

Sermon on the Mount



Part One: Matthew 5

The Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Adult Bible Class - Sunday Morning – Fall Quarter 2026

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Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:” (Matthew 5:1,2)

What is the most popular speech in history? Perhaps, Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address* comes to mind. After all is said and done the Sermon on the Mount is the most read and studied speech and sermon in the past two thousand years. This one sermon at the beginning of Christ’s ministry has sparked countless sermons all through the ages. At this time mankind is still plumbing the great depths of its wisdom. The hearts of men, women, and children are still being molded by its profound message. This short sermon can be read in just fifteen minutes, but forms the core of Christ’s teaching throughout his three and a half years of ministry on earth.

In the attempt to capture the essence of the Sermon’s greatness, it has been called: “The Compendium of Christ’s Doctrine;” “The Magna Charta of the Kingdom;” “The Manifesto of the King;” “Charter of the Christian life;” “The Central Document of the Christian Faith;” “Code for Christian Discipleship;” and Foy E. Wallace called it “Pentecost Pointers.” In contrast, not everyone has been so impressed with this sermon. George Bernard Shaw called the Sermon on the Mount an “impractical outburst of anarchism and sentimentality”. This rejection of the great Sermon is perhaps rooted in the attitude of skeptics like Friedrich Nietzsche who looked upon New Testament morals as a “malignant disease.” Misunderstandings and ignorance is a major factor in not gleaning the true moral and spiritual meaning from Christ’s early sermon. I once heard Paul Earnhart say, “the Sermon on the Mount is the best known of all the teachings of Jesus — it is also the least understood and the least practiced.”

Historical Setting of the Sermon on the Mount

Palestine was under the control of Rome. The Jews themselves were divided up into various factions. They had Herodians who looked to the ruling class of the Herods to bring political freedom. The materialistic Sadducees thought to appease Rome and through bargaining gain control of their own national destiny. Politically they support the Sanhedrin and the politicized position of the High Priest. The Pharisees were religious liberals who appealed to the masses and used their traditions to curry favor with God to restore an independent status to the Jews. The Essenes sought to isolate themselves from society and all other sects while awaiting a more direct Divine intervention. The Zealots were a terrorist group who sought to rid Palestine of Roman influence by assassinating Roman officials and those who collaborated with them. Eventually their efforts started a military conflict with Rome which led to the Jews’ destruction in 70 AD. None of these Jewish sects could find their brand of Messianic hope disseminated in the message of the Sermon on the Mount.

Scriptural Context for Sermon on the Mount

The content of the Sermon on the Mount is very similar to the lesser known “Sermon on the Plain” recorded in Luke 6:17-49. These are not the same discourses. The message in Luke immediately follows the call of the twelve to be the apostles. The audience for both sermons was a great multitude of followers.

Some scholars have sought to nail down a precise date and location for the Sermon. Perhaps, Jesus spoke in the summer of 28 AD during the Galilean ministry. As to the exact location several places have been suggested. Perchance no one knows for sure.

When Jesus opened His mouth and began to speak it was not as one of the learned Rabbi’s of the day. Though He was seated like the Rabbis who stood up to read scripture and took a seat when giving

their explanation. He did not speak like the scribes who quoted learned Rabbis and then gave their opinion. Jesus spoke as if He had inherent authority. He spoke as if saying "thus saith the Lord." The multitude was impressed by this fresh and authoritative approach (Matt. 7:29). He did not just give the views of others but boldly claimed, "But I say to you." These were not a collection of Jewish sayings or proverbs or opinions of the day. This sermon was radical and revolutionary.

The Greek form of the word "*taught*" implies that Jesus spoke these things often. He has already taught these things in the past and was teaching them again. It would be of no surprise to find Christ teaching some of these same truths in the future. The Christ would continuously and habitually teach this to His disciples.

Theme of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:17-20 gives the theme of the Sermon: the righteousness of the citizen of the Messianic Kingdom versus the failed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is telling the masses who are going to be the citizens of the "*kingdom of heaven*" by the character they possess and the various benefits they will receive. Qualified citizenship would have nothing to do with following the traditions of the fathers as taught by the Pharisees, but by developing a godly heart out of which righteous behavior would emanate.

There can be no doubt that this Sermon was Jesus' introduction to the "*kingdom*" which was "*at hand*." Consider the many references to "kingdom": "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 5:3); "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 5:10); "...shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:19); "*...shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 5:19); "*...will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 5:20); "*Your kingdom come*" (Mt 6:10); "*but seek first the kingdom of God*" (Mt 6:33); and "*... shall enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 7:21).

During this Sermon the Messiah was giving them a description as to what the kingdom was. It is not the same concept held as a cherished desire of the Jewish nationalistic heart. It was not going to be like the kingdoms of men on earth. It was going to be an "everlasting kingdom". It was a kingdom which was spiritual like heaven and from God. The words "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" refer to the same thing (cf. Matt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10).

By the time Pentecost after Christ's resurrection and ascension had arrived, the disciples would come to understand the church was the fulfillment of the promises of the coming Messianic Kingdom (Acts 2; Mt. 16:18-19; Acts 20:28; cf. Rev. 5:9-10; Heb. 12:22-23,28). Its headquarters would be in Heaven at the right hand throne of God with Jesus Christ sitting upon it was the King. Its nature is of Heaven, not as the nations of this earth (Jn. 18:36).

The Sermon on the Mount is structured to outline the necessity of Christ's disciples becoming the type of righteous citizens who would enter the Kingdom. First, He explains their blessed character before God (5:3-12) and their relation to the world (5:13-16). The righteous nature of the kingdom is shown in contrast to the "traditional interpretations and applications" of the Law (Mt 5:17-48). Then the righteousness is exhibited in respect to man's relationship to God (6:1-33) and then with regard to man's relationship to his fellow man (Mt 7:1-12). Jesus concludes the third part of His sermon with an encouragement for His followers to enter the Kingdom. They must begin by entering in at the narrow gate and pursuing correct way (7:13-14). As they progress down the road toward the kingdom they need to beware of those false teachers who could lead them astray (7:15-20). At the end of their journey Jesus will show the contrasts between the disciples who practiced mere lip-services to the Lord with true law abiding citizens (7:21-27). And contrasting the rewards of those who are mere hearers with blessings awarded to doers (7:24-27).

Beatitudes: the Quest for Happiness

The Declaration of Independence states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It is evident that all men equally desire happiness in their lives as if it is a God-given right. They are constantly looking for the perfect conditions in life so they will find it.

Almost everyone has lament for time to time: "I would be happy if only..." These "if only" conditions or circumstances will not guarantee happiness. Yet man relentlessly continues to pursue them. If they had only the financial fortune they desire they could lead a life of contentment. If they enjoyed fame and popularity their lives would be filled with enjoyment. With plenty of family and friends their everyday existence would overflow with joy. Others long to find happiness in the pursuit of fleshly pleasures. Many look for happiness at the bottom of a bottle of fermented beverages or pharmaceuticals.

Happiness is not found by merely looking for it in the perfect happenstance. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are they that seek happiness." It is not hungering and thirsting after happiness. Happiness happens for those who have the kind of character which leads to happiness regardless of the circumstances. First, all must seek the righteous attitudes and blessedness will follow.

One of my daughters favorite songs when she was two years old went like this: "Here's a little song I wrote, you might want to sing it note for note: Don't worry. Be happy!" God wants all his children not to worry but to be happy. The advertising world wants to sell customers on the idea that happiness can be found simply by purchasing the right brand of toothpaste or kitty litter. Happiness is not what you have in your pocket or what you squeeze out of a tube. Happiness is what you have in your heart. Jesus does not say man is blessed when the external or outward circumstances in his life change. He promises this blessed state to those whose inward attitude produce the right circumstances in which blessings can be found. Jesus is saying, "let these attitudes be in you and you will be blessed."

Others realize they cannot change their circumstances, so they look for a means of escape in order to find happiness. The Greeks called the beautiful island of Cyprus: "The Happy Isle." It was a place to escape to in order to discover happiness. Today, many escape with alcohol, committing fornication, gambling, etc. These may allow them to temporarily escape from their feelings of unhappiness but reality returns when the "fun" wears off. Far too often the means of escape bring more unhappiness in the end, such as, hangovers, shame, a sexually transmitted disease or poverty.

Through these Beatitudes Jesus shows that happiness is a quality of spirit rather than a set of circumstances. Blessedness is found through the right standard of character not a comfortable standard of living. While beaten and in prison Paul and Silas were content to pray and sing praises in the night (Ac. 16:25). Of the Philippians Christians Paul demanded, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*" (Phil. 4:40. True happiness or joy raises above mere physical conditions. Harvey Scott wrote, "the word 'blessed' is as if we 'are out on the ocean in one of our large ships during the raging of the storm. The waves are rolling high and everything on the surface of the water is disrobed and even the vessels rocking to and fro like a drunken man. But if we could go to the bottom of the ocean we would find perfect calmness - nothing is disrobed - nothing is being moved. That is the condition of the world in the meaning of the word 'blessed' as used by Jesus in the beatitudes" (The Sermon on the Mount, p. 15).

Man's concept of what will make him happy is just opposite of what the Beatitudes claim. For example, God exalts the humble, but the world exalts the proud. The Beatitudes are paradoxical.

The Beatitudes are not the world's attitudes. They all go against man's tendency. They are radical and controversial and different as Jesus life proved to be. Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, "We become forgetful that Jesus is the prophet of the losers', not the victors' camp, the one who proclaims that the first will be last, that the weak are the strong and the fools are the wise."

Blessedness	Character Trait	Promise
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 meek	For they shall inherit the earth
Blessed are...	those who hunger and thirst for righteousness	For they shall be filled

Blessed are...	the merciful	For they shall obtain 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 are persecuted for righteousness' sake	For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

To correctly interpret each beatitude one must understand they are constructed of three parts: a blessing, a character trait, and a promise. The term "beatitude" comes from the Latin *beatus* meaning blessed or happy. The word beatify means to make happy, and Beatitude means consummate bliss or blessedness. In the text "blessed" comes from the Greek word *makarios*. It is found fifty-five times in the New Testament. It implies greatness and was applied to the Greek gods because they were greater than man. Man was considered blessed, if he was dead. To the Greek mind death represented a state where man was free of all the things which keep one from being happy. However, in the New Testament the term is applied to God (1 Tim. 1:1; 6:15). In the context of the New Testament *makarios* is more than just a great state of being but is based on a condition of the spiritual heart and spiritual relationship with God. Following each character trait, such as, poor in spirit, meek, is a promise: "*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Perhaps these promises find a dual fulfillment: a present one in this life as one is a blessed citizen of the kingdom of heaven and a future one where the soul is blessed with eternal life.

The Beatitudes are not meant to be sides on a restaurant menu where one is able to pick what he likes and leave the rest off his plate. Every beatitude is for every Christian. All eight are essential for the citizen of God's kingdom. Citizenship is not for those who are just poor in spirit but will not endure persecution. Heaven is for those who mourn as well as for those who are meek. Let all these beatitudes be in you so you may be blessed.

Questions:

1. Why do some discount the value and importance of the Sermon on the Mount?
2. For what kind of Messianic kingdom were the Jews of the first century looking?
3. What were the various Jewish sects in the first century? How did they differ with each other in view of the Messianic kingdom?
4. T F The sight for the Sermon on the Mount has been positively identified.
5. How did Jesus' teaching differ from that of the average Jewish scribe?
6. What is the significance of the Greek word for "*taught*" as it is used in this context?

7. In your own words what is the theme or objective of the Sermon on the Mount?
8. How does the kingdom of Heaven differ from the kingdoms of men?
9. Show from the context of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus was not just correcting false views about the teachings of the Old Testament?
10. What is a beatitude?
11. Where do men often look for happiness?
12. How are the beatitudes paradoxical?
13. What are the three parts of a beatitude?

Application and Discussion:

1. How have these beatitudes manifested themselves in your life as you have grown in Christ?

Homework: Memorize the Beatitudes this week.

Beatitudes - Part 1

3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
4 *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* (Matthew 5:3,4)

Charles Swindoll tells the story of a man who paid a visit to his local psychologist. When the doctor asked him what had prompted the visit, the man said, "I'm suffering from an inferiority complex." In the ensuing weeks, the psychologist put his new patient through an intensive battery of tests. Next came the long wait while the test results were tabulated and appropriate correlations were made. Finally, the doctor called the man and asked him to return to the clinic. "I have some interesting news for you," the doctor began. "What's that?" asked the man. "It's no complex," the psychologist retorted. "You are inferior." (Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back, p. 117). In like manner Jesus gives us some news about being blessed that does not sound very flattering.

Blessed Are The Poor in Spirit

Jesus promised, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3). This beatitude says happy are those who know they are inferior to God that is "poor in spirit". Many in our society would argue that poverty of spirit leads to despair, not happiness. They would say, "happy are the successful, the powerful, the rich, the famous, the aggressive, the self-reliant, the self-confident, the glamorous." If you want to get on in this world, the modern solution is, "believe in yourself."

Definition of Poor

There are two Greek words for "poor". *Penes* represents the man who has nothing to spare, whereas *ptochos* describes the man who has nothing at all. *Penes* has few things, *ptochos* has nothing and must beg. Like the poor widow in Mark 12:42-44 or Lazarus rendered *beggar* in Luke 16:20,21. It is the word that describes the abject poverty of the Lord's earthly state in contrast to the untold riches of His heavenly state (2 Cor. 8:9). In this passage *ptochos* is not concerned with what a man has, but what a man is.

The phrase *"poor in spirit"* is not talking about moral cowards who are poor-spirited. Jesus does not have those in mind who have a poor self-image and who self-pity. He is not referencing those who have merely a low self-worth: "I'm not very important." Roman Catholic commentators regard it as scriptural authority for the assumption of voluntary poverty. Yet Jesus is not commanding or even encouraging a vow of poverty. Nor is being a poor man said to be better than being a rich man. Poverty does not assure spirituality. Some early Christians were rich (1 Tim. 6:17).

When Jesus said the poor "in spirit" were blessed He did not have financial, occupational, intellectual, or emotional poverty in mind. He was speaking of their attitude toward self. The poor in spirit is the man described by God in Isaiah 66:2: *"For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."*

The poor in spirit are dependent upon God. He puts no trust in his intellect, bank account, friends and family, fame or fortune. He puts his trust in God. His spirit is emptied. Many of the Psalms speak of the poor's dependency upon God (Ps. 34:6; 9:18; 35:10; 68:10; 72:4; 107:41; 132:15).

It is the poor in spirit that are the blessed. It would be interesting to know how many of the 100 richest people in the world are the 100 happiest. The answer is "few is any at all"! Why? Because the rich

trust in themselves and their treasures, not in God.

Poor in Spirit Contrasted with Rich in Self

► **Self-made Vs. Spiritually Bankrupt**

The self-made man is idealized by American society. A rags to riches story. One who can brag "I did it my way". Nebuchadnezzar looked out one day on Babylon and took pride in what he built. God rewarded his royal pride with the insanity of a beast (Dan. 5). The wealthy tend to be "high-minded" (1 Tim. 6:17-19). They must heed the warning in the parable of the rich farmer. *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 'So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'" (Lk. 12:20,21).* In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man did not go to the torment of Hades merely because he was rich, but because he depended on his riches rather than on God. Remember the unsaved man is destitute of every "spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3).

► **Self-Conceited Vs. Selfless**

Consider the observation of the comedian on the evolution of the magazine titles in our Time: Life - People - Us - Me. Remind you of modern man's assessment of self. The self-centered ego maniac has no room for God. C.S. Lewis declares, "Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind... Pride is spiritual cancer; it eats up the very possibility of love or contentment or even common sense." In contrast, the poor in spirit have a pro-God state of mind because they have dethroned self. He is not full of himself, but has emptied himself. Now can a conceited man be filled with Christ.

► **Sophisticated Vs. Sophomoric**

The poor in spirit is not the know-it-all. Intellectual elitism and academic arrogance fill the heart with pride and leave no room to be filled with wisdom from above. Yet in reality every one is a sophomore, that is, a wise moron. Isaac Newton said it well, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy, playing on the seashore, and diverting myself now and then by finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me."

The poor in spirit knows he knows nothing. It is only then that he will seek wisdom. The scholar who thinks that what he does not know is either not true or not important. Being aware of one's emptiness of head will motivate him to cry for help. Paul warned the sophisticated Corinthians, *"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise"* (1 Cor. 3:18). He is poor in spirit who can say with Jeremiah, *"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"* (Jer. 10:23).

► **Self-Righteous Vs. Self-confessed**

The self-righteous will throw his arm out of socket patting himself on the back for his good deeds. These are exemplified in the parable of the pharisee and the publican (Lk 18:10-13). Unlike Paul who realized that his apostleship did not come as a divine reward for his great education, intellect or oration, but by the grace of God (Eph. 3:6-8). It is lowliness that is the beginning of holiness.

The Promise: "Their's Is the Kingdom of Heaven"

Not just anyone can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God has entrance requirements. In effect He has said, "Blessed are those who are spiritually destitute, utterly helpless, for they shall gain access into my kingdom." The attitude of poverty of spirit brings us to the place where we can receive the kingdom from the King.

This promise has a dual fulfillment. As Christians *"Our citizenship is in heaven"* (Phil. 3:20). We are currently part of the kingdom/church. We are at present blessed to be a citizen of the kingdom with the blessed hope of seeing the King on his heavenly throne.

Albert Barnes wrote, "To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own; to be willing to be saved only by the rich grace and mercy of God". This beatitude is first because it describes the attitude one must have toward self. Until he can emptied or be totally impoverished of self, he can never be filled with comfort, mercy,

inheritance, etc.

Blessed are Those Who Mourn

"The death thy death hath dealt to me is worse than the death thy death hath dealt to thee?" These are the words mourned by a widow as she stood looking at the body of her dead husband. In any given week in our community people are mourning. They mourn for the loss of their physical possessions through fire, flood or thief. They will mourn over the loss of an opportunity, youth, health or a loved one.

The next beatitude from Jesus is a certainly paradoxical. *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"* (Matthew 5:4). People tend to be pleasure seekers. Mourning is something that we wish to avoid. Comfort detached from mourning is our aspiration. It is an idealistic utopian dream that any of us can live life in the absence of pain and suffering. No man born to woman has been so privileged to be impervious to distress and injury. Ecclesiastes 3 teaches us that there is a time to weep and mourn for all men.

Jesus teaches us the way to comfort is through mourning. *"Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted"* (Matthew 5:4). The word translated "mourn" is the strongest Greek term for the utter sorrow of a broken heart. Paradoxical as this may be, it is true. The happy heart is found in the broken heart. Arabs have a saying "All sunshine makes a desert." Sorrow and pain can teach a man more than sunshine and pleasure.

Many are tempted to blame God for all the suffering and sin in this world. It is man who has sinned bringing heartache and suffering. Do not fix the fault on God, let God fix the problem. After all, God is not necessarily source of sorrow, but He is the solution.

This beatitude is key to helping us become better Christians instead of bitter critics. Happiness is not a question of having or not having problems. Everyone has problems. "It's not what happens to me that matters most; it's how I react to what happens to me." "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is the wrong question. Instead we should be contemplating: "What happens to good people when bad things happen to them?"

Mourners Who Will Be Comforted

It was prophesied that Jesus would come preaching good tidings and comfort all who mourn (Is. 61;1,2). One of the first words of Christ's ministry is "Repent". It is mourning that grows out of the realization of sin in ones life. *"For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin"* (Ps. 38:18). "Blessed is the one who is sorry for his own sin and his own unworthiness" for Jesus came to give him comfort. Sin hurts the sinner and brings sorrow. Crying over sin moves one to cry for its removal (Ps. 55:6-8,16,22).

The mourner is not just sorry for the sin in their lives, but the sin they have committed against their God. Every time one visualizes the Son of God on the Cross, he pictures the horror of sin, the cost of sin, the pain it brings to God. Sin separates sinners from God.

The mourners who find comfort must hate sin, regret the pain and separation it brings to them and their Father, but also the hurt and destruction it conveys to their fellow man. Saul of Tarsus is a representative of all three. Years after his conversion, he would lament that he was chief of sinners. He mourned in Damascus for three days waiting for Ananias to tell him what he needed to do. He was grieving over the sin of persecuting the saints, persecuting Christ, and hurt to many innocent people. Comfort was found when his sins were washed away (Acts 22:16).

How God Comforts Those Who Mourn

First and foremost of all, God comforts us by giving us Christ. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ"* (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

God gives us opportunity to repent. He wants all men to repent and is not willing that any perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Keep in mind that only those who repent with godly sorrow will find godly comfort (2 Cor. 7:19).

Great comfort is found when we know that God has forgiven us of our sins. No longer are we slaves to sin but have been redeemed to be servants of Christ. Comfort comes from the realization of being reconciled to God and having a clean conscience.

The word "*comfort*" comes from the same root as the word "fortify". "Com" means "with". God gives us strength with which we can fortify our weakness. As the Shepherd's Psalm reads: "*Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*"

Finally, God will comfort those who mourn over their sins by giving them eternal bliss. No sin nor trouble can ever touch the eternally redeemed soul. The cause for sorrow and tears will be non-existent in heaven (Rev. 7:16,17 ; 21:3,4).

Questions:

1. Which of the two Greek words for poor is used in this verse? What is the difference?
2. In your own words define "*poor in spirit.*"
3. Give Biblical examples of self-made men who were not poor in spirit.
4. Give a few Bible examples of those who considered themselves self-sufficient.
5. How is it those who are "*poor in spirit*" are sophomoric?
6. Give two examples of those who became self-aborrent when faced with the glory of God.
7. Why do you thing it is important Jesus listed "*poor in spirit*" first among the beatitudes?
8. How is the second beatitude paradoxical?
9. List those mourners who are not to be blessed or comforted.

10. List those things necessary for the type of mourners who will be blessed and comforted.
11. List the ways God has comforted us when we mourn.
12. What are some by-products of God's comfort?

Application and Discussion:

1. In what ways do you see yourself spiritually dependant upon God?
2. God is pained by the sins of His children. What sinful acts do we do which hurt your heavenly Father?

Homework: Find someone who is truly mourning and be a source of comfort to them this week.

Beatitudes - Part 2

5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:5,6)

Years ago there was a TV game show called *Password*. Contestants would pair up and one would be given clues. Then the other would guess the secret word. On one show the contestants were given the word "meek". The clues were "timid", "weak" and "shy". This tell us what the world thinks of the meaning of the word "meek". Who wants to be known as timid or weak? The world's mottoes include: might makes right, nice guys finish last, only the strong survive, etc.

Blessed are the Meek

Jesus wants us to be meek. *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5)*. Paul tells us *"the fruit of the Spirit which is ...meekness"* (Gal. 5:22,23). The Colossians were told to put on meekness as part of their spiritual wardrobe (Col. 3:12).

What Meekness Does Not Mean

People generally have the idea that a "meek" individual is one that is extremely quiet, withdrawn, timid. Those with an inferiority complex have been mistaken for being meek. Cowardice or spiritlessness have also been referred to as meek. The meek are akin to the Milquetoast. A popular saying is "Meek as a mouse." Mice are shy and frightened creatures who scurry round the corners of life, afraid of everything and everyone. Can one find meekness by imitating a mouse or by just being easygoing? Or does meekness here mean the conformist? Someone who can maintain peace at any price. Too timid to speak up or speak out. One known to straddle the fence on important issues.

It is no wonder that so many are confused as to what "meek" means. The English word underwent a lot of change over the past 350 years. Webster defines meek as "unduly patient or submissive, spiritless" or "humbly patient or submissive, as under provocation from others, overly patient or submissive; spiritless;..." (Web., p. 891). It is sad that our word "meek" sounds so similar to the word "weak." However, these two have absolutely nothing in common.

What Meekness Does Mean

The word for "meek" is translated from the Greek word *prautes*. The word was "...used of animals which have been tamed, and which have learned to accept discipline and control...A horse obedient to the reins, a dog trained to obey the word of command..." (Barclay, pp. 113,114). Meekness is like a horse once wild, but now obedient to the bridle and bit and thus, of service and value to its master. Therefore, it is not the absence of strength, but strength brought under control! Instead of "meek as a mouse" we should say "Meek As A Horse". Just as a horse is tamed by his master, so it is the wild spirit of man trained by the Spirit of God. Real might lies in control and discipline.

Characteristics of Meekness

► God Controlled Strength

Meekness is the opposite of one being out of control. Alexander the Great, who, in a fit of

uncontrolled temper in the middle of a drunken debauch, hurled a spear at his best friend and killed him. *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city"* (Prov. 16:32).

This is not just self-control or being good natured. Many can simply learn to act and not react. The meek will let God give him strength and His laws control him. A Christian is commanded to *"be angry"*. He just controls this emotion so that he is angry at the right time, at the right person, in the right way and for the right duration. Christians feel anger concerning wrongdoing, but he does not allow it to degenerate into hatred and cause him to sin against wrongdoers. Only those with meekness can serve God with all boldness.

► **Teachable**

You cannot teach a man who is self-assured that he knows it all. Yet the meek are willing to listen to God. *"Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day....The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way"* (Ps. 25:4,5,9). Students out of control are disruptive to the learning process. Sons who do not heed their father's discipline will never be self-disciplined. The meek can be led, but the stubborn will be lost. The meek person will accept the Gospel terms of pardon without rebelling against any of them. *"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"* (James 1:21).

► **Humbly Submit to God**

No servants are more miserable than those who constantly resent their servitude. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking more of God. The meek are not demanding of God, but willing to submit to God's demands (1 Pet. 5:6,7).

► **Gentle Toward All Men**

Paul informed Timothy *"And the Lord's servant...be gentle towards all..."* (2 Tim. 2:24-26). It is in such a spirit that we are to restore our erring brethren. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness."* (Gal. 6:1). It takes moral strength and courage to be incensed at the monstrosity of sin and yet to treat the sinner with gentleness and gracious consideration. As we give our defense for our faith, we are to do so with meekness (1 Pet. 3:15). Wives are to have meekness, not weakness, toward husbands (1 Pet. 3:4).

Promise: Inherit the Earth

The promise that the meek will inherit the earth goes back to the Old Testament (Ps. 37:11). They used it as a proverbial expression to denote any great blessing, perhaps as the sum of all blessings. The Jews of Jesus day thought the only way to inherit the land was to overthrow the Romans.

Jesus did not mean to literally imply the meek would inherit the physical land of Palestine. Premillennialists interpret it to mean that Christ will reign with the meek on this literal earth for one thousand years. The Jehovah's Witnesses separate the righteous into classes, with 144,000 going to heaven and the rest to "inherit the earth".

The meek inherit the earth in that they receive the richest, fullest, and most satisfying life that this earth can give. You do not have to be rich to inherit the earth. *"as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things"* (2 Cor. 6:10). The greedy grab and lose, while the gentle inherit and gain. When Abraham and Lot need to separate their flocks and go separate ways. Lot was allowed to choose first. Lot pitched his tent in the fertile fields toward Sodom. His choice cost him the land and his home and his family. The earth is the Lord's (Ps. 24:1). And if you are the Lord's via meekness you will inherit.

Blessed are Those Who Hunger and Thirst

Whenever my wife and I have a family over to the house for dinner, the guest will often ask, "What can we bring?" "Just your appetite!" is my standard reply. Beverley is such a good cook that it will not matter if they have an appetite or not. By the time our guests sit down at the dining room table they will have one.

When coming to the kingdom of God an appetite for righteousness is a must. Those with such a hunger or thirst will not be sent away famished or parched. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6).

The Urgency of Appetite

Few Christians in America today truly know of the kind of hunger Jesus is speaking about. It is not the hunger satisfied by a mid-morning snack or a midnight glass of milk. A sip from the drinking fountain will not satisfy the thirst of which He speaks. When we talk about hunger it is because it is lunch time. When we talk of thirst it is because of a little bit of dryness in the mouth. The words used by Jesus describe a man who is painfully hungry and agonizingly parched. The Greek terms mean "to suffer hunger, to be famished, to crave after" (Liddell-Scott) and "to suffer thirst, suffer from thirst" (Thayer).

Hunger and thirst are possibly the two strongest feelings in the human experience. A good appetite is usually a mark of good health. They are signs of life. Dead men need no food; they crave no water. Without the righteousness of God we are spiritually dead. The Psalmist captures the meaning well *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God"* (Ps. 42:1) and *"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water"* (Ps. 63:1).

Reward for a Good Appetite

The term *"filled"* is a very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals in a stall. The root of the Greek term means "fodder" or "grass". We will become so spiritually satisfied that we will be like hefty, well-fed cattle. It implies a complete satisfaction. One who is filled to the point of having to loosen their belt or not able to take another sip.

If a man dies of spiritual starvation, it will not occur because God did not prepare the meal. God's buffet table is never empty. His wells never run dry. When the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness hungry and thirsty they murmured that God only rescued them from Egypt so they could die in the desert. Not so! God gave them manna from heaven every morning, a wind to blow in quail and water from the rocks. Would it seem logical for God to pay the extreme cost of His Son to ransom us from sin only to let us starve and thirst to death spiritually. God will never let his children go hungry (Matt. 7:7f).

Man has no longings that God cannot satisfy. *"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"* (Jn. 6:33) and *"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:19).

Questions:

1. How does the world view the character trait: meek?
2. What is the proper definition of the Greek term translated *"meek"*?
3. How does is a meek man under God-controlled strength?
4. T F It takes moral strength and courage to be indignant at the monstrosity of sin and yet to treat

the sinner with gentleness and gracious consideration.

5. How powerful of a hunger or thirst is represented by the Greek terms used in Matt. 5:6?
6. How does the Bible illustrate the hunger and thirst saints are to have?
7. List those things which spoil one's spiritual appetite.
8. What can one do to work up an appetite for righteousness?
9. What does the word "*filled*" mean in this context?
10. T F If a man dies of spiritual starvation, it will occur because God did not provide spiritual food to satisfy his needs.

Application and Discussion:

1. Give an example of how you are able to demonstrate meekness as a Christian?
2. What personally helps you work up a spiritual appetite?

Homework: Skip a meal (fast) and read your Bible/feed your soul. Is this too radical? Think of how often you starve your soul and stuff your belly.

Beatitudes - Part 3

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:7,8)

Stephen Covey tells the story of a sad and distracted looking man entering a subway with his gang of rowdy children. As they ran, climbed, yelled, bringing distress to all the other occupants the father seemed to be oblivious to their actions. One man decided to do something about it. "Sir, please get your children under control," he demanded of the father. The father calmly and slowly responded without much emotion. "I suppose your right. We just came from the hospital where their mother just past away. I don't know how to deal with her death and I guess they don't either." At that moment the man along with his fellow passengers no longer felt anger, but compassion and mercy for the father and the children.

Blessed are the Merciful

In the name of religion so-called Christians behaved unmercifully. Catholic persecuted Protestants out of a warped sense of loyalty to Christ. Many Protestants took great delight in serving their Lord by treating Catholics with great cruelty. Muslims attack Jews and Christians. Hindus war against the Muslims. Even among the religious mercy can be a rare commodity.

The Meaning of Mercy

The terms "grace" and "mercy" are not synonymous. Grace is kindness given to those not deserving. Mercy is kindness given to those in need. Trench wrote *"...in each of the apostolic salutations where these words occur, grace precedes mercy, an order that could not have been reversed"* (R.C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, 184). God had to pardon before us He could heal us.

Mercy requires one to understand or know another's circumstances. Getting inside the other persons' skin, feeling what they feel. We must walk a mile in their shoes. Frederick Buechner wrote, "Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it's like to live inside someone else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too."

Knowledge of another's need is not enough. Mercy requires us not only to know how the needy feel and think but change the way we feel and think about them. God demands us to love mercy (Micah 5:7,8). He desires it more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

Mercy is more than knowing and feeling. It is more than an attitude toward others, mercy is meeting the needs of other people. Thayer defined *mercy* as "kindness or goodwill toward the misery of others, joined with a desire to relieve them." When the man brought his epileptic son to Jesus he cried out, "Lord, have mercy on my son" (Mt. 17:15). He did not want Jesus to have a mere feeling of compassion but to do something for his son. When ten lepers called out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (Lk. 17:3), they did not want the Son of God to simply become aware of their circumstances. They wanted healing. When the publican prayed "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13). He did not seek mere pity, but forgiveness. People do not need to simply know how we feel for them. For example, a poor man's horse was hit and killed in the early days of the automobile. Everyone stopped at the scene to console the old man with how sorry they were. One gentleman pulled out a sum money and handing it to the old man told the others "I'm sorry five pounds, how much are you sorry?"

How to Extend Mercy

A merciful man does not turn his head and wink at sin. A Christian is not someone who forgives every one and anything at the drop of a hat. Even Christ did not overlook sin, but He showed mercy. What was the point of the story of the woman caught in adultery? Was it about sweeping sin under the rug? NO! Jesus said, "Go and sin no more". It was a lesson on mercy. The concept that the Christian is to overlook sins and trespasses is contrary to the scriptures and injurious to the offender. When one sins against us, we have an obligation to help them. To grant leniency to our children every time they disobey us is simply to encourage them to their disobedience. To feed a hungry man too lazy to work is to encourage his sin (2 Th. 3:10). To merely forgive a person the evil he has done us robs him of the encouragement to repent (Lk. 17:3).

Mercy is extended when we help others with their needs. *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"* (1 Jn. 3:17). Family is responsible for showing mercy by providing for needy relatives (1 Tim. 5).

Wesley's warning is based on Jesus' statement found later in the Sermon of the Mount *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matt. 6:14,15). Our forgiveness of others is based on God's merciful forgiveness of our own sins against Him *"Forgiving one another, as Christ forgave you"* Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32).

You and I were saved by Christ to share the Good News of salvation with others. The point is that no one who seeks to be merciful can stand by and watch others go to Hell. Teach them about Christ and help bring them to repentance. After they become Christians help your new brother or sister overcome temptation and lead them on the road to heaven.

Promise: Mercy to the Merciful

A spiritual axiom found throughout the scriptures is *"...for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap"* (Gal. 6:7). If we sow mercy, we will reap mercy. Reward awaits those who show mercy. The mercy we show to others will be rewarded on the day of judgment (Mt. 25:41-46). If we are unmerciful we will not reap mercy. *"whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard"* (Prov. 21:13) and *"For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment"* (Js. 2:13).

To retaliate is a natural reflex for some. If someone hurts you the first response is to react in kind. Then if they react in kind and the hostilities can escalate. To break this cycle someone has to show mercy instead of revenge.

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

The next beatitude is: *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5:8). Many consider this the greatest of the beatitudes. Perhaps, because it gets to the very heart of the matter of man and his relationship with God. The heart is that which includes the mind, emotions, the will. With our heart we think (Prov. 23:7), obey (Rom. 6:17), love (Matt. 22:37), and understand (Matt. 13:15).

The word for *"pure"* is translated from the Greek *katharos* from which we have the word *"catharsis."* In psychology and counseling they use the term to refer to a cleansing of the mind or emotions. Here the term means *"unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed"* (Barclay) or *"without the admixture of any element"* (Vine). Thus, in chemistry a substance is pure when there are no other elements present. In the matter of one's spiritual heart no wickedness or duplicity of purpose is present.

Purity in Heart Involves...

- **Pure in Heart**

Jesus often condemned the Pharisees for their apparent purity. They wanted to appear pure outwardly without being pure in the heart. Thus, their religion was merely ceremonial or ritualistic. Jesus once rebuked them saying, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside*

of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matt. 23:25-28). Another example is seen in their ritualistic hand washing (Matt. 15:17-20). No amount of hand washing could remove the guilt for their impure hearts. Today, outward appearances of going to church, reading the Bible, praying, saying "Praise the Lord", etc. are not proof of a pure heart.

- **Pure in Motive**

To be pure in heart would require us to have pure motives. A double minded person thinks one way and speaks and acts another. William Barclay reworded this beatitude: "Blessed is the man whose motive is always entirely unmixed, for that man shall see God." For example, if you are faithful to attend at home, but when away from home fail to attend, give, partake of the Lord's Supper, etc. it could be a clear indication that your motives for your outward devotion are more for self-display than an expression of the heart. The Presbyterians missionaries sometimes refer to "Rice bowl Christians" - a phrase used to describe someone who will listen to anyone preach as long as they get a bowl of rice at the end of the sermon. The pure in heart does the right thing even when no one is looking.

- **Pure in Thought**

Robert Browning said: "thought is the soul of the act." Or as the Proverbs 23:7 puts it "*for as he thinks in his heart, so is he.*" Jesus did not say, "Blessed are they who think happy thoughts." Neither can you have a pure heart while filling it with evil thoughts and filthy images. You should no more allow sinful imaginations to accumulate in your mind and soul than you would let garbage collect in your living room. Purity in action and word begins with purity in thought.

- **Pure in Deed**

We are to "*Abstain from every form of evil*" (1 Tim. 5:22). We do this by avoiding outward sins, such as, abstain from fornication (1 Th. 4:3). King Rehoboam "*did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord*" (2 Chronicles 12:14). The origin of men's actions is in the heart. The heart determines our status before God. A young lady who had been promiscuous and immodest in her dress became a Christian. "Now I dress as though Jesus were my escort each evening," she would say.

Promise: See God

Just how can one see God? We see in one of three ways: physically, mentally or spiritually. We could see Him physically. Yet God told Moses "*you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*" (Ex. 33:18). And "*No man hath seen God at any time*" (Jn. 1:18). Since God is not flesh and blood we cannot see Him with physical sight. However, the physical eyes can see things, but only the heart can see the meaning of things. Like a teacher who explains a math problem until the student exclaims: "I see." This mental sight enables men to discover the laws of math and nature. As Paul told the Ephesians "*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*" (Eph. 1:18). Spiritual sight enables man to see clearly the unseen (2 Cor. 4:18). We see God through the eye of faith like Moses who "*endured as seeing Him who is invisible*" (Heb. 11:14; cf. 3 Jn. 11).

In wide variety of ways we see God. We see Him in the physical creation when we view the Creator's handiwork in the universe and in nature (Rom 1:18-20; Ps 19:1). We see God as a benevolent giver though the manifold blessings He bestows on us (Js. 1:17). We see that God is love (1 Jn. 4:8) when we see He loved the whole world enough to send His only Son (Jn. 3:16). When we see the goodness of God we notice that God is Good. By reading the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we see the Father through the Son (Jn. 14:9). One day we will see God as our final Judge (Rev. 1:7). Hopefully, we will realize the ultimate fulfillment of this promise when we behold the face of God in Heaven (Rev. 22:3,4,14,15). "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 Jn. 3:2).

We have a song we sing: "We Shall See the King Someday". To "see the king's face" stood for a greatly coveted honor. The seven chief princes of the kingdom of Ahasuerus were they "*who saw the king's face*" (Esther 1:14). It was regarded as a high honor to be in the presence of kings and princes and to be permitted to see them (Pr. 22:29; 2 Ki. 25:19). That will be the honor for all who are pure in heart and what a happy day that will be.

Questions:

1. Give examples of mankind's unmerciful treatment to one another in history.
2. What is the difference between the Bible terms "grace" and "mercy"?
3. What is required in order for one to be able to show mercy?
4. Why is overlooking or tolerating sinfulness NOT a demonstration of mercy?
5. List some ways we are to show mercy to others?
6. What is the reward of being merciful?
7. What is the "*heart*" in Matthew 5:8?
8. What does "*pure*" mean in this context?
9. What does purity in heart involve?
10. T F The pure in heart does the right thing even when no one is looking.

11. How is it that man can see God who is invisible, that is, not flesh and blood?
12. Why are some people spiritually blind?

Application and Discussion:

1. How different would your prayer life be if God stopped showing mercy today?
2. What are some ways your pure heart can be contaminated?

Homework: Find one thing you hear, see or do which hinders your ability to maintain a pure heart and cut it out of your life.

Beatitudes - Part 4

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:9-12)

In the film, *The Life of Brian*, the character who is supposed to represent Jesus is speaking to his followers, and a large crowd has gathered. A few folks in the distance are having a hard time making out what he is saying, exactly who he is blessing. They think they hear him say, "Blessed are the cheese makers," and off they go, talking excitedly to one another, trying to figure out the deeper meaning of what he said. What Jesus really did say is, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*" (Matthew 5:9).

Blessed are the Peacemakers

When you consider how often man has gone to war with each other in the past 2,000 years, you would think that Jesus said, "Blessed are the warmongers." War has been a scourge to the human race. Mankind will fight over many things, such as, politics, land, race, and even religion.

What is a Peacemaker?

Someone had said, "peace is that glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload." The world would define it as the absence of conflict or war. Peace is not the absence of something, rather it is the presence of something. Peace is not found in treaties, but in hearts of men. Cemeteries are peaceful places too. There is no strife in the cemetery. There is not life either. Yet, it is not the absence of war or conflict that makes for peace, but it is the presence of God in our lives and in our hearts.

The Hebrew word for "peace" is *shalom*. This word was the most common greeting and farewell among the Hebrews. The word *salaam* is still in use in the East today. It never means only the absence of trouble; it means the presence of all good things. It means everything which makes for a man's highest good.

The Greek word *eirene* is found about eighty-eight times in the New Testament. Found in every book except 1 John and perhaps James. About 17 times it is used in a greeting. It expresses the desire for one's highest good and favorable existence. The concept behind the term "peace" is that of harmonious relationship.

The term "peacemakers" used in the beatitude demands active involvement in bring peace into the world around us. We are to be peacemakers, not just lovers of peace. Peace is to be pursued (1 Peter 3:10-12).

What is Involved in Being a Peacemaker?

✓ Peace with God

Man is at war with God. Sin separates you from God, thus destroying peace (Is 59:1-2). As sinners we are enemies of God (Js. 4:4). The first step in finding peace with God is to stop fighting Him. To become friends through reconciliation. "*And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile*

all things to himself..." (Col. 1:20; cf. Rom. 5:10).

Sin also brings an inner conflict. An internal civil war. Peace breaks out when God is in control. *"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:7). The term *guard* here is a military term. God has set a spiritual garrison about our hearts to keep peace in our lives.

Because of our vertical peace with God through the "Prince of Peace" we have a change in our horizontal relationships, that is, with our fellow man.

✓ **Forgiving**

To make peace we must be willing to forgive one another. Just as Joseph made peace with his brothers. Just as God forgave us and we must be forgiving.

✓ **Practicing the Golden Rule**

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). When Abraham and Lot had to deal with the conflict between their herdsmen. Abraham gave a magnanimous offer to let Lot choose the pastures he wanted. Abraham would go the other way (Gen. 13:7-11).

✓ **Sharing the Gospel**

The Jewish Rabbis held that the highest task which a man can perform is to establish right relationships between man and man. God is the God of peace (Rom. 15:33). He is the author (1 Cor. 14:33). It is His nature (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus the Savior is the *"Prince of Peace"* (Isa. 9:6). At Jesus' birth the host of heaven declared *"peace on earth among men"* (Lk 2:14). He established a Kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17) with the Gospel of peace (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 6:15). As we dress in the armor of God to spread the borders of the Kingdom our feet are shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). We are to go out and preach the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Peacemakers are those who *"preach the Gospel of peace."* They become like ambassadors for Christ, pleading with all to be reconciled to God. The best way to eliminate our enemies is to make them friends of God and thus our brothers and sisters and our friends too.

What is the Reward for Being a Peacemaker?

We are probably not going to receive the Nobel peace prize. Our reward is to be sons of God. Why? Because we look like our Father, the God of Peace. One of the laws of genetics is that the son is like the father. To be called a "son" is to be identified with the character of the Father. To be "a chip off the old block." We expect children to be like their father. Peacemaking is a God-like work. When God sees a breach, He builds a bridge. Where there is a hurt, He heals. The world will see our work of making peace is like God and see that we must be related to Him as one of His children. More importantly, God will call us His sons.

If the peacemakers are blessed, it necessarily follows that cursed are the "peacebreakers". *"There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked"* (Is. 48:22; Is. 57:21). "Woe to the troublemakers, for they shall be called the children of Satan." Are you a son of God or is Satan your father? Are you a peacemaker or a troublemaker? Are you a bridge-builder or bridge-destroyer?

Blessed are the Those Who are Persecuted?

What does the citizen of the kingdom of Heaven have to offer? Jesus did not say that we may be persecuted; He did not say that it could happen to us. He said that we will be persecuted. Paul wrote, *"Yea and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (2 Tim. 3:12). Remember, not all Christians are called upon to suffer at all times. Even our Lord increased in wisdom and knowledge and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). Yet, despite periods of popularity, He still went to the cross.

From the time of the early church, Christians have been the subject of persecution (Ac. 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 8:1; 2 Cor. 11:23-25).

Why are Christians Subject to Persecution?

Those blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Keep in mind that not all suffering by Christians is persecution for righteousness' sake. Some Christians suffer because they have violated the civil laws of society (1 Pet. 2:20). Others may have a "martyr complex" and either seek or see persecution everywhere. Some Christians are obnoxious, arrogant, offensive bringing it upon themselves. Other servants of God become fanatical or overzealous. This beatitude is not a general comfort for those who just happen to be a Christian and just happen to suffer in general. Suffering with asthma or chronic pain is not persecution *"for righteousness sake."* In short, the Master does not offer to bless us simply because we suffer.

Christians who live their life in a dark world let their light shine and thus expose sin. Some men love darkness more than light (Jn. 3:19,20). As Jesus said, *"The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil"* (Jn. 7:7). People get vocal if they think your righteousness makes their wickedness stand out.

A righteous lifestyle disrupts the lives of others. Status quo is interrupted. The lifestyle of the vicious and iniquitous are threatened by a few puritans. We comprise a threat to their status quo. We cramp their style as kill-joys and as prudes. This can happen on the social, political, family etc. level.

The world often fears what it does not understand and especially those who are different. Christ warned His disciples: *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 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 keep yours also"* (John 15:18-20). We live in an upside-down world. To an upside-down man, a right-side-up man seems upside down (Ac. 17:6). We do not do what they do or conform to their standards and *"they think it strange"* (1 Pet. 4:4). The only way to cause people to like you is for you to adapt yourself after their manner of life.

Reward: Their's Is the Kingdom of Heaven

The blessing for being persecuted for righteousness' sake is possession of the Kingdom of Heaven. Notice this last Beatitude reverts to the first. The first Beatitude states the condition of becoming a citizen of the kingdom, and the last describes the character of one who has become a citizen. Tribulation is necessary to enter into the kingdom (Ac. 14:21).

Persecution is a means by which the kingdom will grow. Paul vehemently persecuted Christians who fled taking and spreading the Gospel everywhere they went. Paul and Silas' patience in suffering and persecution led to the heathen warden's conversion (Acts 16:20-34). As it has been said before, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"

Reaction to Persecution

The one persecuted for Christ must *"rejoice and be exceedingly glad."* Again this is difficult for the average Christian. We find it hard to have joy even when a little thing disturb us like: the car will not start, traffic is at a stand still, too many bills and not enough money, etc. In contrast the apostles counted themselves *"worthy to suffer shame for his name"* (Acts 5:41). Or as Peter would later put it *"joy unspeakable an full of glory"* (1 Pet.1:8). We are not to rejoice because of persecution, just for its own sake. Persecution is sin. Our joy is focused on the fact that our "reward in heaven is great."

Ever complain to your parents that something is hard or too difficult for you and they respond "well, it builds character." For Christians' persecution builds patience and hope (Js. 1:5-12). Persecution is valuable to us in a very practical way, because it purges our character of dross, making us fit for the master's service (1 Pet. 1:5f)

When the disciples were persecuted they took it as a compliment. Christ was persecuted and they are now representing Him. If they too are persecuted than the world is being threatened by our positive/accurate representation of Jesus Christ in our lives. In that case, you should be more worried if you are not being persecuted than if you are. This means that in the eyes of some at least, we have been identified with Christ.

Many of the early martyred saints were able to endure the persecution, because they knew by faith

where they were going. They can take away our freedom, our health, our life, but they can never take away our reward of Heaven. *"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day"* (2 Tim. 1:12) and *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* (Romans 8:18). Heaven is eternal, not persecution. *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,"* (2 Cor. 4:17).

When persecution strikes, remember you are numbered among the great apostles and prophets of old.

Questions:

1. How does the world define "peace"?
2. What does the Greek word *eirene* mean?
3. What is involved in being a peacemaker?
4. What does a sinner need to do to make peace or be reconciled to God?
5. T F The only way to eliminate our enemies is to make them friends of God and thus our brothers and sisters and our friends too.
6. What is the reward for being a peacemaker?
7. T F No New Testament Christians in America today should expect to suffer from persecution.
8. Why are Christians subject to persecution?
9. What is the reward for those who are persecuted for righteousness sake?

10. How should not a Christian react to persecution?
11. What is the proper Christian response to persecution?
12. List from the Bible those who suffered persecution for the sake of living righteously.

Application and Discussion:

1. In what situations have you seen a need for a peacemaker?
2. What forms of persecution have you suffered for the cause of righteousness?

Homework: Find two brothers or sisters or co-workers or family members at odds and act as a peacemaker between them this week.

Salt & Light

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16)

As Jesus progressed through the eight beatitudes an ever widening gap grew between those who would be citizens of the kingdom of heaven and the nature of the men of the world. The last beatitude shows the attitude of the world toward Christ's disciples and how Christians should respond to such persecution. Now Jesus gives two illustrations of the positive impact Christians have on the world. They are not only to be good, but good for something. Salt works internally or from within the world. Light comes from an external source upon the world. The citizens of Christ's kingdom have a powerful and positive impact on the world around them.

You Are the Salt of the Earth

Properties of Salt

Today, salt is so common we often do not see its importance. Yet, in order to be the salt of the earth, saints need to understand the properties of salt and how it is such a powerful influence in this world.

◆ Salt Is Valuable

The ancient world had a much better understanding of the necessity of pure salt. Romans would say, "there is nothing more useful than sun and salt." At times Roman soldiers were paid in salt. This is where the saying, "he is not worth his salt" originated. The Latin word for salary is *salarium* and is in turn from the Latin word *sale* meaning salt. So valued were salt deposits in the earth that wars were fought, taxes were levied, and bags of it were used as currency. Salt was used in Levitical worship (Lev. 2:13).

◆ Salt Preserves and Prevents

Our forefathers knew the importance of salt to preserve meat and prevent foods from spoiling. Salt was rubbed into meat before refrigeration or packed in barrels with salt. Even today you can purchase salt cured hams. Farmers have also long understood the ability of salt to prevent weeds and grasses from growing.

The salt-like saints of the world have had a preserving and preventing influence. Ten righteous men in Sodom would have prevented the city's destruction (Gen. 19:23-33). Godly men and women can help preserve the moral values of their generation and prevent the corruption in the next generation. Salt can have an antiseptic effect on infections. It can stop it from spreading. Have you even witnessed the presence of one Christian causing men to watch their speech? We all know that there are certain people in whose company it is easy to be good.

◆ Salt Purifies

Drink hydrochloric acid or ingest sodium hydroxide and these chemicals will likely end your life. Put these two chemicals together and you have sodium chloride or salt. Without salt the body would not survive. It has been used from the beginning of time to fight contagion, purify water, heal injuries, and even remove stains from clothing.

Christians are to have a pure heart (5:8). They have a purifying and healing influences upon this sick and dying world. First, they must “*keep unspotted from the world*” (Js. 1:27). Then they can expose the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). By living and teaching the truth they can expose the filthy practices and adulterated teachings of the wicked.

◆ **Salt Creates Thirst**

We are to thirst after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). Eating salty foods is one quick and sure way to create a powerful thirst for water. Christians in this world can be salty enough to create a thirst for righteousness in the hearts of men. They may hunger and thirst for the better life promised in Christ.

◆ **Salt Gives Flavor**

Nothing brings out the natural flavor in food like salt. Salt has the power to take a bland dish and make it palatable. The word “savor” suggests “a sweet smell, a pleasant taste.” The early church made things better. At first they grew in favor with their fellow-man (Acts 2:47). You ever meet someone who left a bad taste in your mouth. This may be due to the fact they are salt which has lost its savor. Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, “I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.” But Christianity is to life what salt is to food.

◆ **Salt Is Penetrating**

Sprinkle a little salt on your grits and it finds a way of permeating the entire bowl. Rub salt on meat and it will work its way right down to the bone. Despite persecution early Christian went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4). They influenced the whole world (Col. 1:23).

◆ **Salt Is Conspicuous**

The absence of salt in one’s vegetables is readily noticed. One bit and it is time to pass the salt. The world should be able to spot a Christian without them wear a sign: “I’m a Christian”. By the way we walk and talk they should be able to tell. This does not mean the world will like our presence or influence. It is like the time we were making home-made ice cream and some of the cold salt water seeped into the ice cream. One bite and you tasted the salt, but you did not like it. Salt in an open wound is instantly felt. The pain is undesirable. But the power of the salt to help heal is a blessing.

If, however, you can live this world as a Christian inconspicuously than you may be worthless salt that has lost its savor.

Salt Can Lose its Positive Properties

Christians who are not in the world but have sequestered themselves away from the evils of society cannot have a lasting or effective influence for good on the world. When the salt is left in the shaker, the soup will never improve in taste. It is not good enough to be a Christian in this world, if the world is never influenced by your Christ-like qualities. A cartoon in a church bulletin once asked, “if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

Consequences of Useless Salt

Pure salt does not lose its savor. Instead salt becomes contaminated. Those saints who become conformed to this world will have the qualities of the beatitudes leached out of them. He will have just enough salt that he is useless to the Lord and ineffective in the world.

Contaminated salt is useless. It cannot be applied to food. Commentator Matthew Henry said, “salt is a remedy for unsavory meat, but there is no remedy for unsavory salt” (Matthew Henry). The only positive use for such salt is to be thrown down on paths to be trampled on. At least there the salt can keep the weeds from growing over the pathway.

You Are the Light of the World

Attributes of Light

□ **Light Reveals and Illuminates**

In Jesus parable of the lost coin a woman loses a coin and will “*light a lamp*” to search the house till it is found (Lk. 15:8). Light can reveal and illuminate that which is hidden or lost. It exposes dangers and

stumbling blocks hidden in the dark. A blind man carried with him a lighted lantern wheresoever he went. When asked why he did such a thing, he replied, "to keep others from stumbling over me." As light reveals the beautiful colors in a painting, so the light of the Christian shows the beauty of Jesus which can be seen in him.

❑ **Light Banishes Darkness**

When God said, "*let there be light.*" Darkness was eliminated as creation was illuminated (Gen. 1:3). Light shines and exposes the thieves stealing in the dark of night. Jesus explained that evil men hate those who let their lights shine because evil loves the cover of darkness and hates the exposure of the light (John 3:19).

❑ **Light Guides**

As the bright star in the east guided the wisemen to Christ (Mt. 2:9), so the light of the saints can lead men to Christ. Christians can let their lights shine like a runway lit up at night guiding planes down for a safe landing. Like a lighthouse along the shore to ships at sea. As the song we sing, "someone far from harbor you may guide across the bar, Brighten the corner where you are" and "let the lower lights be burning. Send a gleam across the wave. Some poor fainting struggling seamen you may rescue, you may save." We must always remember to "*shine as lights to the world*", Phil. 2:15.

❑ **Light Protects from Evil and Warns of Danger**

Every moment of every day lighted signs go up on our highways to warn drivers away from road hazards which would cause them great injury or even death. Street lamps protect the innocent from being victimized by criminals. Christians serve as warn lights to a world lost in darkness. Our conduct and the truth we speak helps to shine a light to expose those who practice wickedness.

❑ **Light Awakens**

As the sun rises in the east it will shine through the window near my bed and light up my face. This awakens me from sleep if I have not already been awakened. The shining light of a good Christian wife can awaken her husband to the need of obeying the Gospel.

Ancient cities were often built upon mounds or hills. Their lighting could be seen for many miles. During World War II the bombers were able to zero in on the cities because of the lights. Light is easy to see and hard to hide. People will see the light of goodness practiced by Christians. Those who return thousands of dollars to the rightful owners will find their story on the six o'clock news. Good deeds do not always go unnoticed in a dark world.

Our Light Can Be Hindered

Before candles, matches or light switches, there were lampstands. William Barclay explains, "the houses in Palestine were very dark with one little circular window perhaps not more than eighteen inches across. The lamp was like a sauce-boat filled with oil with the wick floating in it ...It was not so easy to rekindle a lamp in the days before matches existed. Normally the lamp stood on the lampstand which would be no more than a roughly shaped branch of wood; but when people went out, for safety's sake, they took the lamp from its stand, and put it under an earthen bushel measure [Bushel a common measure, found in every Jewish house, and containing about a peck.], so that it might burn without risk until they came back. The primary duty of the light of the lamp was to be seen. ...there can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy" (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, p. 119).

Putting a lamp under a bushel is very wasteful. Some Christians will hide their lights by being ashamed of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; I Pet. 4:16), by burning the candles as both ends working all the time to make more and more money or by being apathetic and lazy. Citizens of the kingdom as "The light of the world" must be visible to the world.

Motive for and Means of Letting Your Light Shine

Light is reflective. The moon has no light of its own, but reflects the light of the sun in the darkness of night. Without the rays of the sun the moon would not be visible and could never give light. Without Jesus "*the light of the world*" (Jn. 9:5), all would live in spiritual darkness. When we reflect the light of

Christ through our lives in this dark world God is given the glory. God is worthy enough to have His name up in lights. He is important enough to have His children act as spotlights to show off His glory.

A light must be switched on and a candle must be lighted. God alone gives light. When an actor's name is shown with neon lights, people think of the actor and his talents. They do not praise the lights. When the world sees Jesus in us, they praise Him.

God is glorified when men see the good works in our life. It is not what we are saying about God that shines forth, it is what we are doing for Him. Godly living makes God look more attractive.

Questions:

1. How valuable was salt in the ancient world?

Matching the Properties of Salt

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2. ____ Preserves | a. went everywhere preaching the word |
| 3. ____ Flavor | b. a pleasant taste |
| 4. ____ Savor | c. cured Ham |
| 5. ____ Penetrating | d. used to pay soldiers |
| 6. ____ Valuable | e. added to a bland dish |
7. T F It is not good enough to be a Christian in this world, if the world is never influenced by your Christ-like qualities.
 8. What positive influences did the early Christians have on the Roman Empire?
 9. What are some of the attributes of light and how do they compare to the Christian life?
 10. Why do evil men hate the light?
 11. What is meant spiritually by the hiding of a lamp under a bushel?
 12. Why and through what means do Christians let their lights shine?

Application and Discussion:

1. How has your salt and light influence bettered your workplace or co-workers?

2. What are some ways to can shine and make God look good?

Homework: This week find a friend or acquaintance who does not know you are a New Testament Christian and let your light shine in a way they will find out.

Jesus And The Law

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

We live in a nation governed by laws. Sometimes the laws are good and sometimes they are bad. Then there are those laws which simply do not make much sense. For example, it is Texas law that when two trains meet each other at a railroad crossing, each shall come to a full stop, and neither shall proceed until the other has gone. In Alabama, it is illegal to wear a fake moustache that causes laughter in church. In Oklahoma, whale hunting is strictly forbidden throughout the entire state.

When God gives man laws to live by some of these laws may not make much sense at first. However, God's laws are good and for our good. God never made a bad law. Man has taken God's laws and perverted them. When Christ came He had no intention of destroying the Law but to fulfill it.

Christ Came Not to Destroy the Law

Some may have thought Jesus intended to totally disregard the Law or even destroying it. The word here for "destroy" is *katalusai* meaning "to overthrow, i.e. render vain, deprive of success, bring to naught" (Thayer).

Jesus' conflict with the established self-appointed guardians of the Law, the Pharisees, may have left the impression that Jesus was at odds with the Law itself. The Pharisees tried time and again to catch Jesus in opposition to the Law of Moses. Several times they attacked Him for breaking the Sabbath Day laws (Lk. 6:1-11; Mk. 2:23-3:6; Jn. 5:2-18). At one point the rift between the Pharisees and Jesus' ministry became so volatile, the sect was ready to have Him killed (Mk. 3:6; Lk. 6:11). Eventually, Jesus was crucified as a Law breaker.

Jesus was never in conflict with the Law of Moses and never once disobeyed it. He condemned and rejected the traditions of the elders which were additions to the Law. In fact, it was not Jesus who was destroying the Law, but the Pharisees were by attaching their human traditions. They also were living hypocritical lives in opposition to both the Law and their traditions.

Jesus' disagreement was with the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law of Moses. It was the Scribal Law He was to disobey time and again. It was a vast system of man-made regulations added to the life of a Jew to assist him as far away from violating of the Law as possible. At the time of Jesus these laws were oral traditions. Later they would be collected and written down in the twelve volumes of the Jerusalem Talmud and the sixty volumes Babylonian Talmud. These rules became very elaborate. For example, if a man was wounded on the Sabbath he may apply a bandaged, but if he added ointment it was considered labor on the Sabbath.

Jesus showed these Laws were often in contradiction to the Law of Moses. They often were a result of the Pharisees' misinterpretations of the Law. Because the Pharisees were so focus on the outward obedience to the Law, they would often disobey it. This was because they could not see the intent of the Law. Jesus not only corrected their misinterpretation, He went on to give His rules by His authority.

This proves He was not just defending the Law of Moses from their abuses.

Christ Came to Fulfill the Law

There is a distinct difference between destroying something and fulfilling it. One can take a boat and just dump it in the water in such a way that it is destroyed when it sinks or the wave crushes it. Or one can place it on the water in a way it will float and carry passengers. In the first case the boat is destroyed. In the second the boat is used to fulfill its intended purpose. Jesus was using the Law to fulfill its intended purpose. This made the Law valuable and useful. When Jesus was done with His mission the Law was a success, in that it completely accomplished what God designed it to do.

Just how did Christ fulfill the Law? First, He fulfilled or completed the purpose of the Law. In fact, *“Christ is the end of the Law”* (Rom. 10:4). It was a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ for salvation (Gal. 3:24-25). It was to produce faith in Christ. Jesus upbraided the Jews saying, *“had you believed Moses, you would have believed me”* (Jn. 5:45-47). Second, He fulfilled the Law by coming and preaching the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He reminded the Jews of the many unfulfilled prophecies which point to Him. So naturally, the next way He fulfilled it was by fulfilling the messianic prophecies (Lk. 23:25-27; 44-48). There are over three hundred prophecies concerning the Christ found in the Law and the Prophets. Jesus fulfilled all of them. The fourth manner He fulfilled the Law was by living a perfect life. (1 Pet. 2:21-25). In every area of His life Jesus lived a perfect sinless existence according to the Law. No man could sustain an accusation against Him. His Father was *“well pleased”* with Him. Because He always did the will of His Father (Mt. 3:17; 17:5). Because He was sinless, He was the only man able to pay the penalty of the Law as a sacrifice for sins. By His death, He paid the penalty for our sins against the Law of God. (Ex. 34:1-9). He came to save His people from their sins (Mt. 1:21) by dying for their sins. Thus, Christ also fulfilled the penalty of the Law (Heb. 10:9). He not only shed His blood for the sins of those in His Kingdom, the church, but the blood of the cross flowed backward to cover the sins of those promised forgiveness under the sacrifice of animals. Finally, Jesus fulfilled all the promises of the Law. Beginning with the first seed promise in Genesis 3:15; the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and to those to David (2 Sam. 7).

If Jesus came and failed to fulfill the Law He failed in His mission to earth. Yet, He must have fulfilled it because it has been replaced with a New Covenant (Heb. 7:18-19,22); there has then a change of Priesthood (Heb. 7:11-14); and an end to the sacrifices with the Tabernacle/Temple system of worship.

All the Law Was to Be Fulfilled

Jesus promised heaven and earth would pass away before the smallest part of the law would not be fulfilled. There would and could be no change of Laws until the first was fulfilled. Not one *jot* would be overlooked in the fulfillment of the Law. The word *jot*, or *yod* is the name of the Hebrew letter i, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It is comparable to the Greek *iota* or dot. Nor would even a single tittle be neglected in the fulfillment of the Law. A tittle is what we call the serif. It was a little stroke or mark by which some of the Hebrew letters were distinguished from others. A comparison in the English alphabet would be how the “G” is distinguished from “C”, or “Q” from “O”. Not one crossing of a t or dotting of an i would be neglected in the fulfillment of the Law.

Jesus demonstrated that the smallest part of the Law was important. It is a futile attempt when the Pharisees or anyone tries to divide any part of God's Law into important laws and laws of little significance. The rabbis had traditionally divided the Old Testament law into 613 commandments 248 positive and 365 negative. Jesus did teach that some laws have either greater consequences or blessings to man, but He called upon the Pharisees to obey all of them (Mt. 22:34-40; 23:23; Mk. 12:28-34). Today, some try to limit the Law and obedience to it by just following just the Ten Commandments. Others claim all that one just does is love God and his fellow-man.

Citizens of the Kingdom Obey All God's Laws

Christ never required less than the Law demanded. Jesus commanded them not break any law or teach anyone to break God's commandments. Thayer says the word *“breaks”* means “to annul, subvert,

to do away with, to deprive of authority whether by precept or act.” The teachers of the Law would not only break the Laws themselves but cause others to break them by their human rules. To even break one of the laws is to be “*guilty of all*” (Js. 2:10,11). Man is not at liberty to set aside what he conceives to be little laws. All of God’s laws are significant. Furthermore, the Law as a whole is of great import.

Jesus understood the nature of man well. If a man will break the law in one covenant and will just as easily choose to break the law in another covenant. A disobedient Jew under the Law of Moses will be just as likely be a disobedient Christian under the New Testament. A lawbreaker at heart is one who chooses to break laws. A mere change in Laws will have little effect on his attitude. Only a change in heart toward the Lawgiver will make a difference.

Jesus often spoke in terms of the greatest and the least in the Kingdom of God. He was not arguing for degrees of reward in Heaven or level of importance in the church, such as, a clergy/laity system. In fact, anyone admitted into the Kingdom of Christ will be great. He will be part of a royal priesthood and a child of God.

Righteousness That Exceeds the Pharisees

Imagine the shock Jesus gave to the common people when He demanded a higher standard of righteousness than that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees would have had received an even great trauma to their wounded ego. They had a long history with the Jews for being devout. They were the separate ones who made laws to keep them as far away from being a lawbreaker as possible. Although there is nothing wrong with striving to do one’s best, these rules became traditions and then were accepted as law. They failed when they accepted their oral laws and traditions of the elders as authority on a par with that of the Law of Moses. As a result they created a new standard of righteousness based on the wisdom and will of men apart from God. To keep one from breaking the Sabbath Day regulation of not working they came up with a massive convoluted list of rules. They believed one could not travel on the Sabbath more than about two fifths of a mile from home. Then they set up a rule to create a loop hole to get around the first rule. They defined home as the place where your possessions reside. So before a Sabbath, on which they wish to travel, they would place in the homes of friends a possession and thus their friend’s home would be their home. As a result they could travel all over Palestine without ever breaking any rules. If a fire was burning in a room, a person could gather clay vessels and stack them to create a barrier to keep the fire from spreading to the rest of the room, but he could not put the fire out. A Gentile could come put the fire out as long as the Jew did not ask him or tell him not to.

They made these laws binding on the general population. The Jews even went so far as to condemn both Jesus and His disciples when they broke one of these traditions of the elders. Jesus condemned their use of traditions and accused them of using these to break God’s actual Laws (Matt. 15:1-9).

In the last week of Jesus life, He pronounced several woes upon the Pharisees’ standard of righteousness in Matthew 23. They failed to practice what they preached (23:1-4). They were oppressive (23:4). They did works to be seen of men (23:5-7). They loved distinguishing titles (23:7-10). They hindered others from entering the kingdom (23:13). They were lovers of money (23:14). They had a blind evangelistic zeal (23:15). They used foolish and blind reasoning (23:16-22). They were know to major in minors (23:23,24). They practices outward purity while harboring inward corruption (23:25-28). They were hypocritical (15:7; 22:18; 23:13,15,23,27,29). They practiced murder and deception (23:29-36).

Where would the prospective citizens of Christ’s coming kingdom find a standard of righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees? Jesus gave them a good start with the character traits listed in the Beatitudes. These eight contain the essential principles that produce the righteousness that exceeds. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount will given them further instructions in righteousness. It is a righteousness that exceeds which seeks God’s approval rather than man’s (6:1-4). It enjoys communion with God (6:5-13). It is a righteousness that is interested in heavenly treasures (6:19-23). It is not hypocritical in judgment (7:1-5). This kingdom brand of righteousness must exceed in quality and quantity anything Jesus’ disciples had witnessed among the Pharisees.

Questions:

1. Make a list of laws you have found in the Bible which seem strange or do not make much sense. Explain your answer(s).
2. Why did Jesus and the Pharisees disagree so often?
3. What is the difference between destroying and fulfilling the Law?
4. List five ways Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses.
5. How can we know Jesus fulfilled the Law?
6. What is a "jot" and "tittle"?
7. T F A disobedient Jew under the Law of Moses will be just as likely be a disobedient Christian under the New Testament.
8. How did the Pharisees develop their standard of righteousness?
9. Which traditions of the elders did the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of breaking?
10. List some of the failures of the Pharisees' standard of righteousness found in Matthew 23.

11. Where would the prospective citizens of Christ's coming kingdom find a standard of righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees?

Application and Discussion:

1. List some traditions among congregations which have been exalted almost to the level of being a commandment Christians must obey?

2. Can you think of any positive attitudes found among the Pharisees? Explain.

Homework: Meditate and discover any commandments of God which you have trivialized in the past and start obeying them this week.

Murder with the Mouth

21 *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'* 22 *But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.* 23 *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* 25 *Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.* 26 *Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.* (Matthew 5:21-26)

Jesus had just shocked His disciples by demanding their righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees. The common people looked to the Pharisees as the World Record holders of righteousness. How could amateurs like them even begin to compete with these religious giants?

Jesus does stop at demanding them to excel the goodness of the Pharisees, he also commands they exclude their badness. In the six areas which exemplify the Pharisaical brand of righteousness Jesus shows how those who wish to have kingdom righteousness must do better.

The question at hand is: did Jesus just correct the abuses of the Old Testament by the Pharisees? You will notice that when Jesus quotes what they say, it is not exactly what is found in the Old Testament. Jesus is contrasting their traditional beliefs based on the Old Law with His kingdom Law as the Messiah or King. It is true that He corrects their false traditions which misrepresent the intent of the Law. Yet, Jesus goes beyond this by speaking of His own authority: *"but I say to you."* Pharisee traditions were the bases of their self-righteous standards. Jesus condemns those standards for they are not based on the Law, but the will of mere men. Instead, He demands as King of the kingdom which was at hand a standard of righteousness which was greater morally.

Kingdom Righteousness Must Excel Pharisaical Righteousness

Pharisaical righteousness was based on traditions of men. *"It was said"* is not a quote from the Old Testament but Jesus is quoting scribes' interpretations of the scriptures. *"To them of old time"* refers to the scribes of Jewish history who have handed down their commentary on the Law via oral traditions. They believed the longevity of a held interpretation by a rabbi gave such traditional views great merit. So Jesus is not just attacking their misrepresentations of the Law but directly condemning the rabbinical, scribal, traditional oral teachings. These are often referred to as the teachings of the "fathers of antiquity" or "the men of long ago." Thus, their traditions are in conflict with both the Moses Law and Jesus.

Even though the Pharisees based their traditions on the interpretation of the Law, the Old Testament standard of righteousness exceeded pharisaical righteousness. During Ezra and Nehemiah's day the Levites and Priests were *"to give sense so that they [the people] understood the reading"* (Neh. 8:8). Over time the Jews began to except these traditional interpretations to be an a par with the Law itself. Therefore, breaking these traditions was equal to disobeying the Law of Moses according to the leaders of the Jews.

These scribes and rabbis came to think that the correct way to avoid breaking the sixth commandment ("thou shalt not murder" Ex. 20:13) was to simply keep from taking an innocent life. All the hate and anger which motivated the murder was not a sin. Murdering someone's reputation by slandering

his character or by demeaning his value as a human being did not matter.

Jesus pointed to these six cases of contrasting standards of righteousness to demonstrate that kingdom righteousness starts in the heart. Merely avoiding external guilt or practicing mere external acts of goodness do not make a man righteous. If righteousness does not exist in the heart, it does not exist at all (1 Ki. 8:39; 1 Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 16:9; Prov. 16:2).

Murder Begins in the Heart

Murder is a common crime. Homicide was the first criminal act recorded in the Bible (not counting the eating of the forbidden fruit). The Old Testament lists many murderers beginning with Cain, followed by Lamech, Pharaoh, Abimelech, Joab, the Amalekites, Absalom, Zimri, Jezebel, Haziell, Jehu, Athaliah, Joash, Manasseh, and even including King David. Herod, Judas, the high priests, Barabbas, Herodias and her daughter, and others are mentioned in the New. However, Satan is called by Jesus a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).

Murder is treated very seriously by God in the Bible. To take the life of a fellow human being is to assault the sacredness of the image of God (Gen. 9:6). The Law of Moses condemned murder as a capital offense. Murder demanded the death penalty for the murderer (Ex. 21:12). Yet, according to the Law of Moses the executing of a criminal, just warfare, accidental homicide, killing of animals, and self-defense are excluded from the definition of murder.

Pharisaical righteousness deals with murder as a mere civil issue. It consisted of avoiding the act of murder. Evil was confined to the physical realm and then it was only an overt act. Criminal intent which remained in the heart was of no real consequences.

Jesus implies that the guilt for murder does not begin just when the victim dies. Murder begins in the heart. There are many who have enough hatred in their heart to murder their neighbor, but do not out of cowardice or fear of getting caught. Should such haters be considered righteous men and women. Those who feel secure in their goodness by bragging, "I'm not so bad a person, at least I have never killed anyone" are challenged to rethink their possible guilt. To understand that all haters of men are murderers shatters one's self-illusions concerning their righteousness.

Methods of Murder: With Words

Just how could one be guilty of murder without taking the life of another? Jesus gives three ways this can be done. Each sin increases with regard to the harm or hurt done to the victim and the consequences the dangerous consequences the sinner will face.

First, one may murder his neighbor by being angry with him without a just cause. Jesus is not condemning righteous indignation. Out of just anger Jesus cleansed the Temple not once but twice (Jn. 2:14-17; Mt. 21:12,13). He expressed anger toward the Pharisees (Mk. 3:5). God Himself is "angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11, KJV). Moses becomes furious at the unfaithfulness of the Israelites (Ex. 16:30). David gave voice to anger in the imprecatory Psalms. In fact, all Christians are commanded to be angry. "*Be angry, and do not sin*" (Eph. 4:26). To never have the God-given emotion of anger is to disobey a command of God and sin.

Instead of condemning all anger as sinful, Jesus is damning anger that is without a reasonable motive. Perhaps, one is angry over someone's mere forgetfulness or oversight. The sinner will be angry over something that is beyond the victim's control.

Jesus is also condemning the type of anger that is dwelt on until it comes to the point of boiling over. This is not "righteous indignation." It is stewing over an offense by holding a grudge. Seneca called this anger "a brief insanity."

It has been said that anger is just one letter ("d") away from danger. Anger is the first step leading to hatred which can foment into murder. Jesus indicated that not only will an actual murderer face the judgment of the court of the local elders of the town or city, but so will those harboring such anger. Surely, we cannot conceive of an actual court convening to judge the hidden emotion of unjustifiable anger toward another. The "judgment" referred to by Jesus in this case is perhaps that of the Unseen Judge who is a witness of the unseen sins of the heart where murder has its origin.

The second means by which a hater can murder is by calling his neighbor “*raca*.” This was a commonly used slur used by Jews in the first century. Some scholars suggest the term used here is very difficult to translated into English. It seems to be an attack on the intelligence of a man. Perhaps, calling him an empty headed, stupid fool.” It implies one has very little brains to work with. The term is used in James 2:20: “*but do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*” Obviously, James’ use of the term was not in conflict with Jesus teachings. When you think about how smart God is compared to man it is hard to image anyone of us disparaging the intelligence of another man.

Jesus tells us there is a third method of murdering with the hateful heart. It is by calling a man “*fool*.”

Is Jesus condemning the mere use of the term “*fool*” in relation to another human being. NO! Jesus Himself called the Pharisees “blind fools” (Matt. 23:17). God calls atheists fools (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

The word “*fool*” is translated from the Greek term *moros* from which the English word “moron” is derived. It is a disparaging comment expressing the idea that someone is morally worthless. It destroys his character and his value has a fellow human being. Considering the fact that we are all morally deficient and without any redeeming virtues before God to saved us, how can any man say to another that he is a worthless heathen. Character assassination is murdering someone with words.

Once more this man is in danger, but not from a lower court or the supreme court but of Hell itself. James tells us tongue is a member of the body which set on fire by hell. Such a tongue will lead the hater to an eternal destiny of burning in the fires of hell.

Reconciliation Required for Righteous Worship

Sacrifice was esteemed the highest act of worship. The Pharisees may have taken this to mean that only the correct external actions mattered in worship. Jesus would often correct this misconceptions of men by quoting from Hosea: “*I desire mercy and not sacrifice*” (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). Substituting the mere outward aspects of worship as devotion before God will never be an acceptable replacement for approaching God in worship with a pure heart.

► **Reconciliation must Precede Worship**

Jesus envisions a worshiper taking his sacrifice and traveling to Jerusalem. He goes to the Temple and passes from the Court of the Gentiles into the Court of the Women. At the railing between the Court of the Men and the Court of the Priest he stops. As he hands the sacrifice over to an officiating priest and lays his hand on the sacrifice to confess, he suddenly remembers his unresolved issues with his neighbor. He turns to a friend and leaves his sacrifice with him and seeks out his neighbor to make reconciliation before he returns to offer the sacrifice through the priest. His reconciliation with his neighbor comes before his reconciliation with God.

Devotion to God without repentance over sin is vain (Ps. 51:16-17). Worship cannot cover-up rebellious disobedience (1 Sam. 15:22). If you have wronged a brother or own some debt, you should seek forgiveness and/or pay up. God is not just seeking sacrifices but an obedient heart. Notice the attitude of the Publican in one of Jesus’ parables about prayer, he said “*Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.*” Seek reconciliation with your brother not just with God (Is. 1:11, 16,17. Jer. 7:9-10). If there is so much conflict between you and your brother you cannot worship with him, do you really think you can acceptably worship without him? Just being right with God is not enough.

► **Reconciliation Is the Duty of the Offender**

Whenever there is a conflict between two men the question is: who is going to make the first move toward reconciliation? Who is going to be the bigger man? Jesus indicates here that it is the one who remembers he has offended or is in debt to his brother. However, He also taught that the offended person was to come to the offender (Mt. 18:15-20). Theoretically, if both men are doing as they ought at the same time they would meet each other in the middle to resolve the issue. So the most important thing they should be concerned with is not who is at fault or who should make the frist move, but obeying God and being able to worship Him faithfully.

► **Reconciliation must Be Prompt**

Jesus encourages one to settle their issues out of court as quickly as possible. An “*adversary*” is the accuser in a lawsuit. According to some ancient laws an accuser could make a citizens-arrest by

grabbing and hauling the accused before the court. Albert Barnes wrote, "It is remarkable that this very direction is found in the Roman Law of the Twelve Tables, which expressly directed the plaintiff and defendant to make up the matter while they were in the way." Before they came to face the judge reconciliation was still possible.

Time is of the essence. If anger over the offence or debt is not resolved in a timely manner, they will have let the sun go down on their wrath (Eph. 4:26). Now is the day for reconciliation, not tomorrow. Conflicts are much easier to resolve if anger over the issue is not allowed to stew and simmer over night into a big festering bowl of hate. Jewish law required the courts to demand full payment of what was owed or imprisonment to the guilty. It is hard to repay ones' debts while serving time in prison.

Solution

So, what can a hater who murders by mouth do to avoid judgment. First, recognize your guilt. Find the injured part immediately and make restitution. Then turn to God for forgiveness. Next, time you get angry do not let it fester into hatred. Sooner or later Jesus will come again and arrest you for murdering another in your heart and with your mouth. Instead, arrest murder in the making by controlling your anger and your speech.

Questions:

1. Is Jesus just correcting the abuses of the Old Testament by the Pharisees? Explain.
2. Was Jesus quoting the Old Testament or the oral traditions of the Pharisees and their interpretations of Scripture?
3. How seriously does God take murderer according to the Bible? Why?
4. What actions are excluded from the Bible's definition of murder?
5. Where did Jesus believe the sin of murder began? How does it progress?
6. According to Jesus, what are the three methods of murdering one's neighbor without taking their life? Define each.

7. T F James sinned in referring to a man as "*foolish*" in James 2:20.
8. What is the consequences of calling someone a "moros" or fool?
9. What must one who has a conflict with his brother do before he can acceptably worship God?
10. Who is to make the first move toward reconciliation in a conflict?
11. Why should the offender resolve the matter with the offended quickly?

Application and Discussion:

1. We are commanded to "*be angry*"? What makes you justifiably angry?
2. According to this passage one way to improve worship is not better singing, praying, and preaching, but our worship can be more pleasing to God if we...

Homework: Find someone you have resentment toward or you have offended and start the reconciliation process.

Adultery of the Heart

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." (Matthew 5:27-30)

One Sunday I viewed pornography on the way to church. As I was driving down the highway there as a thirty foot woman high in the sky on a billboard wearing a string bikini. What the ad was for I do not know. My jealous wife (I so describe her out of respect) suggested I keep my eyes on the road. The point is we live in a sex-saturated society. Mass media lures the attention of customers with glamorous women and sex appeal. Many of the commercials on television, ads in magazines, as well as pop-ups on the internet shamelessly displaying half-naked men and women. Movies and programs are filled with what used to be termed "soft porn." The fashion industry continues to crank out immodest apparel. Kent Hughes observed, "there is probably no area in which Christians fail more than in what they allow to enter their minds through the media" (*The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, 109). The pornography industry is perhaps the biggest venture in the world. It rakes in billions of dollars a year.

Why is our world overflowing with sexual images? The old philosophy of hedonism is alive and doing very well. Its mantra is "if it feels good, do it." Women are no longer viewed as ladies to be loved as mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, etc.

What can be done about the problem of porn? In this passage, Jesus deals with the real issue. He attacked the problem right where it resides: in the heart of man.

Pharisaical View of Adultery

Committing adultery has always been a serious sin. In the Law of Moses it was punishable by death. Both parties were to be stoned to death (Lev. 20:10; Dt. 22:22-27). A female slave guilty of adultery would be whipped but not stoned. The man who committed it with her was to bring a trespass offering (Lev. 19:20-22). When the wife was not caught in the act her husband took her to the priest (Num. 5:11-31). The adulterous woman brought to Jesus by the Jews was told by Jesus to "go and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11). In the New Testament adulterers will not inherit the Kingdom of God. "God will judge" them (Heb. 13:4). According to Jesus adultery was to be the only exception for one to get a divorce (Matt. 5:31,32).

There are three kinds of adultery spoken of in the Bible; physical adultery, mental adultery, and spiritual adultery (Js. 4:4). All three are very serious sins. Though they may have different consequences in the end will cost each sinner their soul. The Pharisees did not see how serious a sin adultery in the heart was, because once again they were too preoccupied with external acts (Matt. 23:25,26). In contrast, God looks upon the heart as the source of a man's righteousness and wickedness (1 Sam. 16:7).

Adultery Begins in the Heart

Jesus begins to expose the self-righteous nature of the Pharisees' view on adultery and marriage by looking at the source and origin of the sin. Like all sins, hatred, jealousy, envy, anger, etc., adultery begins in the heart before it is manifested in the flesh. As the hatred of the heart is murder, so is the unbridled lust of the heart considered adultery. Mere external obedience by lusting and not "going all the

way” is in fact the disobedience of fornication in the mind. The heart is the spring from which all the thoughts, words, and deeds of man flow. Like it or not lusting after a woman who is not your wife is mental adultery.

There as known a group of Pharisees who were known as “knot heads.” They did not want to see anything that might cause them to even be tempted to lust, so they walked around town looking at their feet and bumping into things. The truth is one can lust without even looking. So all they gained for themselves was a headache.

Jesus is not condemning mere momentarily observation. He does not say that if a man notes that a woman is beautiful that he is an adulterer. There is a difference between lust and mere attraction, admiration, and affection. After all, it was the Creator who made the woman to be appealing to man and man appealing to woman. Furthermore, a man may be surprised by see a half-naked woman at the gas station, on a billboard, in the store, then turn away and tell his heart “no” to any tempting thoughts.

Jesus knew that in a flash, seeing promotes temptation, giving into the lust of the eyes turned to mental adultery. This too will lead to physical adultery. For example, David saw the bathing Bathsheba. He lusted for her. Called her to his palace. They committed adultery. The end result was murder and death and decades of misery (2 Sam. 11,12). David was considered a man after God’s own heart, yet he failed to guard his heart the look of lust was the beginning of his trouble. Consider this, if a godly man like David could so quickly fall for temptation to lust how careful should all Christian men be in this regard.

Just seeing is not lusting. But Jesus was pointing to men who will cast his eyes upon a woman to “look...to lust for her.” The Greek indicates a deliberate intention of looking in order to lust.

Just being tempted is not to sin by lusting. There is a distinction between the temptation to harbor thoughts of sexual lust in the heart and choosing to give into the temptation. David saw and was tempted. He could have turned his eyes away and fled from fornication.

Related Questions

■ **Does the Woman Have Any Responsibility for Mental Adultery?**

Surely, Bathsheba’s nakedness was also a contributing factor to David. No good reason exists for a women to bath in front of any man to whom she is not married. Surely the temptress is as guilty as the man who gives into the temptation. After all, the Devil is condemned for tempting men to sin whether man concedes or not. If lustful looking is adultery, then dressing and expose one’s body in a way to tempt another is mental adultery. She also sins by using her body to be a stumbling block. *“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea”* (Matt. 9:42). Suppose a woman is totally innocent and a man still lusts. Then he sins and she can have a clear conscience.

■ **Can Women Commit Adultery in the Heart?**

Potiphar’s wife is an example of a woman who lusted after a man sexually? Although Joseph was innocent of tempting her to lust, she sought after him time and again. *“And it came to pass after these thing that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’...So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. ...when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house were inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me.’”* (Gen. 39:7,10-12). Men must also be on guard not to be a tempter. So, why does this passage focus on men? Men are more prone to lust by looking and touching a woman. Women are more prone to lust by being seen immodestly and by being touched inappropriately.

■ **Can you divorce a spouse guilty of mental adultery?**

Jesus is not saying that a man can be divorced for committing adultery in the heart any more than a man can be executed for hating his neighbor.

The Cure for Lust

✓ **Not Self-Mutilation**

When the William Tyndale’s New Testament translation in English came out, some were very concerned that men might read Matthew 5:29-30 and blind or maim themselves by plucking out their eyes

and cutting off their hands. Jesus is obviously using a figure of speech. The literal plucking out of an eye or cutting off of a hand might hinder a man from committing adultery in the actual physical sense. However, any man who can lust with his right eye can learn to lust with his left eye. Additionally, a blind man can lust without sight in either eye. Self-mutilation is completely powerless to remove the sin which emanates from the heart.

The statement in these two verses are hyperbolic. Jesus is using an exaggeration to warn them away from the sin of sexual lusting at all cost. After all, a cancerous limb will be readily sacrificed to save the whole body.

✓ **Mortification of Sin**

Mortification or putting to death the deeds of the flesh was commanded by Paul, *"therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them"* (Col. 3:5-7). *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live"* (Rom. 8:13). This is part of the demands of true discipleship where one *"takes up his cross daily"* (Luke 9:23). The lustful "eye" and "hand" must be removed to save the soul.

✓ **Radical Removal of Enticements**

Anything that causes a man to be trapped or to stumble or lead him into sin must be removed. Paul wrote of his struggles, *"but I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified"* (1 Cor. 9:27). Figuratively, Paul is beating himself up and giving himself a black eye to help control his fleshly desires.

Making sacrifices of the things you love may save you from sin. The Rich Young Ruler was told by Jesus to give all his riches to the poor to have eternal life (Matt. 19). A lizard when caught in an attack will sacrifice its tail and a lobster will give up its claw. Like a runner Christians should, *"lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Heb. 12:1). When you get to heaven nothing in this life you have sacrificed will compare with the glories up there. If you go to Hell, nothing you saved and hung on to will be worth the eternal regret and misery. Anything that morally or spiritually snares us, should be eliminated quickly and totally. This separation is to be absolute and final, not gradual. Do not be like the little boy who wanted a short tail on his dog, so he cut it off an inch at a time. When asked why he said, *"this way it will not hurt as much as cutting it off all at once."*

✓ **Watch What You Look At**

Job wisely determined to guard his eyes from sins. *"I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?"* (Job 31:1). The Psalmist declared, *"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me"* (Ps. 101:3).

✓ **Mind What You Think**

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mark 7:21-23). Therefore, we must *"keep our heart with all diligence"* (Prov. 4:23).

✓ **Run**

When confronted with temptation Joseph ran out of the temptress' house. Christians need to *"flee from sexual immorality"* (1 Cor. 6:18) and *"flee the evil desires of youth"* (2 Tim. 2:22). So look the other way. And run away if you must.

Mental adultery is a very serious matter. Those who succumb to it are in great danger: *"your whole body to go into hell."* Radical spiritual surgery on the heart is necessary to remove the enticements to sin. So, you have choice. It is either amputation or conflagration in the fires of Hell. Just remember, even if it did cost you an eye or hand in the end all that you have lost for the cause of Christ will be restored in the resurrection in heaven. The only difference is it will be incorruptible.

Questions:

1. Do we live in a sex-saturated society? Explain.
2. According to the Bible how serious is adultery?
3. What are the three kinds of adultery spoken of in the Bible?
4. T F A Christian man whose heart is "after God's own heart" can observe bathing beauties and never be tempted.
5. Is just seeing an immodest women the same as lusting? Explain.
6. Is being tempted to lust the same as mental adultery? Explain.
7. When is a woman part of the sin of mental adultery, that is, a man looks upon her and lusts?
8. Can women commit adultery in the heart? Explain.
9. List the things necessary to counter the temptation to lust with the eyes.
10. What is mortification of sin? How is it accomplished?
11. List some things a man might remove, avoid watching and stop attending to help avoid the temptation to lust.
12. How can one protect themselves from evil thoughts?

13. How can marriage help this situation?

Application and Discussion:

1. How extreme or radical should someone be with regard to avoiding sexual lust? Give some examples of great sacrifices which could be made.

2. What can women do to help avoid become a stumbling block to men? Should she be willing to make some sacrifices? Explain.

Homework: Think of about those places, activities or things in your life that either tempt you to lust or cause you to be a temptress to another and cut them off or pluck them out of your life.

Divorce by Paper

31 *“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”* (Matthew 5:31,32)

Divorce is now commonly accepted in modern society. Almost every state has legislated laws permitting “no fault” divorce. Over fifty years ago divorce was rare. Nearly everyone today has experienced the pain of seeing a loving, monogamous relationship ripped apart by divorce.

When divorce becomes common place and acceptable in the world and among the denominations, you can count on the fact that New Testament Christians are going to be strongly influenced. Some will just approve of divorce because it is culturally acceptable and legal. Others will twist the teachings of the New Testament to permit the scandalous disgrace of divorce.

Divorce is not just a modern day problem. The ancient Greeks’ problems with short-lived marriages is illustrated by a quote from Demosthenes: “we have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs.” Since there was no stigma against extra marital relationships there was little hope of the longevity of the relationship in Greek marriages. Furthermore, a double standard existed between the husband and wife. She was expected to maintain moral purity, yet the man was free to engage in any sexual activity. Prostitution was not only legal, it was glorified. Greek harlots were referred to as “holy women.” The money they collected what collected to build temples to the love goddess Aphrodite. Next, came the *hetariae* who were mistresses of men of reputation. Divorce was also common because there was little resistance to divorce in the legal process to protect the marriage contract. All they needed were two witnesses to a verbal dismissing of a wife. However, her dowry had to be returned to her intact.

During the first five hundred years of the Roman Republic not a single divorce has been found record. The first man to divorce his wife was Spurtus Carvillus Ruaga in the year 234 B.C., and he did so because she was childless and he desired a child. Seneca tells of women who identified the years by the names of their husbands. He also remarked that in the Roman Empire that “women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married.” Another cynic joked about the marriage situation when he said, “marriage brings only two happy days, the day when the husband first clasps his wife to his breast, and the day when he lays her in the tomb.”

Among the Jews marriage was protected by the Law of Moses. However, there were three different schools of thought concerning the reason(s) for divorce based on the various interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Rabbi Shammai limited the reason for divorce to adultery based on Moses’ statement “*some unseemly thing*.” Based on the phrase “*find no favor in his eyes*.” Rabbi Hillel took this to mean a man could divorce his wife for just any reason the husband found displeasing. The most liberal view as espoused by Rabbi Akiba who permitted a man to divorce his wife if he saw some woman more pleasing to him. Though men could divorce their wives, no wife was permitted among the Jews to obtain a divorce. In the New Testament the religious leaders held to the view a man could divorce “*for every cause*” (Matt. 19:3). Jewish girls became so fearful of divorce that some even refused to marry.

An understanding of the Law of Moses shows that God did not promote and permit frivolous divorce. In fact, a Jew did not divorce his wife even for adultery. She was stone to death. Divorce was clearly taught to be a defilement for a priest (Lev. 21:7,14). Four hundred years before the era of the New

Testament, Malachi reminded the Jews that God said, *"I hate divorce"* (Mal. 2:16). One rabbi wrote, "the very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth." In one unique case (Ezra 10:3-5) God actually commanded divorce. This was due to the illegality of marrying those who were not considered suitable spouses for God's children. Yet their focus on marriage and divorce was not God's original intention found in Genesis 2 of the Creation account but Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

1 "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 uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after 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 is giving you as an inheritance.

Just how did the Pharisees conclude from this passage Moses was promoting the permissibility of divorce on any grounds? To them the only requirement was the giving of a certificate of dismissal.

Moses' purpose was to prevent not provide for abuses in divorce. Deuteronomy 24 assumes the evil of divorce has taken place and seeks to regulate the remarriage of the wife. The husband is nowhere encouraged or commanded to divorce. Moses' point is if a husband does divorce his wife such divorce must not be in haste for he will not be able to take her back as a wife in the future.

Where Jesus sees Moses giving them a reluctant permission due to the hardness of the hearts, all the Pharisees saw out of this passage was a man's legal right to divorce. Again, the Pharisees were far more concerned with the outward legal steps in a divorce, than the motives of the heart from which divorce emanated. The bill of divorcement was often composed as a legal document: "Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whosoever man thou wilt". As long as he was handed to her and read before two witnesses the divorce was final. Divorce was merely a matter of legal paperwork and procedures.

Even a cursory reading of Moses' law on divorce and remarriage will show that divorce was more than a little bit of legality. It must be *"for some uncleanness."* The Pharisees came to view this uncleanness as something the husband could define on his own. Thus, if she burned his toast one morning for breakfast he could use this "unseemly" thing as a grounds for divorce. So just what is this *"uncleanness"* Moses speaks? It was not a proven case of fornication or adultery for this was punishable by death (Deut. 22). Neither would it be a case where the husband was suspicion of adultery for it was to be dealt with according to the law found in Numbers 5. It is highly unlikely the issue was over the wife turning out not be to a virgin (Deut. 22:13-21).

The Hebrew term *"uncleanness"* has been interpreted by some scholars to mean nakedness or nudity. It as some form of immodesty or indecency and is also referred to as "the nakedness of a thing." The problem with translating the word is it is only found one other time in the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 23:13,14). It must have been a reference to sins of unfaithfulness and promiscuity that stopped just short of actual adultery.

The Pharisees thought themselves to be righteous when they avoid adultery and marry only after legally presenting the proper paperwork to their first spouse. Jesus accuses them of causing adultery by putting away their wife and forcing her to commit adultery when she remarries. And the husband himself would be living in an adulterous relationship with his second wife.

Again the phrase, *"it hath been said,"* is not merely a reference to an Old Testament scripture. When Jesus quoted the Old Testament He often named the author: God, Moses or one of the prophets. When quoting scripture to deal with the temptations from Satan three times Jesus says, *"it is written"* (Matt. 4:4,7,10; cf. 11:10; 21:13 and 26:31. Jesus contrasts His teaching with Jewish tradition that distorted and misapplied the Law. Note the chart below concerning the contrast between the Law of Moses and the teachings of Christ on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

<i>Deuteronomy 22 & 24</i>	<i>Matthew 5:31,32; 19:1-8</i>
Could not put away with approval	Could put away with approval
Not fornication for the fornicator was stoned	Cause was fornication
Defiled if remarries wife	Allowed to remarry (1 Cor. 7:10,11)

In contrast to the Pharisees' tradition allowing divorce for just any cause Jesus only allows for one exception for divorce: fornication. This passage promotes the importance God places on marriage by making divorce the penalty for adultery. Still Jesus does not command spouses to divorce their mate for adultery. It is still an allowance.

The permanency and sanctity of marriage is further protected by the penalties for divorcing a spouse without adultery first being proven. First, divorce without fornication causes wife to commit adultery. Most women of that day would be left in a position where the temptation to remarry was great. J.W. McGarvey's explained it this way, "the mere fact of divorce did not make her an adulteress, but it brought her into a state of disgrace from which she invariably sought to free herself by contracting another marriage, and this other marriage to which her humiliating situation drove her made her an adulteress" (The Fourfold Gospel). When she did remarry the husband was not complete innocent of any guilt for having put away his wife in the first place. In addition to this, divorcing his spouse without scriptural cause is sinful because it shows no love for the mate. It is wrong because it could push the divorced mate into a damning relationship. The man who puts away his wife does what God hates.

Next, when a spouse divorces for just any reason it causes the other man whom the put away spouse marries to commit adultery. This is because the wife is still bound before God to her husband (Rom. 7:1-3).

Jesus also states that in the case where a spouse is put away for fornication and chooses to remarry both the put away spouse and the new marriage partner are living in an adulterous relationship. If the spouse who is guilty of adultery was allowed to divorce and remarry freely, they would be motivated to sin to get a divorce. This is view would in no way promote the holiness of matrimony. Instead it would allow the guilty party to reap the benefits of their own sinfulness.

According to Jesus' kingdom teaching on the subject when a man divorces his wife with the cause of adultery already present at the time he decides to put her away, four people can be guilty of adultery: the wife when she remarries, the man she marries, the husband when he remarries, and the woman he marries.

By necessary inference when a spouse commits adultery the innocent spouse can remarry without the new marriage becoming an adulterous relationship. However, in every divorce there is sin. This is one reason why God hates divorce.

Keep in mind that some Christians hold the view that a man can divorce his wife for any reason and then once she remarries he can "mentality" divorce her at that point for fornication and have a right to remarry without being guilty of adultery. This treatment of Christ's teaching is on a par with the way Pharisees misinterpreted the Law of Moses. Note that Jesus clearly warns, "*whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery*" (Matt. 5:32). Moreover, Christ has given a specific order of events. First comes marriage. Next a spouse commits fornication. Third, an innocent spouse puts away the fornicating spouse for adultery. Finally, the innocent spouse can remarry without it being an adulterous marriage. Compare this to Jesus' plan of salvation: to be saved a man must hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized. If he changes the order to believe and be saved then get baptized, he has not obeyed Jesus' plan of salvation. He is still living in sin. Likewise, if a man divorces his wife, then when she remarries, he accuses her of fornication, he is not obeying the order Jesus outlined. When he remarries, he will still be living in sin.

From the first book to the last book of the Old Testament God promotes the holiness of matrimony. In Jesus' Kingdom He continues to protect the sanctity of marriage with His commandments.

Questions:

1. What are several factors which play a role in the current high divorce rate?
2. What are some of the aspects of Greek culture that promoted divorce?
3. What are the three different views the Jews held on Deuteronomy 24:1-4.
4. How was adultery handled in the Old Testament?
5. T F According to the Jesus divorce was merely a matter of proper legal paperwork and procedures.
6. What is "uncleanness"?
7. Explain how there could result four adulterers when a man divorces his wife for just any reason.
8. T F Jesus' statement "*it hath been said*," is merely a reference to an Old Testament scripture.
9. Show the contrast between the Law of Moses and the teachings of Christ on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.
10. Is a spouse guilty of fornication free before God to remarry? Explain.
11. When can a spouse be allowed to remarry without it being adultery?

12. What is the "mental" divorce position and why is it wrong?

Application and Discussion:

1. If a man and woman have divorced, but not for the cause of fornication, what two options do they have? (See 1 Cor. 7:10,11).

2. If a man is found to be a drug dealer and a murderer, is a wife permitted by Jesus to divorce him on these grounds alone? Explain.

Homework: Find a friend, co-worker, family member or neighbor who is having marital problems and encourage them to work out their differences and avoid the sin of divorce.

Oaths Without Performance

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." (Matthew 5:33-37)

Although there may be a technical distinction between an "oath" and a "vow" in Scripture, we have chosen to consider them as one and the same. An oath is a solemn promise or statement that something is true, which God is called upon to witness. It was often accompanied by raising up the hand (Gen. 14:22; Dn. 12:7; Rev. 10:5,6; Dt. 32:40). The usual formula of an oath was:

"God is witness betwixt me and thee" (Gen. 31:50)

"As Jehovah liveth" (Jug. 8:19; 2 Sm. 2:27)

"As my soul liveth" (1 Sam. 1:26; 25:26)

"Before God I lie not" (Gal. 1:20)

"By the Lord" (2 Sam. 19:7)

"God is witness" (Gen. 31:50; 1 Th. 2:5)

"I call God for a record" (2 Cor. 1:23)

"I charge you by the Lord" (1 Th. 5:27)

"The Lord do so to me, and more also" (Ruth 1:17)

Is it Wrong to Promise via a Vow?

Paul swore "*Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth*" (2 Cor. 1:23) and so did the angels. "*The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer*" (Rev. 10:5,6). Since the angels are lower than God, they can swear by someone greater. Did the angels do what God forbade man to do?

Jesus swore (Matt. 26:63f). To "adjure" is, "to cause to swear, to lay under the obligation of an oath." it is in the intensive form. According to Thayer "adjure; to demand testimony under oath" (p. 453).

Oaths in court are still oaths. The word "affirm" as a substitute for the word "swear" does not alter the fact that He has sworn. Did Jesus do what He told others not to do? Jesus did not forbid the practice here, but rather, practiced it.

Even God swore. "*For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself*" (Heb. 6:13). This involved the promise God made in Abraham. God swore by Himself (Gen. 22:16,17; Heb. 6:13-18; 7:21) because He always says what He means and means what He says.

Did Jesus condemn the swearing of oaths altogether or did He condemn the abuse of vows in Matthew 5:33-37? Let us consider the context. Some of the elders of the Pharisees had drawn the conclusion to break an oath given in the name of the Lord was sinful and profane. That is why the name of God of Israel, commonly spelt Yahweh, came to be called the ineffable name, because it was forbidden

to pronounce it. The public reader in the synagogue, coming on this name in the scripture lesson, put some other form in its place, lest he "should 'take the name of the Lord his God in vain' by saying 'Yahweh' aloud. However, certain promissory vows invoked in the name of things and mortal persons were not so binding. So as to give their claims more credibility, they would swear by the temple, by their head, by heaven or by the earth. They had divided vows into two classes: those absolutely binding because God's name had been used, therefore making God a partner in the transaction, and non-binding vows which had evaded the use of God's name. "The result was that evasion had been brought to a fine art" noted William Barclay. This was nothing more than a religious way to lie. Thus, Jesus here is condemning evasive swearing not the swearing of all oaths.

The principle that Jesus is teaching is that one must see God in every aspect of his life and live truthfully before Him. To swear by heaven was to swear by His throne (Mt. 23:22) the earth His footstool (Is. 66:1); or Jerusalem, His own city (Ps. 48). To swear by one's own head is to swear by one's life. It will be binding whether one has made a formal oath or not.

Bible teaching would condemn "forswearing." "Forswear" means "to swear falsely, to undo one's swearing" (Vine). You do not make a false thing true by swearing. It would also condemn frivolous swearing. Even little children, engage in the most frivolous and profane swearing imaginable, such as, "cross my heart and hope to die."

Contrast is between their perverted and traditional views and the Law in its purity and the Law of Christ. God's original law on swearing forbade perjury (Lev. 19:12; Dt. 23:23). Swearing is absolutely prohibited under the conditions described in the context. The Old Testament allowed frivolous swearing (33), so long as God's name was used and the oaths were kept. Jewish tradition approved evasive swearing (vv. 34-36), as long as the Lord's name was not employed. Jesus did not forbid solemn and truthful judicial oaths or religious oaths. Jesus warned *"unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Mt. 5:20; cf. Lev. 9:12; Num. 30:2, and Dt. 23:21).

Moses demanded that, in swearing, people should use the name of God rather than those for idols (Dt. 6:13-15). They should be truthful and perform what they had sworn to do (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Dt. 23:21-23). "What we style the judicial oaths of the law of Moses, then, were not included in the prohibition" (J.W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*).

A disciple of Jesus must let his "yes" be "yes." The Christian's "word is his bond." His proven character will be the strongest possible affirmation of the verity of his words. His truthfulness and character should make an oath completely unnecessary. The idea that a man or woman can be trusted to speak the truth only when under oath springs from dishonesty and suspicion. These oaths do not cause them to be any more believed or any more highly thought of. James commands us, *"but above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment"* (James 5:12).

This sort of oath taking *"cometh of evil."* Such is because of untruthfulness on the part of a world full of falsehood and originates from Satan who is the father of lies and liars (John 8:44).

It is concluded that Jesus is dealing with men who swear, but do not perform unto the Lord their oaths. We are to *"perform unto the Lord thine oaths"* (Mt. 5:33).

Solomon speaks specifically concerning man's failure to keep his promises in Eccl. 5:1-6. *"Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed-- Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?"*

When one breaks a vow to God or man three things happen: 1) He has classified himself as a fool. Words are cheap; performance is dear. He was too impractical or unrealistic to take stock of in his true capabilities. 2) He has incurred God's displeasure 3) Finally, the vow breaker has sinned, without excuse

(6). "Why didn't you do what you said you would do?" And we are tempted to reply: "I made a mistake; I was hasty; I take it back."

The following points are tips on how a Christian should keep his vows.

✓ **Avoid Rash Vows**

The Scriptures furnish plenty of examples of men who made rash vows (Eccl. 5:1). King Herod promised a dancing step-daughter up to half of his kingdom. He regretted this rash utterance when she requested the head of John the Baptist (Mt. 14:7-9). Forty Jews bound themselves to an oath not to eat till they killed Paul, but God had other plans for the life of Paul (Ac. 23:21). The Israelites were tricked into a hasty treaty with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:15,16). Jephthah of Gilead vowed to sacrifice the first thing he saw when returning home. To his dismay it was his daughter, the saw first (Jg. 11:31-39). And don't offer vows beyond your capability. Flip Wilson, as his character Geroaldine, put it this way, "Don't let your mouth write a check your body can't cash."

✓ **Take Them Seriously**

Yet, what about the person who enters into a covenant without the sanction of God? Is his word his bond? A woman makes a vow unto the Lord which vow was denied by her husband, she was not obligated to keep her word in the matter. Similarly, a female child could violate her bond if her father disallowed it (Num. 30:4-8). A complication is seen in the matter of those who make a vow in ignorance contrary to God's will, such as Israel with the inhabitants of Gibeon. God had told them to make no covenant with any inhabitant of the land (Dt. 7:2; 20:16,17; Jg. 2:2; Ex. 23:12). The Gibeonites tricked the Israelites into making a vow by passing themselves off as a poor people for a far off land. Joshua decreed that the covenant was to be honored in spite of the unfortunate circumstances that led to it (Josh. 9:18-31). The account becomes even more interesting when one takes note of the fact that the Israelites under David suffered a famine for three years because Saul raised his hand against the Gibeonites. It was only after the handing over of seven sons of Saul to Gibeon was the famine lifted and the anger of the Lord assuaged (2 Sam. 21:1-9). Later the marriage vows to foreign women were preempted by their prior contract with God's Law. Both examples clearly illustrate the need to take our vows seriously.

✓ **Do it Even if it Inconveniences You**

The watchword of the present age is expediency, the man of Zion is one *"who keeps his oath even when it hurts"* (Ps. 15:4, NASV). Even old Herod, as mean as he was, respected an oath when he made it (Mk. 6:23).

✓ **Say "If the Lord Wills"**

The events of this life are beyond our control. We cannot add one day to our life. The vows we make to God and others are subject to the will of God concerning the duration of our lives, direction of your lives and the Day of Judgment (Js. 4:15).

✓ **Be Careful Not to Vow To Perform What is Contrary to God's Word**

Like Esau, who in anger swore, *"I slay my brother Jacob"* (Gen. 27:41). Masonic oaths require the initiate to keep secrets of the lodge, lest he have his throat slit, his forehead opened, or be disemboweled. A man promised to divorce his wife if she wrecked the car. Divorce for this reason is wrong. The oath or threat was sinful in and of itself.

✓ **Perform Without Delay**

"When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you" (Deut. 23:21).

Perhaps this is one of the biggest mistakes with regard to making promises. It is too easy to procrastinate. Well meaning individuals get in over their heads by making commitments beyond their time restraints.

✓ **Fulfill Vows Voluntarily**

"That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth" (Deut. 23:22).

After all the vow was not forced upon your lips, so keep them willingly and not because someone

compels or forces you to honor your word. Christians should long to be honest and true.

Questions:

1. What is an oath?
2. Give examples of where Paul or Jesus swore or made a vow?
3. T F God has never swore a vow in regard to making a promise.
4. How did the Jews divide oaths? Why?
5. Jesus does not condemn swearing in general, but when one does make a vow to do something Jesus commands him to...
6. What does it mean to "forswear"?
7. Under what conditions is swearing an oath forbidden?
8. Why does James tell Christians not to swear the oaths designed by the Pharisees?
9. According to Solomon what three things happen when one breaks a vow to God?
10. List those in the Bible who made some rash vows.

11. Why did James advise Christians to say "*if the Lord wills*"?
12. What can be learned about the making of vows in the story of Joshua and the Gibeonites?

Application and Discussion:

1. In like of this lesson do you think in the future you will make promises with "God is my witness" or "on my mother's grave" attached? Explain.
2. Have you ever make a sincere promise you were unable to keep do to circumstances beyond your control? What can you do about it now?

Homework: Think about a promise you have made in the past you have yet to fulfill and work on it this week.

Vengeance

38 *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* 39 *But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.* 40 *If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.* 41 *And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.* 42 *Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.* (Matthew 5:38-42)

An inmate in a prison photo was leaning against the bars of his cell with a big grin on his face. His t-shirt claimed: "I don't get mad. I get even!" Perhaps, claiming his right to revenge is what landed him in jail. Today, everywhere people are demanding their rights: civil rights, women's rights, children's rights, workers' rights, prisoners' rights, etc. Jesus shows that in His Kingdom the rights of the citizens are not of primary importance. He indicates that true righteousness may be best illustrated by those who freely give up their rights, even to revenge. When someone hits you, you do not always need to exercise your "right" to hit back harder. This may only create a vicious cycle of revenge. When rights are first, righteousness suffers.

The Teachings in the Law of Moses

The Law of Moses on retribution reflects the fundamental legal concept of *quid pro quo* or law of like for like. If a criminal takes another's eye in like manner his eye will be taken. It is a just law because it strives to match the punishment equally with the offense committed. It is a good law in that it prevents excessive retribution on a criminal. The punishment could not exceed the damage done by the crime. It was a merciful law in that it restrained the hate and wrathful impulses of the victim and/or his family. It stopped one for being killed over a lost eye. It limited vengeance. It prohibited cruel and unusual punishment. Though it may appear savage to us it was kind compared to the historical setting where death was the penalty for the slightest offence. The Old Testament laws encouraged mercy (Lev. 19:18; Prov. 25:21; Prov. 24:29; Lam. 3:30). Finally, it was a judicial law to curtail vigilante justice as it was to be administered by duly authorized magistrates (Lev. 19:18; Pr. 20:22). Crimes have to be dealt with publically in the justice system and in accord with due process of law. Even in the case of murder the avenger of blood became an officer in executing punishment of the murderer.

Pharisees' View

The traditions of the Pharisees saw retaliation as more of a personal right to be enjoyed under the Law. Justice had to be carried out. One must avenge himself and his family so long as it did not exceed the measure prescribed in the Law. With the attitude it is good to return evil for evil. To them getting even is just a means of settling accounts. It was as if it were their civil and moral duty to see to it that every man got what he had coming to him. It was "tit for tat, you kill my dog I'll kill your cat."

The Law of Christ on the Subject

Christ did not teach the idea of just showing mercy and forgetting any and every offence. He too is a God of justice. Sometimes evil had to be restrained. Jesus cast out the money changers from the temple on two different occasions. Jesus rebuked the high priest for having Him smitten (Jn. 18:22,23) contrary to the Law. Paul smote Elymas blind for a season (Acts 13:6-13). He championed his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25). He challenged the magistrates at Philippi for their unjust treatment of the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ac. 16:35-40). He accused Ananias, the high priest, of being a "whited

wall” and a law violator himself (Ac. 23:1-3). He even appeal to Caesar. Prayers of divine vengeance were common in the Old Testament. Jesus Himself would return in the clouds of judgment upon Jerusalem to punish them in 70 AD (Matt. 24:1f). He used the Roman legions to destroy the wicked nation who killed Him. All Christians must “*resist the devil*” (Js. 4:7). Evil must be firmly resisted within the local church (Gal. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:13. Mt. 18:15-17. 1 Tim. 5:20).

What Jesus is teaching is not a restraint upon the duties of the government authorities (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:13,14). In fact, God has ordained the government to protect the rights of the innocent and punish evil doers. The Bible no where teaches that He has given them the duty to rehabilitate criminals. It is true that not all agents of the government behave according the role given. Some are too negligent and some are too aggressive and unfair. Leo Tolstoy thesis of *War and Peace* is that the elimination of police, the military, and other forms of authority would bring a utopian society. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:19-31) and He has employed the government as an arm of justice (Rom. 13:1-8).

Keep in mind that Jesus is focusing on personal retaliation and spite against an offender. Though nothing that Jesus is saying excludes self-defense it does encourage Christians to seek non-violent ways to resolve conflicts. A Christian is one who seeks to promote peace, love, and forbearance. James and John wanted Him to call down fire on a Samaritan village because the Samaritans wouldn't give them lodging. Jesus did not go along with the views of these sons of thunder. Neither did He permit Peter to take vengeance for Him and He restrained His own power (Mt. 26:52,53).

Does personal integrity demand a like response for an offence? It may be a natural reflex to take a swing at someone who has just hit you. However, Jesus, our example, turned the other cheek (1 Pet. 2:21-22). He did not turn around and punch the high priest in the nose after he was struck (Mt. 26:67-68). This is not necessarily to be taken literally. Jesus did not literally present his other cheek to be struck. This command of Jesus takes the focus off personal rights and one's wounded pride. Revenge is not the proper response.

Not only does Jesus promote saving face when offended, Christians have a right to give up their right to things. Jesus did not have a great deal of worldly possessions. If it was demanded a man give up his tunic via a court ruling Jesus said give them your cloak as well. The Jewish garment called the tunic was a long inner garment of cotton or linen. Even the poorest man would have a change of tunics. The cloak was an outer garment like a robe. It could correspond to a coat. According to the Law man's cloak could not be taken permanently from him (Ex. 22:26-27). However, one could voluntarily give up a clock to settle a debt. This does not mean if we are robbed we give extra to a criminal. It does not mean we have to give more to a beggar than he needs. If the courts rule we owe a man then willing pay up even to the point of giving up your RIGHTS to keep you cloak.

Jesus had commanded His disciples to be willing to give up their rights to retaliate, protect their wounded pride, and their rights to keep things. He even tells them to give up their rights concerning their time. Roman law gave one on official business for the government the right to compel into service any person, beast of burden, or means of transportation to assist him. A Roman official could only legally compel one to carry his pack for a milion or one Roman mile which was about one hundred and fifty yards short of a standard mile of today. The civilian would not be reimbursed for his help. The Roman soldiers who were tasked with crucifying Christ compelled Simon of Cyrene to bear the cross of Jesus (Mt. 27:32). To the average Jew helping a Roman official was the very lowest of duties. It was like aiding and abetting the enemy of your people. Like an American called upon to carry a backpack filled with weapons for the Taliban. Jews were so precise about not helping a Roman official one more step than was required. To insure this they would drive a stake in the ground exactly one mile from their home. According the traditions of the Pharisees this is all a Jews should do. He was not to carry the pack one step beyond the mile marker.

Jesus commanded His citizens to excel the standards of the Pharisees. They were to volunteer themselves to go the second mile which was not required. Those who go the second mile are sons, doing their best to please their Father in Heaven. The Good Samaritan is an example of a “second miler.” The first mile was out of compulsion. The second mile as out of a cheerful heart serving the Lord. Paul said, “*whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord*” (Col. 3:23). Kingdom citizens do not do just was is required

of them to do. They do not look for the minimum requirements (Luke 17:10). They go beyond.

What if Christians of today were not focused so much on what they have to do, but on what they can cheerfully do for the Lord? Instead of asking, "do I have to attend Wednesday night Bible Study?" they should say, "I get to attend." Some attend Sunday morning worship out of a mere sense of obligation. Why not attend Sunday evening out of a sense of loving devotion? Some pray because they feel it is their duty. The extra mile is: "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Th. 5:17). Those employees who do just enough to keep from being fired do not get promoted. Those saints who try to do just enough to keep from the fires of hell, may fail to be promoted to heaven. Jesus was looking for the type of man who would be willing to say, "If you'd like it carried farther, I will gladly carry it for you."

Once someone starts messing around with another's right to their money, they have gone too far. Giving and lending to others is risky business. Why? Because we love our money. This does not mean we blindly hand over our funds to a sluggard who will not work (2 Th. 3:10) or give a bottle of whisky to a drunkard. Instead of being selfish and vengeful, Christians should be generous and liberal. Abraham exhibited this attitude toward his nephew Lot by giving him the first choice of the land (Gen 13). The Good Samaritan gave freely to one in need.

How A Christian Gets Even

Paul gives some clues to how a Christian is to go about getting even in Romans 12:17-21. First, "*repay no one evil for evil*" (12:17). Marcus Aurelius said, "the most complete revenge is not to imitate the aggressor." Next, "*live peaceably with all men*" (12:18b). When you give someone a piece of your mine you lose your peace of mind. Third, turn your right to avenge over to God (12:19). Vengeance is the Lord's prerogative. Do not think you have the right to rob God of His right. Do not play God. God will bring vengeance on the vengeful (Ezek. 25:15-17). God is a better Judge in giving just vengeance upon an evildoer. Also do good to your enemy (12:20a). Benjamin Franklin once said, "doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one makes you but even with him; forgiving it sets you above him."

Paul concludes with the result of getting even in this manner: "*for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head*" (12:20b). The Christian's desire to overcome his enemy is by changing him not by destroying him. When Paul was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (Ac. 16), he did not take revenge on the jailer, instead he won him and his family to Christ. In addition, by following Paul's advice one will be victorious and not overcome. "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (12:21). Sir Winston Churchill said, "nothing is more costly, nothing is more sterile, than vengeance." If you want to simply lose ground just start throwing mud.

Questions:

1. What is the principle of *quid pro quo*?
2. What kind of law was this as it is taught in the Old Testament?
3. What was the view of the Pharisees on this issue of retaliation?
4. Give illustrations showing that the New Testament teaching was not prohibiting the restraint of evil by Christians?

5. Does Jesus' teaching here apply to the government? Explain.
6. Does this teaching preclude any form of self-defense by Christians?

7. What is a tunic and what is a cloak?

8. Why did the Jews recoil at the law compelling them to help carry baggage a mile down the road?

9. Does Jesus encourage Christians to give and lend money to just anybody without exception? Explain.

10. According to Paul how do Christians get revenge?

11. What are the two results of a Christian using Paul's guidelines on getting even?

Application and Discussion:

1. What are some ways we can be "second-milers" in service to Christ?

2. How might these teachings of Jesus assist us in sharing the Gospel with others?

Homework: Find someone who has done you wrong and practice getting even Paul's way - today.

Enemies

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Jesus clearly implies that citizens of His Kingdom will have enemies. It is an honor to have friends. Perhaps, it is a bigger complement to our Christian life that we have enemies. Theodore Roosevelt said a man who has no enemies is a man who does nothing. Perhaps, he was on to something. Jesus warned His disciples that the world would hate them. *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"* (Jn. 15:18-20). Some of these enemies will come out of a Christian's own family. Jesus also warned, *"for I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'"* (Matt. 10:3). In fact, if you claim as a disciple that you have no enemies, such may not be something you want to brag about. *"Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). To be sure all of God's enemies should be everyone of His sons' and daughters' enemies. So, if you do not have enemies, perhaps it is time to go out and get you some.

Once you find yourself some enemies, what should you do with them? Jesus' standard of righteousness teachings us to love and do good to them. The Pharisees came up with a whole different set of rules on how to regard their enemies.

The Pharisees' View on Loving Enemies

- **Perversion by Misapplication**

The Pharisees were familiar with the Law's commandment to *"love thy neighbor as thyself"* (Lev. 19:18). But if you interpret *"neighbor"* to mean those who are faithful Jews your love is limited. Enemies would be excluded. A Pharisee could see no command to love a Gentile or sinner. In fact, if he were to keep this law it meant you could not love his enemy. A neighbor is merely someone who is near to you. In this case a Gentile or sinner or enemy could classify as a neighbor. The scribes and Pharisees also despised and looked down on the common people (Jn. 7:48-49). There was enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. *"Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"* (Jn. 4:9). They counted publicans as their enemies because they collected taxes for the Romans. When Jesus was asked, *"who is my neighbor?"* (Lk. 10:25-27). He did not directly answer it but provided the parable of the Good Samaritan instead. He showed that the real questions to be asked is: *"am I a good neighbor?"* He implied even a Samaritan can be a neighbor. And a neighbor is anyone who is near and anyone who is in need of you to be near them.

- **Perversion by Omission**

Notice the Pharisees tradition left out *"as yourself."* While disqualifying their enemies from the command to love, they also omitted the standard of how to show love to one's neighbor.

- **Perversion by Addition**

No translation or version of this passage in the Law of Moses mentions anything like “hate thine enemy.” Perhaps, Rabbinic Tradition tried to justify this addition on the basis of the imprecatory psalms (Ps. 69:22-24). Even the Essenes at Qumran prescribed hatred for the outsider in their Manual of Discipline.

The Mosaical Law on Loving Enemies

The Law of Moses in several passages did teach repulsion of pagan perversions and heathen habits (Deut. 7; Josh. 23:12,13). Some nations were noted in particular due to the high national threat level they posed to Israel (Deut. 23:6). They were forbidden by law to make peace with the Canaanites (Ex. 34:11f).

Moses taught the children of God to give a proper treatment of strangers in their land “*And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God*” (Lev. 19:33,34). Furthermore, the term “neighbor” is used in the Old Testament to include those who are not of the stock of Israel. They were encouraged to help not just their own countrymen, but also enemies (Deut. 22:1-4).

In fact, the Old Testament is filled with examples of love for one’s enemies. Job did nothing himself to harm his enemies and he did not rejoice when harm came to them from any other source (Job. 31:29-30). David in a cave near Engedi, had opportunity to destroy King Saul while he slept but did him no harm though the king sought to kill David (1 Sam. 24:13). Even later when one of Saul’s relatives, Shimi, threw rocks and hurled insults at David, David would not retaliate (2 Sam. 16:5-10). Some of David’s prayers in the Psalms represent loving concern for even his enemies (Ps. 7:4,5; 35:12-15).

Jesus Teaching on Loving Enemies

“*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” was oft repeated by Jesus throughout His ministry (Mt. 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Luk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Js. 2:8).

♥ **Love Them**

Did Jesus required the impossible of His disciples? It sounds like a part of a utopian dream where everyone can just love each other and get along. Can a saint really love the unholy? What about loving rapist, murderers, pornographers, child molesters, etc? Even Jesus disciples struggled with showing hate toward those who were the enemies of Christ. The “*sons of thunder*”, James and John, wanted Jesus to call down fire upon the cities of the Samaritans who rejected Jesus (Lk. 9:51-56). When Jesus was about to be arrested Peter drew a sword and cut off the ear of Malchus (Jn. 18:10).

First, we must keep in mind that in the Greek there are different words for love. Sexual love is represent in the term *eros*. *Storge* refers to love for family members. *Phileo* is the love one has based on friendship and emotion. These first three types of love are too limited for the love of enemies. However, *agape* is love which is not founded on friendship, emotion, physical relations or an act of the flesh. It is a love that seeks and works to meet the needs of another no matter what your current attitude may be toward them or how you feel and conversely how they feel about you. Agape love is need-oriented. One can show this love to their enemies by understanding there is good in everyone, none of us are perfect, God is the Ultimate Judge of the wicked, and God has set a perfect example. Jesus loves his enemies. The best way to get rid of our enemies is to love them to the point they are turned into our friends, brothers and sisters, and fellow-lovers of God.

♥ **Bless Those Who Curse You**

While the mob was gathered around the cross, they were hurling insults at Jesus while He hung on that cursed tree, Jesus blessed those who cursed Him. “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). What greater blessing can be bestowed on our enemies than to seek their eternal good rather than their eternal damnation.

♥ **Do Good to Those Who Hate You**

Agape is an active good-will toward our enemies. This goodness is not earned by our enemies, anymore than we earned the love of Christ. It is not easy to give love when you are the object of

someone's hate. By doing good one can open up the lines of communication and perhaps begin to end the enmity. Wrongs can finally be righted. Misunderstandings can be resolved.

♥ **Pray For Them**

Instead of balling up your hands into a fist to fight your enemies, fold your hands in prayer and face the Lord on their behalf. Jesus is not talking about us praying for our enemy to get run over by a truck. Your prayers for your enemies can actually serve as a tool to keep you from being destroyed by bitterness and anger. No matter how much they hate you, they cannot keep you from praying for them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor who suffered and eventually was killed in Nazi Germany, wrote of Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:44, "This is the supreme demand. Through the medium the prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God" (The Cost of Discipleship, 1960, 166). Stephen even prayed for his enemies while being stoned to death (Acts 7:60).

Results of Loving Our Enemies

♥ **To Manifest Our Sonship**

"*God is love*" (1 Jn. 4:8). When we demonstrate the same kind of love in our heart which God has, we manifest our true relationship to Him. "*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*" (1 John 4:8). Plummer wrote, "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine." God's love is indiscriminate. He loves all. A son will be like his father. How can God so love the world and give His Son while sons hate those Christ died for. The Lord has known all along that the best way to destroy your enemies is make them your sons and daughters. God has loved us when we were unlovable. As sons we can learn to love those who are unlovely. A Yiddish proverb says, "better that my enemy should see God in me than I should see evil in him."

♥ **To Exceed Your Fellow Man**

The Greek word for "salute" here may mean "embrace". This would be a better representation of loving another. The Publicans, Gentiles, sinners, atheists, Muslims, all know how to love each other. How much praise can there be to reciprocate love to those who love you. It is a love that is common. It brings no special recognition from God. Our love needs to be the kind and quality which will distinguish us from sinners.

♥ **To Be Perfect Like God**

Perhaps being perfect like God is not just the result of loving our enemies. It may represent the result of a Christian following the standard of righteousness Jesus has talking about throughout this chapter. Obviously, Jesus is not saying we can be perfectly sinless like God. For we all have sinned and do sin (1 John 1:8-10). In fact, other men who were not perfect with regard to sin were referred to as perfect, such as, Abraham (Gen. 17:10); Job (1:1); and Asa (1 Kings 14:15). The concept of the word for "perfect" is to be complete or whole or mature, full-grown. As a student who has reached a mature knowledge of his subject. Like a machine is complete with all of its necessary parts, so that it can operate. The Christian who applies Christ's standard of righteousness can be a full-grown, mature, and a complete citizen of His Kingdom.

Questions:

1. Should faithful Christians have enemies? Explain.
2. How did the Pharisees' pervert Moses' teaching in Leviticus 19:18?

3. T F The Law of Moses never taught the Israelites to love their enemies.
4. Give examples of men and women of the Old Testament who loved their enemies.
5. What is the Greek word for *love* in this commandment? How would you define it?
6. List the three ways Jesus says this love can be expressed to our enemies?
7. How did Jesus demonstrate the three means of loving His enemies as listed above?
8. What are the three results of loving our enemies?
9. What is the love of Publicans? Why must our love exceed their love?
10. What does "*perfect*" mean in verse 48?

Application and Discussion:

1. How will loving one's enemies aid us in converting them to Christ?
2. List some things we can pray about when we go to God in prayer for our enemies.

Homework: Find an enemy of yours. Demonstrate love toward him as commanded by Jesus. If you do not have any enemies repent and start acting like a true Christian and you will find plenty.