

# Words and Justice

*"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Matthew 5:33-42*

# Words and Justice

## 1. Oaths and Jesus Audience

- similar to contracts today – binding & non binding
- Lev. 19:12 ***“Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD “***
- Numbers 30:2 ***“This is what the LORD commands: When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.***
- Deut. 23:23 ***“Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth. “***

# Words and Justice

## a) Interpretation over Time

- what is actually swearing by God?
- swear by, heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your own health
- complicated formula to determine what's binding
- Matthew 23:16-22 ***“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.”***

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## 2. Jesus Refutes The Status Quo

### a) Everything Is God's!

- heaven – God's throne, earth – God's footstool,  
Jerusalem – God's city, yourself – God's creation!

- quit looking for the exception to the rule – finding the  
loophole that allows your sin

### b) Mean What You Say!

- Psalm 15:4 ***“who despises a vile man but honors  
those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even  
when it hurts”***

# Words and Justice

- Let your words have truth – do not need elaborate oaths and assurances
- speak truth – live up to your word
- anything beyond this – of the evil one

## 3. Is Being Under Oath Wrong?

- No
  - Matthew 26:63 – Jesus under Oath
  - Old & New Testament full of various examples
  - principle – do not need complicated wording and promises to be held to what you say

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Justice – An Eye for an Eye

## 1. Current Reality of The Audience

- Exd. 21:23-35 ***"If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. "If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.***

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***"If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded. This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter. If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned. "If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his. "If a man's bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally. However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and the dead animal will be his.***

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**- Lev. 24:18-22 " 'If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution—life for life. If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.' "**

- clear terms for offense and punishment (compensation)
- terms were to – protect the public, punish the offender, deter future offence, provide remuneration



# Words and Justice

## 2. Concept of Retribution and Justice

- if offended – law allowing for you to take limited action to seek justice, to ‘right the wrong’, extract vengeance
- History shows – pattern of escalating violence and offence between peoples that are seeking to gain retribution
- To limit retaliation to the scope of the offense is to prevent escalation of injury and violence
- To provide avenues for compensation – make amends to the offended without suffering same offense

# Words and Justice

## 3. Jesus Speaks about God's Intention

- character and worthiness not the issue – ‘do not resist an evil person’

- three area's of offense an our response

### a) Strike on the Cheek

- ultimate offense in many cultures

- challenge to fight, invitation to duel, take that!

- debate about compensation for defamation

- Jesus clear – when insulted, called out, do not respond in kind – take another insult

- forfeit your right for revenge – leave it with God

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## b) Lawsuit for Your Shirt

- Jesus aware of many disputes before the courts
- people looking to gain from others, making claims and seeking their just rewards
- challenge is to suffer personal loss simply to reconcile with another

## c) Walking an Extra Mile

- Roman occupation – law that you must carry for one mile when challenged to do so
- enemies – galling to have to do this.

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- Jesus say's – go an additional mile especially for your enemy

\* When insulted, attacked, maligned, asked to endure the unjust – do not seek retaliation and revenge. Allow insult, suffer loss, go beyond your obligation – and leave bitterness, anger, making it right, your rights to God!

## 4. Making A Loan

- refer to Deut. 15:9-11
- not a command to make unwise handouts to any request
- poor, needy, suffering difficulty – commands in scripture to care for them

# Words and Justice

- generosity and freely giving to legitimate need a biblical truth
- not my things – God’s – so I can easily part with them
- loans – do not loan out money you cannot do without
- helping others a biblical truth – done with wisdom and as God has provided for us and allowed us to participate

# Words and Justice

## So What

### 1. Be People of Your Word!

- not looking for loopholes, way's out,
- say what you mean and mean what you say

### 2. Be Known for Honoring Your Commitments

- living up to what you have said

### 3. Let Justice be God's to Exact

- when insulted, maligned, treated unjustly – do not exact your own satisfaction