

would obviously be easy for a sharp lawyer working on these principles to devour the estate of a poor widow who didn't know the right things to swear by! It was like putting in a lot of fine print exception clauses at the end of a contract! That this was the Pharisaic doctrine is further proved by reference to the Mishna, the Jewish codification of Jewish law of about 200 A.D. It says, "If a man said 'I adjure you,' or 'I command you,' or 'I bind you,' they are liable. But if he said, 'By heaven and by earth,' they are exempt! Again "If a claim concerns these no oath is imposed; bondman, written documents, immovable property, and the property of the Temple...Oaths may only be taken about what can be defined according to size, weight, or number." (The Mishna, Darby's edition, p. 415, 418) These are exactly the foolish distinctions which Jesus denounces.

Jesus upbraids the hypocrites for such wicked practices. An oath taken in God's sight is enforceable by the Righteous Judge whatever men may say.

And the Old Testament has no easy provisions for breaking of oaths such as the scribes had added by their tradition. In Numbers 30 it does give provisions whereby vows of minors and women are not obligatory unless there was the consent of fathers and husbands. But the third commandment, Dt. 23:22, Dt. 6:13 and other passages emphasize that the obligation of oaths is religious and depends upon the fact that there is a god of truth. In contrast Jesus is quoting the Scribes who would distinguish between oaths.

Christ's answer is surely to be taken as a negative of comparison. Some have insisted on giving the negative its full force and have resisted taking any oath. Most Christians, having regard to the examples of Paul and James (Acts 18:18; 21:23), the answer of Christ Himself to the high priest's adjuration (Matt. 26:63), and the promise on oath of God to Abraham (Heb. 6:16,17), etc., do not come to this conclusion. They rather say that Christ intended to teach veracity rather than sharp legal practice. He condemned iniquitous oaths and double talk insisting that for a child of God his word should be as good as his bond.

In this Christ is in strict accord with the Old Testament. But the scribes and Pharisees were woefully out of line with its high moral teaching. They were breaking the commandments and teaching men so. And the result is that Christ in powerful language condemns not the Old Testament, but the sophistry of the Scribal and traditional commentaries thereon.

#### An Eye for an Eye

The fifth of the examples of poor scribal exegesis is the famous law of retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42. The old rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is here contradicted. In handling this comment of Jesus we shall see that the scribes had committed the familiar error of taking a text out of its context.

The quotation is indeed found in the Old Testament -- in three places: Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; and Dt. 19:21. In each case the context shows clearly that this maxim was a divinely-given guide for Israel's