

# Born to Win

## The Words of Jesus #10

by: Ronald L. Dart

Was Jesus a pacifist? You know, one of these peaceniks—the kind of people who don't believe that war can *ever* be right that. Who believe that you shouldn't kill anything, shouldn't hurt *anything or anybody*. It hasn't been much of a question in this country since the end of the draft—that is, being a pacifist—but the question still resonates with a number of people. Did Jesus say that we could not defend ourselves if we're attacked? When he said, “turn the other cheek”, just how far does that go? You're walking along the street some night and a fella walks out of a dark alleyway and holds out a knife and says, “Give me your money!” Well, my advice certainly is to give him your money. But if he attacks you with a knife, can you defend yourself? Or do you have to just stand there and let him put holes in you like a pincushion? Or can you restrain him? Can you try to fight back? What can you do?

Well, in this program series we're talking about the words of Jesus—what do you actually *said*. And on this subject, Jesus had something definitive to say. It's in his longest discourse—the Sermon on the Mount. So we want to know what he *said* and what he *meant*. He said, in the Sermon on the Mount:

### Matthew 5

AKJV

<sup>38</sup> You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

<sup>39</sup> But I say to you, That you resist not evil: but whoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Now, this is a *troubling* saying. Does this mean if a mugger knocks you down the street you can't defend yourself? Does it mean that if a man attacks your wife or your children that you cannot resist him—that you can't fight him off and save your wife or save your children? Would it have meant, to the British in World War II, when the Nazi bombers were overhead ready to blow up London but they couldn't shoot back—they couldn't crank up the ant-aircraft and try to blast those airplanes out of the sky; that, as a nation, Britain should have turned the other cheek and just let the Nazis *roll over them*? Well, they kind of tried that Munich—it didn't work real well.

Now, what is really fascinating about the Sermon on the Mount is that Jesus is acting as a *teacher of the law*. And I think a lot of people, when they read this, don't understand that. He starts out by telling his audience that they should not assume that he was going to destroy the law. He was not come to *destroy* the law, but to *fulfill* it—to fill it full, to restore its meaning. Most of the Sermon on the Mount is a discourse on the difference between *his own* teachings on the law and those of the religious establishment of that day.

First, what about this principle of “an eye for an eye” that Jesus mentions here? Because he starts off by saying “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” and that comes straight out of the law. And didn't Jesus say that not one jot or one tittle shall pass from that law until it's all fulfilled? Now, a careless reading of this passage will assume that the two parts of it are *opposites*—“an eye for an eye” on the one hand and “turn the other cheek” on the other. Some people think the “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”—“Well, that's *Old Testament* But Jesus said ‘turn the other cheek’—that's *New Testament*.” That he was doing away with the old to establish the new.

Now, there's a strong case made by some scholars that even in the Old Testament they didn't actually *gouge out* an eye when a man caused the loss of an eye. What they required was the *value* of an eye for an eye and the *value* of a tooth for a tooth. In other words, the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth principle in the law was a principle of *equity*. You can't get away with causing harm to another person. You've got to make it good. Now, it seems really unlikely that Jesus would dismiss a law like that. Why would he? Do we want to live in a world where, if you cause serious harm and serious injury to another person, you *don't* have to make it good? And it also seems unlikely that, when Jesus said, "Well, I tell you resist not evil", that he means we *always give in* to evil man. You know, I don't know why some people seem to take an approach that you have to lay aside all common sense when you read the Bible. Maybe if we use a little common sense when we read the Bible it will point us in directions and help us to understand more clearly what it is that Jesus and other biblical writers are talking about.

Now, it's very important to understand that Jesus often spoke *figuratively*. He actually, oftentimes, chose sayings that were in common use at the time and used them as illustrations of the points that he was making so everyone would understand what he was talking about. On that one occasion when he said:

### Matthew 5

AKJV

<sup>30</sup> And if your right hand offend you, cut it off, and cast it from you[.]

I just heard on the radio today that some character, because he saw 666 (or thought he did), in the palm of his hand, went and cut his hand off with a circular saw. Smart fellow. And he went to the hospital and he would not even let them put the hand back on because of that. Now, some years later, he's suing the medical establishment, saying that they should have known he was crazy at the time and they should have put the hand back on. Go figure. But the point is that he completely misunderstood what Jesus was talking about. Jesus *understood* that, if you are a thief—you go through a store and you reach over and you pick up something and stick in your pocket and walk out with it—it's not your *hand's fault*, right? Cutting off your hand, your right hand, doesn't mean that you're not going to steal *with your left*. (Well, it might, in the sense that it acts as a deterrent to your doing that again.) But the point simply is this: that it's not the *hand* that is the offender—it's the *mind*, it's the *heart*.

Now, the legalistic attitude toward the law, of the religious establishment, that Jesus was facing at the time, seemed to assume that the heart didn't matter—that it was what you did with your hands that made all the difference. And this is the big argument between Jesus and the Pharisees, as he tries to tackle this problem. He is talking about the fact that, whenever you think to do something wrong—well, there's still a difference in whether you go ahead and do it or not—but when you *think* to do something wrong, you've already made the turn down the wrong road. He says that these evil attitudes and evil actions originate in the heart. But when he said, "if your right hand offend you, cut it off", he's talking in the context of things like: if you look upon a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery with her already *in your heart*, and that anything in your life that's going to cause you to commit sin needs to be *cut off* out of your life. Now, your hand is not going to *cause* you to commit sin—it's a figure of speech.

So how would we take Jesus in this case? What figure of speech might he be using here? Well, so we can understand, let me digress into an important area of biblical law. For some reason, in the modern world there's a presumption that vengeance is wrong *per se*—that only backward people would ever want vengeance—that that's an unworthy motive. One of the arguments offered against capital punishment is that, since it does not really deter anybody (and nobody really knows whether it's a deterrent or not because we so rarely do it, and when we *do* do it, it's 10 years away from the crime and the connection is lost, but anyway) there's a presumption that it's not even a deterrent and that it's, therefore, only a matter of vengeance and, therefore, *unworthy* of modern man. But vengeance is probably the most fundamental principle of equity in law. So what role does vengeance play in law? Now, there's no doubt that, in English, the word "vengeance" has got a lot of negative connotations. But *is that* the connotation of the Bible? Because that's what we're talking about here. Consider this statement out of the law. It's found in Leviticus 19, and verse 17.

## Leviticus 19

AKJV

<sup>17</sup> You shall not hate your brother in your heart: you shall in any wise rebuke your neighbor, and not suffer sin on him.

<sup>18</sup> You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

No that's unequivocal, folks. And even though it may sound New Testament to you, it's Old Testament. The Old Testament taught: you shall not avenge and you're not to bear a grudge against anybody else in your community. So, the Old Testament teaching on vengeance is the same as the New: Don't do it. But does it follow that vengeance is somehow *wrong*—that it's evil? Well, listen to this *New Testament* teaching—Romans 12, verse 19:

## Romans 12

KJV

<sup>19</sup> Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, [...]

Ah, well see, here is precisely the same teachings that we have in the New Testament—don't avenge yourself.

## Romans 12

KJV

<sup>19</sup> [...] but *rather* give place unto wrath: [...]

That is, put wrath aside.

## Romans 12

KJV

<sup>19</sup> [...] for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Now, listen to this. First, vengeance is *repayment*. It's *equity*. It's *justice*. God says, “Vengeance is mine; I will *repay*.” Vengeance is a payback. Second, *God* exacts vengeance. So how can vengeance be evil, as such? Well, it can't be—and it isn't, because vengeance is the *central value* of justice. So, why all these warnings in the Bible against taking vengeance? Why are we told in the Old Testament, why are we told the New Testament, “Don't avenge yourself.”? Well that's easy. It's *personal, private vengeance* that is prohibited. We must wait for *God* to take vengeance. Well, how does he do that? And when is God going to be avenge me? Do I have to wait till, someday, God causes this man, who has hurt me so bad, to fall into a pit and get hurt himself? Is that what's going on?

Well, very shortly after saying, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”, Paul goes on to discuss how it is that God takes vengeance, and what his instrumentality of vengeance actually is. The answer may surprise you.

All right, someone has hurt me and I am prohibited from taking personal vengeance. I can't get back at the guy, I've got to wait on God. Well, how does God actually go about doing it? What is God's instrumentality of vengeance? Well, Paul's answer is really kind of surprising and I think many people read over it without understanding the implications of what he's saying. It's in Romans, chapter 13, verse one.

## Romans 13

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

And right here comes into our language an expression we use all the time, “the powers that be”. And what we mean by that is the civil government. In our local town, it's the police; it's the local judges, the county judges, and so forth. This is the “higher powers” under which we live. Now, when Paul wrote this, the powers that be were the Roman governors. He then said:

### Romans 13

AKJV

<sup>2</sup> Whoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and you shall have praise of the same:

<sup>4</sup> For he [...]

Who? Who's “he” here? Well, it's the government—in this case, the Roman governor.

### Romans 13

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> For he is the minister of God to you for good. [...]

Now, I would say that an awful lot of people living in Rome in the first century when Paul wrote this might have thought Paul had *lost it*. What do you mean saying the powers that be are appointed or ordained of God? Well, he's just simply saying that the civil government, the civil authorities, are the *instrumentality* through which God executes judgment. He said:

### Romans 13

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> [...] But if you do that which is evil, be afraid; for he bears not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on him that does evil.

Well now, isn't that interesting? Because what Paul says here is that it is a *legitimate* use of civil authority to carry the sword. That means the use of violence if necessary, the use of force if necessary, to enforce the law—even *deadly force*. So, vengeance is the legitimate business of a civil authority. Now, don't get confused by the word “minister”. It just means “servant”. The civil government is the *servant of God* to you, for good. Yeah, I know they fail. Yes, I know the legal systems do get corrupted. Yes, I know *all* those things. But the fact of the matter is that, unless we do maintain that kind of order, we will descend into *total chaos*, and it's the *failure* of civil governments to execute judgment, to revenge or execute vengeance, really, upon those who oppress the poor and the weak. It's *that* failure that leads, ultimately, to the collapse of a society. Vengeance is the legitimate business of a civil authority, and if they don't do it they invite *personal* vengeance, which leads to blood feuds and, ultimately, to *chaos*. No Christian has the right to sit in private judgment. You encounter those admonitions again and again in the Bible—don't do that. But that does not mean that, if called to serve on a jury, he cannot serve. Because in such a case, he becomes a *minister of God for good* to his community, as much as any Roman governor in Paul's day was a servant of God to that society.

So when we come back to the Sermon on the Mount, and we come back to Jesus saying, “Don't avenge yourself; turn the other cheek”, it has to be understood in the light of the biblical teaching on vengeance. Jesus is a *teacher of the law* and the law in question is the one that tells you that you cannot retaliate. He's not saying you cannot defend yourself while you are under attack—but that you should not *avenge yourself* or retaliate when the attack is over. Leave that to the authorities. Now, you compare that to what he says in the next two instances and I think it becomes even clearer. He says:

**Matthew 5**

AKJV

<sup>40</sup> And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also.

What he's basically talking about here is: Settle this thing! Don't fool around with it; don't let him drag you off down to court, because you're going to wind up spending your cloak, anyway, if you do that. Go ahead and settle—give him your coat; give him your cloak; give him what you have to, to get this thing over with.

**Matthew 5**

AKJV

<sup>41</sup> And whoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two.

And into our language comes the expression about “going the extra mile”. Now, who can compel you to go a mile with him? Well, in that time it was well known that a civil servant—a mail carrier, or what have you, a soldier—could grab you because he had something to be carried, and he'd get you to carry it a mile with him. If he compels you to carry it a mile, well, go two with him. In other words: *cooperate*. Now, when Jesus says we should not resist evil, he is obviously speaking in the sense of taking over *personally* what is the responsibility of law enforcement authorities. It does not mean that we don't resist evil under any circumstances. In fact, I think “turn the other cheek” has been understood by some scholars to be said in reference to civil authorities—not to hoodlums. In other words, when the governor—when his office or when the police—strike you on the cheek, you turn the other cheek. It is *certain* that that's what's meant by going the extra mile.

The next segment in the Sermon on the Mount is all of a piece, and it has to do with a rather interesting theme. Jesus said:

**Matthew 5**

AKJV

<sup>42</sup> Give to him that asks you, and from him that would borrow of you turn not you away.

That's awfully hard to do sometimes in the modern world because so many demands are made on us, and if we give to *everyone* that asks us we're going to wind up, broke of course, And I'm sure Jesus has in mind exercising this with judgment, but it's really in the context here. He said:

**Matthew 5**

AKJV

<sup>43</sup> You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you;

Now, what's going on here—all the way from “give to him that asks of you” and “do good to them that hate you”? What's this all about? Well, remember we're talking in this sermon about contrasts with the generally-accepted interpretation of the law—the legalistic interpretation of the law—in Jesus' time as opposed to *Jesus'* interpretation of the law. He's *still* teaching the law. But the law doesn't really say that you love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That was more or less the custom of the day—that you have to do good to the people that are close to you but you don't have to worry about the others. What's Jesus doing here when he challenges this cherished opinion. Well, he's talking about what goes on in the heart of a man. He doesn't want us to be the kind of a person who only loves his neighbor and hates his enemy. He concludes this little segment by saying this—this is what's involved in it. He says, do these things:

**Matthew 5**

AKJV

<sup>45</sup> That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

In other words, this has to do with being *like God*. It has to do with performing like he does. And God doesn't cause it to rain down the property line—in that one guy is evil and one guy's good and it rains on one guy's land and doesn't rain on the other. When he causes it to rain everywhere, it basically covers everybody's crops—good, bad, or indifferent—at the same time. And he says, “I want you to be like me: to be gracious, to be kind, to be giving. I don't go around looking for people to hurt. I love *all men*, not just my friends.”

**John 3**

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, [...]

The world; all of it.

**John 3**

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> [...] that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

This little segment has to do with being like God—of saying, “I want you to work on the *inner man*. To be a generous, a kind, and a giving and forgiving kind of person.” You head off vengeful and hateful conduct by *acting like God*. Once again, Jesus is talking about the *heart*, not legalistic conduct.

**Matthew 5**

AKJV

<sup>46</sup> For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? do not even the publicans the same?

<sup>47</sup> And if you salute your brothers only, what do you more than others? do not even the publicans so?

<sup>48</sup> Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Now, that is a tall order. But you know what he is saying is: imitate God, just like a little boy who learned to imitate his father's walk. I'll never forget a friend of mine (I've used the illustration before) that I saw him and his little son walking across college campus one day. And my friend was crippled from something way back when in the hip and he had a really peculiar walk, and his son was perfectly normal, but he was walking *exactly* like his dad. Imitate God.

Now, Jesus continues in the Sermon on the Mount to deal with matters of the heart. There are some things that legalism just can't do. You just can't pass laws, you can't lay out rules and regulations that are going to accomplish some of these things. The law requires giving. But, you know, legalistic giving really leaves room for giving for *personal advantage*. In other words: I give this because I'm going to *get something back* for it. So Jesus said:

**Matthew 6**

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward.

What does he mean by that? Well, if you're giving because of what it's going to *give you*, and you *do* give, then that's what you've got—that's all there is to it.

**Matthew 6**

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does:

Here we have our hands “knowing” things again. It's a figure of speech, folks, and we all know what it means. It means don't make a big show of this.

**Matthew 6**

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> That your alms may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret himself shall reward you openly.

So the law says give, right? So I've got to give. So I will give in such a way, or under certain circumstances, that it brings, somehow, something back to me. But, the truth is, you aren't really giving if you get some personal advantage from it. If you get credit, if you get your name on the wall, if you get a trumpet blown before you, if you get your name announced in public, there's no advantage. Well, there's *personal* advantage, but there's no *spiritual* advantage. Jesus seems to say that *even prayer* can be done legalistically. He said:

**Matthew 6**

AKJV

<sup>5</sup> And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward.

<sup>6</sup> But you, when you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly.

You gotta do these things so there's nothing coming back to you.

**Matthew 6**

AKJV

<sup>7</sup> But when you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: [...]

Don't set up a prayer wheel, you know, and write out a little prayer and put on the wheel and let the wind turn the wheel so your prayer supposedly goes up to God. You think God's going to stand there, with his head going around in a circle, reading those prayers?

**Matthew 6**

AKJV

<sup>7</sup> [...] for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

<sup>8</sup> Be not you therefore like to them: for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him.

So go ahead, ask. But, you know, I'm convinced that one of the things that God wants from us when we come to him in prayer is that we will just *talk to him*. It will not be just a matter of, "Well, I need this and I need that and I want this and I want that", but to share with God our feelings, to share with him our hopes, to share with our fears, to share with him our love.

### Matthew 6

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> After this manner therefore pray you: Our Father which are in heaven, Hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For your is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

There's something really interesting about this prayer. I don't know if you noticed. It's done in the *first-person plural*. You don't say, "Give *me* this day *my* daily bread", you say, "Give *us* this day *our* daily bread", and, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Yeah, this is something we've all got to do together. There's a funny thing about the Lord's Prayer: It's no good just asking for yourself. The selfish prayer doesn't work. You ask God, not just to forgive *you*, but to forgive *us*.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart, and remember—you were *born to win*.

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