

Foundations (8000 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.)

having the hides of beasts attached to them, or they were nailed to crosses or set aflame, and, when the daylight passed away, they were used as nighttime lamps. Nero gave his own gardens for this spectacle and performed a Circus game, in the habit of a charioteer mixing with the plebs or driving about the race-course. Even though they were clearly guilty and merited

being made the most recent example of the consequences of crime, people began to pity these sufferers, because they were consumed not for the public good but on account of the fierceness of one man.

Translated by Richard Hooker

Sermon on the Mount

In contrast to Mark, Matthew contains far fewer miracles and a great deal of teaching, including the famous collection of sayings called "The Sermon on the Mount," some of them quite extreme. As we saw earlier, Jewish law required the fair treatment of enemies, and by no means called upon all crimes to be punished by "an eye for an eye;" but it did not require forgiveness to extend as far as this.

In your opinion, which of these is the most extreme commandment? Why?

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." (1) But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. (2) But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. (3) Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, " You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (4) But I say to you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward to you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (5) And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles (6) do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (7)

(2) This statement is so strong, seeming to leave no room for police, judges, or even self-defense, that some scholars have argued that it must envision a very near end of the world. In that case, civil society need not be maintained because all will shortly be judged by God. A more traditional view applies Paul's theory that salvation by works (good deeds) is literally impossible. These commandments would then be uttered because they are impossible to obey, in order to force the hearer to accept that only faith can save.

(3) This commandment has been explained by some as an extension of the much-resented Roman law which required subjects to carry the spear and shield of a soldier for one mile whenever requested. The early church was anxious to avoid any appearance of being hostile to Rome, unlike the Jews who rebelled against the imperial government. "Going the second mile" has come to be a popular expression for making an extra effort.

(4) This saying occurs nowhere in the Hebrew Bible. It may be simply an expression of popular attitudes.

(5) Tax collectors were hated representatives of Rome, all the more so because their income depended on charging taxpayers more than was actually due the central government.

(1) See Exodus 21:23-25.

Foundations (8000 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.)

(6) Non-Jews.

Jewish law, of course, expected perfection in that the worshipper was supposed to be able to observe all of God's law without superhuman efforts.

(7) With the exception of some saints, few Christians have taken this commandment literally, seeing in it an inconsistency with Paul's doctrine of original sin.

New Revised Standard Version

Paul on marriage vs. celibacy

The meaning of Paul's teachings on women and marriage has been the subject of endless controversy, particularly in modern times. Some have argued that Paul believed that the world was about to come to an end and that there was therefore no need to continue marrying and begetting children. Yet elsewhere Paul seems to be anxious to avoid the extreme asceticism of some contemporary religious thinkers. He has been called an anti-feminist and a proto-feminist. The Catholic Church has embraced both the concept of celibacy (for priests and nuns) and encouraged reproduction (among lay people).

What arguments does Paul use against marriage? What does he say are reasons one should get married?

1 Corinthians 7: 25-31, 36-40)

Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no

dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. . . .

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is.

New Revised Standard Version
