

Mathew: 5:37-48

From Catena Aurea:

5:31–32

31. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

GLOSS. (non occ.) The Lord had taught us above that our neighbour's wife was not to be coveted, He now proceeds to teach that our own wife is not to be put away.

JEROME. For touching Moses's allowance of divorce, the Lord and Saviour more fully explains in conclusion, that it was because of the hardness of the hearts of the husbands, not so much sanctioning discord, as checking bloodshed.

HILARY. But the Lord who brought peace and goodwill on earth, would have it reign especially in the matrimonial bond.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Fasust. xix. 26.) The Lord's command here that a wife is not to be put away, is not contrary to the command in the Law, as Manichæus affirmed. Had the Law allowed any who would to put away his wife, to allow none to put away were indeed the very opposite of that. But the difficulty which Moses is careful to put in the way, shews that he was no good friend to the practice at all. For he required a bill of divorcement, the delay and difficulty of drawing out which would often cool headlong rage and disagreement, especially as by the Hebrew custom, it was the Scribes alone who were permitted to use the Hebrew letters, in which they professed a singular skill. To these then the law would send him whom it bid to give a writing of divorcement, when he would put away his wife, who mediating between him and his wife, might set them at one again, unless in minds too wayward to be moved by counsels of peace. Thus then He neither completed, by adding words to it, the law of them of old time, nor did He destroy the Law given by Moses by enacting things contrary to it, as Manichæus affirmed; but rather repeated and approved all that the Hebrew Law contained, so that whatever He spoke in His own person more than

it had, had in view either explanation, which in divers obscure places of the Law was greatly needed, or the more punctual observance of its enactments.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 14.) By interposing this delay in the mode of putting away, the lawgiver shewed as clearly as it could be shewn to hard hearts, that he hated strife and disagreement. The Lord then so confirms this backwardness in the Law, as to except only one case, the cause of fornication; every other inconvenience which may have place, He bids us bear with patience in consideration of the plighted troth of wedlock.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Yea more, He declares the man who marries her who is put away an adulterer.

CHRYSOSTOM. Say not here, It is enough her husband has put her away; for even after she is put away she continues the wife of him that put her away.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) The Apostle has fixed the limit here, requiring her to abstain from a fresh marriage as long as her husband lives. After his death he allows her to marry. But if the woman may not marry while her former husband is alive, much less may she yield herself to unlawful indulgences. But this command of the Lord, forbidding to put away a wife, is not broken by him who lives with her not carnally but spiritually, in that more blessed wedlock of those that keep themselves chaste. A question also here arises as to what is that fornication which the Lord allows as a cause of divorce; whether carnal sin, or, according to the Scripture use of the word, any unlawful passion, as idolatry, avarice, in short all transgression of the Law by forbidden desires. For if the Apostle permits the divorce of a wife if she be unbelieving, (though indeed it is better not to put her away,) and the Lord forbids any divorce but for the cause of fornication, unbelief even must be fornication. And if unbelief be fornication, and idolatry unbelief, and covetousness idolatry, it is not to be doubted that covetousness is fornication. And if covetousness be fornication, who may say of any kind of unlawful desire that it is not a kind of fornication?

AUGUSTINE. (Retract. i. 19. 6.) Yet I would not have the reader think this disputation of ours sufficient in a matter so arduous; for not every sin is spiritual fornication, nor does God destroy every sinner, for He hears His saints daily crying to Him, Forgive us our debts; but every man who goes a whoring and forsakes Him, him He destroys. Whether this be the fornication for which divorce is allowed is a most knotty question—for it is no question at all that it is allowed for the fornication by carnal sin.

AUGUSTINE. (lib. 83. Quæst. q. ult.) If any affirm that the only fornication for which the Lord allows divorce is that of carnal sin, he may say that the Lord has spoken of believing husbands and wives, forbidding either to leave the other except for fornication.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 16.) Not only does He permit to put away a wife who commits fornication, but whoso puts away a wife by whom he is driven to commit fornication, puts her away for the cause of fornication, both for his own sake and hers.

AUGUSTINE. (de Fid. et Op. 16.) He also rightly puts away his wife to whom she shall say, I will not be your wife unless you get me money by robbery; or should require any other crime to be done by him. If the husband here be truly penitent, he will cut off the limb that offends him.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 16.) Nothing can be more unjust than to put away a wife for fornication, and yourself to be guilty of that sin, for then is that happened, Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself. (Rom. 2:1.) When He says, And he who marrieth her who is put away, committeth adultery, a question arises, does the woman also in this case commit adultery? For the Apostle directs either that she remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. There is this difference in the separation, namely, which of them was the cause of it. If the wife put away the husband and marry another, she appears to have left her first husband with the desire of change, which is an adulterous thought. But if she have been put away by her husband, yet he who marries her commits adultery, how can she be quit of the same guilt? And further, if he who marries her commits adultery, she is the cause of his committing adultery, which is what the Lord is here forbidding.

5:33–37

33. Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by Heaven; for it is God's throne;

35. Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

GLOSS. (non occ.) The Lord has hitherto taught to abstain from injuring our neighbour, forbidding anger with murder, lust with adultery, and the putting away a wife with a bill of divorce. He now proceeds to teach to abstain from injury to God, forbidding not only perjury as an evil in itself, but even all oaths as the cause of evil, saying, Ye have heard it said by them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself. It is written in Leviticus, Thou shalt not forswear thyself in my name; (c. 19:12.) and that they should not make gods of the creature, they are commanded to render to God their oaths, and not to swear by any creature, Render to the Lord thy oaths; that is, if you shall have occasion to swear, you shall swear by the Creator and not by the creature. As it is written in Deuteronomy, Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shall swear by his name. (c. 6:13.)

JEROME. This was allowed under the Law, as to children; as they offered sacrifice to God, that they might not do it to idols, so they were permitted to swear by God; not that the thing was right, but that it were better done to God than to dæmons.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Faust. xix. 23.) Inasmuch as the sin of perjury is a grievous sin, he must be further removed from it who uses no oath, than he who is ready to swear on every occasion, and the Lord would rather that we should not swear and keep close to the truth, than that swearing we should come near to perjury.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 17.) This precept also confirms the righteousness of the Pharisees, not to forswear; inasmuch as he who swears not at all cannot forswear himself. But as to call God to witness is to swear, does not the Apostle break this commandment when he says several times to the Galatians, The things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. (Gal. 1:20.) So the Romans, God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit. (Rom. 1:9) Unless perhaps some one may say, it is no oath unless I use the form of swearing by some object; and that the Apostle did not swear in saying, God is my witness. It is ridiculous to make such a distinction; yet the Apostle has used even this form, I die daily, by your boasting. (1 Cor. 15:31.) That this does not mean, your boasting has caused my dying daily, but is an oath, is clear from the Greek, which is νή τήν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν.

AUGUSTINE. (de Mendac. 15.) But what we could not understand by mere words, from the conduct of the saints we may gather in what sense should be understood what might easily be drawn the contrary way, unless explained by example. The Apostle has used oaths in his Epistles, and by this shews us how that ought to be taken, I say unto you, Swear not at all, namely, lest by allowing ourselves to swear at all

we come to readiness in swearing, from readiness we come to a habit of swearing, and from a habit of swearing we fall into perjury. And so the Apostle is not found to have used an oath but only in writing, the greater thought and caution which that requires not allowing of slip of the tongue. Yet is the Lord's command so universal, Swear not at all, that He would seem to have forbidden it even in writing. But since it would be an impiety to accuse Paul of having violated this precept, especially in his Epistles, we must understand the word at all as implying that, as far as lays in your power, you should not make a practice of swearing, not aim at it as a good thing in which you should take delight.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Faust. xix. 23.) Therefore in his writings, as writing allows of greater circumspection, the Apostle is found to have used an oath in several places, that none might suppose that there is any direct sin in swearing what is true; but only that our weak hearts are better preserved from perjury by abstaining from all swearing whatever.

JEROME. Lastly, consider that the Saviour does not here forbid to swear by God, but by the Heaven, the Earth, by Jerusalem, by a man's head. For this evil practice of swearing by the elements the Jews had always, and are thereof often accused in the prophetic writings. For he who swears, shews either reverence or love for that by which he swears. Thus when the Jews swore by the Angels, by the city of Jerusalem, by the temple and the elements, they paid to the creature the honour and worship belonging to God; for it is commanded in the Law that we should not swear but by the Lord our God.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 17.) Or; It is added, By the Heaven, &c. because the Jews did not consider themselves bound when they swore by such things. As if He had said, When you swear by the Heaven and the Earth, think not that you do not owe your oath to the Lord your God, for you are proved to have sworn by Him whose throne the heaven is, and the earth His footstool; which is not meant as though God had such limbs set upon the heaven and the earth, after the manner of a man who is sitting; but that seat signifies God's judgment of us. And since in the whole extent of this universe it is the heaven that has the highest beauty, God is said to sit upon the heavens as shewing divine power to be more excellent than the most surpassing show of beauty; and He is said to stand upon the earth, as putting to lowest use a lesser beauty. Spiritually by the heavens are denoted holy souls, by the earth the sinful, seeing He that is spiritual judgeth all things. (1 Cor. 2:15.) But to the sinner it is said, Earth thou art, and unto earth thou shalt return. (Gen. 3:19.) And he who would abide under a law, is put under a law, and therefore He adds, it is the footstool of His feet. Neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King; this is better said than 'it is mine;' though it is understood to mean the same. And because He is also truly Lord, whoso

swears by Jerusalem, owes his oath to the Lord. Neither by thy head. What could any think more entirely his own property than his own head? But how is it ours when we have not power to make one hair black or white? Whoso then swears by his own head also owes his vows to the Lord; and by this the rest may be understood.

CHRYSOSTOM. Note how He exalts the elements of the world, not from their own nature, but from the respect which they have to God, so that there is opened no occasion of idolatry.

HILARY. Otherwise; They who live in the simplicity of the faith have not need to swear, with them ever, what is is, what is not is not; by this their life and their conversation are ever preserved in truth.

JEROME. Therefore Evangelic verity does not admit an oath, since the whole discourse of the faithful is instead of an oath.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) And he who has learned that an oath is to be reckoned not among things good, but among things necessary, will restrain himself as much as he may, not to use an oath without necessity, unless he sees men loth to believe what it is for their good they should believe, without the confirmation of an oath. This then is good and to be desired, that our conversation be only, yea, yea; nay, nay; for what is more than this cometh of evil. That is, if you are compelled to swear, you know that it is by the necessity of their weakness to whom you would persuade any thing; which weakness is surely an evil. What is more than this is thus evil; not that you do evil in this just use of an oath to persuade another to something beneficial for him; but it is an evil in him whose weakness thus obliges you to use an oath.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or; of evil, that is, from their weakness to whom the Law permitted the use of an oath. Not that by this the old Law is signified to be from the Devil, but He leads us from the old imperfection to the new abundance.

5:38–42

38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39. 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.

40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

GLOSS. (non occ.) The Lord having taught that we are not to offer injury to our neighbour, or irreverence to the Lord, now proceeds to shew how the Christian should demean himself to those that injure him.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Faust. xix. 25.) This law, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, was enacted to repress the flames of mutual hate, and to be a check on their undisciplined spirits. For who when he would take revenge, was ever content to return just so much harm as he had received? Do we not see men who have suffered some trifling hurt, straightway plot murder, thirst for blood, and hardly find evil enough that they can do to their enemies for the satisfying their rage? To this immeasured and cruel fury the Law puts bounds when it enacts a *lex talionis*; that is, that whatever wrong or hurt any man has done to another, he should suffer just the same in return. This is not to encourage but to check rage; for it does not rekindle what was extinguished, but hinders the flames already kindled from further spread. It enacts a just retaliation, properly due to him who has suffered the wrong. But that mercy forgives any debt, does not make it unjust that payment had been sought. Since then he sins who seeks an unmeasured vengeance, but he does not sin who desires only a just one; he is therefore further from sin who seeks no retribution at all. I might state it yet thus; It was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not take unequal retaliation; But I say unto you. Ye shall not retaliate; this is a completion of the Law, if in these words something is added to the Law which was wanting to it; yea, rather that which the Law sought to do, namely, to put an end to unequal revenge, is more safely secured when there is no revenge at all.

JEROME. Thus our Lord by doing away all retaliation, cuts off the beginnings of sin. So the Law corrects faults, the Gospel removes their occasions.

GLOSS. (non occ.) Or it may be said that the Lord said this, adding somewhat to the righteousness of the old Law.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 19.) For the righteousness of the Pharisees is a less righteousness, not to transgress the measure of equal retribution; and this is the beginning of peace; but perfect peace is to refuse all such retribution. Between that first manner then, which was not according to the Law, to wit, that a greater evil should be returned for a less, and this which the Lord enjoins to make His disciples perfect, to wit, that no evil should be returned for evil, a middle place is held by this, that an equal evil

should be returned, which was thus the passage from extremest discord to extremest peace. Whoso then first does evil to another departs furthest from righteousness; and who does not first do any wrong, but when wronged repays with a heavier wrong, has departed somewhat from extreme injustice; he who repays only what he has received, gives up yet something more, for it were but strict right that he who is the first aggressor should receive a greater hurt than he inflicted. This righteousness thus partly begun, He perfects, who is come to fulfil the Law. The two steps that intervene He leaves to be understood; for there is who does not repay so much, but less; and there is yet above him, he who repays not at all; yet this seems too little to the Lord, if you be not also ready to suffer wrong. Therefore He says not, Render not evil for evil, but, Resist not against evil, not only repay not what is offered to you, but do not resist that it should not be done to you. For thus accordingly He explains that saying, If any man smite thee on thy right cheek, offer to him the left also. Which as being a high part of mercy, is known to those who serve such as they love much; from whom, being morose, or insane, they endure many things, and if it be for their health they offer themselves to endure more. The Lord then, the Physician of souls, teaches His disciples to endure with patience the sicknesses of those for whose spiritual health they should provide. For all wickedness comes of a sickness of the mind; nothing is more innocent than he who is sound and of perfect health in virtue.

AUGUSTINE. (de Mendac. 15.) The things which are done by the Saints in the New Testament profit for examples of understanding those Scriptures which are modelled into the form of precepts. Thus we read in Luke; Whoso smiteth thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also. (Luke 6:29.) Now there is no example of patience more perfect than that of the Lord; yet He, when He was smitten, said not, 'Behold the other cheek,' but, If I have spoken amiss, accuse me wherein it is amiss; but if well, why smitest thou me? (John 18:23.) hereby shewing us that that turning of the other cheek should be in the heart.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm in Mont. i. 19.) For the Lord was ready not only to be smitten on the other cheek for the salvation of men, but to be crucified with His whole body. It may be asked, What does the right cheek expressly signify? As the face is that whereby any man is known, to be smitten on the face is according to the Apostle to be contemned and despised. But as we cannot say 'right face,' and 'left face,' and yet we have a name twofold, one before God, and one before the world, it is distributed as it were into the right cheek, and left cheek, that whoever of Christ's disciples is despised for that he is a Christian, may be ready to be yet more despised for any of this world's honours that he may have. All things wherein we suffer any wrong are divided into two kinds, of which one is what cannot be restored, the other what may be restored. In that kind which cannot be restored, we are wont to seek the solace of revenge. For what

does it boot if when smitten you smite again, is the hurt done to your body thereby repaid to you? But the mind swollen with rage seeks such assuagements.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 20.) Whence the Lord judges that others' weakness should rather be borne with compassion, than that our own should be soothed by others' pain. For that retribution which tends to correction is not here forbidden, for such is indeed a part of mercy; nor does such intention hinder that he, who seeks to correct another, is not at the same time ready himself to take more at his hands. But it is required that he should inflict the punishment to whom the power is given by the course of things, and with such a mind as the father has to a child in correcting him whom it is impossible he should hate. And holy men have punished some sins with death, in order that a wholesome fear might be struck into the living, and so that not his death, but the likelihood of increase of his sin had he lived, was the hurt of the criminal. Thus Elias punished many with death, and when the disciples would take example from him they were rebuked by the Lord, who did not censure this example of the Prophet, but their ignorant use of it, seeing them to desire the punishment not for correction's sake, but from angry hate. But after He had inculcated love of their neighbour, and had given them the Holy Spirit, there wanted not instances of such vengeance; as Ananias and his wife who fell down dead at the words of Peter, and the Apostle Paul delivered some to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Yet do some, with a kind of blind opposition, rage against the temporal punishments of the Old Testament, not knowing with what mind they were inflicted.

AUGUSTINE. (Epist. 185. 5.) But who that is of sober mind would say to kings, It is nothing of your concern who will live religiously, or who profanely? It cannot even be said to them, that it is not their concern who will live chastely, or who unchastely. It is indeed better that men should be led to serve God by right teaching than by penalties; yet has it benefitted many, as experience has approved to us, to be first coerced by pain and fear, that they might be taught after, or to be made to conform in deed to what they had learned in words. The better men indeed are led of love, but the more part of men are wrought on by fear. Let them learn in the case of the Apostle Paul, how Christ first constrained, and after taught him.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 20.) Therefore in this kind of injuries which are wont to rouse vengeance Christians will observe such a mean, that hate shall not be caused by the injuries they may receive, and yet wholesome correction be not foregone by Him who has right of either counsel or power.

JEROME. Mystically interpreted; When we are smitten on the right cheek, He said not, offer to him thy left, but the other; for the righteous has not a left. That is, if a heretic has smitten us in disputation, and would wound us in a right hand doctrine, let him be met with another testimony from Scripture.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) The other kind of injuries are those in which full restitution can be made, of which there are two kinds; one relates to money, the other to work; of the first of these it is He speaks when He continues, Whoso will sue thee for thy coat, let him have thy cloak likewise. As by the cheek are denoted such injuries of the wicked as admit of no restitution but revenge, so by this similitude of the garments is denoted such injury as admits restitution. And this, as the former, is rightly taken of preparation of the heart, not of the show of the outward action. And what is commanded respecting our garments, is to be observed in all things that by any right we call our own in worldly property. For if the command be expressed in these necessary articles of life, how much more does it hold in the case of superfluities and luxuries? And when He says, He who will sue thee, He clearly intends to include every thing for which it is possible that we should be sued. It may be made a question whether it is to be understood of slaves, for a Christian ought not to possess his slave on the same footing as his horse; though it might be that the horse was worth the more money. And if your slave have a milder master in you than he would have in him who seeks to take him from you, I do not know that he ought to be given up as lightly as your coat.

AUGUSTINE. (Enchir. 78.) The Lord here forbids his disciples to have lawsuits with others for worldly property. Yet as the Apostle allows such kind of causes to be decided between brethren, and before arbiters who are brethren, but utterly disallows them without the Church, it is manifest what is conceded to infirmity as pardonable.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 19.) The third kind of wrongs, which is in the matter of labour, consists of both such as admit restitution, and such as do not—or with or without revenge—for he who forcibly presses a man's service, and makes him give him aid against his will, can either be punished for his crime, or return the labour. In this kind of wrongs then, the Lord teaches that the Christian mind is most patient, and prepared to endure yet more than is offered; If a man constrain thee to go with him a mile, go with him yet other two. This likewise is meant not so much of actual service with your feet, as of readiness of mind.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xviii.) The word here used signifies to drag unjustly, without cause, and with insult.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Let us suppose it therefore said, Go with him other two that the number three might be completed; by which number perfection is signified; that whoever does this might remember that he is fulfilling perfect righteousness. For which reason he conveys this precept under three examples, and in this third example, he adds a twofold measure to the one single measure, that the threefold number may be complete. Or we may so consider as though in enforcing this duty, He had begun with what was easiest to bear, and had advanced gradually. For first He commanded that when the right cheek was smitten we should turn the other also; therein shewing ourselves ready to endure another wrong less than that you have already received. Secondly, to him that would take your coat, he bids you part with your cloak, (or garment, as some copies read,) which is either just as great a loss, or perhaps a little greater. In the third He doubles the additional wrong which He would have us ready to endure. And seeing it is a small thing not to hurt unless you further shew kindnesses, He adds, To him that asketh of thee, give.

JEROME. If we understand this only of alms, it cannot stand with the estate of the most part of men who are poor; even the rich if they have been always giving, will not be able to continue always to give.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Therefore, He says not, 'Give all things to him that asks;' but, Give to every one that asketh; that you should only give what you can give honestly and rightly. For what if one ask for money to employ in oppressing the innocent man? What if he ask your consent to unclean sin? We must give then only what will hurt neither ourselves or others, as far as man can judge; and when you have refused an inadmissible request, that you may not send away empty him that asked, shew the righteousness of your refusal; and such correction of the unlawful petitioner will often be a better gift than the granting his suit.

AUGUSTINE. (Epist. 93. 2.) For with more benefit is food taken from the hungry, if certainty of provision causes him to neglect righteousness, than that food should be supplied to him that he may consent to a deed of violence and wrong.

JEROME. But it maybe understood of the wealth of doctrine: wealth which never fails but the more of it is given away, the more it abounds.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 20.) That He commands, And from him that would borrow of thee, turn not away, must be referred to the mind; for God loveth a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:7.) And every one that receives, indeed borrows, though it is not he that shall pay, but God, who restores to the merciful many fold. Or, if you like to understand by borrowing, only taking with promise to repay, we must understand

the Lord's command as embracing both these kinds of affording aid; whether we give outright, or lend to receive again. And of this last kind of shewing mercy it is well said, Turn not away, that is, do not be therefore backward to lend, as though, because man shall repay you, therefore God shall not; for what you do by God's command cannot be without fruit.

AUGUSTINE. (Epist. 138. 2.) Some object that this command of Christ is altogether inconsistent with civil life in Commonwealths; Who, say they, would suffer, when he could hinder it, the pillage of his estate by an enemy; or would not repay the evil suffered by a plundered province of Rome on the plunderers according to the rights of war? But these precepts of patience are to be observed in readiness of the heart, and that mercy, not to return evil for evil, must be always fulfilled by the will. Yet must we often use a merciful sharpness in dealing with the headstrong. And in this way, if the earthly commonwealth will keep the Christian commandments, even war will not be waged without good charities, to the establishing among the vanquished peaceful harmony of godliness and righteousness. For that victory is beneficial to him from whom it snatches licence to sin; since nothing is more unfortunate for sinners, than the good fortune of their sins, which nourishes an impunity that brings punishment after it, and an evil will is strengthened, as it were some internal enemy.

5:43–48

43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44. 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;

45. 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.

46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the Publicans the same?

47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Publicans so?

48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

GLOSS. (non occ.) The Lord has taught above that we must not resist one who offers any injury, but must be ready even to suffer more; He now further requires us to shew to them that do us wrong both love

and its effects. And as the things that have gone before pertain to the completion of the righteousness of the Law, in like manner this last precept is to be referred to the completion of the law of love, which, according to the Apostle, is the fulfilling of the Law.

AUGUSTINE. (de Doctr. Christ. i. 30.) That by the command, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, all mankind were intended, the Lord shewed in the parable of the man who was left half dead, which teaches us that our neighbour is every one who may happen at any time to stand in need of our offices of mercy; and this who does not see must be denied to none, when the Lord says, Do good to them that hate you.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 21.) That there were degrees in the righteousness of the Pharisees which was under the old Law is seen herein, that many hated even those by whom they were loved. He therefore who loves his neighbour, has ascended one degree, though as yet he hate his enemy; which is expressed in that, and shalt hate his enemy; which is not to be understood as a command to the justified, but a concession to the weak.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Faust. xix. 24.) I ask the Manichæans why they would have this peculiar to the Mosaic Law, that was said by them of old time, thou shalt hate thy enemy? Has not Paul said of certain men that they were hateful to God? We must enquire then how we may understand that, after the example of God, to whom the Apostle here affirms some men to be hateful, our enemies are to be hated; and again after the same pattern of Him who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, our enemies are to be loved. Here then is the rule by which we may at once hate our enemy for the evil's sake that is in him, that is, his iniquity, and love him for the good's sake that is in him, that is, his rational part. This then, thus uttered by them of old, being heard, but not understood, hurried men on to the hatred of man, when they should have hated nothing but vice. Such the Lord corrects as He proceeds, saying, I say unto you, Love your enemies. He who had just declared that He came not to subvert the Law, but to fulfil it, by bidding us love our enemies, brought us to the understanding of how we may at once hate the same man for his sins whom we love for his human nature.

GLOSS. (ord.) But it should be known, that in the whole body of the Law it is no where written, Thou shalt hate thy enemy. But it is to be referred to the tradition of the Scribes, who thought good to add this to the Law, because the Lord bade the children of Israel pursue their enemies, and destroy Amalek from under heaven.

GLOSS. (ord.) They who stand against the Church oppose her in three ways; with hate, with words, and with bodily tortures. The Church on the other hand loves them, as it is here, Love your enemies; does good to them, as it is, Do good to them that hate you; and prays for them, as it is, Pray for them that persecute you and accuse you falsely.

JEROME. Many measuring the commandments of God by their own weakness, not by the strength of the saints, hold these commands for impossible, and say that it is virtue enough not to hate our enemies; but to love them is a command beyond human nature to obey. But it must be understood that Christ enjoins not impossibilities but perfection. Such was the temper of David towards Saul and Absalom; the Martyr Stephen also prayed for his enemies while they stoned him, and Paul wished himself anathema for the sake of his persecutors. (Rom. 9:3.) Jesus both taught and did the same, saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34.)

AUGUSTINE. (Enchir. 73.) These indeed are examples of the perfect sons of God; yet to this should every believer aim, and seek by prayer to God, and struggles with himself to raise his human spirit to this temper. Yet this so great blessing is not given to all those multitudes which we believe are heard when they pray, Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 21.) Here arises a question, that this commandment of the Lord, by which He bids us pray for our enemies, seems opposed by many other parts of Scripture. In the Prophets are found many imprecations upon enemies; such as that in the 108th Psalm, Let his children be orphans. (Ps. 109:9.) But it should be known, that the Prophets are wont to foretel things to come in the form of a prayer or wish. This has more weight as a difficulty that John says, There is a sin unto death, I sag not that he shall pray for it; (1 John 5:16.) plainly shewing, that there are some brethren for whom he docs not bid us pray; for what went before was, If any know his brother sin a sin, &c. Yet the Lord bids us pray for our persecutors. This question can only be resolved, if we admit that there are some sins in brethren more grievous than the sin of persecution in our enemies. For thus Stephen prays for those that stoned him, because they had not yet believed on Christ; but the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 4:14.) does not pray for Alexander though he was a brother, but had sinned by attacking the brotherhood through jealousy. But for whom you pray not, you do not therein pray against him. What must we say then of those against whom we know that the saints have prayed, and that not that they should be corrected, (for that would be rather to have prayed for them), but for their eternal damnation; not as that prayer of the Prophet against the Lord's betrayer, for that is a prophecy of the future, not an imprecation of punishment; but as

when we read in the Apocalypse the Martyrs' prayer that they may be avenged. (Rev. 6:10.) But we ought not to let this affect us. For who may dare to affirm that they prayed against those persons themselves, and not against the kingdom of sin? For that would be both a just and a merciful avenging of the Martyrs, to overthrow that kingdom of sin, under the continuance of which they endured all those evils. And it is overthrown by correction of some, and damnation of such as abide in sin. Does not Paul seem to you to have avenged Stephen on his own body, as he speaks, (1 Cor. 9:27.) I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection.

CHRYSOSTOM. Note through what steps we have now ascended hither, and how He has set us on the very pinnacle of virtue. The first step is, not to begin to do wrong to any; the second, that in avenging a wrong done to us we be content with retaliating equal; the third, to return nothing of what we have suffered; the fourth, to offer one's self to the endurance of evil; the fifth, to be ready to suffer even more evil than the oppressor desires to inflict; the sixth, not to hate him of whom we suffer such things; the seventh, to love him; the eighth, to do him good; the ninth, to pray for him. And because the command is great, the reward proposed is also great, namely, to be made like unto God, Ye shall be the sons of your Father which is in heaven.

JEROME. For whoso keeps the commandments of God is thereby made the son of God; he then of whom he here speaks is not by nature His son, but by his own will.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. in Mont. i. 23.) After that rule we must here understand of which John speaks, He gave them power to be made the sons of God. One is His Son by nature; we are made sons by the power which we have received; that is, so far as we fulfil those things that we are commanded. So He says not, Do these things because ye are sons; but, do these things that ye may become sons. In calling us to this then, He calls us to His likeness, for He saith, He maketh His sun to rise on the righteous and the unrighteous. By the sun we may understand not this visible, but that of which it is said, To you that fear the name of the Lord, the Sun of righteousness shall arise; (Mal. 4:2.) and by the rain, the water of the doctrine of truth; for Christ was seen, and was preached to good as well as bad.

HILARY. Or, the sun and rain have reference to the baptism with water and Spirit.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Or we may take it of this visible sun, and of the rain by which the fruits are nourished, as the wicked mourn in the book of Wisdom, The Sun has not risen for us. (Wisd. 5:6.) And of the rain it is said, I will command the clouds that they rain not on it. (Is. 5:6.) But whether it be this or that,

it is of the great goodness of God, which is set forth for our imitation. He says not, 'the sun,' but, His sun, that is, the sun which Himself has made, that hence we may be admonished with how great liberality we ought to supply those things that we have not created, but have received as a boon from Him.

AUGUSTINE. (Epist. 93. 2.) But as we laud Him for His gifts, let us also consider how He chastises those whom He loves. For not every one who spares is a friend, nor every one who chastises an enemy; it is better to love with severity, than to use lenity wherewith to deceive. (vid. Prov. 27:6.)

AUGUSTINE. (De Civ. Dei, i. 8.) For the good man is not puffed up by worldly goods, nor broken by worldly calamity. But the bad man is punished in temporal losses, because he is corrupted by temporal gains. Or for another reason He would have good and evil common to both sorts of men, that good things might not be sought with vehement desire, when they were enjoyed even by the wicked; nor the evil things shamefully avoided, when even the righteous are afflicted by them.

GLOSS. (non occ.) To love one that loves us is of nature, but to love our enemy of charity. If ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? to wit, in heaven. None truly, for of such it is said, Ye have received your reward. But these things we ought to do, and not leave the other undone.

GLOSS. (non occ.) But if you only pray for them that are your kinsfolk, what more has your benevolence than that of the unbelieving? Salutation is a kind of prayer.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

5:34 Do Not Swear by Heaven

Swearing Oaths Inappropriate.

Chromatius: By the grace of gospel teaching, the law given by Moses acquired an advantage. The law prescribes that one must not swear falsely; but according to the gospel one must not swear at all. The Holy Spirit had seen fit to order this through Solomon when he said, "Do not accustom your mouth to oaths."⁶ And again: "Even as a well-chastised servant is not deterred from envy, whoever swears and does business will not be purged from sin."⁷ Therefore it is absolutely inappropriate for us to swear. What need is there for us to swear when we are not allowed to lie at all and our words must always be true and trustworthy, so much so that they may be taken as an oath? On this, the Lord not only forbids us to swear

falsely but even to swear, lest we appear to tell the truth only when we swear and lest (while we should be truthful in our every word) we think it is all right to lie when we do not take an oath. For this is the purpose of an oath: Everyone who swears, swears to the fact what he is saying is true. Therefore the Lord does not want a gap between our oath and our ordinary speech. Even as there must be no faithlessness in an oath, in our words there must be no lie. For both false swearing and lying are punished with divine judgment, as the Scripture says: “The mouth that lies kills the soul.”⁸ So whoever speaks the truth swears, for it is written: “A faithful witness will not lie.”⁹ Tractate on Matthew 24.2.2–4.10

5:35 Do Not Swear by Earth

Do Not Deify Creation.

Cyril of Alexandria: For this reason Jesus prohibits us from swearing by heaven or by the earth. This is in order that we should not give to creation an honor surpassing creation. Do not deify creation. Those who swear, he says, “swear by the greater,” as the apostle has said.¹¹ And he also forbids swearing by Jerusalem. For the earthly Jerusalem is a type of the Jerusalem above,¹² and God swears only by himself, that is, by his own glory.¹³ Wherefore, since the similarity transcends us, we are obliged to swear neither by ourselves nor by our own glory, for we are not free like God but are subject to God’s authority. Fragment 63.¹⁴

5:36 Do Not Swear by Your Head

Do Not Swear by Earthly Elements.

Chromatius: These words of the Lord whereby he forbids us to swear by these different elements invite a double explanation.

First, he wanted to draw us away from the use of oaths and the customs of human error, lest each of us through swearing by these elements accord a creature the honor of divine veneration or believe one has impunity in swearing falsely if one swears by the elements of the world....

It can also be explained in this way: When one swears by heaven and earth, one swears by him who made heaven and earth, as the Lord himself declared elsewhere: “He who swears by the altar swears by it and by all things that are on it; and he who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.”¹⁵

Jesus goes on to say, “nor by Jerusalem,” for it is the city of the great King, that is, the symbol of Christ’s body, which is the spiritual and heavenly church. “Neither shall you swear,” he says, “by your head,” for according to the apostle, “the head of every man is Christ.”¹⁶ Therefore the one who swears by these things makes reference to him who is the author of all these things. Tractate on Matthew 24.3.1–4.¹⁷

5:37 Unadorned Speech

A Simple Yes or No.

Chrysostom: He has prohibited anyone from swearing by his head, for in doing so one would be worshipping himself. Rather, Jesus intends to refer all glory to God, signifying that human beings are not finally masters of themselves. Oaths made by the head are thus discredited. For if no one would relinquish his own child to another, how much more will God refuse to relinquish his own work to you? For though it be your head, yet it remains the property of another. For he did not say, “You cannot make one hair grow” but “You cannot make one hair white or black” or change its quality.

What is it then that exceeds a simple yes or no? It is the oath, not the perjury. For lying is openly acknowledged to be wrong, and no one needs to learn that it is of the Adversary. It is not an excess but a deficiency. An excess, though, means something more, something over and above the statement itself. This is the nature of an oath.

Someone might then object: If the evil one is the source of all oaths, how could they have found a place in God’s law? Well, we could say much the same thing about Jesus’ teaching on divorce. How is divorce now accounted adultery, particularly when divorce was permitted by Moses? What can we reply? The precepts Moses uttered at that time accounted for the weakness of those who were receiving the laws.

Just as a lisp is unworthy of a philosopher, so the scent of burnt offerings is unworthy of God. Our understanding of the principles of virtue has advanced beyond the time of Moses. Therefore divorce is now seen to be adultery and the necessity of an oath to be from the evil one. If the earlier laws had been devilish from the first, they would never have resulted in such goodness. Had Moses’ laws not been forerunners, Jesus’ teaching would not have been so easily received. Don’t require a present excellence from past laws, when their usefulness has now been surpassed. Still, if you wish to retain them, even now they demonstrate their virtue. They show their virtue most of all through the fault we discover by their

aid. The faults we now see commend them most to us. For had they not brought us up well and prepared us for the reception of the greater precepts, they would not have appeared as good.

It is similar with the breast of the mother; when it has fulfilled its task, it dismisses the child to a more mature diet and after that appears useless. Thus the mother who once viewed it as necessary for the baby now taunts with ten thousand mockeries the child's need for the breast. Breastfeeding is over. In the same way, Christ says that the ancient laws are from the evil one, not to indicate that the old law is of the devil but in order that he might with great earnestness lead them away from their ancient poverty. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 17.5–6.¹⁸

5:38 An Eye for an Eye

5:39 Turn the Other Cheek

Offer the Other Cheek.

Origen: Jesus' words regarding turning the other cheek concern more than simply long-suffering. For it is against nature to be so arrogant as to hit the other person. The one therefore who is "ready to give an answer" to every malicious person "concerning the faith that is in him" ²⁰ will not offer resistance. The spiritual meaning is this: To one who strikes him upon the right cheek—that is, against the rational doctrines—the believer will offer also the ethical ones. This will scandalize those who do not understand the reasonings of faith. They will cease from their accusations, since they will be ashamed and continue progress in divine things. Fragment 108.²¹

Tolerate a Hidden Injury as a Witness to Future Judgment.

Hilary: The Lord wishes that the hope of our faith, extending into eternity, be tested by these things, so that the very toleration of a hidden injury should be a witness of our future judgment. The law used to hold unfaithful Israel within a boundary of fear and contained the desire for injury by the threat of injury returned. Faith, however, does not permit resentment for injuries, nor does it wish for revenge.... There is in the judgment of God a greater consolation for those who have suffered injury and a punishment more dreadful than injuries returned. Therefore the Gospels not only warn us away from iniquities but also drive out the latent desire for vengeance. For if we have received a blow, we ought to offer the other

cheek.... The Lord who accompanies us on our journey offers his own cheek to slaps and his shoulders to whips, to the increase of his glory. On Matthew 4.25.22

Resist Not Evil.

Chrysostom: For this reason Jesus has also added, "But I say to you, do not resist the evil one." He did not say "do not resist your brother" but "the evil one"! We are authorized to dare to act in the presence of evil through Christ's influence. In this way he relaxes and secretly removes most of our anger against the aggressor by transferring the censure to another.

"What then?" one asks. "Should we not resist the evil one at all?" Indeed we should, but not in this way. Rather, as Jesus has commanded, we resist by surrendering ourselves to suffer wrongfully. In this way you shall prevail over him. For one fire is not quenched by another, but fire by water. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 18.1.23

5:40 Give Your Coat and Cloak

Be Removed from Every Lawsuit.

Chromatius: Beyond the tolerance of physical injury, the Lord wants us also to have contempt for things of this world and to be so far removed from every lawsuit or contest of judgment. If by chance a slanderer or tempter comes forward to initiate a lawsuit for the sake of testing our faith and desires to rob us of the things which are ours, the Lord orders us to offer willingly not only the things that the person goes after unjustly but even those not demanded. Tractate on Matthew 25.2.1.24

5:41 Go a Second Mile

The Second Mile.

Chrysostom: Do you grasp the excellence of a Christian disposition? After you give your coat and your cloak, even if your enemy should wish to subject your naked body to hardships and labors, not even then, Jesus says, must you forbid him. For he would have us possess all things in common, both our bodies and our goods, as with them that are in need, so with them that insult us. For the latter response comes from a courageous spirit, the former from mercy. Because of this, Jesus said, "If any one shall compel you to go

one mile, go with him two.” Again he leads you to higher ground and commands you to manifest the same type of aspiration. For if the lesser things he spoke of at the beginning receive such great blessings, consider what sort of reward awaits those who duly perform these and what they become even before we hear of receiving rewards. You are winning full freedom from unworthy passions in a human and passible body. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 18.3.27

A Missional Interpretation of the Second Mile.

Chromatius: Some believe that this section, “He who is pressed into service for one mile, let him go with that man as far as another two,” is to be understood spiritually in this fashion: If a nonbeliever, or one who has not yet followed the knowledge of the truth, makes mention of the one God the Father, the founder of all things, as if coming to God by the way of the law, go with that one the second mile. That is, after his profession of God the Father, lead this same person, by the way of truth, to the knowledge of the Son and the Holy Spirit, showing that one is to believe not only in the Father but also in the Son and the Holy Spirit. Tractate on Matthew 25.3.2.28

5:42 Give to One Who Begs

Freely Give.

Jerome: If we think that only this is all that is taught about almsgiving, then there are many poor to whom it cannot apply. And even the wealthy can give forever, if they are always giving. For the sake of goodness, therefore, this doctrine of almsgiving was given to the apostles: that they who have freely received should freely give. 29 Money of that sort is never lacking. As much as is given, by that much it is increased, and though the fountain water drench the fields below, it never runs dry. Commentary on Matthew 1.5.42.30

Constraints on Irresponsible Giving.

Theodore of Heraclea: In giving us these directives so that their sense might be diligently examined, he did not intend us to take them according to the bare sound of the words. For he does not command to give to everyone who asks without exception, even if one has nothing to give, for that is impossible. Nor does he instruct us, if we have plenty, to give to someone who asks with a bad motive. For the donation then goes for evil things, as when someone asks for the sake of lust and intemperance and not for real need, and the person who gives merely provides fuel for such intemperance. For why is it said concerning the apostles that “distribution was made to each as any had need”? 31 This tells us that they gave not so

much to those who simply asked but that they provided for others on the basis of need. And do not forget about the verse that says, “A man is acceptable according to what he has, not according to what he does not have,”³² and “not so that others should be relieved and you burdened.”³³ Fragment 37.³⁴

5:43 Hating an Enemy

The Old Law.

Theodore of Heraclea: Whether, he says, it be a friend or an enemy, a believer or an unbeliever, do good to the person in need. Do not follow the Jewish law that focuses repayment primarily on friends. For this reason, when they were urging the Lord to heal the son of the royal officer, they said to him, “He is worthy to have you do this for him,” because “he has even built us our synagogue.”³⁶ Fragment 38.³⁷

5:44 Loving and Praying for Enemies

Christ Does Not Command Impossibilities.

Theodore of Heraclea: The law of the Lord transcends both the law of nature and the law revealed to Moses. For the things that are impossible with humans are possible with God.³⁹ But Christ does not legislate impossibilities, as Stephen showed at the time of his passion, when he bent his knees and prayed for those who were stoning him.⁴⁰ Similarly Paul, who had suffered so many things at the hands of the Jews, also prays for them.⁴¹ Therefore the infrequency of these things shows that they are not impossible. For most people, though, they are difficult to accomplish owing to their unwillingness to strive to reach the summit of virtue. Fragment 40.⁴²

Pray for Those Who Persecute You.

Chrysostom: For neither did Christ simply command to love but to pray. Do you see how many steps he has ascended and how he has set us on the very summit of virtue? Mark it, numbering from the beginning. A first step is not to begin with injustice. A second, after one has begun, is not to vindicate oneself by retaliating in kind. A third, to refuse to respond in kind to the one who is injuring us but to remain tranquil. A fourth, even to offer up one’s self to suffer wrongfully. A fifth, to give up even more than the wrongdoer wishes to take. A sixth, to refuse to hate one who has wronged us. A seventh, even to love such a one. An eighth, even to do good to that one. A ninth, to entreat God himself on our enemy’s behalf. Do you

perceive how elevated is a Christian disposition? Hence its reward is also glorious. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 18.4.⁴³

5:45 Imitating the Father

The Evil and the Good.

Theodore of Heraclea: The imitator of God and Christ makes the sun of his word and the brightness of his righteousness to shine on both evil and good people, and the rain from his mouth falls upon both the righteous and the sinful. Fragment 42.⁴⁴

Joint Heirs with Christ by Adoption.

Augustine: With regard to what immediately follows, namely, “That you may be children of your Father who is in heaven,” it is to be understood in the sense in which John also speaks when he says, “He gave them the power of becoming children of God.”⁴⁵ For there is One who is the Son by nature, and he absolutely knows no sin. But since we have received the power to become sons, we are made sons insofar as we fulfill the precepts that have been given by the Son. “Adoption” is the term used by the apostle to denote the character of our vocation to the eternal inheritance, in order to be joint heirs with Christ. By spiritual regeneration we therefore become sons and are adopted into the kingdom of God, not as aliens but as his creatures and offspring. Sermon on the Mount 1.23.78.⁴⁶

A Spiritual Interpretation of Sun and Rain.

Augustine: Since he calls us to the adoption as sons through the only begotten Son himself, he calls us to his own likeness. For, as the Lord at once adds, “He makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” Now, if you would understand the expression “his sun” to mean not the sun that is visible to bodily eyes but his wisdom, to which the following expressions refer—“he is the brightness of eternal light”⁴⁷ and also “The sun of justice is risen upon me,”⁴⁸ as well as “But to you that fear the name of the Lord, the sun of justice shall arise”⁴⁹—then you must also understand the rain as a watering by the teaching of truth, because that teaching has become manifest to the good and to the evil. But you may prefer to understand it as the sun that is manifest to the bodily eyes of beasts as well as people and to understand the rain as the showers that produce the fruits that God has given us for the perfection of the body. I believe this to be surely the more probable meaning, since the other “sun” does not rise except on the good and the holy, for this is the very thing that the unjust bewail in the book that

is called the Wisdom of Solomon: “And the sun [of understanding] has not risen upon us.”⁵⁰ And the spiritual rain refreshes only the good, for the vine signifies the bad of whom it is said, “I will command my clouds not to rain upon it.”⁵¹ Sermon on the Mount 1.23.79.⁵²

5:46–47 What Reward Have You?

5:48 Perfect as the Heavenly Father Is Perfect

All Things Are Perfected by Goodness.

Hilary: Matthew concludes, “All things are perfected by goodness.” The law used to demand that your neighbor be loved and allowed hatred against an enemy. Faith, rather, requires that enemies be cherished. It breaks the tendency we have to be peevish and urges us to bear life’s difficulties calmly. Faith not only deters anger from turning into revenge but even softens it into love for the injurer. It is merely human to love those who love you, and it is common to cherish those who cherish you. Therefore Christ calls us into the life of heirs of God and to be models for the just and the unjust of the imitation of Christ. He distributes the sun and the rain through his coming in baptism and by the sacraments of the Spirit. Thus he has prepared us for the perfect life through this concord of public goodness, because we must imitate our perfect Father in heaven. On Matthew 4.27.⁵⁶

The Law of Gospel Love.

Chromatius: The Lord has shown that we cannot have the good work of perfect love if we love only those from whom in turn we know the return of mutual love will be paid in kind. For we know that love of this sort is common even to nonbelievers and sinners. Hence the Lord wishes us to overcome the common law of human love by the law of gospel love, so that we may show the affection of our love not only toward those who love us but even toward our enemies.... Thus we may imitate the example of true piety and our Father’s goodness. Tractate on Matthew 21.2.1.⁵⁷