

Ministry of Grace

Matthew 5 (Part 2)

¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that

you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

³¹"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' ³⁴But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Parallel Passages

Luke 6:17-49 11:33-36

¹⁷ And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ²² Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵ "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

²⁶ "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

²⁷"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. ³²"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

³⁷"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." ³⁹He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴²How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

⁴³"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

⁴⁶"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

³³"No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁴Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. ³⁵Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. ³⁶If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

Notes

General

In verses three through twelve, Matthew presented the opening portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This section, known as the beatitudes, identified those attitudes and actions in our lives that cause God to have a smile on his face. They are attitudes and actions that He approves of. That is to say, they are things that all believers throughout the ages of time should constantly strive for. In each of the beatitudes He references all people by use of the third person pronoun (blessed are *those*). In the second section, he references His followers specifically by use of the second person pronoun (*you*). These are actions that we are to take so that the rest of the world can see our good works with the result being that they give glory to God.

In Jesus' day the people had expected the Messiah to come and abolish the Law, setting up a new standard for righteousness that was easier for them to live up to. However, Jesus told them that he (the Messiah) had not come to abolish the Law, and that no one could enter the Kingdom unless they were more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees. This seemed impossible to the disciples.

He then proceeded to explain to them that righteousness is not measured by the outward observance of the various commandments in the Law, but by our inward thoughts and tendencies. He said these things, talking directly to the hearts of his disciples by saying, "You have heard it said ... but I say to you."

During the Reformation, there were two radically different opinions on this portion of Jesus' teaching. One group thought that what Jesus was doing was no more than a correction of how the Scribes and Pharisees interpreted the Law, not a correction of the Law itself. This teaching of His was simply a new way of looking at the Law; giving it deeper meaning. The other group of Reformers believed that Jesus' teaching was radically new and different than what Moses taught. As we look at this teaching, let's recognize that it was, in fact, supportive of the Law, giving it deeper meaning, **and** at the same time radically new.

Matthew 5:21 - 22

²¹"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire

"**You shall not murder**" – This is an exact quotation of the sixth commandment from **Exodus 20:13**. The added phrase, "and whoever murders will be liable to judgment," although not part of the original commandment, is absolutely true and is how the law was interpreted by everyone (even by the Law itself). Verse 22 contains Jesus' radically new teaching regarding this commandment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. – First of all, we need to understand that Jesus is not teaching that there are different levels of anger, for which there are different levels of punishment. Neither is He teaching that all anger is sinful. We know that Jesus was without sin and yet, he became

angry. He was angry with the money changers in the temple ([John 2:13-22](#)) and He was angry with those who were critical of Him healing a man's withered hand on the Sabbath

And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ([Mark 3:5](#)).

Mark even used the Greek word *orgē*, meaning "anger, indignation, or wrath" to describe Jesus' feeling. And in [Matthew 23:17](#), Jesus even called the Pharisees "blind fools." So, this treatise on the sinfulness of anger must be exempting a specific type of anger, unrighteous anger. Jesus' anger was not the result of personal attack. He was angry at sin and injustice.

"whoever insults his brother" – This is the use of the Aramaic word *raca*, meaning "empty-headed." Today, we might say idiot, jerk, numbskull, or brainless twerp.

"You fool" – This is the Greek word *moros*, from which we get the term moron. However, *moros* has nothing to do with IQ, but to someone's moral condition. It is a term that was applied, for instance, to those who deny the existence of God.

The fool has said in his heart, There is no God! ([Psalms 14:1a](#))

Raca expresses contempt for a man's intelligence (you are so stupid!), whereas *moros* expresses contempt for his character (you are worthless, good for nothing!). Jesus' teaching says that even though we have not taken someone's life, we are just as guilty if we have harbored anger and contempt toward anyone. It doesn't matter that we haven't said these things out loud, we are guilty of murder if we have simply thought them.

Do you see here that Jesus is not correcting the Law, he is giving deeper meaning to it. He is applying it to you and me directly! I suspect that it makes you feel the same way it makes me feel; it makes me squirm in my seat! I've lost track of how many times I have called another driver an idiot.

Matthew 5:23 - 26

²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Jesus now gives two examples of how believers should act to avoid holding onto feelings of ill-will toward others. When we learn that another believer thinks we have wronged him or her, we need to go to them and try to work it out. This seems to be the case whether or not we actually believe we have done something wrong. No amount of ceremony, attendance at worship, giving, or humble service will give us peace as long as we are resisting the urging of the Spirit. But what if the other believer is not willing to be reconciled? We cannot control someone else's desire to hold onto anger. It is up to us to put forward our sincere attempt to make things right and leave the rest up to God. When our efforts are rebuffed, we should do as Jesus did:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, *but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* ([1 Peter 2:23](#))

Once we have talked to our brother or sister, we can return to other religious observances and serve God with a peaceful heart.

As R. Kent Hughes put it in his book “The Sermon on the Mount:”

If we are guilty of offending another, may we covenant with God to deal with it soon. Some of us have been spiritually dry because we have been offensive to others. May we covenant now to confess our sins to those whom we have offended. Then the heavens will open again.

Matthew 5:27 - 28

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

“**You shall not commit adultery**” – This is a word-for-word (in fact, a letter-for-letter) rendering of the seventh commandment as contained in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). It is a perfectly good statement of God’s Law and what He expects of every man (and woman). Most of us have never broken this commandment, but that does not give us any reason to act smugly superior to those who have. Because, Jesus added, “**everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**”

Jesus does not mean that it is sinful to look at a person of the opposite sex and admire their appearance, but it is wrong to do so lustfully. It is not the first glance that is sin, but the second, and third, and forth, that swells with lustful desire. Notice that Jesus does not say that this will lead to adultery. He says the person who looks with lustful intent “has already committed adultery.” This is expressed in the Greek aorist tense indicating past completed action!

The Scribes and Pharisees were so focused on outward actions that they completely missed this truth. Few male and female believers have not crossed the line from attraction to lust at some point in their life. We are all adulterers by this standard. And, even if you have never crossed this line, remember what James says:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. (James 2:10)

You who have never succumbed to this visual temptation, do not become proud from Jesus’ teaching, be humbled.

Matthew 5:29 - 30

²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

This is tough teaching! But, Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation. Jesus is talking about what is known as “spiritual mortification.” John Stott explains it this way:

What does this involve in practice? Let me elaborate and so interpret Jesus' teaching: "If your eye causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through your eyes (objects

you see), then pluck out your eyes. That is, don't look! Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and flung them away, and were now blind and so could not see the objects which previously caused you to sin. Again, if your hand or foot causes you to sin, because temptation comes to you through your hands (things you do) or your feet (places you visit), then cut them off. That is: don't do it! Don't go! Behave as if you had actually cut off your hands and feet, and had flung them away, and were now crippled and so could not do the things or visit the places which previously caused you to sin." That is the meaning of "mortification."

We live in a world that is controlled by sensuality. Everywhere we look, we see things that entice our senses. Illicit sexual conduct is freely talked about and implied (even outright shown) in movies, on television and on commercials. Advertising is constantly trying to stimulate our senses with subtle, and not so subtle, implications of sexual activity. And, although men are more susceptible to visual stimulation than women, women need to be just as vigilant to keep their thoughts pure.

Spiritual mortification is not always negative. In fact, it is ultimately positive. It is a habit that we must constantly work on. It is not, "I shouldn't do this or that." It is, as Paul teaches us:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Matthew 5:31 - 32

³¹"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

³²But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

I find it interesting that Jesus talks about divorce right after He talks about adultery and our inability to control our sexual desires. Because those who have trouble being faithful to one person always seem to think that it can be resolved by divorcing their spouse and hooking up with another. Our culture today supports this attitude and generally objects to the Biblical teaching regarding sexual relationships, marriage, and divorce.

Ten years ago, I read that 50% of all marriages end in divorce. It is certainly no better today. Recent surveys indicate that 8 out of 10 people are either directly or indirectly affected by divorce. Many people are deeply wounded by broken marriages and discussions of the subject bring up feelings that they would like to forget. For this reason, many preachers simply avoid the subject. However, since Jesus considered it an important enough subject to be addressed in His Sermon on the Mount (one of the greatest sermons ever preached) and this is the section of Matthew that we are currently looking at, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about it. I will try to be sensitive to those of you who have been hurt by it, or who are hurting right now because of it. I know the pain of divorce, especially unwanted divorce, because I went through it myself shortly before I got saved almost 50 years ago and it's still painful and embarrassing today.

So, instead of some theologian's opinions on divorce, let's see what Jesus said about it. First, however, we need to look at the context of Jesus' teaching. Even in Jesus' day there was much

controversy regarding divorce. It centered on the interpretation of a phrase in **Deuteronomy 24:1** that states:

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house ...

(**Deuteronomy 24:1**)

This verse teaches that a husband could divorce his wife if he no longer favored her because he found “something indecent” in her. In Jesus’ day there was much controversy over what “something indecent” meant. The opinions of the “experts” that is to say, the leading Rabbis, ran the gamut from a man’s wife burned dinner, to – she was walking around with her hair down, to – she was speaking to men on the streets, to – she was speaking disrespectfully of the husband’s parents. Some even interpreted the expression, “finds no favor in his eyes” to mean that a man could divorce his wife if he found someone more attractive. However, interestingly enough, their concept of “indecency” did not include adultery. Why was that? Because according to the Law, adultery was punishable by death.

This is why the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” (**Matthew 19:3**)

Instead of answering the question directly, Jesus and the Pharisees had this discourse:

"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." (**Matthew 19:4-9**)

And, in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi speaks to those who complained that God had seemed to have abandoned His people. The Living Bible version says it this way:

"Why has God abandoned us? " you cry. I'll tell you why: it is because the Lord has seen your treachery in divorcing your wives who have been faithful to you through the years, the companions you promised to care for and keep. You were united to your wife by the Lord. In God's wise plan, when you married, the two of you became one person in his sight. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. Therefore guard your passions! Keep faith with the wife of your youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, says he **hates** divorce ... (**Malachi 2:14-16**) [TLB]

We see then that, although he hates it, Jesus permitted divorce and remarriage on one and only one ground – marital unfaithfulness.

But what about a marriage where one person is a Christian and the other is not? The Apostle Paul spoke very specifically about this situation:

To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the

unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

What is the bottom line?

Scripture allows remarriage in three instances. First, if someone's mate is guilty of sexual immorality and is unwilling to repent, divorce and remarriage are permitted. Secondly, if a believer is deserted by an unbelieving spouse, divorce and remarriage are permitted. The third, though not specifically mentioned in any of the teachings on divorce, is if a believer was married and divorced before he or she became a Christian then remarriage is permitted.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, **all** things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17) [NKJV]

Yet, there is one type of situation that the Bible does not speak to directly or indirectly, and that is physical or emotional abuse. When this happens to you in a marriage, you need to go to the elders of your Church and, with their help, seek out good Christian counselling. But, if the perpetrator of this abuse refuses to submit to the Elders or refuses to go to counselling, then the victim needs to find other living arrangements, apart from the one they are married to. No one should continue living with someone who is abusing them! If you, as a Christian, are being abused by a non-Christian spouse, I believe that you have God's blessing to divorce (and remarry).

Finally, what about a Christian who has gone through a divorce and it was not in accordance with the principles we have laid out here? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it very well when asked what to do in this situation:

All I would say about them is this, and I say it carefully and advisedly, and almost in fear lest I give even a semblance of a suggestion that I am saying anything that may encourage anyone to sin. But on the basis of the gospel and in the interest of truth I am compelled to say this: Even adultery is not the unforgivable sin. It is a terrible sin, but God forbid that there should be anyone who feels that he or she has sinned himself or herself outside the love of God or outside His kingdom because of adultery. No; if you truly repent and realize the enormity of your sin and cast yourself upon the boundless love and mercy and grace of God, you can be forgiven and I assure you of pardon. But hear the words of our blessed Lord: "Go and sin no more!"

Matthew 5:33 - 37

³³"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

It used to be that in court you had to swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God! Those days are gone.

Today there is a drought of truth, even among Christians, which is what makes Jesus' teaching all the more important for us. However, in order to fully understand this teaching of Jesus we need to understand the historical and cultural (spiritual) background. First of all, swearing oaths and making vows were encouraged in the Old Testament.

You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. (Deuteronomy 10:20)

And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, 'As the LORD lives,' ... (Jeremiah 12:16a)

Secondly, if a person did swear an oath or vow, the Law required him or her to fulfill it.

You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:12)

If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:2)

If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. (Deuteronomy 23:21)

In reality, by the first century, many rabbis were teaching that a vow or an oath was not binding if it didn't include, or at least imply, the name of God. The Mishna, or oral traditions of the Jews, included an entire section on when oaths were binding and when they were not.

As a result, by the first century, swearing an oath really meant, "I'm not telling the truth, but I want you to think I am, because I'm not really lying either. Jesus' answer to the constant oath taking was,

But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, ... Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

This does not apply to oaths taken in legal matters, even though some Christian groups, such as the Quakers, take an extreme position on this, and refuse to even take this kind of an oath. Notice that later on in Matthew's gospel he tells us that even Jesus swore an oath:

But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so ..." (Matthew 26:63-64)

The world today is filled with deception. Advertisements are so filled with euphemisms and hyperbole that we don't even realize the deception and we accept what is said as solid truth. We can't change the behavior of the world or even of our culture, but we can change our own speech. Jesus calls us to be radically truthful

Matthew 5:38 - 42

³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to

him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

There is an old saying, “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” In other words, just because someone did something to you that was wrong, doesn’t mean you should respond by doing something to them that is also wrong. This does not come directly from the Bible, but there are several allusions to this maxim. The law that Jesus quoted here, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” actually predates the Mosaic Law. It was part of the Code of Hammurabi and was referred to as *Lex Talionis*. It was originally written as a limit to the kind of vengeance that could be inflicted. But, individuals could not use this law to settle disputes, only the courts were permitted to do so. This *Lex Talionis* concept is the foundation for our entire legal system. Jesus, however, takes it one step further. Now, pay special attention to the fact that each of the following are responses to **religious persecution**.

Our world is predominantly right handed. This has been true for the entire history of mankind. Therefore, when Jesus talked about someone slapping you on the right cheek, it was not just an act of aggression. In order to slap someone on the right cheek with the right hand, you must slap him or her with the back of the hand. According to rabbinic law, to hit someone with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as hitting him or her with the flat of the hand. The back-handed slap was *calculated contempt* against someone for their religious beliefs. In Jesus’ day this was an action for which a Jew could take someone to court. Jesus’ new explanation of an eye for an eye was, don’t retaliate even if you have the legal right to. Take it and move on.

Also, within the court system of the first century was a law that if you took someone to court and won your case, then even though the person had no possessions you could demand their tunic (shirt), or cloak (outer garment), or both. However, if you were awarded the cloak, you were required to return it to the person each evening because it also served as their blanket.

Likewise, Jesus’ teaching on going the extra mile is based on the word translated “**forces**.” This is a Greek word that was taken from the Persian language. It is the Greek word *aggareuō*, which refers to “the service of a public courier.” Persia implemented what was probably the first “Pony Express” to deliver letters and decrees. The courier would start off his journey on a fresh horse, but when that horse got tired, he would “borrow” a fresh horse and the owner of the borrowed horse was forbidden to refuse. This eventually became applicable to other acts of service. In Jesus’ day it was used by the Romans as a means of religious oppression against the Jews. They could demand that a Jew carry a load for them, but could not require them to go more than a mile. That’s why, at Jesus’ crucifixion, the Romans could require Simon the Cyrenian to carry Jesus’ cross.

The last example, like the other three given, looks into the idea of lending to those who want to borrow from you. It too was based on religious persecution. Luke also mentions this in his account of the Sermon on the Plain:

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. (Luke 6:35)

These are all examples of how Jesus says we should respond to specific forms of persecution for our beliefs. These actions should be taken as a form of witnessing to those who would abuse us for our faith in Christ that Christians are “delightfully different.”

Matthew 5:43 – 48

⁴³You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' – This was the traditional teaching of the Rabbis, however – it is not what the Law of Moses teaches. The Law says:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18)

The rabbinical teaching to love your neighbors but hate your enemies was what all Jews of Jesus' day were taught. The command to hate your enemies was probably inserted because the Jews believed that God loved only the Jews. After all, He had the Israelites slaughter the residents of the Promised Land when they entered and a number of the Psalms and prophetic utterances speak about God's judgments against the enemies of the Israelites. What the rabbis failed to see was that the imprecatory Psalms and prophecies against their enemies were judicial, not personal. By Jesus' time the hatred for foreigners was so pervasive that they thought they were honoring God by hating anyone who was not a Jew.

Jesus' new teaching was that by loving their enemies, the people would be demonstrating that they were, in fact, the children of God. He makes the point further by demonstrating that God rains blessing (pun intended) on the unrighteous as well as the righteous and He causes the sun to shine on all people, good or bad. Being good to all people and being a blessing to them is a God-like quality.

The second reason to show love to the world is that it distinguishes us from the world. The fact is that nobody is attracted to a religion whose followers are just like the rest of the world (what's the purpose). People of the world are attracted to a religion when they see its adherents demonstrating that they are delightfully different!

Jesus commanded His disciples that they were to demonstrate an Agape-like, self-sacrificial love to everyone, not for their own sake, but for the sake of others and because it demonstrates who and what the object of our faith is and what He is like.

When we love others unconditionally we are glorifying God!

So What?

As I said earlier, this is some tough teaching from Jesus. Traditional teaching by the Scribes and Rabbis in the first century typically started off something like this: “Rabbi Abin said in the name of Rabbi Elai in Rabbi Jochanan’s name that ...” But Jesus did not rely on someone else’s reputation or authority. Not only was His teaching radical and strict, He taught it with his own authority when he said, “But I say to you.” Notice what the people said at the end of this sermon.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29)

Jesus was, and is, the ultimate authority. These were the very words of God! This sermon was not just for first century Israelites. It is for all of us who claim to worship God in spirit and in truth. As I said earlier, sometimes Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount makes me squirm in my seat. It is demanding, convicting, and challenging. But, keep in mind that none of us is capable of obeying Biblical teaching on our own. We need the empowering of the Holy Spirit. None of us is perfect. We all stumble in our walk with the Lord. The key is that when we stumble and fall, we get back up again, we confess our sins to God, and we get back on the pathway of life more determined than ever to live the life that will honor Him!

(Prayer)

Last week I gave you a copy of my sermon notes and in them was a list of ten things from the Beatitudes that will make God smile if we do them. Is anybody willing to share with us how you did this past week with one of them?