Setting:
This parable is found within Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5—7). Further, it is the first of Jesus’ six antitheses, where Jesus revises and radicalizes the typical Jewish understanding of the Law. This first antithesis concerns murder, where Jesus claims that anger and contempt are also unacceptable (5:21-26). To highlight the importance of reconciliation, Jesus provides two parables, one concerning reconciliation with a brother or sister in Christ and then this one concerning reconciliation with an opponent. Jesus then continues with an antithesis concerning adultery and lust (5:27-30). In contrast, Luke places this parable within an eschatological discussion, affirming our need, not to reconcile with people on earth, but to reconcile with God before the judgment day (Lk 12:57-59).

Exegetical:
The parable begins abruptly with a command to “come to terms” quickly with your adversary. “Come to terms” means “to make friends with” (Hagner 117; Davies and Allison 519). This adversary is an opponent or accuser (Hagner 117). The conclusion implies the paying of a debt, so perhaps the adversary is the creditor and the implied subject is the debtor (Gundry 86). Urgency is implored with the command to make friends on the way to court; there is no time to lose (Hagner 117).

If we do not make such efforts before reaching the court, we may be handed over the judge, then to the guard, and be thrown into prison. The imprisonment of the debtor implies a non-Jewish background, since Jews did not imprison people for debt (Hagner 117). The Q source could have
included this Gentile background, or its presence could indicate the use of hyperbole. In any case, the debtor will not be released until the last penny is paid. The monetary amount specified is actually worth about a quarter of a penny (Hagner 118).

**Message/Application:**
Seeking peace to avoid punishment appears to be the theme (Davies and Allison 520). Reconciliation, even with enemies, is imperative, and lack of reconciliation comes with dire consequences. We must always be “ready and anxious to take the first step” in reconciliation (Dodd 106).

Jesus in this section of his Sermon on the Mount is emphasizing how unacceptable anger and contempt are for the Christian community. Just before this parable, Jesus speaks of the importance of reconciliation within the Christian community. Yet Jesus goes further than that, saying anger and contempt even for an adversary, an opponent, no matter how deserved we think our hatred may be, is unacceptable. Later, just in case his audience did not catch on, Jesus explicitly states that we are called to love our enemies (Mat 5:44). In contrast, Luke’s account within an eschatological discourse demonstrates the importance of being reconciled to God before the final judgment. As a summary, Christians should seek right relationships with God, friends, and even enemies.

**Bibliography**


