

The Strange Sound of God's Laws by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. L3060419
Exodus 20:1-17 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, and Matthew 5:38-48
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Some of our human “wisdom” goes like this. We teach our children to fight back. We hear talk that a good defense is to buy handguns. The reasoning is that if criminals knew we all carried handguns around, they would be more hesitant to attack us. There is so much emphasis in our culture to be tough. Our idols are those who tough it out with guns and fists, like Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Such human wisdom is bankrupt. Palestinians and Jewish settlers fight it out with an eye-versus-eye mentality. Sunni and Shiite Muslims fight it out tooth-versus-tooth. Urban street gangs and hockey teams all reflect this policy of getting even and exacting retribution. Yet, this human wisdom does not seem to put a stop to violence and hatred.

During Lent, we are spending time looking at God's covenants and getting to know the teachings of this Jesus who is quite different in his ways of wisdom. He showed a different kind of toughness: a toughness of moral character, not of physical prowess. God's “wisdom” sounds strange to us. Jesus' teachings sound really strange. It is important that, more than mouthing words of belief in Jesus Christ as savior, we live our lives in the ways he taught. He said “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”¹

Anyone who has more than a single child will realize that one child does and says things just to irritate or “get a rise” out of another child. If the other child does not react, the one who is initiating the trouble will eventually get bored, and the game is over. If, however, the other child fights back, the initiator got what she was desiring, and the dispute moves to a higher level.

Jesus knew that fighting back would not solve problems. It simply escalates the problem to new levels of tension, offense and defense. These new directives by Jesus were not given in ignorance. He knew what he was saying. His teachings must have sounded as crazy to his audiences as they do to us today. His Jewish audience were under Roman oppression. Zealots like Judas Iscariot wanted to throw off Roman rule by force. Jesus knew it would be impossible for this small nation of people to take on the empire, and his way was more powerful. His teachings won out in the end. Within three hundred years the emperor Constantine himself became a Christian. The might of Rome fell under the sway of the Prince of Peace.

In Biblical times, if you gave someone who sued for your coat your cloak also, the suer would be guilty of a moral infraction because he left you with nothing to keep warm. Jesus knew the dilemma this would have created for the one who was suing.

Although Jesus' teachings are difficult to live up to, they are the ultimate sanity. Abiding by his teachings shows much greater moral strength. It results in the offender, the physically tough one, becoming humiliated. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.”²

To those who have no hope in God's love, it sounds insane to pick up the cross and to choose to give up one's life for another. Yet, I understand that the Christian cross is one of the hottest fashion items going. Anyone who picks up that cross and wears it like jewelry better know what it means. I hesitate to wear a cross--not because I'm not glad Jesus Christ died for us, but because

¹Matthew 5:39

²1Corinthians 1:18

I know my words and actions do not always represent the teachings of Jesus. I don't want to be an embarrassment to him. Do not blaspheme Jesus Christ by wearing a cross around your neck and then swearing or putting another person down.

The Psalmist writes that the “ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.”³ To hear and live by Jesus’ teachings is worth more than a spacious home, wealth, power, or a good-looking mate.

Non-violence can be a powerful tool if used in a morally pure manner. Mahatma Gandhi's methods and philosophy of nonviolent confrontation, or civil disobedience, led his own country to independence and influenced political activists of many persuasions throughout the world. Martin Luther King Jr. used non-violent resistance to obtain equal rights for African Americans. “For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.”⁴

What about abuse? Does turning the other cheek mean that we should become a physical or verbal punching bag for someone who is abusive? - *NO!* Get out of the situation. Run as fast as you can to the safety of a nurturing environment.

We can follow this wisdom because we know we are God’s children. That gives us the strength to do and be more than we thought we could. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”⁵ Simply because we are Christian does not mean that we will get more sunshine and less rain, or if we’re farmers in a drought, that we'll get more rain. Being Christian gives no guarantees of an easier existence, but knowing that we are God’s children will help us endure the hardships of life.

Jesus asks us to be perfect like God. Come on, how can we be perfect? The rich young ruler who wanted to follow Jesus couldn't do it. Even Jesus said he himself was not good, only God was. How can we be perfect? By ourselves, we cannot be. By loving God more than anything else, there is a possibility. With God all things are possible.

There is a bumper sticker about that reads, “Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.” Yet, it is clear that Jesus asks us to strive for perfection. We will always know there is something to improve in our personalities. The struggle for perfection is not over until God is through molding and shaping us.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”⁶ Jesus, does that mean I have to pray for Muslim terrorists? Surely, you don't mean them. Does it mean love North Korean communists? Surely, Jesus, you don't mean them- they're out to destroy us and our way of life.

Jesus does not mince words. He makes no exceptions.

Jesus, do you mean I should pray for members of the Aryan Nations who twist your words and threaten our very democracy? Surely, you don't mean to love them. That guy who sped up in the merging right lane and almost ran into me--you don't mean I have to love him, do you? You do? You do! Jesus, you make it difficult to be a Christian.

³Psalm 19:10

⁴1 Corinthians 1:25

⁵Matthew 5:45

⁶Matthew 5:43-44