

Christlike Love Protects What is Right

Defining Real, Christlike Love: Part 5

Mark 11:15-19

Here we come to what many scholars believe to be the second of two times in which Jesus cleansed the temple, one at the beginning and one at the end of his earthly ministry. In both cases, Jesus enters the temple during the Passover to find the outer court filled with what is described as people selling sacrificial animals and exchanging pagan money for Jewish currency. What makes this interesting is that scholars tend to agree that these services were not only legal, but in certain ways needed for people to worship properly. What, then, was Jesus' problem?

1. Read the article attached to this lesson. Then read the language Jesus uses in verse 17. What was the problem Jesus had with these vendors offering a very necessary service?
2. These vendors took something wonderful and godly and corrupted it into a tool for their own personal gain. Is it possible for something like this to happen in the church today? If the answer is yes, how can we avoid this trap, both personally and as a church?
3. How was Jesus showing Christlike love to the vendors through his response to their actions? Did his anger make his actions unloving? Why or why not?
4. How was Jesus showing Christlike love to the people who worshipped in the temple as well? What does this teach us about how Christlike love treats those around us?

Who Were the Money Changers in the Bible?

Article Credit: GotQuestions.com

The Bible records two instances of Jesus cleansing the temple of money changers and those selling sacrificial animals. Jesus' first encounter with money changers was at the beginning of His three-year ministry (**John 2:14–16**). He made a whip of cords and drove them out. The second time He confronted the money changers was the week before His trial and crucifixion. Seeing that the money changers had come back, He again drove them out, saying, “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers’” (**Matthew 21:13**).

Because Jewish law required a temple tax of a half-shekel (**Exodus 30:11–16**), Jews and visitors from other nations came to pay their taxes when they offered their sacrifices. But foreign coins with the likeness of pagan emperors would not be accepted in God's temple. So money changers exchanged those foreign coins for Jewish money, but they did so at an exorbitant profit. Rather than provide this service as a business in another part of town, they exploited the religious zeal of the visitors to Jerusalem and did their business on temple grounds. Because they determined their own exchange rate, money changers easily took advantage of the poor and the foreigners pouring into Jerusalem for Passover.

These same money changers were associated with others who engaged in shady business practices in the temple courts. Some sold sacrificial animals, overcharging people who did not bring their own. Others were in charge of examining the animals to be sacrificed, and it was a simple matter to declare an animal “unapproved” and force the worshiper to buy another animal—at an inflated price—from the temple vendors. Such goings-on, exploiting the poor and the foreigner, angered the Lord Jesus and was strictly forbidden in the Mosaic Law (**Exodus 22:21**; **Leviticus 19:34**).

The money changers in the temple courts were similar to tax collectors in that they extorted money from their own people. They were more than ordinary businessmen. They were seeking to profit financially from the worship of God. Wherever passion and zeal are found, there will also be those who seek to profit from that zeal. Paul wrote to Timothy about such people, false teachers who found a way to make a fortune off the gospel (**1 Timothy 6:5**). Modern versions of the money changers flood the airways, promising to exchange your hard-earned dollars for blessings, healing, and God's favor. For a suggested donation, they will supposedly pray for you or promise virtually anything you want. For another twenty bucks, they will sell you a book about how to wrangle prosperity, health, or spiritual insights from God. And, like the simony of the first-century money changers, the practices of modern religious price gougers only aid those worshipers who have enough cash to purchase their wares.

Paul often clarified the difference between his ministry and that of false teachers by pointing out their greed. In **2 Corinthians 2:17** he wrote, “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.” Peter also warned that one way to spot a modern-day money changer is to notice his or her fascination with financial gain (**2 Peter 2:3**). Jesus hated the money changers' exploitation of the devout two thousand years ago, and He still hates it. We may not have shady characters collecting temple taxes outside our places of worship, but we have them invading our homes through radio and television. We are wise to remember how Jesus reacted to such selfish swindlers. With no apologies, He drove them out of His Father's house. When we identify a modern money changer, we should do the same.