toward brother	Already guilty before the court	Uncontrolled anger leads to murder.
2) Contempt for brother's mental abilities—you stupid idiot	Guilty before the supreme court—no further appeal.	You are basically saying that a person is worthless. God has never made a worthless person—everyone has purpose.
3) Contempt for brother's heart and character—you shyster, or scoundrel.	Guilty enough to go into fiery hell.	You are saying that a person is unredeemable—that God is not able to change your brother's heart.

Jesus continues on with a “therefore”, which means that what follows is a conclusion drawn from what was previously said. Whenever you see a “therefore” in the Scriptures make sure that you determine what it is there for. Jesus makes it clear that our heart condition toward our brother hinders our

relationship with the Lord. Our offering is not acceptable until we have corrected things with our brother. This is the essence of the problem between Cain and Abel, which illustrates the result of uncontrolled anger.

We don't truly appreciate how much our relationship with our brother affects our walk with the Lord. John, who was present when Jesus said these things, tells us very plainly in his first epistle.

The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:9-11 NASB)

Let's move on to the next “but I say to you...” statement.

But I Say to You—Do Not Look with Lust

but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28 NASB)

Jesus said this in response to what had been said previously:

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; (Matthew 5:27 NASB)

This is another of the Ten Commandments. The Law was only enforceable based on outward actions. Again, Jesus moved the requirement from an observable outward act to an inward condition of the heart. Jesus emphasizes this requirement with the next couple of verses.

"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30 NASB)

He is not speaking of literal body mutilation but, rather, the spiritual application—a holy life may require radical “surgery”. Our eyes are how we perceive natural reality. If our eyes are setting traps for us (the meaning of “makes you stumble”) then it would be better for us to remove the eye; that is, bring it under control so that the temptation traps are avoided. The same thing with our hands, which is involved in what we do. A holy life requires that the input of our senses be brought under control so that we do not yield to temptations.

But I Say to You—Do Not Divorce

The next thing that Jesus deals with is closely related to the lust issue and is one of our major problems today. The Law allowed divorce.

"It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; (Matthew 5:31 NASB)

However, Jesus put a qualifier on the issue of divorce, one which we basically ignore today.

but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

(Matthew 5:32 NASB)

Jesus said that there is only one justification for divorce and that is *infidelity*. Any other reason creates a situation in which the divorced wife marries another man and causes her to commit adultery because the divorce was *not authorized* according to the principles of King Jesus.

There are some who are reading this who are divorced, maybe more than once, without having legitimate reason according to Jesus. I am not saying that you need to return to your first spouse, especially if there are children from both marriages, and I don't believe that the Lord is saying that either. I am saying that your rebellion and disobedience to the words of Jesus needs to be dealt with. You must repent of your actions, confess your adulterous relationships, be cleansed by the blood of Jesus and move on with your life in the Lord, making confession and restitution as led by the Holy Spirit.

But I Say to You—Do Not Swear Oaths or Vows

After the divorce issue, Jesus moves on to our vows or oaths by stating what was said of old.

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' (Matthew 5:33 NASB)

Jesus then told us what He had to say about vows and oaths, which was quite a bit different from what the old sayings were.

"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. (Matthew 5:34-37 NASB)

Why do we make oaths and vows to begin with? What is their purpose? We do that to convince others of our sincerity and the seriousness with which we view the situation. It is not necessary for a follower of Christ to use an oath to prove these things. A follower of Christ does what he says he will do *because* he is a follower of Christ. That is why only a “yes” or “no” is sufficient.

We should consider Jesus' words when we are asked to make a financial “pledge”, which is just another word for a vow or oath. We are not to be bound by these types of commitments. If you want to give money to the project, then say 'yes' and give whatever is in your heart to give for today. Tomorrow the Lord may have you give to someone else or to another project, which you must be free to do. Don't be hindered by a previous pledge.

But I Say to You—Do Not Resist an Evil Person

Jesus now moves to another “you have heard it said” statement, one which is often quoted when someone desires revenge.

"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' (Matthew 5:38 NASB)

Jesus then says some things that are very hard for us. We tend to ignore these words or gloss them over because they are so alien to our nature.

"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. "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:39-42 NASB)

Do not resist an evil person! That is contrary to all that we have been taught. Notice that Jesus said 'person'. Paul tells us later in the Scriptures that **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."** (Ephesians 6:12 NASB)

So, we see that our struggles are against *spiritual things* and *not people* even though many spiritual things are manifested through people. Therefore, we don't resist evil people but allow God to deal with them by the Holy Spirit. So, if a person wants to sue us for our shirt, we don't resist that but instead give it to him along with our coat too, putting our trust fully in the Lord. This is not an easy thing to do because our old nature says that this is "unfair", not right.

In the times of Jesus a Roman soldier could make a civilian carry his pack for him for a mile. When this happened and the person took the last step of the mile he would throw down the soldier's pack. Jesus said not only to carry it for the mile but to actually go beyond duty and carry the pack for two miles. He then applied this to those who would want to borrow from you. We are, apparently, missing something about the character required of a follower of Christ.

But I Say to You—Love Your Enemies

Jesus then gives us another hard one. What was said of old made sense to our natural way of thinking.

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' (Matthew 5:43 NASB)

But, then Jesus took His requirement out of the realm of our natural ability to accomplish it.

"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 causes His sun to rise on *the evil and the good*, and sends rain on *the righteous and the unrighteous*. "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Matthew 5:44-47 NASB)

It is natural to love those who love us, to be friends with those we call brothers. Even the heathen do this. But, if we are to be sons of the Father, we must have the characteristics of the Father. He provides many things without partiality. The day dawns on both the evil and the good; the rain falls on both the righteous and the unrighteous. To be like the Father, who loved us while we were still His enemies, we must love our enemies and pray for them that persecute us. To do this requires the power of the Holy Spirit working in us to change our mental processes, to renew our minds. Our old mindsets cannot embrace this concept.

The Ultimate Goal

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48 NASB)

Jesus tells us why He is saying these things to us. As a result of these things we are to be perfect just like our heavenly Father.

“Perfect” is a tough word for us to accept so it is important for us to fully understand what it means. This the definition according to Robertson's Word Pictures: *“Perfect (teleioi). The word comes from telos, end, goal, limit. Here it is the goal set before us, the absolute standard of our Heavenly Father. The word is used also for relative perfection as of adults compared with children.”*

So, we see that there are two aspects to its meaning. First, it is a term of maturity as an adult is mature relative to a child. Second, it relates to the end goal—the mark toward which we strive.

Putting this together, we are to grow up to maturity, to the goal of the standard of our Father. We are to be true sons of God with the mature characteristics of the Father in practice in our life.