

THE GREATEST TEACHER

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Whatever one thinks about Jesus Christ, whether you believe in Him or not, His teachings have been acclaimed throughout the world, even by atheists and agnostics, as the most profound, rational and sensible teachings of all time.

I have to say, however, that the Bible admits that it contains some teachings hard to understand. But there are sufficient that we can understand to take on board for ourselves.

However, if all the world lived by the Lord's teachings, the world would be a safer and better place.

I will draw your attention to some of His teaching in Matthew's gospel.

When the Lord was tempted by the Devil for forty days and nights, He suffered but resisted temptation (Matthew 4). Imagine what we could achieve if we resisted temptation. One can say that Jesus was Divine and so it was easier for Him to resist since we are mere mortals.

I am angry with someone and rightly so, and I want to give them a real telling off but I may say things that I regret. Is it not better for me not to yield to temptation and not rant at him? Be angry but sin not is the New Testament teaching. (Ephesians 4.26)

On a lighter note, you know you must not eat cream cakes but here is one in a shop window. It is so tempting. Temptation is not a sin nor is it a sin to eat a cream cake.

Your husband has admitted to having an affair. You are hurt and angry. And angry with good cause (Matthew 5. 22). You throw things at him, swear at him, cut up his clothes with scissors and throw them out of the window. You draw all the money out of your joint account and cut up his bank cards. You storm round to the other woman and fight with her pulling her hair, tearing her dress and giving her two black eyes. You may say that this is justified and understandable but you have given in to temptation and committed several criminal offences. The Bible teaches Do violence to no man (Luke 3.14)

Take the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Let me summarise some of it.

It is best to be humble (poor in spirit) and to meek and gentle. It is good to long for righteousness and to have a pure heart and not a heart of evil or arrogance. It is best to pursue peace and to show mercy to people which is a virtue.

Then the Lord refers to some of the commandments

Thou shalt not kill. This is murder and unlawful killing. Does it include self-murder, that is to say suicide? You may be in a rage and hit someone with a blunt instrument and kill them. That is murder. You may kill someone because you are drunk. That is murder. You may shoot someone while engaged in a bank robbery. That is murder. You may murder to obtain a financial benefit or kill the wife's lover in jealousy. These are unlawful killings. Anger and bad temper can result in murder. It is wrong.

Science, which is now the main religion of the world, cannot say why it is wrong but Christian morality can.

How would you feel if someone murdered someone you loved deeply?

It is wrong to unlawfully kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

This is not a popular commandment since we live in an age of sexual freedom. Adultery is also called fornication and it means sex with someone to whom you are not married. It would also include rape since

that is forced fornication.

There is your husband who has had an affair with another woman whom we have already mentioned. He has caused you shock and endless distress. He has fornicated and committed adultery. His lover may also be married and so your husband has broken another commandment and coveted his neighbour's wife.

We live in days where there is indiscriminate drinking and one night stands, the increase of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

Adultery destroys families, can result in divorces and damaged children. There are arguments over absent parents rights to see the children of a broken marriage. Heartache, tears and mental problems as well as social problems and ruined lives perhaps scarred for ever. And, of course, if someone finds their partner having sex with someone else that could lead to violence and murder and, perhaps, the grim walls of a prison.

There will be Christians who will disagree with that the Lord allowed divorce on the grounds of fornication (Matthew 5.22). He also said that the marriage of a divorcee, a second or subsequent marriage, is adulterous. This is a deep subject for consideration on another occasion.

Let your yes be yes and your no be no is also sound teaching. Plain speech is preferable. Oaths are unnecessary and positively discouraged. A few words is always best and sometimes silence is better still.

The teaching of Christ in Matthew 6 begins with a call not to be proud or parade yourself and your good deeds. I cringe when I hear that a celebrity has given a large sum of money to a good cause and, if the celebrity has said it themselves, then that is pride. Look at me. I am special. That is sickening!

The so-called Lord's Prayer follows and it includes Lead us not into temptation and save us from evil. It is a prayer for help when tempted. Surely that makes sense. The subject of mercy comes up again. We must be prepared to forgive but note what it says in the beginning of Luke 17. If the person who has hurt you repents, then you forgive him. I, therefore, judge that forgiveness is dependant upon repentance.

The subject of hypocrisy is now addressed. You cannot serve two masters. You can't hunt with the hounds and run with the fox. You must not be two-faced. This makes sense. You cannot be a Christian but only on a Sunday and be a rogue for the rest of the week. You cannot be nice to me face to face and, behind my back, say all manner of horrid things about me. That is hypocrisy. You cannot say you are a good man but have an evil temper and fly into rages and cause distress and damage.

Matthew 7 begins with a warning not to be judgmental. But we are all judgmental. We all make judgments and have to. What the Lord means is unfair

judgments. It is not for us to judge what people eat or drink or what they wear.

Here is man who claims to be a Christian but he emphatically rejects some of the New Testament teaching. In fact, I met a man once who had some pages in his Bible removed because he disagreed with the teachings on those pages. I am not to judge him in the sense of destroying his character but I am to gently show him the value or worth of the Scriptures he rejects but not provoke him to anger or subject him to ridicule.

There is a fascinating verse in Matthew 7. 6, 'Do not give what is holy to dogs'. A similar verse is, 'Do not cast your pearls before swine'.

This means that the Gospel and the Bible is holy and Christians are called upon to present the truths of the Gospel but if it is rejected or causes hostility then the servant of the Lord must not strive. (2 Timothy 2.24). He must not be tenacious as a dog with a bone. He must be as harmless as a dove (Matthew 10)

The dogs referred to here were not domestic pets but scavengers and germ carriers. They were dogs that

returned to their own vomit (2 Peter 2.22).

The holy words are pearls. They are not to be cast to swine. The same principle applies here as it does in the example of the dogs.

When the Lord sent His disciples out to preach, He told them that they should cease if the reception was greeted with hostility even though those disciples had been given the miraculous power of healing. People rejected healing and the Gospel which defies belief!

Going back to the Sermon on the Mount the Lord emphasises, Love your enemies. Now this love does not mean affection or friendliness but respect and that respect may mean avoidance of the enemy.

But we must beware of false prophets who come as gentle sheep, that is to say in friendship, but are ravening wolves. The Bible warns about teachers with false doctrines wanting to make a name for themselves.

And we are not only talking about false prophets who use Christianity to form heresies and denominations, but the false prophets who use science and spiritualism to undermine the Christian gospel. For example, mediums are false prophets because, for example, they practice necromancy, which is totally forbidden in the Bible, as is witchcraft and lying wonders.

There are many who profess to be Christians but are not and some will say to the Lord in the last days, "We did this. We cast out devils. We performed wonderful works." But the Lord will reply, "Go way. I do not know you."

The following chapters of Matthew concentrate of the Lord's healing ministry. He healed all who came to Him, the blind, the deaf, the lame, those with sickness and disease, those with embarrassing illness and those possessed with evil spirits and mental illness. He commissioned His disciples to go out and preach and gave them healing powers stating that the labourers in the harvest were few.

As we have said, He instructed His disciples not to stay where there was hostility to the truth and, even today, there is hostility to the truth. People do not want to hear about Jesus and His love. It is all garbage, they say. People want to do what is right in their own eyes as did the people in the end of the book of Judges. People are not going to agree with the teachings of some Jew two thousand years ago. They would rather believe that He did not exist or that He was not born of a Virgin, that He is not the Son of God, that He did not rise from the dead or that He did not die but married Mary Magdalene and had children with her.

In Matthew 12, the Lord referred to the prophecy in Isaiah which foretold His character. He was not loud or intimidating but kind and gentle (verse 20) and this must be the example Christians are to follow.

But modern day Christianity is not like this. You can go to some churches and house groups where it is all noise, guitars, drums, flashing lights, jiggling up and down, hands raised, dancing, entertainment and so-called worship songs which dwell on what Christians do and lessen or ignore the essential doctrines of grace, sin, salvation, repentance and the greatness of the Lord Jesus.

All manner of sin can be forgiven is the teaching of Christ, except the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which, being interpreted, is the denial of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. That is the sin that will not be forgiven. But this does not mean we continue in any sin deliberately, believing in automatic forgiveness. Repentance is to turn away from that sin and avoid it thereafter. If, for example, I have a bad temper and sin I repent, but do not repeat that bad temper sin, but seek, with God's help, to avoid it in future.

Jesus taught in parables so that the people could understand. This is an example we should follow. We should use simple words, illustrations and expressions with ordinary people who know little or nothing of the Lord and the Bible.

When you have a meeting of firmly established believers then you can delve into the richness of the Bible

but the Bible teaches that, at first, hearers want the pure milk of the Word and, later, the meat.

One of the most unpopular doctrines is of hell and hell fire. If God is a God of love, He would not allow anyone to burn for eternity, people say. The Lord taught that there are two types of people and only two... the wheat and the tares... the good produce and the weeds. At harvest, the wheat is collected and the tares burned.

The wicked will be cast into eternal fire where there shall be weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. It is a living death.

In Luke 16 19, the Lord gives an account of two men who have died and gone into the afterlife. One was a rich man and the other was a beggar called Lazarus. The rich man had been wicked and was in hell's torment and the beggar was in heaven. The rich man pleaded for a drop of water to cool his tongue. The teaching is that both had received the rewards they deserved. There is a heaven for the Christian belief and there is a hell for those who reject the truth about the Lord Jesus.

The man in torment begs the Lord to send Moses back to the people to preach and warn the Jews of this awful place of torment. 'Even if that were possible,' said the Lord, 'they would not believe Moses... but they have the books of Moses and the prophets'.

This teaching cancels the beliefs of spiritualists in their assertions of reincarnation.

There are people who are universalists. They believe everyone goes to Heaven but on different levels. You hear people talk of some one who has died saying, 'Wherever he is now, he is looking down on us here'.

Can you imagine Heaven accommodating both Hitler and the apostle Paul. Heaven is the eternal dwelling of the Lord Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God and the book of Revelation states that no one enters heaven who is wicked (Revelation 21.8). These wicked persons include unbelievers, the abominable, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters and liars, 1 Corinthians 6 also lists persons who will not enter Heaven and this includes fornicators and men who abuse themselves with other men, that is to say homosexuals, thieves, drunkards revilers and extortioners. Note that those who are effeminate are also excluded from Heaven.

However, the Gospel message is that anyone can repent and turn to the Lord and be saved for eternity. Let the wicked forsake his wicked ways (Isaiah 55. 7) and the Lord will acquit him (Nahum 1.8). All manner of sin can be forgiven except the denial of Christ as the Son of God.

It is interesting to note that Jews and enemies of Christ had to admit that He was the Son of God when they heard His preaching and saw His miracles.

Repentance will mean an end to adultery, belief in any type of witchcraft and spiritualism, an end to homosexuality, drunkenness, stealing, lying and all these other things.

God is not willing that any should perish but that all may come to everlasting life (2 Peter 3.9). God is not cruel nor a despot but has offered salvation and eternal life to all who believe in Him and obey Him.

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(This is the text of a talk given in Newport in June 1990)