

The Hard Sayings of Jesus: Part 1

Many people who believe in Christ do not know what He really taught. They are unaware that they would not accept many of Jesus' instructions. These are the "hard sayings" of Jesus-the teachings we will examine in this series. Even in the time of Christ many of His words were misunderstood and rejected. Take John 6:59-60 for example. After hearing Jesus speak, some of the disciples said, ". . . This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Many of Jesus' precepts are difficult to understand, while others simply are not palatable to the human heart. Jesus was opening an entirely new way of thinking-an expansion of the letter of the law to a spiritual level. In Jesus' day, many found this to be unacceptable. Today the situation is reversed. Many who spiritualize the Word of God regard physical obedience to the Law of God unacceptable.

Jesus illustrated this new way when He was asked: ". . . Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?" (Luke 5:33). Jesus answered: ". . . Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days" (vv. 34-35). Jesus then spoke a parable: ". . . No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish" (vv. 36-37). Jesus illustrated the contrast between what He was teaching and what was maintained by the religious leaders of the day. What He said is that the Pharisees and Sadducees would not be able to accept the spiritual expansion of the Law of God as long as they held on to their traditions. Many today, as well, find their traditions to be a stumbling block to accepting what Jesus really taught. They would rather hold to what they have always thought. Like Job's friends they say, "What knowest thou, that we know not? what understandest thou, which is not in us? With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much elder than thy father" (Job 15:9-10).

With the advent of Christianity, a new dispensation was introduced into the world-an expansion of the Law of God that entirely magnified the old, while at the same time not nullifying the old (Isa 42:21). This is why Paul wrote: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15).

Jesus illustrated this expansion of the Law of God when He said: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment . . ." (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus added a whole new dimension to God's Law. The law was not "done away" but was expanded to show that in the New Testament dispensation, one is held accountable for even hating his brother. Hatred is merely murder in feeling (I John. 3:15). Murder begins in the mind. With the help of God's Spirit the mind can be controlled. But many find this too hard. They make no attempt to control their minds and would rather harbor hatred. Jesus even went so far as to say that if one reviles his brother because of hatred, he is just as bad as a murderer (Matt. 5:22). This is a hard saying indeed. Such people, Jesus said, would be in danger of eternal death in the lake of fire. This is how important it is for a man to control his mind and thoughts. Jesus even added that one cannot truly worship God if he is at odds with his brother (vv. 23-24).

Today many professing Christians believe that it is permissible to hate as long as one does not kill. Not according to Jesus! Under the Old Covenant God did not hold one accountable for hating another, as long as one did not murder, but He did admonish the Israelites to love their brothers and not to take vengeance

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or bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18). Under the New Covenant the law has been expanded. While today the legal system does not exact a penalty, the judgment bar of God does. This is what Jesus emphasized. It is a hard saying. Many cannot bear it. With man, it may seem impossible to practice what Jesus taught, but with God all things are possible.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uttered many hard sayings. Another is found in Matthew 5:27-28. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Here is Jesus' instruction regarding the seventh commandment, originally found in Exodus 20:14. During the Old Testament period adultery was punishable by death. Jesus now expanded the application of this commandment. Did He do away with it? Of course not! He added the spiritual dimension by telling us that adultery is committed by even lusting after a woman. Jesus did not "do away" with the seventh commandment. It is senseless to assume that while lusting is a sin, the actual act of adultery is not. Adultery is a sin, and the spiritual application also includes what is in the mind. Adultery is not just a physical act, but also a matter of the heart. One of the signs that this world is in a state of moral decay is the prevalent amount of lewdness and pornography. This is why Jesus warned: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30).

What did Jesus mean by this last warning? Was He talking about a literal eye or hand? We all know these parts of the body are merely receptors, that is, they do what the mind directs. They are organs that respond to stimuli. What is the source of the stimuli? The mind, of course! So, what was Jesus saying? He was saying that sin is caused by an errant mind—a mind that makes no attempt to control the bodily organs. James explained it in this manner: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15). The Bible admonishes, "flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18). When one fails to check his or her lust, the organs of the body become the offending instruments. The real problem is in the mind and heart. Cutting off an offending organ will solve nothing, as long as lust remains in the heart and mind. If the mind is under control, the organs will not offend. When Jesus talked about the need to excise an eye or hand, He was talking about the need to rid our minds of the lust and the wrongful desires of the mind. This figurative example emphasizes the importance of avoiding lust. The literal need is to rid us of the root cause—lust in the heart and mind. Jesus warned that the failure to control what is in the heart and mind can lead to eternal death! This is a hard saying indeed!

Christians are told that God created our bodies for a holy purpose, not for the exercise of sinful lusts. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:18-20).

Take a look at Matthew 5:38-39. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Here is another hard saying of Jesus. It is based on the law of *lex talionis* found in the Old Testament. This law states: "And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:23-25). Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:38-39 emphasizes the law of love. Christians should apply His instruction personally, as the Bible clearly reveals that the nations are not going to cease fighting and warring until Christ returns (Isa. 2:4). In this world, the practice is not only to avenge personal wrongs, but

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whole ethnic groups and nations seek to avenge wrongs directed against just one segment of their particular ethnic group or society. The result is an endless cycle of wars and bloodshed. Jesus tells Christians not to exact revenge. When Jesus gave this instruction, He was illustrating that revenge and retribution lead only to retaliation, and the violence continues.

Further on Jesus added to this principle: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44). How many people can do this? On a personal basis Jesus is telling us that the best way to destroy an enemy is to befriend him. The Apostle Paul gives this instruction: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20). So, the best way to get rid of an enemy is to make him your friend. This is why Jesus added:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? (Matt. 5:44-46).

Christians are directly admonished not to seek revenge, for God says He is the avenger. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21). The context of this verse tells us that Christians can be overcome with evil if they give in to wrath and seek to avenge themselves. Christ knew quite well that the vast majority of mankind would not receive this instruction. Can we? The supreme example of this principle was illustrated by Jesus when He said, ". . . Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). Peter adds: "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9).

Forgiving others for the wrong they have done against us is extremely difficult. But notice what Jesus told Peter: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22). Jesus explained elsewhere that this forgiveness was to be predicated upon the offender's repentance. "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4).

He illustrated this principle by a parable.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he

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should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses (Matt. 18:23-35).

There is a tremendous lesson here, a lesson that should not be disregarded. We can all receive forgiveness from God. If we cannot manifest the same forgiveness toward our fellow man, then we clearly show we cannot accept the hard sayings of Jesus.