

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

THE BEATITUDES

Matt. 5:2; and opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying;

Webster defines a sermon as a speech given as instruction in morals or any serious talk on behavior and/or responsibility. The Sermon on the Mount, to me, is Jesus Christ describing to us what a Christian looks like from His perspective from the inside first, that is our moral character, then having that character exposed in our outward conduct. I believe all of the things that Webster mentioned to define a sermon is included in these passages; not to mention what He expects of a Christian as he traverses this present evil age, that is, his moral make up, his responsibilities, and his disposition in God's kingdom. The whole of Matthew's Gospel is built around five main sermons or collections of teachings from Jesus Christ. The first of these, Chapters five through seven, is known as the Sermon on the Mount, named after the place where Jesus was teaching at the time. Although this section is a unified whole, many of the teachings within it occur in different settings in the other Gospels. It is likely, in view of Matthew's style of writing and presentation that this section contains more than the contents of a single sermon. Jesus knew at the time that not everyone who heard Him teach would become one of His disciples, but as in all things that Christ gave to us, all of His teachings were intended for everyone. The things that He taught had no exclusions as far as who was the object of the content was concerned with and to whom the message was intended to be taught. ***Matt. 5:1, 2; and when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying.*** Jesus was beginning to draw huge crowds everywhere He went and as He taught the people they began to believe in Him, and were becoming His disciples. These disciples followed Him everywhere He went to teach. Let's take Matt. 5:1-2 apart to get a full meaning of the intended Greek translated back to English: *As He saw and perceived the crowds that had been following Him from as far away as Decapolis, Jerusalem, Galilee, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan, He ascended to the mountain nearby, moving from a lower place toward a higher place; and so after He sat Himself down, He prepared Himself for teaching His followers who were believers and made His teachings the basis of their conduct, and they approached Him at His location. And as He opened His mouth again He began to instruct them by word of mouth.* The people that followed Jesus could not get enough of His teachings; after He would finish one teaching they would continue to follow Him wherever He went.

The Jews had special traditions when it came to teaching; the master or the teacher usually would sit at the head place or in the chief place, and the disciples before him would sit in a circuit, like a crown so that they all could see the master and hear his words. And the master would not sit upon a seat and the scholars on the ground; either they all sat on a seat or

they all sat on the ground. Formerly the master used to sit and the scholars stand, but before the destruction of second temple, all masters used to teach their disciples as they were sitting. From the days of Moses to Rabban Gamaliel (the master of Paul), they did not learn the law unless they were standing. But after Rabban Gamaliel died, sickness (of attitudes) came into the world and they learned the law while sitting.

Jesus spoke with a clear strong voice so that all of the people might hear Him and with great freedom and cheerfulness He began His teaching with the attitude that what He was about to say to His disciples was very important. His teaching wasn't directed only to His disciples, but to the whole multitude. All who heard Him listened with great astonishment. Some of the things He taught were mentioned for His disciple's sake and some of it was for the multitudes in general. And as often happened in these situations many others gathered to listen to what He had to say; some came to hear Him for the first time, some that had heard Him teach became disinterested and left, the ones that followed Him and stayed with Him were considered His disciples. Jesus' teaching set out for His disciples the quality of life and behavior that He required of those who desired to enter His kingdom and they came under His rule and authority.

Life in God's kingdom is characterized by humility, love, righteousness, mercy, sincerity, and dependence on God. Unlike life in a human society in general, it has no place for pride, hatred, cruelty, aggression, hypocrisy, and self-sufficiency, ***Matt. 5:3-10; Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle (or humble) for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*** It seems to me that what Jesus Christ is teaching us in these Beatitudes is that to be His disciple we have to discipline ourselves by setting aside our human nature and take on a new spiritual nature. Jesus is enumerating a contrasting of natures, the old with the regenerated. He is teaching us that if we can't identify ourselves with these qualities of character in ourselves then we must go through a spiritual change. This cannot come to us merely by behavior changes which are merely suppressing what are flesh desires; it takes a change of the heart; our spirit needs to be in fellowship with God's Holy Spirit so that a regeneration can take place in our heart, which is what is meant by being "born again." The word "heart," as I am using it, is defined as: *the seat of the desires, feelings, affections, passions, and/or impulses.* In this Sermon on the Mount Jesus refers to those who must be "pure in heart;" these are those whose center of life has been made pure by Jesus Christ. Let's take these verses apart to understand their meaning and to keep what Jesus is teaching us in its proper context. As we read these verses and the

amplification of them we should remember that if we are calling ourselves Christians, Jesus should be describing the character in us: *The brothers in union with Christ who are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by the fullness of God because they have God's kingdom within their heart i.e., those who recognize their spiritual helplessness when it comes to the seat of their affections, emotions, and passions of various kinds, and especially for possessing these properties, which are considered as humility, because they know, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and faith in Jesus Christ, that they have been separated from the worldly minded by Jesus Christ, as their Judge, that is from the wicked, and His disciples are presently in a continuous state of being an heir to the Royal Dominion of the residence of God where a reward is reserved for the righteous. The brothers in union with Christ who are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by being one of who are sorrowful over their sin and the sin of the world that leads to spiritual separation from God, because those who are sorrowful for their sin will be encouraged. The brothers in union with Christ who are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by the fullness of God because they are meek and mild; these shall in the future possess, as friends of God, admission to the new creation. The brothers who are in union with Christ are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by being one of who long for spiritual nourishment and have an ardent desire for faith that is acceptable to God, because they will be filled with spiritual blessings. The brothers in union with Christ who are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by the fullness of God because they are compassionate, benevolently merciful in their thoughts and actions, not merely because they express acts of mercy, but who have this attribute as a result of the indwelling of God; these shall obtain salvation through Christ. The brothers in union with Christ who are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by the fullness of God because their center of life, i.e., their desires, feelings, affections, passions, and impulses has been made clean and pure in a spiritual sense from the guilt and pollution of sin, are made void of evil by Jesus Christ, and they will perceive God as He truly exists. The brothers in union with Christ who are fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by the fullness of God because they are the ones who have received the peace of God and have an absence of confusion in their own heart and bring the peace of God to others and spread the good news that they have experienced, these will be regarded as pious worshippers of God, they are righteous, and saints. The brothers in union with Christ who have been fully satisfied no matter what their circumstances may be and enjoy the favor of God are marked by the fullness of God are the ones who have been pursued with repeated acts of enmity on the grounds of having faith acceptable to God, because they possess the right to be heirs of the Royal Dominion of the residence of God where a reward is reserved for the righteous. The Beatitudes must be taken as*

a whole having as the basis the last phrase in verse 11, ***“On account of Me.”*** The Lord said to His disciples, “Blessed are you...on account of Me.” The word for “blessed,” in the Greek, means to be characterized by the quality of God, “blessedness.” When one is indwelt by God, and God’s nature is in him, he has the kingdom of God within him, ***Luke 17:21; nor will they say, look, here it is! Or, there it is! For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.*** “Blessed” also means to be fully satisfied. This satisfaction, however, is not due to the circumstances of life nor the fulfillment of the conditions prescribed in these Beatitudes, but due to Christ’s indwelling. In the NT it is used of the joy that comes from salvation. Therefore it is wrong to translate “blessed” as “happy” because happy is connected with luck or favorable circumstances. People can be happy because of favorable circumstances, but they can only be blessed because of Christ. Blessedness is that basic condition created by Christ’s indwelling in man’s heart which brings a fundamental satisfaction in the life of the believer.

Blessedness, however, is not static, but progressive. This progressiveness of blessedness depends upon the fulfillment of the conditions set down in these Beatitudes: (1) “The poor in spirit...here indicates the helpless person contrasted with the “poor but able to help oneself.” The first step to blessedness is the realization of one’s spiritual helplessness. (2) “Those who mourn...” sorrow for ones sins and the sins of others. It is the submissive attitude, agreeing with the Lord concerning sin. (3) “Humbledness,” which in this context means to become angry at sin. It is the active attitude of the Christian toward sin in combating it instead of a passive, indifferent attitude. (4) When one exercises active combativeness against sin, he hungers for a new filling of God’s righteousness which is the realization of God’s rightful expectation of the believer. “Those who hunger...” in Greek is better rendered “the hungry ones,” indicating constant and repetitive satisfaction with God’s righteousness, expending the received energy and hungering anew over and over again as with physical hunger. (5) The outward demonstration of the Christian character is shown in “mercifulness”. This is the course of action and considerate attitude of the Christian in empathizing with the unbeliever and suffering with him the consequences of his sin and doing everything possible to relieve the tragic results. The difference between “grace” and “mercy” is that the first affects the character of a person and changes it. Only God can effect grace but we are admonished to show mercy and be merciful, to alleviate the consequences of sin without enabling them in their sin. (6) Purity of heart is not something that is achieved once and for all, but it is a continuous cleansing that the believer experiences as a result of the fulfillment of the previous conditions of blessedness. The more pure a person is the more clearer his sight of God becomes. (7) “Peacemaking,” is not simply trying to stop the feuding between nations and people, but bringing the peace of God that the believer has experienced to his fellow human beings. (8) Being “persecuted for the sake of righteousness” causes a person to reach the higher rung of the satisfaction of blessedness.

When does this state of blessedness begin with the believer? It is not something to be experienced in the afterlife as the Greeks believed, but it is something that begins the very moment that a person believes in Jesus Christ. This is demonstrated by the fact that the promise concerning the kingdom of heaven as in verse 3 and verse 10 is in the present tense while all of the other promises are in the future tense. The fruits of one's obedience to the conditions for blessedness begin here, but they are not all given here. They will be given in their totality in the future, in heaven (v 12).

The Beatitudes are not a spiritual buffet, i.e., pick what makes you happy, but if you don't want some of it, leave it. That would mean that we would want to only be a part of the kingdom of God while also consorting with the enemy. All of the beatitudes are intertwined with each other and all are intertwined with humility, the itemized list that Christ presents to us is only a part of the greater whole. They are kind of like a spiritual cable with seven strands, and a disciple is only as strong spiritually as the weakest of one of the cables, or Beatitudes.

There is nothing of this world that will fit into God's kingdom. Jesus tells us that we cannot serve both in ***Matt. 6:24, No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other.*** There is no existent condition where we can be only partially blessed, partially in God's favor, or partially marked by the fullness of God, these would all be an oxymoron, like being partially pregnant; it's all or nothing. We must take all of God's beatitudes as a whole. It's like coming to the dinner table famished but only taking a small sampling of one item and expecting to be full. The Beatitudes describe a contrast of how Christ's followers must live in this present evil age. Each of these Beatitudes tells us how to live blessed by Christ; the word Beatitude is defined as *perfect blessedness*.

These Beatitudes are as Christ wanting to present us with a hidden treasure of joy and He is giving us the roadmap of how to get to the spot marked by "x". A part of this perfect blessedness is also that we are favored and graciously approved by God; He no longer sees us as His enemy. In these Beatitudes Jesus Christ is trying to separate us from the attitudes and values of the world which will lead us to judgment's condemnation rather than blessedness. So it goes without saying that what Jesus promises us has nothing to do with the world's mindset of getting to a point of "having made it." His concern is the salvation of the world not the indulgence of the world. So His "hidden treasure" has nothing to do with our finding bliss from an outward source, or the world's source of happiness vs. joy.

In His first pronouncement He wants us to understand that it is impossible for man to please God in and of himself. We are helpless (poor in spirit) to please God, we have nothing that God needs so we must depend on His mercy alone to gain acceptance by God. We can only become an heir to His kingdom if we realize a complete dependence on Him. This is very much like a parent/child relationship, the child instinctively knows that he is dependent on his

parents for his survival; so is a believer dependent on Christ and His work of mercy and grace. As parents try to bless their children with the best possible living arrangements that they can provide, Jesus also promises that anyone who follows this plan of living will be rewarded with the best possible living arrangement that any Deity can provide. Some of this best life we can enjoy in the here and now, some of it is reserved for our resurrection.

Verse four refers to His disciples need and desire to mourn for their sins and the sins of the world. He is to mourn the sins of his nature, indwelling sin, which is always working in him and is a source of continual grief. He is to mourn the unbelief in his heart, notwithstanding the many instances, declarations, promises, that God's grace made unto him. These sins of life we mourn because they are committed against a God of love, peace, grace, and mercy that grieves the Holy Spirit and dishonor the gospel of Christ. They also mourn the sin of this present evil age.

This mourning is tied into the beatitude of verse three, the humility of being aware that we are spiritually helpless, we now realize our unworthiness before God as we feel sorrow for our sins and we realize that only God can take away sorrow for our sins; God is the only One who can forgive our sin, that is in the sense of it being totally erased from our guilt. This realization should give us great comfort; knowing that our sin will be forgiven and we can come before God boldly, without fear, asking Him for forgiveness. In our mourning there is an inner weeping, and sometimes it is also accompanied by a physical weeping. But in **Revelation 7:17** we read that as we confess our sin, repent of our sin, and ask for His forgiveness, He will wipe away every tear by giving us that assurance that He has heard our confession and does forgive us. Just as He does not punish the lamb that strayed, but led it to the spring of life, so He does with us; **Rev. 7:17; for the lamb in the center of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.** As Jesus guides us to that spring of water we must be aware that we can still be distracted on the right and on the left by fame, popularity, wealth, or any other enticement of this present evil age, but as we are being distracted He also tells us that He will not abandon us. It is very similar to being led down a road until you come to a double fork in the road. We have three choices, we can either turn right to continue on in the promises of Jesus Christ or left where the temptations and false promises of the world abide that look so inviting that it is almost impossible to resist. If we can keep on the straight and narrow path that lies straight ahead to the kingdom of God Jesus will go with us, but He cannot go where He knows that we will be lead to sin. Staying on the road that lies straight ahead will involve some pain, discipline, and being taken out of our comfort zone. Jesus Christ will traverse the straight and narrow path that lies ahead with us, but if we choose the path on the right or left He will let us go but He informs us that He cannot accompany us down either of those two paths. If we choose the right or left fork and realize that we have made a grave mistake and turn back to where we parted

company with Jesus, He will be there waiting for us with welcoming open arms. I envision Him waiting patiently under a shade tree asking us if we are ready to continue our pursuit of true life, the life that He represents. Verse four promises us that we will be blessed with an uninterrupted communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit, and with the joyful society of the angels and glorified saints if we choose the life He represents.

Once again verse five is tied into verse three and four by humility. Jesus says that the gentle shall be blessed. When we think of gentle people it conveys to our mind people who are compassionate and humble. These persons seem to trust in God to orchestrate their lives, not being concerned about what's in it for them, but rather they are consumed by how they can make someone else's life easier, even if it costs them some of their own comfort or profit. Truly gentle people know where they stand before God and they are not concerned with any gain they have an opportunity to make while traversing this present evil age. They have the gift of being able to live their life in a lowly way without living also in condemnation. They would rather follow the compassion of their heart by taking the risk of giving to someone who may be putting on a pretense of being needy, rather than to pass up an opportunity of giving to someone who is truly needy. They understand that anything that they might lose here on earth cannot compete with the rewards that await them as they take possession of their inheritance in heaven. So being cheated is not as much a concern to them as it is to follow what soothes their spiritually moral conscience, that is, serving their Lord and demonstrating His attributes. These persons are not provoked to anger and patiently bear and put up with assaults on their character. What others think of them is not as much a concern as knowing that they stand righteous in front of their eventual eternal Judge. They are courteous and amicable to everyone, they do not let another party dictate their disposition. Humble persons do not envy those who seem to have made economical or social gains in this present evil age nor do they envy the spiritual or earthly gifts of other men and are willing to be instructed and admonished because they realize that they don't know all there is to know and are willing to be in a state of constant learning. This kind of disposition puts them in a place of ascribing all that they have and are to God; not taking any of the credit for what the Holy Spirit has done for them.

Here meekness (or humility) is considered as not being a moral virtue, but as the result of Christian grace, a fruit of the Spirit of God; which is eminently in Christ. This fruit can be of a great advantage and use for them in hearing and receiving the Word because knowing the Word gives them accountability for the reason of the hope that is in them. The blessing that is given to them for this frame of mind is that they shall inherit the earth. At first glance this doesn't seem much like a blessing and indeed in its present state it could even be considered a curse. But this blessing of "earth" refers to the "New Earth," where only such persons as themselves shall dwell in it. We receive this blessing as we take our position of being joint heirs with Christ who will at that time be ruler of the earth and the fullness thereof. This blessing is a

reference to ***Ps. 37:11; But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.***

When I think of hungering or thirsting for something, I think of something as being necessary for life, and to not get them will end in death. This is a pretty intense desire, but an accurate one when Jesus tells us that His disciples should hunger and thirst for righteousness; it *is* a matter of spiritual life or death. To have this intense desire for righteousness means that we are on the right path that leads to being “filled” that is, satisfied with knowing what will be our eternal destination. This is not only a desire for the world to be righteous, but we need to take a deeper look within ourselves to see what wrongs need to be righted. Whether it be offenses committed against someone else, or our own attitudes and values that need changing. It is very easy for us to see the righteousness that needs to take place outside ourselves but the work that needs to be done within us is sometimes a little more difficult.

Righteousness is defined as conformity to the claims of a higher authority and stands in opposition to lawlessness. It is what is commanded by God and stands the test of judgment. In order for us to conform to the authority of someone else, namely God, requires us to practice humility on our part and so once again we see the necessity of humility to identify with the Beatitudes. After we humbly approach God we will recognize that our hunger and thirst for righteousness requires us to first of all have a desire to be righteous. The desire for righteousness is not something that we are born with, we must humbly ask for it and if we are sincere He will give it to us. It all begins with an attitude of repentance in order to be right with God, that is, to be of one mind with God. After we are in a position of being right with God then we also need to ask for a desire to always *do* right. In other words we want to reflect His image in our conduct, conversations, and remember that we are His representatives here on earth. Then we need to have a desire created in us to see to it that things done by others are done righteously to the point that we can influence others. When we see a wrong being perpetrated in any way we need to speak up and take a stand for righteousness. To say or do nothing about lawlessness (sin) is the same as participating in it or condoning it.

Persons who hunger and thirst for this righteousness are not looking for justice and equity in this present evil age; they know that true righteousness can never be found here. But what they do hunger for is the righteousness that justifies us because of our position with Christ, that is, our believing in Him and our faith that is derived from Him. To hunger and thirst supposes a want of righteousness, (and/or justice), which is the case with all men, but it is only perceived by those who are spiritually enlightened. These men prefer this righteousness over all other so called righteousness of the earth. God will bless these persons by filling them with this righteousness and with all other good things that are a consequence of it. These consequences are particularly the attributes joy and peace which are the resultant effect of

righteousness. They don't have any need to search for any other type of righteousness because this righteousness is full, perfect, sufficient, and entirely complete.

The next part of the Beatitudes requires us to be merciful, without prejudice! Mercy is defined as *to feel deeply or affecting the emotional rather than the intellectual part of us, that is, an inner feeling. To feel compassion, requiring us to extend help for the consequence of sin, as opposed to be hardened.* Many of us, myself included, have witnessed someone paying the consequences for their sin and rather than coming to their aid and effecting some help, that we were capable of giving, we chose rather to stand by with the attitude of "well, they are just getting what they deserve!" There is not much, if any, compassion in that attitude.

So are we responsible to bail out everyone that is suffering the consequences of their sins? No! What Jesus would desire us to do, which once again takes humility, is to come along side that person, let them know that you have experience with the same consequences or find common ground that will provide a means of talking them through their experience and witness to them in such a way that is not condemning but encouraging. Persons who are suffering through their consequences need to see the role of Jesus Christ in their life or they are apt to repeat this experience again and again. When we turn our back on a person that is hurting, especially one that we are capable of helping, is to be like the Levite or the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Any Christian believer that has experienced God's mercy should be overwhelmed with a desire to show a quantity of that same mercy to someone else; to not do so is to be very ungracious and considered a slap in the face of our Savior.

It is not possible for us to extend the same magnitude of mercy toward someone else that He has shown to us, while we were sinners, while we were His enemy, so for us to show a trifle to others of what God has shown in abundance to us should be the minimum of our efforts and foremost in our heart. When Jesus says that the merciful shall be shown mercy, we should not require or expect that He is talking about the person that we have shown mercy to return it to us. If they are not believers they do not yet fully understand God's mercy and could be skeptical of your demonstration of mercy. So Jesus' directive to us is to not worry about being shown mercy by other members of the human race for we shall receive it in part in the present and in all of its fullness and glory on our resurrection and that should give us comfort and satisfaction. We deserve nothing from others and we should expect nothing, but with God we deserve nothing but we can expect everything!

This expression of mercy should not be merely an expression of words of pity and concern; but a communicating with cheerfulness and readiness, with affection and tenderness, and with a view of the glory of God. This is how our God operates with men and the way that He operated with us when we were ignorant of the gospel when He gave us good counsel and

advice. To show this kind of mercy is very delightful and desirable by God. But it is also what He requires because it makes us more like the Father.

Jesus tells His disciples that they can expect to be blessed if they are pure in heart, with a promise that they will see God. Our heart deals with the seat of your desires, feelings, affections, passions, and impulses. He wants His disciples to be honest and sincere, people of integrity and not scatterbrained. His disciples need to be in union with Him and with other true believers. Jesus' own life was a walking example of what He desired in us and others. Not only was it desirable but also necessary if we want to see God! The word "see" in this verse, in this context, means "to perceive." This kind of "seeing" does not need to wait until we die, we can perceive God through His Word, which is a channel He uses to reveal Himself to us. After we die God the Father Himself does not become visible to us, but we can perceive who He is by seeing His Son, ***John 14:9; Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'?"***

Being pure in heart goes beyond our pure notions and deeds and limiting our pureness to outward conversations only. The heart of man is naturally wicked and man does not have the power to make it clean or pure from sin. And no man is so pure in heart that he is free from sin. One who has never sinned is only true of Jesus Christ. But even though this is true, though they have sin dwelling in them, they are justified from all sin by the righteousness of Christ and are cleanse through the Word and at our judgment the sentence of "justified" is pronounced on us. All of our sins have been forgiven and our hearts have been sprinkled with the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all sin. We have the grace of God in our hearts, which at this point, even though it is still imperfect, is entirely pure, positionally, because of the saving work of our Savior Jesus Christ. There is not the least stain or spot of sin within it. As a result of this pure heart Jesus promises us that we will perceive God in our heart; in this life, enjoying communion with Him both privately and publicly, and for sure in the life that He gives us eternally. We will be able to see His power and His glory; we will taste and know that He is good and gracious. We will also see Him after our resurrection; which will be unspeakably glorious, desirable, delightful, and satisfying. This vision of Him will be unclouded or stained, free from the darkness of our sin and error and free from any interruption. It will be appropriating and transforming and will last forever.

As Christians we are called to emulate Jesus Christ's life that He portrayed here on earth. He was a man of peace and was referred to the "Prince of Peace" by Isaiah. As with all the rest of the attributes of a disciple we are to be a person of true peace which, once again, takes humility.

After we have lived our life on into adulthood there are probably several things that we have to come to a point of peace about. Some things that we wish we could change in the world and some things that we wish we could change within ourselves. But, after we allow Jesus Christ to administer our lives we will notice that we can gain peace about these things by learning to be content to know that everything is as God anointed it to be. Our perspectives and points of view begin to change as we mature in discipleship. As we mature spiritually we come to realize our helplessness to promote any satisfying change within this present evil age and trying to promote change by aggressive measures is fruitless. As Peacemakers we are called to try to infuse peace into every situation or circumstance that seems unsettled. Far too often we can excuse ourselves from being involved by saying that this particular situation is none of my business. This is not true for the believer. As a peacemaker we have been called to make peace in as much as we are able. To not get involved is to have an attitude of arrogance and selfishness, because successful peacemaking could lead us to having relationships with someone that we may not have chosen as friends for ourselves, either because we have caused peace to exist with someone that our society considers a castaway, or we could be involved with someone that is now going to take away from time that we were planning to spend on ourselves or with others of our own choosing. But we must remember that if Jesus only chose the ones to have relationship with that were as perfect as He, we would not be included. So, to be a son of God means that we reflect the attribute of being a purveyor of His peace and that peace is as Jesus defines peace, that is, *the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Jesus Christ, fearing nothing from God and consequently content with its earthly lot, whatever it is as a direct result of redemption by Christ*. It's His peace that we bring because in our own nature we don't have any true peace to give. As we do humbly reflect His attributes this is when He calls us His sons and daughters.

In the context of this verse Jesus is not referring to peace between God and man, for no man can make his own peace with God. But his peace is between man and man. His desire is for men to live peaceably with all men and with one another. The Jews spoke very highly of and much about the efforts to make peace. They reckoned this among the things that would be useful to man, both in this world and in the next. Making peace between a man and his neighbor they say is what Aaron was much disposed to doing. Moses used to say "let justice break through the mountain, but Aaron loved peace and pursued it and made peace between men and his neighbors; ***Mal. 2:5-6 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me, and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity.*** Hence the Jews always have said that they should be a disciple of Aaron, who loved peace, and followed after it. Now Jesus is saying that such persons shall be called children of God, that is, they are children of God by His adopting grace, which is manifested in their regeneration and is

evidenced by the fruits of it, which in this case, peace being one of them, **Gal. 5:22; But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control.**

Persons who reflect all of these beatitudes will never receive any kind of glory or honor from man for being this way, this of course takes humility to accept. But we as believers also realize that we don't exemplify the Beatitudes to get the praise, honor, or even the rewards; we do it because this is what being a disciple of Christ is and looks like and it's our desire to be the best disciple that we are capable of being, even if we don't get recognition from man for it. We know in our hearts that this life on earth is only very temporary when we compare it to eternity and any reward that we may get in eternity is going to far outweigh any inconvenience or trouble that being Christ-like will cause for us. Those of us who are persecuted (persecuted can be defined as "to pursue with repeated acts of enmity"), because we promote a Christ-like lifestyle know that the persecution that we suffer will be nothing when compared to the suffering that our persecutors will endure after God judges them, so we do not need to waste any time on vengeance for our sake. The One and Only Judge that can see the hearts of men has it handled justly and/or righteously. Repeated acts of enmity can range from being as little as being called names for what we believe, to psychological or physical harm. We are comforted knowing that God is aware of all of our persecutions and the best we can do is to pray for our persecutors that they will eventually change their ways before God judges them. Just as Christ does not desire that anyone should be condemned, so too the true believer of Christ desires this also which includes all that He stands for (looking for redemptive value in persons) and all that being condemned implies.

Jesus tells us that as Christians being persecuted is not a matter of *if* we will be persecuted, but *when*. **Romans 8:16,17; The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, in indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.** Many uninformed Christians have been lead to believe that Christianity somehow protects them from or that we are exempted from, the reproach or persecution by men. As soon as they proclaim their beliefs publically they shall be informed differently. As Christians we can't conduct ourselves perfectly to these Beatitudes, but we are progressing in them toward the image of God and we will progress until the end of our physical life. Non-Christians are progressing in their lives also, but they are progressing away from the image of God. Unfortunately the older they get the more entrenched they become and the spiritual death (separation from God) more deeply defines their identity and the more callous their heart becomes away from God. Not to say that a regeneration of the heart is impossible with the elderly, just that they are more entrenched in who they are and change presents more difficulty to them. But, as the hymn tells us, "nothing is too difficult for Thee." As their heart becomes more and more callous it gets harder and harder

for the Holy Spirit's conviction to penetrate their heart. In many cases it will eventually get to a point where it will take a near death tragic event in their life to reverse this trend.

Living out our lives according to these Beatitudes will assure us that the Holy Spirit's conviction will always be able to penetrate our heart. But the ones that choose to stay on the path that leads them away from Christ will try to find ways of destroying a believers reputation by public mocking and ridicule, as they take on the character of the son of this world, that is, Satan, to not necessarily disgrace us, but Christ in us, **Matt. 5: 11, 12; Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** When we read quotations from Scripture concerning persecution, the word persecution seems to get a lot of attention, but the most frequently asked question seems to be "what exactly is persecution?" While most of us think of it as the suffering that the early Christian martyrs went through; persecution still goes on today for most Christians. I think commentator John Gill gives a pretty good definition of it; *being reviled by men, speaking very reproachable to us, branding us with infamy loaded with disgrace, from place to place. Being set up to look embarrassed speaking evil of us, doing the worst things that they can think of to us and inventing others. They are seditious (setting up rebellion) against us, accusing us of being guilty of sacrilege, incest, and murder, all of it is lies of course and all of these with the intent of bringing us and Christianity into a state of disgrace.* With these words in mind I think that it would be fair to say that all of us, to a certain extent, been persecuted for our belief.

In Matthew 5:11 and 12 Jesus is making a full disclosure statement to His disciples. What Jesus is proposing to His disciples, if they choose to follow Him, is not going to allow them to live comfortably in this world. They can expect to be insulted, pestered, lied about, and cursed. But He also reassures them that if this is happening in their life they should count it as joy because that means they are being effective for His kingdom. If they weren't being effective at spreading the Good News these enemies of Christ would be leaving them alone. Let's amplify these verses to get the full impact of Jesus' full disclosure: *Brothers in Christ, count it as a blessing and being fully satisfied because you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit by means of your faith in Jesus Christ; so when-so-ever men assail you with abusive words, and pursue you with repeated acts of enmity, and speak words against you, intending to lower your image, saying remarks with deceitful accusations and slander against you with every kind of injurious words that are intended to cause you pain or hurt, on account of Me. Brothers in Christ if this is your situation then joy be to you, and you have reason to rejoice exceedingly, because your reward of life is in the here-after where a reward is reserved for the righteous and is to a degree great, because in the like manner that you are being persecuted, the enemies of God pursued the prophets of the OT with repeated acts of enmity who preceded you in time.* In these verses Jesus

switched from speaking in general of the principles of what a disciple's life should look like to speaking directly to His disciples. He went from speaking to the whole crowd, because He was aware that some were rejecting what He was saying, to the elect who have decided that this man is more than a teacher, He is the Son of God. Jesus was not making promises; much like a vacuum salesperson might do, to lure a few people in to only tell them later on "the rest of the story," or a "bait and switch" scheme, that is, this is not going to be an easy journey. He wanted a full commitment from His disciples and in order to get a true commitment He needed to tell them the whole truth of what they were about to embark on. "Expect to be persecuted." Not what you want to teach while you're trying to build a following, but it was the righteous thing to do. And this is a good lesson for us also; we as believers know that following Jesus is not a walk in the park. It takes commitment, trust, and faith to accept that you may not be the most popular person at the Christmas party because of your belief in Christ and the life-style that you have chosen will reflect that choice. You will probably be the odd one out because you chose not to participate in the jokes, gossip, and less than moral behavior. **John 15:20; remember the word that I said to you. A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word they will also keep yours.** To be a follower of Jesus is to imitate His life and the life that He guides us through. He does not wink at the "little" indiscretions thinking that there are times when these indiscretions are okay; they are never okay because these "little" indiscretions have a tendency to grow and get out of hand, like a noxious weed that may have pretty blossoms when it is young and tender but as it grows it takes over the entire yard, not to mention that in the Lord's eyes there are no degrees of sin. You cannot live a partial righteous life; it's all in or nothing.

But Jesus' message to His disciples was not all doom and gloom, why would anyone follow someone that only promised more suffering and possible death? There is spiritual hope in His teaching and Jesus told His disciples and tells us as well, that we should rejoice and be glad when we are being treated this way. The word "glad" would actually be better translated as "exult" or "rejoice." **1 Pet. 4:13; to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.** The definition of this word from the Greek means to *exult, leap for joy, to show one's joy by leaping and skipping, denoting excessive or ecstatic joy and delight*. This type of rejoicing is not just for the moment but eternal—unhindered and unchanged by outside circumstances. How is it possible for anyone to be in a spirit of rejoicing while they are being slandered, insulted, and in general persecuted? Our natural response, at least my first natural response would be to try to plan and scheme my way to revenge; this is a natural response that has its origin in the "old man." But we are no longer controlled by the natural man, so we respond in an extraordinary way; we think of Jesus' promise of our reward in heaven and so we desire to respond as Jesus did. When we get a glimpse of what that reward consists of, that is, when we have the opportunity to live out eternity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, plus all of the others that

are righteous and holy; the persecution that we suffered will pale in comparison and we would gladly endure even greater persecution to receive what our Lord Jesus Christ has for us.

Our joy will be complete, that is, while we are engaged in this kind of joy there is nothing possible that could make the joy any greater. This is something that on this side of heaven we, as sinners, have never experienced. If we took our greatest experience that we have engaged in on earth and multiply it times a hundred fold it would not compare to the joy that Jesus has waiting for us in eternity. Jesus also reassured His disciples and us that we will be in good company because the way that they have persecuted you is the same way that the OT prophets had been persecuted, most of whom paid the ultimate price. If we are committed to speaking righteously and truthfully we can expect opposition; opposition that will try to make us look bad and make our life as tough as possible; that's the price, we have to decide if the cost is worth the reward, Jesus assures us that we will not be disappointed, ***Ps 22:5; to Thee they cried out, and were delivered; In Thee they trusted, and were not disappointed. Rom. 9:33; just as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed. Rom. 10:11; for the Scripture says whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed. 1Pet. 2:6; for this is contained in Scripture: Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.***

DISCIPLES AND THE WORLD

Matt. 5:13; ...you are the salt of the earth

In verse thirteen Jesus is comparing His disciples to salt, that is, He is teaching them how important their witness is in the present and also in the future. The things that He is teaching them now they need to *preserve* in their heart to not only use in their life today but also for future generations. Salt was used as a preservative and just as salt was used to preserve what was important to their sustenance as far as food is concerned, His disciples as the caretakers of the salt needed to preserve these teachings that they are hearing, ***Matt. 5:13; You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.*** Jesus is emphasizing the importance of witnessing and giving testimonies and these statements are not only applied to them but it also applies to us now, so let's open this verse up to get the full context: *Each one of you brothers in Christ are similar to the natural salt that purifies, cleanses and preserves from corruption; in a spiritual sense you are like purveyors of salt in that it is My desire for you to circulate among and purify the corrupted mass of mankind on earth by the heavenly doctrines and holy examples (witnessing and giving testimonies of what they have been taught of wisdom and prudence); but if the conditions exists whereby the natural salt can no longer make anything salty, how will it be made into making food taste salty again? And if*

the food has been made putrid how can it be preserved and made good again? In a spiritual sense if you lose your purpose for existing by not circulating among and purifying the corrupted mass of mankind by teaching My doctrines and presenting the mass of humanity with a holy example, how are they going to hear about My teachings after I am gone? What would preserve the human race from becoming morally worthless, or what would season them by being tried under fire in order to become acceptable to God again? Just as tasteless salt is effective for not the least bit of anything anymore, except to be thrown away and tread underfoot by mankind, so too if You do not teach what you have heard or demonstrate it by your example you are not fulfilling My intended purpose of the doctrines that I have taught you and My word of the gospel of salvation would be treated with contempt and indignity, trampled beneath the feet of a sinful human race. The chemical components of salt are sodium and chloride; if chemical salt should lose either the sodium or the chloride it has lost its saltiness or its purpose. Spiritual salt is the Beatitudes; if the Disciples of Christ lose any of the components of the Beatitudes we too will lose our preserving effectiveness to fulfill our spiritual purpose. I think here that it is very interesting to note this scientific oddity that sodium and chloride in their makeup should repel each other and chemists are baffled as to how these two components bond together. But this scientific reasoning fits in with the analogy that Jesus Christ presents to us as being the salt of the earth because the natural man also repels God's righteousness and His teachings, especially in the beatitudes, but yet somehow man can be mystically bonded by Jesus Christ and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Another interesting truth in this analogy is that when salt becomes contaminated with other elements of the earth it loses its saltiness, just as when a disciple of Christ contaminates his witness by earthly values and his own opinions his witness loses its effectiveness.

In this break down from the Greek meanings of the words to the English translation we can see more than just words of wisdom. Jesus is giving us instruction. He is telling us (1) how do we accomplish His instructions, *by circulating among the masses, that is, building relationships*; (2) for what purpose, *to purify the corrupted masses*; (3) how, *by teaching heavenly doctrines and our holy example of wisdom and prudence, (skill, insight, knowledge, purity, deep understanding with practical application)* (4) what are the consequences if the disciples allow their teaching to be contaminated by worldly attitudes and values or choose not set a moral example, *they will have nothing of value and will be cast out and treated with contempt and indignity.*

Jesus' concern in these teachings was that after Jesus left the earth someone will have to carry on with His teachings and examples of living, that is, to be His church. This He not only left in the hands of His disciples that He taught on the mountain, but also leaves it in the hands of His disciples of today. Of course sinful, morally corrupt man could never maintain the purity of Christ's intent and pull this off in his own power and He knew that. To leave His church solely

in the hands of man would mean that sooner or later before later His church would become morally corrupt and have a tendency to move toward worldly values, because man is morally corrupted by worldly values. So He gave us the Holy Spirit and left us His written Word to lead us and guide us to insure the integrity of His teachings. Even at that, which should've been enough to guarantee the integrity of His church, His church seems to be losing its moral integrity to a point where His original disciples would not recognize what we have today in most churches as Christ's church. In my opinion one of the first questions the NT disciples would ask us if they could communicate with us is, "why so many "Christian" denominations? "When we left the earth there were no denominations." The only answer we could give to them is that we have allowed a little moral corruption to creep into our churches causing splits and disagreements, we have lost our focus and we have discarded the Beatitudes as a guideline for living the disciple's life and exchanged them for bowing to our stubborn pride, we gave in to worldly values to fill the pews and insisted on getting our own way rather than being humble and remaining teachable, instead of resolving our issues, as Christ instructed us. There is nothing wrong with holding a pastor accountable, but starting a new church is not the answer.

All that Jesus had in mind with the analogy of salt is that His disciples would be the balance or the contrast to the moral corruption of the world, if there were no balance or contrast to the world it would soon rot in its own moral decay. I believe, and it is my opinion, that it is more accurate to see Jesus' doctrines and precepts as the true salt and His disciples are merely the salt shaker, the vehicle that gets the salt spread around. They carry the salt of the savory doctrines which they preached, which are agreeable with the Scriptures, and are of the evangelic kind, full of Christ; they serve to exalt Him, and to magnify the grace of God. This statement by no means exhausts the functions of His disciples.

The world would prefer that we were honey instead of salt, that is, more desirable to the flesh and easier to swallow. The disciples have one great function, to spread the salt of the earth by living out the terms of discipleship listed in the Beatitudes and the rest of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The disciples could teach, they could even live out an example of a moral life, but if its origin is not the Word of God and His example, the salt will soon lose its saltiness. If the disciples begin to teach their own opinions, or reinterpret what Christ is teaching to gain favor among men, that is, as Paul says, teaching that which merely tickles the ears, the persons they are teaching will soon trample him and this teaching under their feet. They can get teachings on psychology, philosophy, etc. on any street corner; what they want to hear is the truth of the good news, the assurance of their salvation by means of their gracious Savior.

When we say that Christ desires that His disciples are to be a contrast to the world and its values and attitudes, He makes that point a lot clearer in the next verses, ***Matt. 5:14- 16 You***

are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under a peck measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. In these verses we see a contrast between light and darkness; one is used to expose while the other is used to hide. Let's amplify these verses to get more of an idea of the contrast that Christ expects from His disciples as opposed to worldly minded men: *You are to continually be the moral teacher and spiritual light of knowledge for mankind which enlightens the mind, soul, or conscience, including a conduct of moral goodness, purity, and holiness, and a teacher of the consequent reward and happiness. You need to be like a walled city placed up on a mountain that cannot even be temporarily hidden. In addition neither do men make a lamp filled with oil to burn in order to give light and then place it under a measuring basket, but they set it on a lampstand so that it gives off light to everyone who has entered the house. Let your moral spiritual light of knowledge that lightens the mind, soul, and conscience, including the holiness and purity of Christ, be exhibited in the presence of mankind in such a way that others may observe your good and noble deeds, and render glory to the Father who is in heaven, recognizing Him for Who and What He is, and celebrate that knowledge with praise, worship and adoration.* I believe in this teaching that Jesus is teaching us that He wants us, as His disciples, to stand out in a crowd. He wants us to bring attention to ourselves, not in a self-centered way, but in a contrasting way. When I think of a city on a mountain/hill I think of a city like Denver that on a clear day would be very obvious to see from great distances from every direction and position. At night there would be such a contrast from what the city lights would give off compared to the darkness of the night, it would be impossible not to see it. Not only would it be impossible not to see it, but our eyes would be naturally drawn to it. This analogy describes how Jesus wants His disciples to stand out; He doesn't want us to cower in the background of a crowd because we are different, He wants us to stand out and be bold because we are different than the rest of the crowd. He wants unbelieving eyes to be drawn toward us so that we can get their attention and have an opportunity to tell them about the good news of the gospel of salvation. But we also must be careful; with this attention comes responsibility. We can't say one thing to the masses and then not practice it in our own life. This is what they see already from the teachers of the worldly view. "Do as I say not as I do," seems to be their mantra.

The disciples are not the light, just as, in my opinion; they are not the salt, but purveyors of Jesus' light. ***John 1:4; In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 8:12; Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. John 12:35-36; Jesus therefore said to them, "for a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light. John***

12:46; I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. Jesus is the light and so also has to be the source of the light; Christians are merely reflection of that light. Their function is to shine for Him just as the moon does not have a light of its own without the sun; the moon at best can only be a reflection of the light of the sun. Without the sun we would not be able to even see the moon; just as without the Son others would not be able to see the good news that we bring to them. Christ's disciples must live for Christ, shining like lights in a dark world, showing clearly what Christ's words and example has taught them and how having Christ in their life has changed their moral character. The antithesis of light is darkness. Salt is for corruption, light is for darkness. Substantially they are the same, but formally one points to a distortion of the truth (salt), the other points to ignorance (light), that is, of not knowing the truth, spiritual blindness, and folly. Just as the light is literally used to drive out the darkness so too a disciple should be prepared to drive out and overcome false teachings, misinterpretations, and false notions about Christianity. This of course can only be done through the strength and power of the Holy Spirit and having Christ alive within us as our example in our conduct and as a vessel that He can use to speak for Him.

The light that we have should not only shine as an individual but also collectively. Just as the light from a city does not come shining through just one window, but it is a culmination of light from many windows. How do you hide a lighted city that is elevated high above everyone? Our Christian fellowships should be like the city that is set on a hill/mountain; it is elevated above its surroundings and it shines in the midst of darkness. Even lanterns that glow from behind a wall send a light at night that can be seen for miles. While we ourselves are traveling at night the lights of the next town offer us, direction, protection and shelter, especially in the midst of a storm. We are attracted by that protection and drive toward it. This should illustrate and display the character for others to see while they are in the midst of a spiritual storm, for *both* Christians and non-Christians. We can be a source of refuge because we have the refuge in us by means of Christ Jesus. Those whose lives exhibit the traits of Christ's teachings cannot be hidden and must reflect the Light. If we claim to live for Christ, we should be glowing like lights, showing others what knowing Christ can also do for them.

I believe that Christ intentionally picked items to make His point that could be found in every household of the time. He never tried to speak above anyone and He used words that the most common of men would understand. His desire was and still is that everyman will understand what He has to say and teach. The candle and the peck measure are probably things that almost every household had at the time and His disciples could easily relate to what they are and what their function is, even today; most houses have lamps, lamp stands, and a measuring device.

Jesus told His disciples that we, as His followers, are to be instruments of light, that is, we, as His disciples, are to enlighten people about the gospel of salvation, and not to be embarrassed about it by being different. We shouldn't try to hide the Light in any situation. As a disciple of Christ and His sovereignty I believe that each one of us is in a precise place, at a precise time, for His precise purpose. Not just for an hour a week, or once a year, or once in a lifetime, but 24 hours of a 7 day week. Right now you are in the precise place that God intended you to be, right now at this precise moment in time, to serve His precise purpose. So to dim our light or even to extinguish our light at anytime is for us to not recognize God's sovereignty in our life. And we are to be instruments of light in our own house as well as out in the public. This is true especially for men, as leaders of the household; this is not only desirable, but it is also Biblical. It is the role that God created men to fill, to be leaders in bringing the light to their household. The man or husband is to be the illumination of the light of Jesus Christ. We are the purveyors of light that shines and we need to allow that light to flow through us for others to see, in our conduct, values, and attitudes, along with everything that Jesus taught us in the Beatitudes, which, in my *opinion*, are a detailed explanation of the intent of the Ten Commandments.

This is not only for contrast out in the world, but also to let everyone know, who may come to visit, what kind of conduct they can expect from a well lit household. Our houses should be a place that offers direction, protection, and shelter, physically and spiritually. Unfortunately many men have passed up the opportunity to carry that light and have passed it on to their wife; that's not to say that women can't spread the light or make good disciples, obviously when we look inside of our churches we can plainly see that is not the case. But when the leadership of the household does not hold true to God's ordained plan for leadership obviously something is going to be missing in effectiveness and the household will not get the full benefit of having a God ordained/preferred leader in the house. They, i.e., the husbands, have, in a sense, put their light under a peck measure, that is, they have gotten passive about their God ordained responsibilities and have not allowed themselves to be as an object drawing light to be reflected off of them and have at the very least not been a good example of what Jesus has taught.

The analogy of the lamp is intended for us to see the light as being something that is portable. Christ desires that we are portable with our Christian character also and not to hide our Christ-like character when we are in the public or only allow it to shine when we are in the company of other Christians. A lamp that is lit in a room that is already fully lit serves no purpose; a lamp in the darkness disperses the darkness and all eyes are drawn toward the light.

Our good works, resulting from our faith in Christ's teachings, is another way for the Christian to display the light of Christ. Words that are not accompanied with equally good

works are meaningless to the outside observer. Good works are not only important as a witness to others but also as a continuation of the work that Christ began on earth. When we check the Gospels it is plain to see that the integrity of Christ's teaching was equally balanced with the integrity of His works. If our faith is drawn from the light, our works of faith are the rays that radiate from that light. We ourselves reflect the light just as John the Baptist was a reflection of the burning and shining Light; yet because our light is derived from Him, we have the light when Christ is in us, that is, when our lives are a reflection of everything that He desires in us as we reflect His character. Our incorruptible works that are purely motivated by our faith shine with a heavenly brightness in this dark present evil age of sinful self-motivated works. The light that we reflect is the light that will draw others to Christ so that they too will give glory to God.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a new set of rules to replace the Law of Moses. It does not lay down a legal code of ethics, but aims to work within people's values and attitudes to produce a standard of behavior that no law-code can produce, no matter how good it might be, ***Matt. 5:17-19; Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*** In these statements Jesus is saying that the Law of Moses addressed our behaviors, these Beatitudes address our disposition or the prevailing aspect of our nature. In my belief the Beatitudes address the Law from our inside out, that is, from the seat the heart, the way we must think and explained as the seat of our desires, feelings, affections, passions, and impulses; rather than our conduct. Interestingly enough if we change our nature from within, we will change our behavior from without. Let's open us these verses and expand on them to get the full context of what Jesus is saying to His followers: *Do not suppose that I came to mankind to dissolve the laws found in the books of Moses or the Prophetic books of the OT, such as keeping the Sabbath; I did not come to mankind to dissolve any divine laws, but on the contrary, to accomplish an end concerning these laws; that is, preaching the gospel, which is the realization of hope set forth as the way for man to be righteous and justified before God. Because this is the truth of the matter that I say to you in solemn affirmation, that not as long as the over-arching, the all embracing heaven beneath which is the earth and all that is therein, (including not only the air that the fowl fly but by which the clouds are suspended, the rain is formed, the celestial expanse that the sun, moon and stars are placed and the earth in which we tread) perishes, not one iota of the smallest letter or the least part shall be dissolved from the Law of Moses, until My end is completed. Whosoever thereupon does away with one of the most minimum in magnitude of these precepts of the Mosaic Law, in whole or in part, and also teaches men with the intent of shaping the will of the one being taught by the communication of his false knowledge, shall be regarded as minimal for the duration of his time in the kingdom*

of heaven; but whosoever does and teaches by the shaping of the will of the one being taught by the communication of his knowledge, he shall be regarded as distinguished in the kingdom of heaven. From verse 3 to the 10th inclusive, Jesus seems to be teaching primarily to His disciples and also His followers; and by followers I mean those who are interested in hearing what He has to say but they haven't made up their mind yet. From verse 10 to 16 inclusive it seems He is more pointed toward His specific disciples who were called to spread the good news of the gospel. Now He seems to pick up again with the teaching of the whole crowd. When He talks about the salt and the light the crowd is hanging on every word waiting to hear Him say that there is no longer any need for the Law of Moses or the Prophets; we can go about living our life without moral limitations. We must remember that the Gospel of Matthew addresses primarily Jews and there may have been some in the crowd who were only there primarily to find a reason to have Jesus put to death for blaspheming the Divine Law. They were hanging on every word; not because they were being convinced that He was the Messiah, but to see if in His teaching He was going to disregard the Jewish teachings and traditions.

Unfortunately today we have some in our churches that are in the pews just waiting to hear their Pastor make a mistake or say something that is arguable with them so that they will have a reason to condemn him or to somehow show their superiority of knowledge. The Jews were probably thinking close to the same thing, trying to find a reason to condemn Jesus so that they could find an excuse to not change their lives or something like that when Jesus taught about the salt as being useless. They may have thought that He was going to say that the Law of Moses and the Prophets is now useless. And likewise with the light, that the light was going to be dispersed and push out the Law of Moses etc. But, Christ knew the thoughts in their hearts, that they had some prejudices against Him and this is why He mentions that He did not want them to think that He came to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. If they would only recall what the Scriptures taught about the coming Messiah they would realize that He indeed was who they were waiting for. He was sensitive to the objections that His teachings might raise with the Jewish population and the Jews were sensitive to the fact that a change was coming in what He was teaching and in what was required of them, in the way of additional or different means to practice their religion and consider what being truly righteous would require of them. They were no longer going to be able to get by with their outside appearance anymore, what Jesus was teaching was a change in their nature, a much harder teaching to be grasped because it required accountability from the inside out. They could no longer "fool" those who observed them publicly as holy, now they were accountable for their holiness out of sight of the public; they were accountable in their personal private places also.

But, in actuality this was not a change in what was required from them by God; this was God's ideal from the beginning; however some priests interpreted the Law from a point of convenience rather than veracity. But the Law of the Prophets was, as yet, not completed. The

promised Messiah had not come to them. Jesus came to complete the law, which He did doctrinally by giving the true sense and meaning of it. He also did so as our example by yielding perfect obedience to all of its commands, whereby He became the end, the fulfillment.

Verse 18 is a statement of reassurance, especially to the Jewish audience, that Jesus is not proposing that the law be done away with and in its place a new revolutionary law. The law is here to stay as long as the heavens and the earth are here. And heaven and earth are not going away until all is fulfilled in the law. The Jews have a saying that agrees with what Jesus is saying; “the whole world is not equal to even one word of the law,” which is to say that not one letter of the law is superfluous. The Law, as it was given to Moses and the Prophets, was able to be understood by the Israelites, but because of the stubbornness of their hearts they refused to obey the Law as it was intended. Thus Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount to give them a more in depth understanding of what the Law ascribed. The fact that they did not follow the Law as set down by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount proves that the Jews were not disobedient for lack of understanding, but because of the stubbornness of their hearts.

It is important to notice that Jesus did not say that the law would never pass away. He said it would not pass away until all was fulfilled. This distinction has ramifications for the believer of today, and since the believer’s relation to the law is rather complicated, let’s take a moment to summarize the Bible’s teaching on the law.

The Law is that system of legislation given by God through Moses to the nation Israel. The entire body of the Law is found in Exodus 20-31, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, though its essence is embodied in the Ten Commandments. This law was not given as a means of salvation, Acts 13:39; and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. Rom. 3:20; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. Gal. 2:16, never the less knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but thorough faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. Gal. 2:21; I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly. Gal. 3:11; Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “the righteous man shall live by faith.” The Law was intended to show man his sinfulness, Rom. 5:20; And the Law came in that the transgressions might increase, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. Rom. 7:7; what shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; For I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” 1st. Cor. 15:56; The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. Gal. 3:19; Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator,

until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. Then after being shown his sinfulness the law was intended to drive them to God for His gracious salvation. It was given to the nation of Israel, even though it contains moral principles which are valid for people in every age, ***Rom. 2:14, 15; for when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.*** God tested Israel under the law as a sample of the human race, and Israel's guilt proved the world's guilt, ***Rom. 3:19; Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God.***

The law had attached to it the penalty of death, ***Gal. 3:10; For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them."*** To break one command was to be guilty of all of them, ***James 2:10; For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*** Since people had broken the Law, they were under the curse of death. God's righteousness and holiness demanded that the penalty of death (or, separation from God and all of the affects of His attributes) be paid. It was for this reason that Jesus came into the world: to pay the penalty of death by His death. He died as a substitute for guilty lawbreakers, even though He Himself was sinless. He did not wave the Law aside; rather He met the full demands of the Law by fulfilling its strict requirements in His life and in His death. Thus, the gospel does not overthrow the Law; it upholds the Law and shows how the Law's demands have been fully satisfied by Christ's redemptive work.

Therefore, the person who trusts in Jesus is no longer under the law; he is under grace, ***Rom. 6:14; For sin shall no longer be master over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace.*** He is dead to the law through the work of Christ. The penalty of the law must be paid only once, since Christ paid the penalty, the believer does not have to. It is in this sense that the law has faded away for Christians, ***2 Cor. 3:7-11; But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.*** The law was a tutor until Christ came, but after a means of salvation was provided, this tutor is no longer needed. ***Gal; 3:24, 25; therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.***

Yet, while the Christian is not under the law that does not mean that he is lawless. He is bound by a stronger chain than law because he is under the law of Christ, **1 Cor. 9:20, 21; And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.** The believer's behavior is molded, not by fear of punishment, but by a loving desire to please his Savior. Christ has become his rule and authority in life, **John 13:15; for I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. John 15:12; this is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Eph, 5:1,2; therefore be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. 1 John 2:6; the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 1 John 3:16; We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

The ministry of the law to the non-believer has not ended: **1 Tim. 1:8; But we know that the Law is good if one uses it lawfully.** Its lawful use is to produce the knowledge of sin and thus lead to repentance. But the law is not for those who are already saved: **1 Tim. 1:9; realizing that the law is not made for the righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers.**

The righteousness demanded by the law is fulfilled in those who are a disciple of Christ, **Rom. 8:4; in order that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** In fact the teachings of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount set a higher standard than that set by the Law. For example, the law said "Do not murder;" Jesus teaches us, "Do not even get angry." So the Sermon on the Mount not only upholds the Law and the Prophets, but it amplifies them and develops their deeper implications.

Through His Word and His Spirit God enables us to meet the requirements of the Law and of His teachings. Through His power and His grace we meet them in a double way; we do them and teach others to do them; and also in our own hearts and lives and in our teaching of others. Jesus will fulfill and accomplish the entire Law and the Prophets. He explained, therefore, that His followers must also keep and follow the commandments. No one has the authority to set aside or alter any of God's laws. In addition teachers have the responsibility to live correctly and to teach correctly so that they do not influence others to break even the smallest law. In the eye of God there is no such thing as a big or small law; all of them are of an equal magnitude and importance, that's why He said that if we break one of them we break all

of them. Jesus was using hyperbole, i.e., exaggeration for effect and it not meant to be taken literally, He used it to make a point, most likely He was not referring to minutiae, that is, that which is small or relatively unimportant, of the law for which the Pharisees were contending so scrupulously. The Jewish rabbis referred to greater and smaller sins or parts of the law because it fit their lifestyle as far as appearance is concerned, lesser sins committed would mean greater righteousness and vice versa, but Christ brought this up in His sermon only for demonstration. We all have a tendency to want to excuse our sin; sin makes us look spiritually ugly and has a sense of a loss of integrity in which we see ourselves as we desire to be. In an attempt to get around our sin we create “loop holes” in our known sin, which can relieve our feeling of guilt temporarily, but the conviction of our sin, righteousness and judgment is still alive and well and we do not get rid of our true guilt until we confess our sin, repent, and ask God for forgiveness.

Because the Law and the Prophets point forward to Christ and His teaching, people can “do” and “teach” the commandments by following and adhering to Jesus’ teachings. Those who do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Through our own ignorance we may set aside a word of God by a wrong interpretation or by means of selfish manipulation (excuses), that is, we want the Bible to say what fits our lifestyle instead of getting our lifestyle to fit what the Bible teaches us. By doing this in a teaching setting we are saying that we are representing the truth of the Bible while teaching others, but the reality is that we are not truly representing God’s truth if we are manipulating words or taking verses out of context, but we are only furthering our own selfish ambitions. We want to gather the same large crowds that Jesus gathered and we want to receive glory from men. The same thing applies to us hearing someone misrepresenting the truth of the Bible by misquoting the Bible and we stay quiet when we know what they are saying is not to be found in the Scriptures. Our responsibility is to minister the truth to them if they are in doubt or at least give to them a fuller explanation of the teaching just in case the person knows the truth but just doesn’t know how to appropriately convey it to others. But when we are convicted of what we have done we must immediately correct it, and in some cases repent of what we said publicly, if we are in a group setting. Ultimately we are responsible for what we teach and for what we do. If we are in a situation where a teacher has misled us this does not relieve us of our responsibility to check what he is teaching and then to hear and teach it correctly. We have the Word as our ultimate authority, and we need to reference it when we are being taught and when we are teaching. If we knowingly set aside a law or a part of a law we shall be called least in His kingdom over and against the one who does and teaches all of the requirements and is therefore called great in the kingdom of heaven. Being called “greater” or “lesser” in the kingdom is a description of the motivation of our heart; some are greatly motivated, others lesser.

In my opinion we should not get confused about this “being called great or being called least.” This must apply to how we are regarded by other men while we are in God’s kingdom

here on earth or as we are a part of His church on earth. The Word teaches us that Jesus Christ sees us all as equals and in our glorified bodies we will all be spiritually perfect. In His eyes He makes no distinction among believers, non greater and non least, **Gal. 3:28; there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man; and there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ. Acts 10:28; And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Acts 10:34; And opening his mouth, Peter said, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality." Rom. 10:12; For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him. Col. 3:9-11; Do not lie to one another. Since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on a new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free man, but Christ is all, and in all. John 17:11; And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee, Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as we are. Rom. 8:1; there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Gal. 5:6; For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.** Now, if we intentionally lead someone astray by our teaching or by our contributions to a conversation, then that's a completely different story and we can be sure that a person who would do that is not a true Christian.

The doctors of the Sanhedrin were given the power, by his peers, to root out anything in the law, to loosen or make void any of its commands with the exception of idolatry. This is the reason Christ had to express Himself in the manner that He does when He says "he shall be called least in the kingdom of God." Men who would do this would have neither a name, nor place in the church of God and he shall not be in the least esteemed. But he shall be cast out as a worthless man; conversely any man that teaches the law exactly as it appears in the Scripture shall enjoy the ultimate state of happiness in his church here and glory in eternity.

The righteousness that Jesus wants in His followers is more than outward conformity to certain laws, **Matt. 5:20; for I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.** The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was for show only, they had a righteous appearance, but in their heart they were schemers and connivers and used "righteousness" as a self appointed social status symbol; some may have even tried to impress God by their appearance, (which unfortunately seems to still be going on in the Christian churches). Let's learn more about the righteousness that God expects us to surpass: *Therefore I lay this teaching before you; that except your righteousness, that is, what is internal, where the heart is right with God and you have piety*

toward God and practice Godliness, i.e., faith acceptable to God; distinguishes itself much more from the false righteousness of the members of the Sanhedrin, elders, and chief priests, and the Pharisees, which is that of being merely external and consisting only of observances of external precepts of the law, you shall never be in a condition to enter into the life of the royal dominion of heaven. Among the Jews the scribes and the Pharisees were regarded as those who most perfectly and completely taught and lived up to the will and expectations of God in the OT. The people looked up to them as being the very greatest in the kingdom and scribes held the same high estimate concerning themselves. These estimates were, of course, wholly false, as Jesus will show in detail as He proceeds through the Sermon on the Mount. The scribes and the Pharisees were the opposite of models for the disciples in meeting the will of God which is more concerned with your heart condition than appearances. That's why He tells them that if they are to be great; or to even to be the least in the kingdom of heaven His disciples must surpass the scribes and the Pharisees in righteousness by far. While it is true that the Pharisees were the acknowledged expounders of the OT, and the scribes who professed to live up to the legal regulations of the Torah in a most scrupulous manner, Jesus chooses not to compare the two, but puts them on the same scale as being under achievers of true righteousness. He regards the two as one body to make His point that they have failed to attain to the righteousness that God acknowledges as justified to enter His kingdom. We cannot conclude that the scribes and the Pharisees will be considered as a part of the group that will be called the least, because the scribes and the Pharisees have not attained to the righteousness to even be in the kingdom. Christ admits that the scribes and Pharisees have righteousness but it is the righteousness as defined by the world's standard of righteousness; He tells His disciples that they must have a different type of righteousness if they expect to be entering into His kingdom. He desires them to have a righteousness that is not defined by man but by the code of God, which He exposes in His Sermon. The scribes and the Pharisees declared themselves righteous by their deeds alone in the sight of men, but, what Jesus wanted was righteousness of the heart that leads to righteous deeds whether in the sight of men or not. This truth is brought out in ***Luke 16:15; And He said to them (Pharisees) "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."*** This statement should've led to asking themselves this question; "by who are you declared righteous, by men or by God?" This fact and/or statement should give us pause, *no fulfillment of the law of deeds, which even the best of Christ's disciples may attain, admits them to the kingdom. The kingdom is not acquired by our good works; but they are merely evidence of our justification.* When we are being tempted to believe that our good works punches our ticket to His kingdom we need to have this thought in mind; "besides all of the good that we are able to do we are to humble ourselves before God and say "dear Lord, I am a poor sinner, be gracious to me and judge me not by my works but by according to Your grace and mercy which You have promised and have prepared in Christ." The Lord warns

us against spiritual pride and brings us to the knowledge of our depravity while leading us to the hope that is in His grace; for He will then declare us righteous. Without Christ's redemptive fulfillment we shall never surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they have the kind of righteousness that He rejects.

The words that Jesus spoke in verse 20 were not directed to His true disciples in general, or to His apostles in particular, but to the whole multitude of people who had a great esteem and admiration for the scribes and Pharisees. The people in general saw them as the definition of righteousness and holiness. He mentions the scribes because they were the more learned part of the people who were used to writing out and expounding on the law. The Pharisees are mentioned by Jesus because they were the strictest sect among the Jews concerning outward religion and righteousness. And yet, for both of them, it seems that their righteousness was very defective. Their righteousness did not arise from a purified heart or the principles of grace. Nor was their righteousness performed with sincerity and with a view toward God, but only for their own applause. In our church today we can plainly see this attitude of righteousness when a person speaks to their own deeds of holy kindness, forgiveness, goodness, or righteousness to draw attention to them and to receive the applause of men.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Matt. 5:22, and whoever shall say "you fool," shall be guilty enough to go to the fiery hell.

Jesus Christ wants us to have a new attitude and new values from within—the principles of the law written on disciples hearts. It is not enough for instance to simply refrain from murder. Suppressing our behaviors never really changes anything because we will do one of two things; we will either get tired of the effort it takes to suppress the behavior and then let it be a part of who we are again in an outburst, or we will simply exchange that behavior for another, which at the very least will be equally disagreeable in its nature. Having been a member of AA I have witnessed several persons who attempted to suppress their alcoholic behaviors by refraining from drinking within their own power only to sadly completely fail. If you have a socially distasteful behavior that surfaces while you are drinking and you try to change that behavior by not drinking, the only thing you have accomplished is being a person with distasteful behavior that doesn't drink. Sooner or later alcoholics must realize that the word "sober" reaches much further than cessation from alcohol; ANY TRULY RECOVERED ALCOHOLIC will tell you that it requires a change of character. The change must come from within the heart by adopting new attitudes and values that will lead, by its nature, to better social behaviors. The only One that can accomplish this change, by not merely suppressing behaviors, is God. This truth also applies to our spiritual nature; disciples must come to a realization that "righteousness" is more than changing behaviors, it requires them to adopt new attitudes and values that removes our old self so a new self can be created and according

to verse 21, and also the rest of Jesus' sermon, they must adopt a new attitude toward anger and remove the spirit of anger, hate, and revenge from their hearts, for that is the spirit that produces murder. Like the alcoholic, if they only focus on their behaviors and do not allow God to make these changes, then spiritually they have become like the scribes and the Pharisees mentioned in the previous verse. **Matt. 5:21-22; You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court, But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca" (empty headed or good for nothing) shall be guilty before the supreme court and whoever shall say, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."** Rom. 8:3, 4; **for what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** Heb. 8:10; **"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel" after those days says the Lord: "I will put My laws into their minds, and I shall write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people."** Since we are dealing with the Sermon on the Mount let's take verses Matt. 5:21-22 and extract from them the teaching of our Lord: *You have been informed and have come to know from the disciples that were present since the beginning of faith, that it was said "You shall not kill a man unjustly and whoever kills a man unjustly shall be charged with being obnoxious and guilty and sentenced to the punishment inflicted by the tribunal."* However, I say these exact words to you, *"that anyone who is provoked to anger with his fellowman shall be charged with being obnoxious and guilty and sentenced to the punishment inflicted by the tribunal; and anyone who shall speak the words of contempt relating to being empty, worthless, or foolish, to his fellowman shall be liable in front of the Sanhedrin that is, the seventy men composed of high priests, chief priests, former high priests, elders and lawyers; and anyone that says to his fellowman, "You morally worthless man," shall be charged with being obnoxious and guilty and sentenced to the punishment to go to the eternal fire, the place of punishment and abode of demons and the souls of wicked men."* The Jews of Jesus' time knew that murder was forbidden by God and that the murderer was liable to punishment. This was true even before the giving of the law, **Gen. 9:6; "whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He has made man."** This was later incorporated into the law; but with the words that Christ teaches us it goes to the heart of the law with these words, "but I say to you." Jesus institutes a further explanation of the law by taking us deeper into the intent of the law given by God to Moses. This was a rabbinical way of speaking, it was used when a question is determined and a false notion is refuted. It is a magisterial form of expression and well suited for Christ to use. He spoke as having only one authority opposing the traditional law, not the Mosaic Law, but the false gloss that the ancient teachers had put upon it. No longer could a person take pride in having never committed murder. Jesus now says, "In

My kingdom, you must not even have murderous thoughts.” He traces the act of murder to its source and warns against three forms of anger. The first case is of a person who is angry with his brother without a cause. One accused of this crime would be in danger of the judgment of Christ—that is, he could be taken to court. Most people think that they can find a valid cause for their anger, but let’s consider this; how many people can get angry without taking the seat of the Judge? Anger is never right when it is expressed in retaliation for personal wrongs. Righteous anger, which many of us excuse ourselves with, means that we can see through to the person’s heart and know his intent and motive for his words or his actions. Many a good intentions or actions have been misinterpreted and wrongfully punished or caused offense.

Equally serious is the sin of insulting a brother. By brother is meant any man of any country or natural origin, because we are not to be angry with any man. In Jesus’ day, people used the word “raca” (an Aramaic word that means “empty”) as a word of contempt. Some derive this word from the Aramaic that means “to spit upon.” And it was used as if the person that used it thought the man he spoke to deserved to be spat upon. Wouldn’t it be nice if that was the standard today for the insults we receive (tongue in cheek)? Those who used this disparaging word were in danger of the council—that is, they were subject to trial before the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the land.

And also, to call someone a fool is the third form of anger that Jesus condemns. Here the word fool means more than a dunce, we have kind of softened the meaning of this word today, but in Jesus’ time it was highly offensive. It signifies a moral fool who ought to be dead and it expresses the wish that he were. Today it is very common to hear a person cursing another with the words “God damn you (or it)!” The reality of this expression is that he is calling on God to consign the person to hell. Jesus says that anyone who utters such a curse is in danger of being judged to go to hell himself! The bodies of executed prisoners were often thrown into a burning dump outside of Jerusalem. So this is where the figure of the “fires of hell” in this verse originates or comes from; these fires burned continually and were of the sort that will never be quenched. These dumps, where everything that was considered worthless and no longer being considered useful were disposed of, were in a state of continual burning. Thus it was used as an analogy for hell where useless and worthless people that did not contribute to God’s kingdom were dispensed with.

There is no mistaking the severity of the Savior’s words. He teaches that anger contains the seeds of murder, that abusive language contains the spirit of murder, and that cursing language implies the very desire to murder. There has been a time in my life when all three of these examples were prevalent in my life, I’m forever grateful for His mercy and grace that prompted the Father to send His Son to save me from His condemnation and His Holy Spirit

that convicted me of this sin and judgment! Not that I am no longer ever in a state of anger, but that now I know that I am forgiven of this sin as soon as I repent.

If a person offends another, whether by anger or any other cause, there is no use in his bringing a gift to God while he is in this state of mind especially if he has come to God to give Him worship or praise. We can only give Him appropriate praise and worship when we come to Him in the purist form of frame of mind that we are capable of possessing. To do anything else is disrespectful to His holiness. It would be even more offensive than to give a gift to someone that we love, and that gift had been laying in the street for several days, where the traffic has had its irreversible effect on it and it was only good for the garbage dump. We would never think of doing such a thing, not even to our worst enemy. If we offend a party, by our lack of respect for that person, it causes an offense against God as well as the other party because we are lacking in respect for all things created in His image and we are disrespecting the most valuable gift that He has given to us, that being the gift of forgiveness. The Lord will not; the Lord *cannot* be pleased with this gift. The offender needs to make it right, before the offended party and God. Only then will the gift be acceptable; only then can he be in a right frame of mind. God does not receive any worship from a person who is not on speaking terms with another, ***Matt. 5:23-26; If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.*** If not before hand, then while we are in God's presence in our worship, where we humbly remember to submit ourselves to the will of God, any sin that is lying in our conscience ought to come to the surface of our remembrance also. When this verse 23 says that "if our brother has anything against you" it means rightfully has against you, by word or in deed, by omission or by commission, before God and in your conscience. Let's amplify this verse to gather all of the nuances of what Christ is teaching us and apply them to our heart: *If you are in the circumstance of offering your gift of honor at the altar of the true God, and while you are there it comes to your mind that a sacrifice is futile when presented to God while retaining unrepentant sin in your heart and your fellowman has something in the way of general accusations aimed toward you, let your gift remain there at the altar of the true God, and depart to go on your way; and then change your feelings toward your fellowman, seeking reconciliation and then after that is completed come and offer your gift of honor to the true God. My desire is for you to be well-intentioned with your opponent in an upcoming lawsuit up to and including the time you are with him on the way to see the powers and authorities, so that your opponent in a law suit may not deliver you over with evil intent of the power or authority of others for trial or condemnation, and the powers and authorities will then hand you over to*

those who execute the decrees of that power and authority, they then will have you casted off into the custody of a prison. This is so and I say this to you, you shall not by any means depart from that place of confinement, as long as you have not fulfilled your obligation to the least amount of your debt. These verses require that we take an honest look inside ourselves concerning any offense that we may have initiated or left unsettled and it doesn't matter if the other person holds something against us or not, that's not the point. If we have committed any of the offenses from the previous verses we need to settle our affairs before the other person and before God first before we consider offering anything to God as a show of our commitment to His code of living. This shows that acts of love and friendship are preferable to sacrifices. God knows the truth of the matter and it is God that we are trying to get right with; getting right with our fellow man is only a part of the process of getting right with God. If your memory or your conscience nags at you it is a clear indication that something was left unsettled. We must be our own honest judge. However, if a person is offended but without cause to be, accusing you when he has not right to accuse, then the onus is on him and he must settle up with God. When we come before the purest form of justice and righteousness that exists, we must also try to emulate that purity as we ask to come into His presence to the best of our capacity. This of course requires the strictest sense of confession and repentance on our part; to come before God, "trying to hide our guilt behind our back" is an insult to the intelligence of the very definition of intelligence, the Father. The last part of the amplification of these verses points out a very real truth that many of us have experienced already; that until we get things settled with our brother that has something against us, to the completeness of God's form of righteousness, we will, in fact, keep ourselves in an emotional, psychological, and spiritual prison. We will not know the freedom that peace and reconciliation with God brings.

God looks at our heart and no act of worship is acceptable to Him that comes from a heart which is knowingly guilty of an un-confessed wrong to another. When we are burdened with such guilt, we ourselves are not acceptable, either now in our worship or later on in His judgment. V-24 tells us to go first and confess the wrong and ask for the other person's forgiveness. He should of course gladly and joyfully accept you're coming to him and be satisfied with your confession and demand no more from you, and cheerfully forgive you. This is the part for me where I have to give up control of my body and my thoughts to the Holy Spirit. I have to allow Him to direct my path to the offended, in the best of timing, which is usually immediately, and allow Him to give me the strength and humility to allow the Holy Spirit to speak for me, and through me. This will ensure the utmost of honesty, clarity, and the sincerest righteousness. If later on we consider that we should have said more or should've said something differently, it probably was not the right time for the other person to receive more from us and even though the icing on the cake makes the cake taste good, too much icing will make us sick. In other words, if we put our faith in the Holy Spirit and have allowed the Holy Spirit to give us the appropriate words to say we can't allow our pride to take over and think

that we could've done it better. The reconciliation that is provided is the desired reconciliation for both parties concerned. But if the other person gets unreasonable and refuses to forgive, that's not our problem and as far as we are concerned we are reconciled with God and we are to pray for the unforgiving other person so that he too may be reconciled to God. The issue is not our lack of saying the appropriate things; the issue is the other person's lack of personal issues that he has to settle with God.

The example that our Lord Jesus Christ gives to us is perfect in every way. It is a simple case of fulfilling the love commandment with the heart. Here we do not have perfectionism, for a wrong was committed against another, yet the wrong is removed, and by removal of the wrong the commandment is kept. This can only be accomplished by God's grace, for His grace, favor and forgiveness is the blessings that we desire and ask for by our offerings and our worship. The old covenant required sacrifices in the Temple, which pointed to the Messiah whose mediation bestowed grace and pardon on all repentant Jewish believers. The new covenant, now without the need for sacrifices, points to Christ and His accomplished mediation and thus bestows grace and pardon on all repentant Christians. Thus the righteousness of faith brings forth the righteousness of life through grace.

The imagery in verse 25 is borrowed from the legal method of dealing with debtors who could be remanded to prison until they paid the last cent of their debt. The focus and context of this verse does not deal with money but only uses money as a prop; Jesus is still concerned with the heart and teaching about the love commandment. He gives the illustration of a man who has somehow wronged his brother and should go be reconciled with him. Jesus addresses the debtor, he owes the money. The sensible thing for him to do is to settle the debt before he goes to court. It is tempting to stop at this point, but it would not be in the nature of Jesus to not address the brother to whom the money is owed. He too, owes a debt to the brother that wronged him, a debt of forgiveness. He owes that debt the moment he realizes that he has been wronged and ought to be joyfully ready to pay it to him. Our natural reaction would be the total opposite, when we realize that someone wronged us our tendency is to get angry with them, but Jesus teaches us that our spiritual response should be to joyfully await their confession so that we can bless them with our forgiveness. If the brother that wronged us makes no such appearance, the Lord, who is our provider of anything and everything that we need, will fill in the gap of our loss. So no matter the outcome we have no reason to be angry! Remember that Jesus is teaching us about accomplishing matters of the heart, not earthly justice.

This actually was the real teaching of the ten Commandments that God gave to Moses and the Prophets, but it all got lost by the Pharisees and scribes because their hearts became

alienated from God and from His Messiah. This is what Jesus is trying to restore in the heart of His disciples in His sermon.

Jesus tells us to be reconciled quickly, while we are still in the company of the one we have offended on the way to the judge, before it is too late; or, as it would apply to all of us, while we are all still together in this life so that we may easily settle our misdeeds against each other. But, significantly, in this case, the debtor and the creditor are depicted as being on their way to the judge the time for reconciliation is drawing short. Because while earthly judges only sit on cases that are formally brought before them, every infraction against God's law, when it is without repentance, confession, etc., must also finally reach His court if we are unable to be reconciled among ourselves. If the case is not settled while both parties are still alive, the case has no choice but to go before the Divine Judge.

Verse 26 tells us that a case that advances to the Divine Judge is too late for repentance and confession and he must be thrown into the eternal prison until the debt is paid. But, this is kind of like a "catch 22" because payment for the debt is now impossible to pay because in the prison there are no means to secure payment, or to put it in literal language, it's too late to repent when we have breathed our last.

SIN BEGINS IN THE HEART

Matt. 5:28; ...I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery...

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not oppose or contradict the Law of Moses. Rather He opposed the traditional interpretations and the false applications taught by the Jewish teachers of the law. Their concern over outward correctness failed to deal with the inward attitudes or with the heart, ***Matt. 5:27-30; You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery; "but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, (or cause you to sin) cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go to hell.*** These verses on adultery, divorce, and remarriage ought to be taken together as a whole teaching. It is the person who "keeps on looking" and caressing with his hands, whether literally or in his heart, that is trapped in his sin and desires to dismiss his wife although she is innocent of any moral infidelity. One remark that is necessary to clearly understand is the meaning of the word "divorced." It means the innocent dismissed wife of the man who practices unrestrained sexual activity who is described in verses 28-30 who, lusting after another woman, dismisses his own

wife in order to marry the other woman. Such a thing, dismissing one's wife for any reason other than infidelity, Christ forbids; but people were and are doing it, nevertheless. He expresses His concern about the dismissed spouse who is innocent. To clear such a dismissed spouse, the Lord insists that the OT provision be adhered to, i.e., the guilty party in dismissing the innocent spouse ought to clear her or him of guilt by giving a bill of divorcement. If the dismissed spouse was guilty, the punishment was death by stoning. Thus there was no reason to give such a bill of divorcement. Divorce papers issued by a judge today should not be equated with this bill of divorcement. God knows who is innocent and who is guilty and the individuals concerned know. The Lord in His pronouncements concerns Himself with the truly innocent and not with the one who may have been able to merely secure a legal divorce. A legal divorce today does not mean that a person is necessarily innocent. He or she may or may not be. Only the truly innocent, according to the word of God, has the moral, Scriptural right to remarry. If the guilty dismissing husband gives his innocent wife a bill of divorcement as prescribed in the OT, then that wife is cleared of the stigma of being considered an adulteress. If she is not thus cleared of the stigma of guilt, then she herself is considered by the ignorant public as an adulterous and also whosoever shall marry her. Sexual infidelity is the only permitted reason for dismissing one's spouse. Both in the OT and in the NT there were those who wanted to dismiss their innocent wives for reasons other than sexual infidelity. It is to such that reference is made as the "dismissed wife." It is the wife who had been dismissed unfairly who was not an adulterous but who, because she was dismissed without a bill of divorcement, was stigmatized as an adulteress. Naturally, if anyone married such a woman, he would appear to be an adulterer also. However, this should not be considered as true adultery but only the unjust consequence of the first husband's action in allowing his wife to be considered as an adulteress.

This has gotten a little bit away from the context of the verse we're studying but I think it's important to understand the full implication of verse 27 and 28 and what the Jewish teaching was at this time, so let's take verses 5:27-30 apart to get the full meaning: *You have been informed and know that it was said, "You shall not be the type of person who does what is actively considered being an adulterer who constantly looks upon and touches another woman other than his wife, however I say to you, that anyone who has a constant fixation of the eyes upon a young maiden in a bad sense so as to covet after her, has actively committed adultery with her and has completed the act in his desires, feelings, affections, passions, and impulses. Also if you are in a condition that you covet in a bad sense and find favor in your mind and in your heart with things that you see in a maiden or anything else and it causes you to sin, metaphorically pluck it out of your heart and cast it away from you, turn away from it; because it is advantageous for you to need to destroy your sinful desires and passions rather than to go to the extreme extent of allowing your material body to be cast into the place and state of the lost and condemned. Also if you are in a condition that you covet in a bad sense and find favor*

in your mind and in your heart with a desire to touch a maiden or anything else and it causes you to sin, metaphorically cut it out of your heart and cast it away from you, turn away from it; because it is advantageous for you to need to destroy your sinful desires and passions rather than to go to the extreme of allowing your material body to be cast into a place and state of the lost and condemned. These verses address, with respect to the law, the members of the body which are often the means of leading a person on to the breach of the law. Particularly these members are the eyes and the hands. The eye is often the instrument that ensnares and grabs the attention of the heart. Mention is made of only the right eye, but the left eye is equally as guilty as the right. But in the days of the Mosaic Law the right eye was given favor as being most dear and valuable, so that is the one chosen to be parted with. In the context of this verse the sense is that persons should make a covenant with their eyes, just a Job did. In doing as Job did we will turn away from beholding objects which may tend to excite impure thoughts and desires. This will deny the heart the gratification of the sense of seeing, or feeding the eyes with such sights which our flesh craves. ***Job 31:1; I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin?*** By this covenant we can reject with indignation and contempt, and avoid all opportunities and occasions of sinning, which the eye may be the leading instrument that leads us into a state of temptation. Once the hands become involved, either physically or in the heart, the birth of sin has taken place.

The Mosaic Law clearly prohibited adultery. A person might be proud to say that he had never broken this commandment in the act, and yet have his eyes and heart consumed with adultery, ***2 Pet. 2:13, 14; they are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing, unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed.*** Biblically anyone who is in active rebellion to God's Laws is a spiritual adulterer. He has decided to set God aside in his pursuit of pleasure and pursue what he covets, in a bad sense, his sensual desires. That person is considered an adulterer because we as His church are considered to be the bride of Christ. If we choose instead to pursue another lover, that is, the lusts of our heart in any fashion, we are committing spiritual adultery.

While looking outwardly respectable the adulterer's mind might be constantly wandering down labyrinths of impurity. So Jesus reminded His disciples that mere abstinence from the physical act was not enough—there must be inward purity. So He says that it is more profitable for us to lose one of these members of our body rather than the whole body. The meaning is that it will turn out better to our account, on our day of judgment, to lose all of the carnal pleasures of the eye, or all of those pleasing sights, which the carnal heart embraces, rather than to expose the whole body and soul to everlasting destruction. The law always forbade the act of adultery and once again Jesus brings out the intent of the law as it was given

to Moses, that is, the desire is equally sinful as the act, because the desire originates in the heart.

Once again Jesus is only concerned with the heart where the identification of who we are can be found. And once again we must remind ourselves that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for the things that we did, but for who we are. "If you just think of an act of adultery, you do not satisfy the sex urge; you are merely pouring oil on a fire to quench it." (E. Stanley Jones). Sin begins in the mind and that is where we need to kill it, before it has a chance to cause our death, if we nourish it and keep it alive in our thoughts we will eventually commit the act.

James 1:13-15; Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

So the same thing holds true for the right hand as with the right eye, as before with our unchaste looks, also here all unchaste touches, embraces, and etc. are condemned. Just as adultery can be committed with the eye, in the heart, so too, this statement applies with the hand. The Jews of this time actually did impose their authority by allowing the cutting off of the right hand on several accounts. If in the morning before a man had washed his hands he put his hand to his eye, nose, mouth, or ear it was to be cut off. Also if his hand moved to his private parts or if his hand went lower than his naval his hand was to be cut off. His hands were to reach no further below this because there was a possibility of his hand exciting his thoughts. Men refraining from all such impure practices, either with themselves or with a woman, were said to be of a defiling nature and endanger of losing their salvation. These are just some examples of how the scribes and Pharisees were focused on the literal part of the law more than the heart of the law.

Maintaining an undefiled thought life demands strict self discipline and a willingness to die, spiritually, to those things that define your life, but are not acceptable in God's kingdom and allow God to create in us a new person. Thus Jesus taught that if any part of our body causes us to sin, it would be better to lose those members during our earthly life rather than to lose our soul for eternity. Are we to take Jesus' words literally? Was He advocating self mutilation? The words are literal to this extent: if it were necessary to lose a member of your body rather than one's soul, then we should be gladly ready to part with a member of our body. Sometimes, I think for me that could be the easy way out. Fortunately though, it is never necessary, since the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to live a holy life by confession and repentance. However there must be cooperation and rigid discipline on the believer's part. After I did the exploration of the Greek in these verses I believe that our Lord was giving us a picture of something that is hard for us to see with our physical eyes, that is, our heart or mind.

My opinion is that He more intentionally meant for us to cut these things out of our heart, that is, where the seat of our desires, feelings, affections, passions, and impulses dwell. It's not a physical place or member that can be literally cut out of us, but the need for a change in who we are; a willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us to the heart of God, being a spiritually minded person rather than a worldly minded; we need a heart like God. We need to turn our back on, metaphorically, whatever it is we covet in a bad sense, cut it out or off of our heart or as I picture it, cut the umbilical cord that is attached to the temptation, giving it life to sin that wants to remain a part of us, and then replace that void with the image of Jesus Christ. We can self mutilate our bodies until all we have left is the bare minimum to sustain life, but it will not change the desires of our feelings, affections, passions, and impulses. But, as a person with a depraved heart and mind this is something that I cannot accomplish on my own, I need to ask Jesus Christ into my heart and all His Holy Spirit to create in me a new, God-centered, heart and mind.

DIVORCE

Matt. 5:32; ...whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery...

The scribes so twisted the meaning of the law that they could claim the law's authority for actions that were clearly contrary to the law, ***Matt. 5:31-37; And it was said, whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of un-chastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again you have heard that the ancients were told, you shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord. But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No no"; and anything beyond these is of evil.*** It would seem that after Jesus Christ got everyone straightened out on the moral divorce issues of the laws that we in our society have once again discarded the intent of the laws as God prescribed them to a point that to be *not* divorced is the exception to the rule. In other words the rate of divorce is higher than the rate of life-long commitment. Once again we need to remind ourselves that just because our society has disregarded something and made it legal does not mean that God approves of it. We, like the scribes and the Pharisees, have changed the intent of the divine law to fit into our ever changing, evolving immoral lifestyles. But God's law never changes, like we heard in verse 18 not one iota of His law will be abolished until all is accomplished or fulfilled. If some of these laws quicken our conscience, they should, because as the earth gets older, our society seems to be more and more callous to listening to what God desires, and we choose to do not what God desires, rather what man desires and we are still struggling with doing what's

right in our own eyes instead of what is right in God's eyes. **Judges 17:6; And in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.** It would seem, by this verse, that the evolution of immorality has been taking place since the ancient days; so let's take an amplified look at these verses in Matthew so that we can clear our conscience if we need to and know for sure that in spite of what our society dictates that we are still in God's will: *And it was said, "whoever dismisses his wife, let him give her a bill of divorcement." But I say unto you that whosoever dismisses his wife except for the reason of sexual sin while she is still his wife makes her to be considered as having adultery committed against him, and whosoever marries one who is unjustifiably dismissed is considered as committing adultery. Once more you have comprehended and understood that it was said to those from the beginning of faith, "You shall not break your vows, but shall keep and perform ones vows to the Lord," till the end of your physical life. However I teach you this, do not make or take an oath at all, neither resting on God's dwelling, or His resting place, because it is the seat of the Royal Authority of the God He is the Sovereign of the universe, nor make an oath resting on anything found on the earth, because it is the footstool of His feet, nor make an oath facing toward the Holy City, because it is "the city of the great King, the One who rules." Nor shall you make or take an oath resting on your head, because you do not have the power and cannot cause any single one of your hairs to be shiny white or black. However, let your replies in your conversations be yes when in your heart you mean yes or no when you mean no, because whatever you may add to your reply that is more than these is from the evil one.* At first glance it may seem like in these verses that Jesus is eclectically jumping around to several topics, but in fact, these teachings are all intertwined like the cable that we mentioned before. He talks about marriage and the marriage commitment where an oath is very much in play. We very much need to consider the consequences of taking an oath when we take the step of marriage. We need to first of all consider who we are making this oath to, not only the potential spouse, but to God also, and we must remember that our spouse also is not the spiritual buffet we mentioned earlier. We can't just accept the parts that we like about them and cast off the rest; it's all or nothing. And marriage is not merely a part-time commitment it is intended to be a lifetime, fulltime, commitment that resembles the commitment that we make to Christ when we give our life to Him. We are, essentially giving up our lives to our spouses, not only the life as a single person, but also giving our life to them as their servant for a lifetime.

Verse 31 seems like, at first glance, that Jesus is starting out this verse much like He did several verses before hand, but there is one significant difference; in this verse He does not mention what the ancients said or used the words "you have heard." The reason for this is because the case of divorce was not any Law of Moses or of God. Divorce was only discussed and a provision made for because of the hardness of their hearts. The causes of divorce were not debated by the ancients; this was a relatively new thing that the scribes and Pharisees had added to their laws during the time of Jesus. Some sects allowed frivolous reasons for divorce

while others were allowing divorce only on the basis of adultery. But they all agreed that though there were several ways to get married, there was only one way to get divorced and that was by a bill of divorcement. This bill was written in twelve lines; no more and no less. Then signed by the husband, witnesses, and was either delivered by the husband or an agent of his to the wife in the presence of two persons. After she received this bill of divorcement she might, if she desired, enroll the document into the public record and marry whoever she pleased.

The scribes and Pharisees not only disregarded the application of the Seventh Commandment (you shall not commit adultery) to the heart and thus failed to see the sinfulness of lust, they also extended this disregarding the outward conduct by regarding the law as actually permitting all manner of divorce and on insisting only on the outward formality of handing over a certificate of divorce. It is easy to see, even today, how societies have totally disregarded God's will and desire in order to do what is right in their own eyes. And, by God's definition, divorce is a form of murder. We are putting to death a relationship ordained and brought together by God, with severe consequences that go far beyond the family involved. We have often heard that a divorce is very similar to a funeral as far as the depths of emotions go. The things that we are studying now about the times of Jesus are the same today as they were then, frivolous divorces are commonplace. There is no reason required to get a divorce in today's society and we have made it easier to get divorced than we have to get married! So Jesus adds this statement about adultery, that the commandment which forbids lust, in the case of wanting to be with another person, certainly also forbids divorce. Jesus is making reference to the word of Moses that he wrote in ***Deut 24:1-4; When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that 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 from the house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives to you as an inheritance.*** This was used by the scribes and Pharisees to justify their lax divorce practice. Therefore, too, Jesus summarizes Deut. as the Jews did when they assumed that this passage allowed their divorces and demanded only that a certificate be handed to his wife. ***Matt 19:7-8, they said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."*** In these verses Jesus explains how it came about that divorce was allowed by Moses. Jesus refers to Deut. 24 only because of the false justification for their evil practice in order to place over and against this practice the true intent

of God's commandment. Jesus references Deuteronomy only because of the Jews references to this book and He is trying to keep the passage correct and in context. Jesus considers the law secondarily to man's heart. When Jesus sums up the Ten Commandments by narrowing them down to two, He wanted us to focus on our heart and not on a set of written rules. Intimate relationships are built through the heart and not by rules. As they got further and further away from the true intent of God's Commandment it became easier and easier to be more lax on the intent of the Commandment and easier to justify the intent to be interpreted as "anything that is displeasing," (about your spouse), which is more in alignment with how we interpret the divorce laws today. In either case a man was able to get a divorce just on the basis of finding what was thought to be a more desirable wife. Where does it stop? To a certain extent marriage has been reduced to the same practices as dating, or getting a trophy in a sporting event, or even shopping, try it on; if it doesn't fit take it back and get another one.

Christ did not infringe or revoke the original commandment to grant or give permission of a divorce; He only freed it from the false interpretations and bad use of it. Jesus was bringing divorce back to its original intent and limitations. That is, divorce is only granted in the case of adultery, incest, or any unlawful copulation. Our Lord now says that a man ought not, without exception, to put his wife away, whether it is his first or second wife, for any other reason than sexual un-cleanliness. And that whoever does, upon any other account, causes her to commit adultery. I thought that it is interesting that Jesus would say that the husband causes his wife (or ex-wife) to commit adultery? He is the cause of it because he is exposing her, through a rejection of her, to the sinful embrace of others. And, indeed, should she marry another man, while her first husband is still alive, which her divorce allowed her to do, she would be guilty of adultery!

What Jesus declares as being the force behind the Seventh Commandment regarding marriage is summed up in **Matt. 19:6; "Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate."** God alone can sever the bond of marriage by death, **Rom. 7:2, 3; For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.** Every other severance is excluded by the Seventh Commandment and any other severance is a violation of the law. Once this is understood, the words of Jesus become clearer, and several wrong interpretations are cleared up. Jesus is not merely setting one cause for divorce over and against the idea of many causes, but what He is doing is forbidding all divorce and all causes for divorce as being against God's intent as expressed in **Ex. 20:14; You shall not commit adultery.** We need to keep in mind that Matthew's Gospel deals mainly with Jews and here Jesus is speaking to an audience of Jews

who never even considered that a woman could divorce her husband, so Jesus naturally specifies only one example of a case involving a man divorcing his wife. But women should not lose sight of the fact that these principles apply to them as well, **Mark 10:12; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she is committing adultery.** Mark adds this verse because his Gospel is directed toward Gentile listeners. If we get the idea that Jesus is here making a wife's fornication a legal cause for which a husband may secure a legal divorce we are making the words of Jesus a mere legal verdict, whereas, in reality, it is something far more, fundamentally, namely it is a part of His truly moral exposition of the Seventh Commandment, concerning adultery. Jesus is not concerned with the legal steps that might be taken in the case of a fornicating spouse; His concern is that our heart is right before God in whatever we do.

Divorce was never God's intention for man. His ideal is that one man and one woman remained married until their union is broken by death. Jesus made this clear to the Pharisees by appealing to the divine order of creation. God hates divorce, **Mal. 2:16; For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with wrong, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to your spirit; that you do not deal treacherously.** As we have read from Matt. 5:31, 32, and 19:9, Jesus taught that divorce was forbidden except when one of the partners had been guilty of sexual immorality. Even though divorce is not the ideal, it is permitted in the case where one's partner that has been unfaithful. Jesus *allows* divorce in this case, but He does not command it. Some teachers see **1 Cor. 7:12-16** as teaching that divorce is acceptable when a believer is deserted by an unbeliever, **But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?** Paul says that the remaining person is "not under bondage in such cases," that is, he or she is free to obtain a divorce for desertion, IF the other person partakes in adultery. It is often contended that, although divorce is permitted in the NT, remarriage is never contemplated. Remarriage is not condemned for the innocent party in the NT—only for the offending person. Also, one of the main purposes for allowing divorce is to permit remarriage; otherwise separation, would serve the same purpose as well.

In any discussion of this topic, the question inevitably arises, "What about people who were divorced before they were saved?" There should be no question that scriptural unlawful divorces and remarriages contracted before conversion are sins that have been forgiven. Pre-conversion sins do not bar believers from full participation in the local church. Another point

that needs to be mentioned is that before our conversion we did not know God and we did what comes naturally; we only intended to serve the needs of ourselves. After our conversion a new person has been created, one that knows God and desires to live in His will and wants to serve Him. So the point is this, more than likely we did not have a contract with God concerning our marriage before our conversion so we did not break a contract that did not exist, even though we repeated words that sounded like a contract, in our natural self-centered way of thinking the contract was only for the other person. But we also must consider this, that marriage is not defined by God solely as an oath taking; when we sexually consummate a relationship we are, in God's eyes, married to that person, because the sexual act has been set aside only for those who are married.

Of course we also have the case of a spouse or children being physically or psychologically abused by the other spouse. Are we commanded to stay in an abusive relationship that will bring us or the children physical or psychological damage? These questions bring out the importance of a long term, sexually pure courtship before marriage so as to know your partner as well as possible. It was not uncommon for the Jews to be engaged for a year before consummating the relationship with marriage. I don't believe that God wants us to stay in a living condition that has the potential to be harmful to us; if the wife is harmed how can she nurture her children? If the husband is harmed how can he provide for his children? I certainly do not believe that children should remain in a condition that would allow them to be harmed; a parent's responsibility is to protect their children that cannot protect themselves and to nurture them into God-fearing adults. Ideally a separation of the spouses and children from the abusive spouse would solve the problem, but this doesn't always work either and a divorce is the only way that a spouse can receive financial support for the children. As is any other case of divorcement there is no "rubber stamp" answer and every case is unique.

A more difficult question concerns Christians who have divorced for unscriptural reasons and then remarry. Can they be received back into the fellowship of the local church? Should they get divorced in order to be received back into the church? I believe that divorcing again could only compound the problem here on earth, but we need to consider the eternal consequences. The answer really comes down to whether adultery is the initial act of physical union or a continued state. In other words did the parties get divorced because they were caught up in adultery and then got married to make their adultery legal? If these people are living in a state of adultery, then they would not only have to confess their sin but also forsake their present partner. So am I saying that two wrongs (divorcing twice) make a right? No, but if the "marriage" was consummated while in a state of adultery, in my opinion, God did not recognize that as a marriage, but merely two people getting married to try to resolve their guilt without coming before God and confessing their sin. This does not contradict my previous

statement, “that God considers any sexual union as a marriage,” because if one is committing adultery he already has a spouse. These situations can get very complicated and this is why it would be better to have more than one person drawing upon God’s wisdom as to determine their spiritual status as best we can by studying and answering according to God’s Word. Keep in mind that we are trying to look at this through God’s eyes and not the legality of a law or through man’s eyes. What we also need to remember is that God’s forgiveness is not partial. Anyone who truly repents is forgiven; does a true repentance mean that the relationship between the man and woman must be broken? How do we know that a person has truly repented? We do not have the privilege of being able to see into man’s heart. I think that we must assume the sincerity of the repentant sinner, his behavior from that point on will communicate his sincerity. But if they are restored to the Lord, who are we to not restore them to our fellowship? The bottom line, in my opinion, is that there is no black and white answer to the question and each case should be discerned individually according to the Word of God. Any decision man comes to should be guided by and interpreted by the Holy Spirit.

Another perversion of the Law on the part of the scribes and Pharisees, who always leave out the heart of the matter and thus attain no real righteousness, pertains to oaths and the Third Commandment, *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God*. God’s name should always be treated with respect; that includes using God’s name lightly in making promises or in any other way. This is the name that raised people from the dead, caused the blind to see, and made the paralyzed to walk. It is a powerful name and needs to be used with the right attitude and Jesus finds no fault with the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. Their great fault was the fact that in using these oaths they saw nothing but a general permission to use all sorts of oaths and then spent all of their deceptiveness on determining the degree of the binding force of the different forms of oaths, concluding that those which did not directly name God had no binding force. This law, in their eyes was intended to prevent perjury, false swearing. These men had convinced themselves that if they did not include God in their swearing that it was permissible to tell a lie or give a false statement. They argued that if Moses told them not to take an oath falsely, that it was okay to make one truly. Jesus points out that the true deductions from the words of Moses run in a very opposite direction of the scribes and Pharisee’s supposing. It would be obvious then to discern that any oath that did not include the name of God was not a sincere oath, thus being deceptive and **“originating from the evil one.”** So it is better to make no oath at all than to make an insincere one that would cause us to be a liar. Rash swearing about trivial matters and by other objects is directly contrary to Jewish canons. These swearing, if broken, were not considered to be criminal. Once again we see Jesus going to the context of these verses of the Law that pertains to the heart as does every law of God.

The different forms of swearing that are included in these verses seem very foreign to us, but they had common usages to the Jews of Jesus' time. These forms of swearing are condemned because they insinuate that man has a power that only God has. "*Because you cannot make the hair white or black,*" shows that a man's head or even one hair on his head, is there in His own power, and therefore man ought not to swear by it, or heaven, earth, Jerusalem, etc., because all of these are in the possession of God, they are not man's to be put up for security of an oath.

As a Christian we should not have to add an oath to our conversations in order to add validity to what we are saying. Our yes and our no should be as good as our signature. If someone is skeptical of what we are saying and we are tempted to add an oath to reinforce the integrity of our commitment or our stand, we are in a position that has us on a slippery slope as far as our relationship with that person is concerned. In our everyday communications if someone requires more from us than a yes or no, then we are probably communicating with someone that has a problem with their own integrity. Whatever exceeds this way of speaking (goes beyond yes or no) and conversation in the common affairs of life, is either from the devil, or one who is dominated by evil, or from the evil heart of man, i.e., from the pride, malice, or envy that is in his heart. As I think about these statements of making oaths and I recall the times in my past when I have used them it was not to reinforce the integrity of what I was saying as much as to reinforce me as a person of integrity. I did not want the listeners to believe that I was a liar or an exaggerator when I was telling of things that were extraordinary. Now if I say something in conversation that seems to raise the eyebrows of doubt I stay quiet and let the truth speak of the matter speak for its self; if someone doesn't believe me it does not change my integrity.

RETALIATION

Matt. 5:40 ...if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

Instead of being forgiving, the scribes used the law as an excuse for personal revenge. They took the civil laws relating to penalties for crimes and applied them to personal relationships, ***Matt. 5:38-42; You have heard that it was said, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.*** No matter what circumstance we are in it is of utmost importance for us to remember that our mission as Christ's disciples is the same as His mission. Our mission is not to get even with an injustice; that would be a lifelong wasted duration of time in this present evil age because we will never find righteousness, justice, or equity in this age. Our mission first and foremost is for

the lost to see the redemptive Christ in us. So let's take a closer look at these verses to get a better handle on how Christ in us responds to these circumstances: *You have heard, that is, comprehended and understood that it was said by the elders of the synagogue, "An eye shall be compensated with money equal to an eye, and also a tooth monetarily compensated equal to a tooth." However, I lay this truth before you, do not stand against him who is malicious, that is, Satan, with your evil thoughts, words, or deeds that are injurious, hurtful, or cause pain, but rather be the person who, when someone hits you with the cuff of their hand first on your right jaw, with malice so as to intimidate or insult you, turn yourself toward him and offer the other jaw in addition. And also if you are in a circumstance whereas you are on your way to be judged with someone and it is their desire to actively take away by force your inner garment, let him take your tunic also. In addition whosoever compels you to go into service with them for one-thousand paces, go with them two-thousand paces. Give to him of your free will and accord what he asks of you and do not reject him who wishes to borrow money from you.* The Jewish scholars agree in general that the law did not give them the right to take another's eye after losing your own, but that it meant that the person was entitled to compensation, usually in the form of money. The usual price of compensation was generally the cost of a servant. The same thing applied to the hand or foot. From the traditions we understand that the Hebrew word used for "for" that is spoken of in this verse translates to and should be understood as "money." *The loss of an eye shall be monetarily equally compensated from his neighbor that put out the eye.* The law never intended that one neighbor should hurt physically another neighbor. But not all of the Jewish scholars agreed and even the historian Josephus says "he must be deprived of that which he has deprived another of." But this verse cannot be explained literally, for if a man hurt another man's eye and he only lost 1/3 of his sight, how could you so accurately hurt another's man's eye so that he only lost 1/3 of his sight? It would be impossible to strike a blow that was not either less than or more than what his neighbor suffered.

Jesus now turns to perversion of the penal law against crime. The OT form of justice and law said that you can take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That is, whatever amount was taken from you these are what you are entitled to receive back from the perpetrator in compensation. No more and no less. This was both a command to punish and a limitation on punishment—the penalty cannot exceed the crime. However, according to the OT, authority for punishment was vested in the government, not in the individual. In their perversion they cast aside what Moses had originally taught them about how such circumstances should be handled. The scribes and the Pharisees deduced that in his dealings with others every man should likewise retaliate in kind and should in every case insist on his full rights. (Things haven't changed much have they?) But, what they are perverting is what Moses taught when he taught these words that were given to him by God, ***Lev. 19:18; you shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord.*** And they also set aside the wisdom of Solomon, who as king administered the penal

laws, as he wrote, **Prov. 24:29; “Do not say, Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render the man according to his work.** All of these things that the ancients prescribed, who wrote these laws, went for naught. This is how the scribes and the Pharisees manipulated the laws to suit their own self interests, they insisted on selfish revenge as a form of justice due to them. The worst feature of this perversion was the fact that those who insisted on their rights adorned their revengeful and base actions with the very word of God as though God Himself prompted them to act as they did. The one thing that we might notice, by even our lawmakers of today, not in every case, but in most, when laws are changed they have a tendency to become more lenient toward the giving of power to the authorities, or lean toward taking more freedoms away from its citizens, which was the trend in Jesus’ time also.

Jesus went beyond the law to a higher righteousness by abolishing retaliation altogether. The Law of Christ’s teaching, or Moses’ Law, which had been perverted, did not intend for us to seek out our own private revenge. This does not mean that we cannot defend ourselves, not endeavor to save ourselves from injuries; but we are not to make the law a provision for us to take personal revenge. We should not be the initiators of aggression toward anybody. Jesus showed His disciples that, whereas revenge was once legally permissible, now non-resistance was graciously possible and desired as a disciple. It is possible, because God, in His sovereignty, knows our needs and has already addressed them before we even knew what we needed. The only thing that revenge accomplishes is to restoke and continue the fires of a malicious relationship, it never really settles anything. Also to take revenge requires some partaking on our part of being their judge and parceling perfect and righteous justice, which man is not capable of instituting.

Jesus instructed His followers to offer no resistance to an evil person. If they were slapped on the cheek by someone (a metaphor for being insulted or disgraced), they were to turn the other to him also (showing that, by example, there is a greater judge that will dole out any justice necessary to cover any injustice done to him). If they were sued for their tunic (a metaphor for any kind of material possession) they were to surrender their cloak, (showing that they came into the world naked and God provided clothes for them once and He will do it again). If they were compelled to carry an officials baggage (a metaphor for obeying a law) one mile, they were to voluntarily carry it two miles (that is show their obedience to all laws believing that they were all God ordained), **Rom. 13:1; Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.** The words of this verse can be correctly interpreted to pertain to our government today. Anything that they want to take from us, that don’t cause us to become immoral, we should give to them freely, because it is better to not dispute such a matter, even if it is somewhat laborious and disagreeable, for the sake of peace. We shall remember that the most important thing that they cannot take from us is our freedom in Christ and His salvation. **1**

Pet. 3:13, 14; And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed, and do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled. Rom. 8:18; For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us. 2 Cor., 4:17-18; for momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal. Phil. 1:12; Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

Again Jesus did not come to earth to abolish these laws, but we can see that these laws that were given to the Jews by way of Moses and are being perverted by focusing solely on behaviors and Jesus is trying to bring them back to their original intent which makes them a heart issue, that is an issue of our passions, emotions, and impulses. I have a feeling that it would be like trying to bring back the original authors of the Constitution of the United States to re-establish the intent of what was written. Jesus does not see His mission as one to change the laws as being too harsh or not being humanitarian enough, or needing reform in any other respect, but to fulfill the law or bring the law to completion. The Law is complete when it causes us to have a change of heart. He and His disciples are filled with the love of God, not with condemnation or what a judge is called to do with a proved criminal. Whereas the laws of executing justice are in the hands of the government, the laws of God are placed in the hearts of His disciples, which will effect a change in our attitudes and values along with our conduct. This law requires us to be patient, and willing to forego our governmental rights and to suffer a wrong in order to overcome evil with good, so that the governmental courts do not need to step in. By obeying the laws of love from the heart the verdict of the final Judge will come down in our favor.

To hit a man in retaliation or to poke out his eye after he has poked out yours is to merely get even with him in his sin! And the worst part of the sin is in the anger, resentment, and evil passion that fills the heart when such resistance is offered. When we respond like this we now have not only gotten even with him in his sin but we have probably lost any opportunity of witnessing to him or anybody else that has witnessed your actions! Christ's teaching is intended to keep our hearts clean; if we do we will again surpass the offender, but this time in having a greater righteousness. The law of love was never intended to throw open the floodgates of unrestrained cruelty and crime. We respond by going directly to God and praying for the person's redemption; not to ask God to do what we in our heart want to do in the way of revenge. God will not and cannot do anything sinful, but we also do not respond in such a way that is not redemptive, so our prayer is not limited to a change in the perpetrator alone but also a change in us.

The disciple of Christ is never called on to perform according to the righteousness created by man and so it goes that when man tries to better himself by taking from us, then, we shall give him more than he intended to take. Why? In my opinion the object lesson in a nut shell is so that the offender will take pause to consider the sin that has been perpetrated on another by him. In his conscience, if he has any conscience at all, his conscience will be a constant companion wherever he goes, whatever he does, and whoever he pretends to be, so much so that our hope is that he will eventually repent and ask for God' forgiveness; but what about our loss? God allows things to be taken away and to be given as He sees fit in His sovereign will (see Job). As a disciple of Christ we believe that God will meet our necessities, not necessarily back to the same condition we had previously, but He will meet our needs in order to survive and to perform our ministry. Sometimes less can be more; that is, sometimes the things we have can become a hindrance or a burden to our ministry and being stripped of those things will possibly allow us to minister more profitably for His kingdom. ***Proverbs 28:27; He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses. Matt.10:42; And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these humble ones even a cold cup of water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward. John 5:21; for just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.***

In Jesus' time a Persian postal courier was authorized to requisition anything that he needed to expedite him on his trip. The verb "shall force you to go" is literally translated and came to mean "press into service." This same verb is used of Simon of Cyrene, for instance, when he was compelled to bear Christ's cross. So in the context of this verse Jesus is supposing that a disciple is being forced into service for a mile. In the Roman culture a mile consisted of one-thousand paces. Rather than rebelliously resist the imposition with a heart full of bitterness the true disciple will, of his own accord, in perfect cheerfulness of heart, add a second Roman mile. To do it begrudgingly adds nothing to our witness.

The striking feature about the three illustrations that Jesus gives us is the doubling, which is wholly voluntary on the disciple's part. He accepts the fact that he lives in an unjust world, but his heart to serve has overcome his heart for justice. Truly an amazing regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit! In this way the disciple has mastery over his own heart and will keep himself free from the natural bitterness to which sin makes us prone to be. The moral of these verses; it is better to suffer anything than to lose the love that insures us the better righteousness in God's judgment. We cannot, however, bait someone into doing us an injustice with the motive of showing them how much better off we are in God's sight.

The fourth illustration is different than the other three in that it does not offer any doubling. When someone wants to borrow from us we do not offer to give them double. The

difference is that in the other three illustrations we have a compulsion to do something, here it is a request. Instead of harboring bitterness here we might be inclined to hardness, lack of compassion, etc. The Greek in this verse does not intimate that this is begging from the poor or an insistent borrowing. The law instilled the duty of giving and of lending **Lev. 25:35; Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, that he might live with you.** This law forbade the selfishness of turning these acts into a personal advantage as might be done by usury. The desire to help should be prompted by a loving heart, not so that a person is in a position to owe you something. Jesus is of course speaking for the sake of His disciples and not to encourage a wicked man. This verse was added by Jesus, it would seem, so that there would be no extravagant interpretation of the examples that Jesus gave. Christ's words are not intended to be applied mechanically, just formally, or with foolish blindness which loses sight of the true purpose of love. Love does not foster crimes in others or expose our loved ones to disaster and perhaps unto death. Coupled with love is the wisdom that applies love.

ENEMIES

Matt. 5:44...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

The scribes and Pharisees became so diluted in their thinking and in the positions that they held in society that they gave their own sayings equal authority with the law, **Matt. 5:43-47; You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even tax gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** Although throughout these verses we have pointed out what it is that the Pharisees and scribes do as the subject of a wrong heart, we must not forget that these teachings are designed for us also. Jesus would not be pointing out the contrasts of the position of the heart verses our deeds if He did not see some similarities in His disciples of what He also sees in the scribes and Pharisees. When He tells us to be not like the Pharisees and scribes, He obviously sees some behaviors in others that are similar; otherwise He would not have to mention it. It's always easier for us to get on our high horse and point down at the wrongs of others, but let's don't be a worse offender by adding hypocrisy! Let's take these verses apart so we can look inside our heart to prevent us from being hypocritical: *You have heard and so have understood and comprehended that it had been taught, "You shall wish well and do good for your friends and associates, and also at the same time have a persecuting spirit toward your adversaries, neglecting, disregarding, and*

condemning them.” However, I tell you with absolute authority, that you are to find your delight and joy in discerning the needs of your adversary and meet those needs of faith in your adversaries and speak well of them with praise and thanksgiving invoking God’s blessing upon them; continually asking God to be active in their lives and to intervene to accomplish His will with those who abuse you by insults and spiteful conduct and also pursue you with repeated acts of enmity. Do this in order to begin to be like those who belong to God in eternal life, disposition, and benevolence and the one who will join Him in His dwelling place; because in His common blessing He causes His sun to rise and spread out over the wicked and mischievous and also the virtuous and upright, and He also causes the rain to fall on those who have conditioned their lives by the standard which is not theirs but God’s and also on those who lack the imputed righteousness wrought by the Spirit of God. Because if you are in an active condition of delighting in those who delight in you, what good, advantage, or benefit in the hereafter do you continually strive to possess? Do not even those who associate with the most depraved class of society do the same? And also if you are in a condition that you only treat those with whom you have a common bond with affection, what is it that you do that distinguishes you from others? Isn’t this the same things that even the heathens do? So, from these premises, you are to keep yourself unspotted from the world; enjoy the freedom that is a distinct privilege of the saved, a freedom that is so profound and far reaching that as a believer you are conscious of Your sonship in relation to God, who is your Father in heaven and who likewise keeps Himself unspotted from the world. Our Lord’s final example of the higher righteousness demanded in His kingdom concerns the treatment of one’s enemies, a topic which grows naturally out of the previous teaching. The law had taught the Israelites to love their neighbor. Although they were never explicitly commanded to hate their enemy, this spirit was the basis of their indoctrination. This kind of attitude is prevalent today also; it seems the spirit of the law accounts for nothing. In actuality the persons that look for a way to maintain their self-deification, those who need to be told explicitly what is right and wrong, are merely looking for an excuse to continue in their sinful lifestyle and still receive their reward in heaven. They are like an attorney that pours over the laws to find “the smallest letter or stroke” missing from the laws in order to gain freedom for a guilty man. This kind of intellectual knowledge means nothing to Christ, because any knowledge that he has originated with Christ anyway. Anyone who studies the law with this much diligence is intelligent enough to know what the spirit of the law is, that is, that which applies to the heart of the law. The most intelligent attorney on earth will not be able to outsmart the greatest attorney in heaven. This attitude was a summary of the OT’s outlook toward those who persecuted God’s people. It was considered a righteous hostility directed against the enemies of God. They mutilated even the words they quoted from **Lev. 19:18; You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.** They mutilated it by omitting the “as yourself” part of the law. The original command was not intended to state *whom* we are to love so as to

raise the question as to who this neighbor is, but to state *what* we are to do, namely to love, even placing “as yourself” for the sake of emphasis, and *how much* we are to do, namely to love placing “as yourself” for contrast. The law was not intended to teach us who to love but to show us what actions we are to take; we are to love, “not hate.” **Lev. 19:17; You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart.** By their shifting of the emphasis these false teachers had to ask Jesus who their neighbor was so that they could righteously hate anyone that was not included in the definition of “neighbor.” This was a flagrant perversion of the law which included all of the members of the Jewish nation down to the lowest and extended even to the stranger. If, according to Leviticus, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves instead of taking vengeance and bearing a grudge, we have exactly what Jesus commands of us in this verse, but this is nothing new, this is the old commandment in its proper context and pure form. By teaching that we could retain our righteousness while hating our enemies was a fall from the ancient moral code.

But now Jesus announces that we are to love our enemies, and He adds that a part of the love we show our enemies is demonstrated by praying for them, asking God to bless them, and to do good things for them! Most of us consider this an impossible task and in our natural state it is; that is why we must humble ourselves before God, ask Him to forgive us for any evil thoughts or schemes that we have contrived in our heart or mind against those who have persecuted us and ask that the Holy Spirit indwell us, as we check our worldly attitudes and values at the door. What Christ asks us to do is a violation of everything that our natural self sees as righteous. When Jesus teaches us what His disciple looks like we can use these pointers as a measuring rod. We can pray to the Lord and ask Him; how am I doing in these areas? The answer is always going to be that we could do better, but He will also encourage us through our faith in Him and He will move those mountains that seem to block our vision of what He wants us to become. **Matt. 17:19, 20; Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” And He said to them; “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, “Move from here to there, and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”** The fact that Jesus commands us to love shows that it is a matter of the will and not primarily our emotions. It is not the same as natural affection because it is not natural for us to love those who hate and harm us. It is a supernatural grace and it can be manifested only by those who have divine life.

When Jesus tells us to love our enemies He crushes the rabbinical perversion and restates what Moses and the prophets really commanded of God’s people. He uses the plural to include all of His hearers, and in Greek the words translate “love constantly.” “Your enemies constantly” are personal enemies who are defined as “those persecuting you,” those who hate you and try to injure you, either physically, emotionally, or psychologically. They are flagrantly transgressing the law, but two lawbreakers do not make one righteous. We cannot

allow anyone to change who we are by permitting them to give us a mindset of retaliation as a means of justice, righteousness or equity. As Christians we are peace-loving, benevolent people; retaliatory conduct is not included in such a definition. Our enemies will have to account for who they are in front of their Judge, just as we will. We have to “constantly love them” in spite of their conduct toward us or how they treat us.

The “love” that Jesus teaches us to have toward our enemies deserves some attention at this time. It signifies something different and greater than the “love” of mere affection and liking. This “liking” kind of love would be impossible in the case of an enemy; he would not accept our affection, (or else he would not be our enemy) and he would probably respond in an aggressive physical way, continuing to try to harm us. Nor are we able to like our enemies and as we research the Scriptures we can’t find any verses that tell us that Jesus liked His enemies. This “love” in the Greek context denotes the love of intelligence, comprehension, and corresponding purpose. This love, indeed, sees all of the hatefulness and wickedness of our enemy, it feels his stabs and his blows; it may even have something to do toward warding them off. But, in spite of all of this, this “love” fills the loving heart with the one desire and aim, to free its enemy from his hate, to rescue him from his sin, and thus lead him toward forgiveness, repentance, and salvation. Mere affection is often blind, but even then it thinks that it sees something attractive in a person; this higher love that we have for our enemies probably doesn’t see anything attractive, but the motivation of this love is to simply bestow blessings upon the enemy and treat him with the utmost of respect as a person with possible redemptive potential. This is the kind of love that Jesus Christ saw in us “while we were yet His enemy,” ***Romans 5:10; For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.*** I cannot like a low-life, mean, criminal who may have robbed me and threatened my life, or the lives of my loved ones, nor can I like a false, lying, slanderous person who has vilified me again and again; but I can by the grace of Jesus Christ love the potential of being redeemed in them all, discern what is wrong with them, and have a desire to work with them as the Holy Spirit directs me. Once again we cannot lose sight of what we must’ve looked like to Christ before our conversion and He did not give up on us. Our enemies may go on persecuting us, but as adamant as they are to persecute us we must be equally adamant to pray for them. The easiest prayer that comes to mind is the prayer that Jesus recited while hanging on the cross concerning His executioners, “forgive them for they know not what they do.” Our prayer would be that God’s grace may bring our enemies to see their sins and their wrong, to repent and thus obtain God’s pardon. Only the love that Jesus puts into our hearts is capable of such a prayer.

There is no reward for loving those who love us, or to respond with love to those who love us. Jesus tells us that anybody and everybody does that, even the pagans. That type of love does not require any kind of regeneration in our heart; it is a natural human response mostly to stimulus. Neither is there any virtue in greeting only people that you know. The pagans do that

also; there is nothing distinctively Christian in this kind of conduct. If our standards are no higher than the pagans, it is certain that we'll never do anything that is attractive to them or that will distinguish us from the rest of the world.

How we obtain this kind of love in our hearts and allow it to completely control us has already been taught to us when Jesus taught us the Beatitudes, especially the verse which says; ***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*** And we can find this kind of transforming love in the lessons on salt and light. Why do we need to have this transforming kind of love? Jesus tells us in verse 45, ***in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*** We become sons of the our Father when we are born again by grace through faith in the Son and as such "sons" we will, indeed, be able to love our enemies even as our heavenly Father loves them.

This does not mean, however, that by loving our enemies that we will become sons of our Father. By faith we are now sons of God. That we are, indeed, sons of God will become a settled fact when our likeness to our Father in loving our enemies as He loves His enemies furnishes us with the evidence. His grace has put us sinners into a relationship with Him, through His Son, who came to make us as sons. This should be motive enough for us to love as He loves.

Jesus emphasizes this even more as He continues in the verse and brings out why loving our enemies would make it plain that we are sons of the Father. He has control over the sun, He made it and He controls it. Yet He lets it rise on the wicked who by their deeds show that they are enemies of God, just as He does on those who do good deeds and show that they are His friend. He does the same with rain. God sends rain on the righteous as well as the unrighteous. This function helps express the thought that, when bestowing sunshine and rain to produce crops and whatever else that men need to sustain life; neither one nor the other comes first as far as God is concerned. "Good" and "wicked" express moral character, God pronounces one as the "good" and righteous and the other "wicked" and unrighteous, both of which are moot points to God in the present and point to God's judgment. The good deeds of the righteous reveal their faith, regeneration, and son-ship; the evil deeds of the unrighteous their lack of faith, spiritual life, and divine childhood. The world's view of judging the good or the wicked means nothing to God. The scribes and the Pharisees and even persons of today that are praised as "good" may not appear as such when God judges them.

The fact that God makes no difference in sending sunshine and rain and many other earthly blessings on His sons and on His enemies we must remember is due to His love with a special purpose, ***Rom. 2:4; Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*** On the other hand we shouldn't think that it doesn't cost God anything to send rain and sunshine

on the unrighteous. It is His mighty mercy and grace that restrains Him from sending nothing but destruction on them. But by His kindness He desires to lead them to repentance, with this loving purpose of His, our actions toward our enemies should be in accord with His. We should be more concerned about having grace and mercy on our enemies and leading someone to repentance over desiring revenge.

Jesus teaches us that we cannot maintain our position as His disciples if we cannot maintain the love for our enemies that our Father has for them. If they withheld their love from their enemies they would remain on the old, low level of open sinners and pagans. If we love only those who loves us or greet only the ones that are our friends, how are we distinguished as His disciples, even the pagans do this much. When the words “what reward have you?” in verse 46 is translated from the Greek a better translation would be “what recognition have you” for our love from God as His sons. To not love our enemies is not an option for us as His disciples and we should consider ourselves in a state of willful sinning if we refuse to obey His command.

But the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees is even worse when it comes to handling enemies. They centered their teaching on the expression “the sons of your people” in Lev. 19:18; which states fully: *You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.* They totally disregarded the rest of the verse. They drew a sharp line between Jew and Gentile despising the Gentiles as utterly unworthy of a Jew’s attention, not to mention their love. They taught that a Jew only needed to greet a Jew and regarded a Gentile on the same level as a dog. And likewise the Gentile retaliated in kind. This is what Jesus was referring to in verse 47 noting that a greeting was the lowest form of a demonstration of love.

It occurs to me that if we think that our present evil age has gotten over these attitudes and values concerning different ethnic groups, we surely must be living our lives in a cave! The point is that we can’t get caught in the trap of only thinking that all of these things were only issues of Jesus’ time, or issues that only the Jews had; our cultures haven’t changed at all for the better and more than likely we have gotten worse and not only as a nation but, even down to our neighborhood that we live in. Some of us rarely greet our next door neighbor, let alone, a stranger. By the scribes and Pharisees (and us) only greeting their own kind they brought love down to a prejudice pagan level. Jesus’ disciples cannot be operating on this level.

Jesus closes this section with an admonition: *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* The word perfect can cause some of us to give up trying before we can even get the word out of our mouth. But this word must be taken in context. It does not mean sinless or flawlessly. The previous verses explain that to be perfect means to love those who hate us, to pray for those who persecute us, and to show kindness to both friend and foe.

We should not allow another person's disposition dictate who we are or even more, we should not allow another person's disposition dictate how we will respond in any situation.

Perfection, as it is used here, is a spiritual maturity which enables the Christian to obey God in dispensing blessings to everybody without partiality. We are to make God our model in all of His perfections and follow Him in spirit and truth; not, however, that complete equality is required. For God's attributes are infinite while ours are finite, and when we compare them to God's, ours are mere shadow. The scribes and the Pharisees mutilated and perverted the law and tried to subtract as much as possible even from the outward acts that were commanded, haggling with God, it seems, on all points. They reduced themselves to being minimalists, as far as obedience to the law goes, and their spirit was not centered on obedience as much as putting on a performance. Jesus teaches us that His true disciples are to be different; they will be judged by their heart and the motivation of their deeds.

The thought of verse 48 comes from ***Deut. 18:13; You shall be blameless (or, complete, perfect, or having integrity) before the Lord your God.*** Jesus adds that God Himself is perfect in this sense, namely true and upright in His dealings with us and therefore the model for His sons. He who is perfect is the one that has reached or completed the goal, i.e., the one indicated in the context. The sense is that the one who is perfect is the one who gives himself to the law of love without holding back on any point, including his enemies. It is incorrect then for us to assume that the goal of loving our enemies is impossible for us. This goal that we must reach is through and by His grace, otherwise God cannot regard us as His sons. Fortunately we have the mercy and grace of our Father that will point out our shortcomings in love and will give us the opportunity to repent of our shortcomings and ask for His forgiveness so that we may love "perfectly". This is not a mechanical confession, but a heartfelt true confession accompanied with a true desire to repent, turning our backs on our shortcomings and turning to the Father as the model of what it means to be complete; that is, to be as our Father desires His sons to be, true disciples of Christ as defined in His Sermon on the Mount.