

The next portion of The Sermon on the Mount, though spanning 35 verses, should be considered together to appreciate the context. Jesus began this pivotal sermon by reestablishing the source of true happiness in godliness (a.k.a. the beatitudes). He now calls His fledgling church to take on the role of being salt and light across the entire world by allowing men to see their radical righteousness. Even though Jesus' sermon appears to turn Judaism upside down, He is actually revealing the love behind the law and calling His church to live up to this greater standard. Mankind will witness this righteousness by the way we treat one another and also by the way we treat them.

Begin by reading Matthew 5:13-48. What are the broad themes that span this passage?

- Jesus calls His church to be a **witness** to the world
- Jesus clarifies that His ministry does not conflict with Old Testament revelation, but **fulfills** it
- Jesus reveals the spirit of **love** behind the O.T. law regarding **personal** relationships that He desires His disciples to attain to.

Being Salt (5:13)

In this passage, our purpose is very succinct: be the salt of the earth. The remainder of the passage is devoted to the danger of losing our "saltiness", without which we have no real use in this world. Let's begin by seeking to understand the purpose of salt.

THE MEANING OF SALT

Salt has always been valuable in human society, often much more so than it is today. During a period of ancient Greek history it was called *theon*, which means divine. The Romans held that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt. Often Roman soldiers were paid in salt, and it was from that practice that the expression "not worth his salt" originated...

Salt was frequently used in the ancient Near East to bind a covenant, somewhat in the way an agreement or contract is notarized in our day. When the parties to a covenant ate salt together before witnesses, the covenant was given special authentication. Though no particulars are given in the account, we learn from 2 Chronicles 13:5 that God made a covenant of salt with David. God prescribed that all sacrificial offerings in Israel were to be offered with salt "so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking" (Leviticus 2:13).

In numerous ways Jesus' hearers – whether Greek, Roman, or Jewish - would have understood salt of the earth to represent a valuable commodity. Though most could not have understood His full meaning, they knew He was saying that His followers were to have an extremely important function in the world.

Whatever else it may have represented, salt always stood for that which was of high value and importance. (Emphasis added)

- *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 241*

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

We know that salt functions today as seasoning and as a preservative. Especially in the absence of freezers and refrigerators, salt is essential to survival. The message of Jesus is clear in this passage: when His church is functioning properly, it is essential to the welfare of this world. However, if we lose our savor (saltiness), we are no longer essential but worthless.

Our goal now turns to defining our savor. What is it that makes us salty? This illustration is quoted by two other gospel writers and is placed into different contexts that will help us understand its meaning. Read Mark 9:38-50 and Luke 14:25-35 and answer the following questions.

What are the two points Mark makes in this passage (vs. 50) and what does it mean to be salty?

Mark teaches us to be salty and be at peace with one another. Mark appears to equate being salty with being willing to sacrifice anything that makes us stumbling in our walk with the Lord.

How does Luke describe what it means to be salty?

In context, Luke is speaking about discipleship and the singleness of our devotion to Christ. He is to be above all other things in our life, to the point that we would surrender them for His sake. If we lose this singleness of devotion, we run the risk of becoming unsalty.

Now return to Matthew 5:13. Having just studied the Beatitudes and having read the passages following Matthew 5:13, do you believe this illustration is used in the same way here? Why or why not? Yes, it appears to be used in the same way. Jesus is teaching us what it means to follow Him. It is very different from the rest of the world. It is this Christ-likeness that identifies us as His disciple and makes us unique and therefore valuable in this world.

We can broadly say that losing our devotion to Christ causes us to lose our savor. What does that mean specifically, though? Read the following passages and identify some of the corrupting influences.

- Developing too close of a relationship with those who are ungodly. (1 Cor. 5:6, 2 Cor. 6:14)
- Adopting the philosophies of men (2 Timothy 2:16-17)
- Observing or entertaining ourselves with sin (2 Peter 2:7-8)

As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"

As we look around this country at organizations that are labeled "Christian" but are so in name only, we see that they do not have any redeeming quality, but rather have served to further corrupt our country and made Christianity into a joke for many. In other words, there is so much worthless salt that has lost its savor that the world thinks that all "salt" is equally useless. Every generation of Christianity faces challenges. This is the challenge of our day. We must strive more diligently to be distinctly salty so that our value to this world may be realized.

Being Light (5:14-16)

We need to consider the concepts of salt and light together. We are an essential influence on this world, but not an influence that is to be quietly milling around in the background. We need to be seen, or rather, Christ needs to be seen in us.

THE IMAGERY OF LIGHT

The physical light of this world is the sun. It really is the catalyst of all life on this planet (Genesis 1:3). Without it, not only would we experience great darkness, but also a loss of heat. Without light and an external source of heat, all life on this planet would eventually die because the plants would quit producing oxygen. Without the sun's gravitational pull, the earth would wander off of its orbit and drift into space aimlessly. The moon would no longer be seen as it reflects the light of the sun. The surface of this planet would eventually freeze. There is no physical life on this planet without the physical light of this world. Jesus chose powerful imagery when He called the church the light of the world. Rather than bringing physical light and life, His emphasis was on bringing spiritual light and life. What would life be like without the church being the spiritual "light of the world"?

By calling this gathering of disciples (His newly established church) the light of the world, He was doing at least four things:

- He was calling them to a **unique** role in the world: **THE** light, not **A** light; (Acts 4:12)
- He was **transferring** a role to them; (John 1:4-9, 9:4-5, 12:46)
- He was defining the **extent** of their ministry (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8); and
- He was **describing** the role they would play in the world.

The role these disciples would play was a continuation of the work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke was recorded to share both what Jesus taught and what He did during His ministry on earth (Acts 1:1), essentially His talk and His walk. Read 1 John 1:5-7, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and 12:27 and discuss how we continue the illuminating work of Christ in this world. **We are called to walk with Him in the light. This light is not our light, but His light. Our true fellowship with Him (in Word and deed) makes us a light to this world as individuals and as a body. The fact that we are called the body of Christ speaks both of our make-up (each bearing separate qualities and abilities of Christ by the ministry of the Spirit) and the work we are called to do: represent Him to this world.**

What happens when we speak truth but do not embrace it in a tangible way in our life? Read Romans 2:17-24 and Matthew 15:13-14, and 23:15. **The Jews had the light of God's truth and thought they were a light to the world, but they actually did more harm than good because they lived in hypocrisy. This hurt God's cause because those who rejected them blasphemed their God and those who followed them became even greater tools of Satan to undermine the work of God.**

The next imagery Jesus uses is to call His church a city set on a hill. A city upon a hill can be seen both day and night because of its position. Jerusalem was a city upon a hill, providing a strong military advantage. Those who traveled there were said to go “up to Jerusalem” regardless of which direction they traveled from (John 11:55, Galatians 1:17-18) because it was located at a higher elevation than the surrounding areas. In Revelation, Jesus speaks of His church as the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12, 21:2,9-10) that comes down from heaven. The point of this picture is that the light we are given is meant to shine upon this world, not be hidden.

HIDE IT UNDER A BUSHEL... NO

Under the bushel . Not a bushel. "The figure is taken from lowly cottage life. There was a projecting stone in the wall on which the lamp was set. The house consisted of a single room, so that the tiny light sufficed for all" (Bruce). It was not put under the bushel (the only one in the room) save to put it out or to hide it. The bushel was an earthenware grain measure. "The stand", not "candlestick." It is "lamp-stand" in each of the twelve examples in the Bible. There was the one lamp-stand for the single room. "

– A.T. Robertson's *Word Pictures*

Discuss the connection between the “candlestick” (candle stand) we read about here and the use of the same imagery in Revelation 1:9-20 and 2:5.

Jesus is calling the New Testament Church to be a light in this world. It is Christ Himself that makes us light. This same word, “candlestick” is used in Revelation 1 and 2 to describe each of the seven churches of Asia. The Church of Ephesus was warned in Revelation 2:5 that if they didn't repent and return to their first love, they would lose their candlestick, aka, would no longer be the Lord's true church.

The purpose of the light is for men to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. The phrase, “good works” means, attractiveness or beautiful appearance. This is the beauty of God working in your life. We don't do our good works as a show, but as we live before the Lord in obedience, it will affect the way we live, what we say, and the way we treat others. Without this tangible difference in our life, Satan will effectively reduce our message to one of a million philosophies marginalized in the minds of men. Our mouths must be involved as much as our actions. We must turn the praise to God and give Him glory! If you want to be used by God, you must be willing to direct the glory to Him.

As Ephesians 3:21 reminds us, “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

The Reality that Cast the Shadow (5:17-18)

Much of Jesus' ministry flew in the face of the Jewish rules and traditions that they believed were just as precious as the law of God itself. In fact, they truly believed their traditions were the natural expression of God's law. As Jesus lived out the gospel in His life, some of His actions were in direct contradiction to their customs. He healed on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2), ate with sinners (Luke 7:34), allowed His disciples to eat with unwashed hands (Mark 7:1-5), and directly contradicted the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 15:3-6).

This untraditional behavior required Jesus to set some things straight with His disciples. He was not provoking them to lawlessness. In fact, Jesus takes quite the opposite stance. He is calling His disciples to a higher righteousness than they have ever known (verse 20). Instead of standing against the law, Jesus declared that He came to fulfill the law... every bit of it.

What is meant by the “law and the prophets”? Read Matthew 11:13, 22:34-40 and John 1:45.

The “law and the prophets” is a term referring to the collective writings of the Old Testament. The first five books, written by Moses, are considered the law. The remainder of the books are called, “the prophets”. There are historical and poetical books included, but the predominance of the Old Testament are “law and prophets”.

How is the law compared to the revelation of Christ in the New Testament? Read John 1:17, Colossians 2:16-17 and Hebrews 10:1. What had the Jews done with the law prior to the coming of Christ?

The law was only a shadow, a partial revelation of God’s truth and character as it relates to man. Jesus Christ Himself was the embodiment of the law, the reality that cast the shadow that they knew. The Jews had taken the shadow and tried to draw in the details they were missing by adding their own rules and regulations and in the process, missed the fullness of what they had. When the reality appeared to them, they didn’t even recognize Him because they had so obscured the shadow they were given.

The Scriptures teach us to live a life of purpose and vision. Jesus Christ is the prime example of this principle. How did Jesus demonstrate this purpose? Read John 2:4, 9:4, 13:1, and 19:30.

Jesus was on a spiritual clock. He came to live in complete obedience to His Father’s will, hour by hour and day by day. Nothing was done by accident. He was the perfect and sinless Lamb of God. He guarded His life in order to lay it down when called by His Father.

This passage is the perfect prelude to the upcoming passages where Jesus reestablishes and expands upon the meaning of God’s law. He expands upon it even further by His life. Read John 1:17, 13:34, 15:9-13, and Philippians 2:5-8 and discuss how Jesus expanded upon the law by His life.

Jesus was the personification of the law, living it out in the manner and spirit intended by God the Father when it was given to Moses. No man had ever been able to perfectly live the example of the law before others, so the gold standard was always the law itself. When Christ came, He blew away the standard of the law and became the new high-water mark for righteousness. No longer were we simply commanded to love one another, but to love like Christ. No longer are we called to simply be humble, but to take on the humility of Christ. He is the greater revelation.

Read Romans 7:7-13 and Philippians 3:4-15 and discuss how this truth affected the Apostle Paul’s life.

Paul lived a life that looked blameless to men. However, God revealed his sin to him through the law. Though other men may not have seen it, Paul knew that he was a sinner. He later found the greater righteousness of Christ available by faith and he forsook his attempts to achieve merit and redemption by the law and gave himself completely to know the righteousness of Christ. Salvation wasn’t enough. He pressed on even further to know the fullness of Christ, walking with Him and thereby becoming more like Him. It was the unachieved but blessed pursuit of his life.

The Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of Scripture (5:18)

I want to treat this subject separately though it is essential to grasp how completely Jesus fulfilled God's law. Among the many fronts upon which Satan attacks Christianity and the church, one of the greatest is the inerrancy of Scripture. God's Word is attacked by evolutionists, humanists, liberal theologians, and even some well-meaning Christian book companies. If Satan can bring the foundation of God's Word down, everything else crumbles too. See the illustration below, created by Answers in Genesis.

The title of this section is the Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of Scripture. This is based upon Jesus' statement that, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." If we believe Jesus is God, which we do, His view of Scripture is authoritative.

What are a jot and a tittle?

A "jot" is the Hebrew word, "yodh", which is the smallest letter of the alphabet. The "tittle" is a small decorative spur or point on the upper edge of the "yodh". Jesus is saying that every detail of God's law would be fulfilled. A similar English expression would be the dotting of the "i" and crossing of the "t".



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What does this have to do with the "verbal" inspiration of Scripture? Read Psalm 12:6 and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

The verbal inspiration of Scripture is the conviction that EVERY WORD was inspired by God. This is different than the belief that God's message was somehow degraded as it passed through the writers or that God only communicated concepts. Jesus' statement supports the conviction that the Word recorded by the writers was completely perfect without any defect. Therefore every word of the Bible is both meaningful and important and should be considered carefully.

While we are discussing the verbal inspiration of Scripture, we should also mention the "plenary" inspiration of Scripture. Plenary means full, entire, or complete. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and Revelation 22:18-19 and discuss whether God has given us a plenary (complete) revelation in His Word. We see in these passages that God has not short-changed us on revelation. His Word is multi-faceted and sufficient through the Holy Spirit to make us complete. We are not awaiting additional prophecy to do the work God has called us to. The ability of God's revelation to make us complete also signifies that the Word itself is complete.

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

When it comes to translating Scripture, there are three theories of translation commonly used throughout modern history:

Literal - Seeks to stay as close as possible to the exact words and phrases in the original language.

- Pros: **Very Reliable** (uses italics for words not in original); **Word Studies** are meaningful
- Cons: **Takes more study to understand**; **Sometimes has awkward wording**

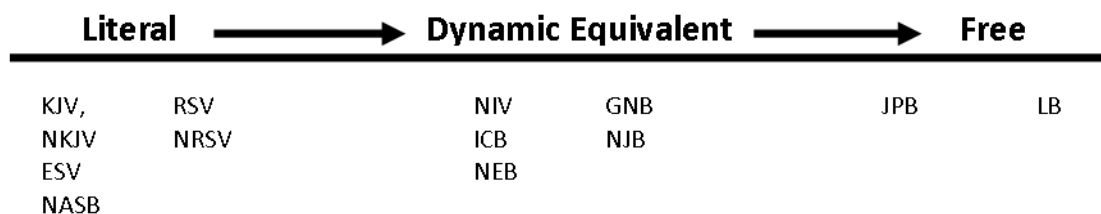
Free - Tries to translate general ideas into common, everyday language

- Pros: **Most readable**; **Can be insightful**
- Cons: **Becomes a commentary**; **Word Studies** are meaningless; **Many inaccuracies**

Dynamic Equivalence - Tries to translate words, idioms, and grammatical constructions from the original language to precise equivalents in the receptor language.

- Pros: **Tries to be literal where possible but emphasizes being readable**
- Cons: **You never know whether you are reading a literal or paraphrased translation**

The chart below shows a continuum of translation theories and the versions that are translated in accordance with those theories.



King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New International Version (NIV), International Children's Bible (ICB), New English Bible (NEB), Good News Bible (GNB), New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), J.P. Phillips New Testament (JPB), Living Bible (LB)

We now need to make this practical. How does a conviction in the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture guide us in selecting a Bible translation for our personal authoritative study and preaching and teaching in the church? **When it comes to selecting a translation for authoritative study and the proclamation of the truth, I have the conviction that we need to use a literal translation, at least as the basis of our study. Other versions may have use to provide insight or commentary, but are simply not sufficient when we are held accountable to accurately know and proclaim God's truth.**

How does a conviction in the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture guide us in interpreting Scripture? **Because all Scripture is true and equally inspired, we must uphold it all. We must look at the context of the passage we are interpreting to determine its meaning and must harmonize Scripture with Scripture (the law of noncontradiction). If all of God's Word is true and God is unchanging, it must be internally consistent from Genesis to Revelation.**

A New Life with an Old Law (5:19-20)

Verses 17 and 18 of this chapter demonstrate the commitment of Christ to not only uphold God's law, but to fulfill every facet of it. Sometimes good-intentioned Christians will proclaim Christ to have fulfilled the law so that we can live outside of the law. Christ did fulfill the law, but He never told us to live outside of the law. In fact, reality is quite the opposite. We are no longer under the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), meaning that those who are saved do not face eternal death as a result of breaking God's law. There is no condemnation for those who have put their faith in Christ (Romans 8:1). However, we are called to live in accordance with the law in the context of the work and revelation of Jesus Christ. This may sound a bit confusing right now, but that is exactly what Jesus seeks to explain (and we hope to illustrate) throughout the remainder of this sermon.

We are first taught that whoever, "shall break" one of the least commandments and teach others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. The word, "break" is also translated as "annul" in other literal translations and means to loose, release, dissolve, or melt. Obviously, men cannot alter or destroy God's Word in any way. He will preserve it. How do we annul God's Word?

We annul it by treating it flippantly or lightly or ignoring it altogether. When we do this we decrease the stature of God's Word in our mind and in the minds of those who watch us.

Jesus refers to the "least commandments". Are some commandments more important than others? Are they all the same? Read Matthew 22:36-40, and 23:23.

The Scriptures imply that some commandments are more important than others. They are all important, but some of the basic moral principles are truly the basis of all the other ritual observances.

What connection does Jesus make between how we personally keep the law and what we teach others about the law? *They go hand in hand. He contrasts those who break the law and teach others to break it and those who keep the law and teach others to keep it. There is really no middle ground. We may speak of the importance of the law, but deny it with our lives. In doing so, we really deny the law.*

When we think of teaching the Word of God, many think of pastors and teachers standing publicly in the church? Is this the complete context of the passage? Who are the teachers that need to beware? Read Deuteronomy 6:7, Proverbs 22:24, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Peter 3:1-2.

All who publicly profess to be Christians are teachers of the law. Some of the most powerful lessons are taught without a word. Parents are teachers of the law to their children. Youth are teachers by their example. Our friends are our teachers. Even those who are sinful are teachers. This passage has application to all of us. We all need to take heed because the way we live says as much or more about what we really think of Jesus than our words.

Truly, religious hypocrisy has done more harm to the cause of Christ than outright opposition.

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

The consequence of breaking the law and teaching others to do so is to lose esteem in the eyes of God, in His kingdom. On the other hand, keeping the law and teaching others to do so is to increase our esteem in the eyes of God, in His kingdom (1 Samuel 2:30). We aren't threatened with losing our salvation, but with losing our rewards. How does this agree with other Scriptures that teach about our eternal rewards? Read Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:24-26, 2 John 8, Revelation 3:11.

God is not threatening us with a loss of our relationship with Him, but with the loss of rewards and blessing in His kingdom. Scriptures agree that we must endure in our Christian walk if we hope to enjoy the rewards of our labors. By our folly, we can undo much good God has accomplished through us. Conversely, by keeping the law, especially the law of love, we gain great advantage in God's economy.

"It is possible to lose in the second phase of our Christian lives what we built up in the first"

- *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 271*

When we try to reconcile Jesus teaching about keeping the law with the rest of the New Testament, it is important to make some clarification. As we read in Matthew 5:17, Jesus came to fulfill the law. That is exactly what He did. Some of the aspects of the Old Testament law were merely shadows of the reality of His coming. We no longer need to look to the shadow, but rejoice in reality. Also, some parts of the Old Testament law were written for circumstances which do not currently exist.

Generally speaking, there are three categories of law given in the Old Testament: Moral law, Judicial Law, and Ceremonial Law.

Moral Law – These are exemplified by the 10 commandments and other moral duties. These laws still provide moral guidance to us today.

Judicial Law – Laws given to Israel as a nation. See Luke 20:25 as an example of Jesus dealing with Pharisees trying to uphold the judicial law in context with Deuteronomy 17:15.

Ceremonial Law – Laws given to Israel to foreshadow the coming of Christ and His sacrifice upon the cross. See Colossians 2:16-17 for instruction regarding ceremonial law.

How did the people Jesus preached to esteem the scribes and Pharisees?

They revered the scribes and Pharisees as religious authorities. They made themselves to be something before men and everyone seemed to buy it and hold them in esteem.

How did God esteem the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Read Matthew 23:27-28 and Romans 3:9-11. We know that God has declared that all men are sinful and have fallen short of righteousness. Specifically, Jesus upbraided the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.

What was Jesus' purpose in telling them that their righteousness had to exceed the scribes and Pharisees? Read Philippians 3:4-9. The point is that we need a righteousness beyond our own. We need to abandon hopes of working our way to heaven and instead look to the Lord.

More than Don't Kill... Don't Hate (5:21-26)

We now see Jesus become more explicit in His teaching and He assumes a position of authority in both interpreting the Old Testament law and providing them with new commands. The command, "thou shalt not kill" is found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13). The consequence for premeditated murder was death (Exodus 21:12-14). However, the Jews at the time of Christ were no longer following the full extent of the Jewish law, partially because they were under Roman authority and could not put a person to death without Roman approval, and partially because they had made murder a civil offence. One who murdered was to be brought before the council for judgment.

Jesus now describes three scenarios, each dealing with attitudes and actions that fall short of the act of murder. The consequences of these actions, however, meet or exceed the consequences the Jews had for the crime of murder.

1. Anger Without Cause

Anger is not always sin. Jesus became angry and cleansed the temple of money changers. Scriptures teach us to be angry without sin (Ephesians 4:26). Many times, this involves resolving the cause of our anger. The type of anger described by Jesus is the "slow burn" wrath and bitterness that can sometimes set up in our heart without a word ever being spoken. Specifically, Jesus speaks of being angry without a (good) cause. What does Scripture teach us about this kind of anger? What are its consequences? Read Acts 8:18-23 and Hebrews 12:15. **The attitude reflected by Simon the magician shows how seriously bitterness can affect our thinking. He tried to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This type of anger can poison our hearts and minds and many can be brought down and defiled by it as we read in Hebrews.**

2. The Insult, "Raca"

Raca – probably an Aramaic word meaning "empty" or "empty head". This insult deals with the capability of the individual. It would be similar to calling someone stupid, ugly, or clumsy today.

3. The Insult, "Thou Fool"

There is a difference between calling someone "Raca" and a fool. The difference is best understood in the context of Scripture. What does the Bible teach us about fools? Read Psalm 14:1, Proverbs 17:10,21, 26:3. **A fool is someone who is not only lacking sense but is morally defective. The simple can learn and become wise. The fool has rejected God in his heart and is going completely astray.**

What is the difference between the insult, "Raca" and "thou fool"? Why is there a more severe consequence for the latter insult? **The insult, "raca" deals with a person's capability. It is hurtful and insulting. The insult, "thou fool" goes beyond the surface and judges their character. It is to call them a worthless and godless person that is good for nothing.**

Each of the responses above is an expression of hatred. Read 1 John 3:15 and discuss the connection between hatred and murder. **Hatred is the heart attitude that builds and grows into the action of murder. To man, who only looks at the surface, we only become alarmed when we see the action. To God, who looks at the heart, there is really no difference between hatred and murder. Hatred is simply murder in miniature to God. They look the same.**

Why is murder such a grave sin? Read Genesis 9:6. **Murder is a destruction of man, who was made in the image of God. Essentially, murder is a desecration of the image of God.**

Review the consequences of the sins listed by Jesus: judgment, the council, even hell fire. Why are such strong sentences passed for simple words? Why are our words so important? Read Matthew 12:34, 18:6, and James 3:1-12. **The outflow of the mouth is from the abundance of the heart. Our words are extremely powerful, both for good and for bad. They are used to build up and to tear down. They affect the hearers in deep ways. A cutting comment or insult can cause our brother or sister to stumble (be offended). Each soul is precious to God, worth the blood of His own Son. If we casually cut them down by our words, we show reproach for the shed blood of Christ and the work of God in their life. The consequences are appropriate to the crime.**

THE JUDGMENT, THE COUNCIL, HELL FIRE

We see both a progression in the crime and consequence in this passage. To the Jew, the Judgment was a typical court or tribunal held regularly to decide matters that came up from day to day. Moses was instructed by his father-in-law, Jethro, to appoint men to hear matters so that he would only have to address the more difficult issues (Exodus 18:13-22). The Judgment was similar to appearing before one of Moses' appointed judges. The Council, however, was the high court, the Jewish Sanhedrin. They presumed to sit in the seat of Moses and were made up of the Jewish leaders, such as the high priest (Matthew 23:1-3, Acts 23:1-5). They addressed matters of greatest significance and their rulings were the final word in Jewish society (ignoring the fact that the Jews were under Roman control at the time of Christ). Hell Fire, however, is translated literally as "Gehenna fire". Gehenna was located in the Valley of Hinnom, basically the Jerusalem landfill, where a continual fire burned the refuse brought from the city. This perpetual burning of refuse was used symbolically by Jesus to represent the fires of eternal destruction in hell.

How does Jesus' assignment of consequence compare to the Jewish assignment of consequence? **God takes these things much more seriously than we do. Sometimes as we search Scripture, we find ourselves seriously out of sync with reality. Things that seem inconsequential to us really aren't that way to God. Our culture is similar to the Jewish culture in how we view anger and malicious speech versus the act of murder. Remember that regardless of men's standards, the only standard that matters is God's. It is the standard to which we all will be held into account.**

The consequence for the first two crimes is assigned to the courts of men, but the consequence for the third crime is taken from the hands of men and judged by God. How does this harmonize with the rest of Scripture? What does the unrepentant commission of the third crime indicate? Read 1 John 3:14-16 and Revelation 21:8. **The Scriptures agree that hatred is a form of murder and murderers do not have eternal life. We know that Christians can all fail and sin, but to commit a sin of this nature and have an unfeeling and unrepentant heart is an indication that you are not truly born again. You stand in danger of hell fire.**

What priority is given to maintaining relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ in verses 23-24? Why? Read 1 John 4:20-21. **Loving our brother or sister is given a position of priority over the act of worship itself. Our worship is only pleasing to God when our heart is right before Him. When we harbor ill will and hatred toward another, our worship cannot be pleasing. In order to love Him, we must love them.**

Jesus' instruction regarding loving our brethren extends even to those who are lost and are our adversaries. We are told to be willing to reconcile with our opponent quickly. To do this, we must maintain a spirit of love and kindness toward all men. The Scriptures give us strong admonition regarding how we are to walk in our dealings with the world. Complete the following statements as you read each passage.

- Walk **humbly** before all men in this world (Romans 12:16)
- Live **peaceably** with all men as much as possible (Romans 12:18)
- Do not seek **vengeance** against those who do you harm (Romans 12:19)
- Go out of your way to show **kindness** to your enemies (Romans 12:20)
- Mix both kindness and **truth** into your speech before all men (Colossians 4:5-6)

A believer might hear or read the Sermon on the Mount and assume that because the meek are promised the earth that we have some sort of upper hand when dealing with temporal matters in this world. What does the Lord tell His disciples will happen if they are taken to court and they are in the wrong? **They are promised that they will have to pay every last cent. The Lord does not want His people to have a reputation as cheats or individuals that take advantage of others. Like Christ, we should put the needs of others before our own.**

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

More than a Casual Glance (5:27-30)

In the last section, Jesus taught us that the very presence of sinful anger in our heart is the spirit of murder. To a God that looks upon the heart, that attitude is simply “murder in miniature”. This same principle is now carried forward to the sin of adultery. Like the law against murder, this law was also based on the 10 commandments. Unfortunately, adultery and divorce were extremely common among the Jews. I have heard it said that a Jewish man could divorce his wife if she displeased him in any way... even if she burned his dinner.

Harkening back to Old Testament law, what was the consequence for adultery? Read Leviticus 20:10.

The consequence of adultery was death.

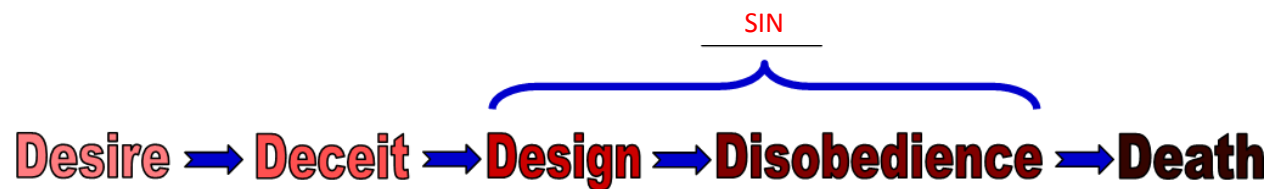
Was this punishment practiced by the Jews of Jesus’ day? Read John 8:1-11.

The Jews who brought this woman to Jesus were trying to test Him. If Jesus ordered her execution, He would have been at odds with the Roman government, which would not have rendered capital punishment for adultery. It would have been an act of sedition.

As with premeditated murder, adultery does not begin with the act itself but can be traced back further to the heart. Read Mark 7:21 and James 1:13-15. Where does all sin begin?

All sin begins with lust, a desire for something that is forbidden. Many times, these sinful desires are good desires that are twisted by our sinful nature into something wicked. Contrary to popular belief, Satan does not make us sin. We already have that tendency!

If we were to unravel the process of sin, from beginning to end, we would end up with a diagram like the one shown below. Define each of the terms below scripturally. How would we classify design and disobedience?



Desire (James 1:14) – Lust, or evil desires that dwell in our heart

Deceit (James 1:14) – Entice, Delude, Trap, Beguile – all of these involve deceit

Design (James 1:15) – Conceive, clasp, seize, arrest – just as life begins at conception, sin begins when we allow our thoughts to flow freely, fantasizing and giving our heart over to this desire

Disobedience (James 1:15) – Sin; this is the culmination of action that flows from a corrupt heart

Death (James 1:15) – Death is destruction. No sin is without consequence.

This understanding of the progress of sin is very consistent with Scripture and explains to us why God looks at our heart with such disdain when we have yielded our hearts and minds to uncleanness. The Bible teaches that life begins at conception. When we are formed in the womb by God, all of our days are known; every physical characteristic is carefully programmed into our DNA. We may still be simple and unformed, but we are alive, in possession of an eternal soul, and have a standing before God. This same principle is true of sin. Even in the infantile form of lustful thoughts played out in our mind, the full DNA of adultery is present.

Is it a sin to be tempted? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

No. In fact, Christ was tempted. 1 Corinthians 10:13 teaches us that when temptation comes, God will make sure there is a way of escape so that we may be able to bear it. It is not His will for us to ever sin and He always gives us a path of righteousness that forks away from the path of destruction.

If we were to try and stop this progression of sin before it actually becomes sin, how would we do that? Consider both of the precursors to sin (desire and deceit). What can restrain and overcome them?
Sinful desire is restrained by lack of opportunity to commit the sin and is quenched by a change of heart. Deceit is counteracted with truth.

We find that God's Word lays out a plan taking aim at the very heart of sin and deals it a death blow when we remain committed to follow God's path to victory.

In Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus offers one necessary and important step to overcoming sin. What is it?
Flee temptation. If there is something that tempts you to sin, seek to rid yourself of the temptation. Unfortunately, Christians are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to overcome sin.

The **sacrifice** necessary to overcome sin is far less than the **consequences** of sin.

Is this principle found in the rest of Scripture? Read 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14; 2 Timothy 2:22.
Yes, this principle is taught throughout Scripture, even in the Old Testament. Joseph fleeing from Potiphar's wife is a prime example. The consequences of fleeing from her (being falsely accused, losing his job and being thrown in jail) were far less than the consequences of giving in to sin. By his obedience, God used him to save his whole family, a future nation of people.

Jesus does not provide us with an exhaustive lesson on overcoming sin in the Christian life. He does, however, address one important aspect that is part of any realistic plan for spiritual victory. Based on our earlier discussion of how sinful desire can be overcome, why would God require us to flee rather than just change our heart?

God will not always change our heart immediately. He may do it over a long period of time. He may also allow it to remain unchanged to some degree in order to teach us to lean on Him. Consider Paul's thorn in the flesh. God did not remove it but instead required him to endure it. Throughout church history, we read of men and women whose innate fallibility helped them to remain humble and dependent upon the Lord day-by-day for strength.

Till Death do us Part (5:31-32)

The issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are involved and often controversial. God gives us clear guidance on the issues but the frequency of failed marriages and the strong emotions involved often taint perspectives. Our goal in this section is to understand this explicit command Jesus gave and allow it to be a building block in our understanding of God's view of marriage.

As we stated earlier, divorce was rampant in Jesus' day. The Jews justified their behavior by stating that Moses allowed divorce. Read Matthew 19:3-9 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Why did Moses allow divorce? **Moses allowed divorce because the hearts of the Israelites were hardened and couldn't maintain the spiritual standards God had for marriage. We have to remember that though Israel were God's people, they were largely unsaved and did not have the enabling grace of God's Spirit. Jesus is speaking to his fledgling church who are called and enabled to obtain a higher spiritual standard.**

How did Jesus' disciples feel about His view of the permanence of marriage? Read Matthew 19:9-12. **These disciples, who were willing to leave all to follow Jesus, found this commandment to be so burdensome that they suggested that it is easier to remain unmarried. Jesus responds by teaching them that marriage, like discipleship, is a calling. Those who are called will be equipped. Truly, we need great grace from God to successfully endure and flourish in marriage.**

There are two questions we need to consider with this teaching. First, why does God desire marriage to endure over the entire span of our lifetime? Second, why is fornication a reason for divorce? Let's begin by looking at the first question by considering what marriage is.

- Marriage is a **calling** of God. (Matthew 19:10-11, 1 Corinthians 7:7-9)
- Marriage is the **uniting** of two lives. (Genesis 2:23-24)
- Marriage is a **Divine** institution. (Mark 10:9)
- Marriage is a **covenant**. (Malachi 2:14, Song of Solomon 8:6)
- Marriage is a **picture** of the relationship of Christ and the Church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

All of the above are primary reasons to maintain the marriage relationship over the span of a lifetime.

Our second question concerns why fornication is considered a Biblical reason for divorce. To understand this we have to first understand the proper place and nature of sexual intimacy. Let's begin by defining, "fornication".

Fornication – in the Greek it is the word, "porneia", from which we derive the word pornography. Fornication is sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship. It is a broad term that includes any type of intercourse outside of the marital relationship.

Unfortunately, the very concept of sex has been corrupted by our society. Let's wash our minds with a bit of God's Word on the subject.

Let's be clear. The Bible does not call sexual intercourse or romantic love evil. Any sexual activity outside of the confines of marriage, however, is a sin.

- Sexual intercourse and romantic love is lawful, proper, and **encouraged** by Scriptures (Hebrews 13:4, Song of Solomon 4:8-16)
- Sexual intercourse is the **physical** representation of the oneness that occurs in marriage (Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:16)
- Fornication is a unique sin because it is a sin against our own **body** (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).
- Fornication is a unique sin against our **spouse** because it:
 - Betrays our **oneness** with them (1 Corinthians 6:15-16, 7:1-4)
 - Creates challenging emotional issues that are **difficult** (but not impossible) to overcome (Jeremiah 2:20-22, 3:1)

While Jesus said you could get a divorce because of adultery, He didn't say you have to.

The believer who is seeking to be obedient to God's Word needs to prayerfully consider what the Lord would have them to do if they are a victim of adultery. It seems the Lord gives the believer the option to leave their spouse under that circumstance, but does not require it and in fact may guide them by His Spirit to seek reconciliation, just as the Lord did with unfaithful Israel.

What about remarriage after divorce? Again, every circumstance is not contemplated by this passage. There are other Scriptures that speak to the issue that should be considered. The passage does teach, however, that remarriage after an improper divorce constitutes adultery. What would be considered an improper divorce? Read Matthew 5:32 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.

Any divorce based on unscriptural reasons is improper. This includes divorce for reasons beside adultery except when an unbelieving spouse leaves a believing spouse. In that situation, the believer should allow them to leave.

Why is remarriage after an improper divorce considered adultery?

Because God only legitimizes divorce in cases of adultery or when an unbelieving spouse departs a believing spouse, all other separated couples are under Divine command to reconcile and remain faithful to their marriage covenant. To disregard this instruction and marry another is to irreversibly disregard their former covenant of marriage by becoming one with another (see Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Simply put, to marry someone who has a biblical obligation to reconcile with their former spouse is adultery. The biblical obligation to reconcile exists when a divorce has occurred for any reason beyond those listed in Scripture: adultery or the abandonment of a believer by an unbeliever.

This leaves one final question to consider in order to bring us to a bit more closure. Can Christians who are “scripturally” divorced remarry? There are three passages in 1 Corinthians 7 that provide guidance. Remember, one of the most important principles of Scriptural interpretation is the harmony of the texts. This is a book written by God and is therefore internally consistent (it doesn’t contradict itself). We must interpret each passage in a way that harmonizes with the other texts addressing the subject. Read each passage and discuss.

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 – Paul speaks here to the “unmarried and widows”. One who is scripturally divorced could now reasonably be considered “unmarried.” They are without obligation to their former spouse and are now free to marry if God places that calling on their life.

1 Corinthians 7:25-28 – Here Paul speaks in the context of a “present distress”, likely a persecution faced by the Christians. In this passage he addresses two categories of unmarried individuals: those loosed from a spouse (perhaps widows and those scripturally divorced) and virgins (those who have never been married). In both cases, he says it is not a sin to remarry.

1 Corinthians 7:39-40 – Finally, Paul addresses widows and encourages them to stay unmarried. They do have liberty however, to remarry “in the Lord”. I believe this means to marry a saved individual. I also believe this instruction is applicable to any believer seeking marriage. All marriage should be, “in the Lord”.

How Good is your Word? (5:33-37)

Vows and covenants are both found and condoned in Scripture. God Himself entered into covenants with men (Genesis 9:9, 15:18, Luke 22:20) and has sworn by Himself/made a vow (Jeremiah 51:14, Amos 6:8) to perform certain acts. In the New Testament, we see that the Apostle Paul made an unnamed vow (Acts 18:18), shaving his head a symbol of that vow, and also used a vow as a point of emphasis in his epistle to the Romans (Romans 9:1).

Why are vows necessary? Read John 8:44-45 and Psalms 58:3.

Ultimately, they are necessary because of man’s fall in the Garden of Eden and the sin nature that has come upon man. Satan is a liar and the father of liars. We are born with this nature.

Why would the Lord make vows seeing that He never lies? Read Hebrews 6:13-19

Vows are useful to commemorate a special commitment. As our nature is to lie, we also have a tendency to doubt what others tell us as soon as we learn the nature of other men. Although God is not like men (He cannot sin), He has accommodated our tendency to doubt by making vows when our faith in His promise is especially important. This includes the security of our salvation (see Heb. 6:13-19).

When we look at our text at face value, it appears the Lord is nullifying the use of vows altogether. That interpretation is not consistent with the whole of Scripture. As we have studied each of the surrounding passages, Jesus is setting right a corruption to God's Word that occurred because of the wicked traditions of men. Let's first understand the actual commands God gave regarding vows. Read Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21-23 and summarize their teaching.

A vow made in the Lord's name must be kept. To not keep that vow profanes the Lord's name. A vow made to the Lord or an oath made to bind our self must be kept. To break such a vow is a sin. We don't have to make vows, but if we do we should keep them.

Now let's play lawyer. How might someone try get around these teachings to make vows they don't feel obliged to keep? The Pharisees of Jesus' day were experts at this type of contortion. Read Matthew 23:16-22 and describe what the Pharisees were doing to vows.

The issue appears to be both the inflation and corruption of vows. Vows became more necessary to affirm truth because of the dishonest communication of men. Vows also were corrupted by men who attested to their vows to various objects or places and then assigning them a relative value based on the perceived "holiness" of that object or place. It is akin to a child crossing his fingers behind his back while making a promise and then using that as an excuse to break the promise.

Do we see this corruption reflected in our text, Matthew 5:33-37? If so, how? Also consider James 5:12. This appears to be exactly what Jesus was addressing. He spoke of oaths sworn by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even their own bodies. This is much the same as James 5:12. They used anything they could to authenticate their word to others but still come short of making a binding oath in the name of God. In this manner, they felt they kept the commandment, but in God's eyes they fell far short.

How does Jesus negate their faulty logic of swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or their own bodies? Read Matthew 23:16-22 and also Psalm 24:1, 50:10, and Haggai 2:8.

The lines the Pharisees tried to draw between secular and sacred were artificial and imaginary. Everything belongs to the Lord. Anything that has any value derives its value from Him. The glory of heaven and earth are His. The strength of man and his glory comes from the image of God Himself. There was nothing they could swear by that did not invoke the name of God and therefore bind their word. We would do well to learn this lesson and view every aspect of our life as an opportunity to glorify Him and honor His name.

What did Jesus prescribe as the remedy for this perversion of truth?

Our communication should be simple, honest, and straightforward. When we play with words to hide intentions and leave opportunities to renege on our commitments we sin. This teaching should really affect how we speak. We should be much more thoughtful about making commitments. We should admit it when we don't know something rather than try to make it up. We should also make every possible effort to fulfill any commitment we make.

Ultimately, God's Word is both truth and power. We are to follow our Father's example.

A Cheek for an Eye (5:38-42)

Of all the passages we have studied heretofore, this is one of the most difficult to apply because of how our human nature resists this level of humility and submission. Jesus begins by reminding his audience of the Old Testament laws regarding punishment of crime as found in Exodus 21:22-27, Leviticus 24:19-20 and Deuteronomy 19:19.

Yet, when we look at other Old Testament passages, we find what at first appears to be conflicting guidance. Read Exodus 14:14, Proverbs 20:22 and 24:29, and explain how these passages harmonize.

The first set of passages in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy were written to the nation of Israel as judicial law. It was not law meant to be enforced by individuals but by the government in authority. The second set of passages from Exodus and Proverbs teach of principles that hold true to individuals.

A stellar example of how these concepts harmonize is found in Joseph, the step-father of Jesus. Read Matthew 1:18-20 and discuss.

Joseph legally could have made Mary's supposed infidelity public, disgracing her and possibly having her stoned in accordance with Old Testament law. Even though he could seek that legal remedy, he sought to break their engagement as privately as possible to save her reputation.

Unfortunately, the Jews of Jesus' day do not appear to have understand the harmony of the Old Testament principles and discarded mercy for overzealous judgment and personal vengeance (See Matthew 23:23). Jesus appears to have lived in a litigious society full of selfish people seeking vengeance and their pound of flesh. It is part of our sin-cursed nature to seek vengeance over a real or perceived slight. Why isn't this appropriate for us? Read Genesis 4:3-8 and 4:23-24.

We tend to have a very sin-cursed perspective on judgment. We take our sin too lightly and judge others too harshly for the sin they commit against us. We are in no position as individuals to judge or exact vengeance.

After establishing the problem, Jesus provides the solution and gives us four points of application of this truth dealing with our dignity, property, convenience, and benevolence. Undergirding the teachings of this passage are principles of humility, patience, and faith. Read Romans 12:17-19 and discuss how this teaching integrates with Matthew 5:38-42.

Our witness for the Lord is of greater value than our rights. Our sin nature is nurtured by our culture to encourage the selfish pursuit and defense of our "rights". The Lord teaches us to surrender our rights to Him, even when we suffer persecution and mistreatment at the hands of sinful men. We must humble ourselves, place our faith in God's justice and wait patiently for it. He will avenge His elect!

The first thing Jesus teaches us is that, "ye resist not evil". This should be clarified. He is not teaching us to accept evil. On the contrary, we are fighting a great battle against sin (Ephesians 6:12). This passage is a bit unclear as translated in the King James. It is speaking of an evil person. Again, Jesus is not teaching us to be passive against sin. This interpretation is not consistent with Scripture either (Matthew 3:7, John 2:13-16). He is speaking exclusively about personal offences committed against us.

The first example regards turning the other cheek. A slap across the face is one of the most insulting expressions of contempt known to man. Jesus Himself suffered this abuse by the Romans as part of the violence leading up to the crucifixion (Matthew 26:67-68). When Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek, is He telling us to physically offer our other cheek to be slapped or something else? Read Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Peter 2:21-23 and discuss.

Jesus took the abuse without opening up His mouth in rebuke. He accepted their torment without seeking vengeance. He isn't teaching us to physically turn the cheek to someone encourage or invite their abuse, but rather to lay down our personal rights to seek vengeance for it. He is teaching an attitude of nonresistance to personal scorn, not taunting or self-deprecation.

It is important to note at this point that what Jesus asks of us is challenging. In fact, I believe this is impossible to accomplish in our flesh. We need the aid of the Spirit of God to do this. Look at the example of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1, 4-6, 12 and Acts 23:1-5, and discuss how he succeeded and struggled with consistently apply these concepts.

Paul gave up many of his "rights" in service to the Lord. He gave up his right to eat what he wanted, the right to marry, even the right to engage in vocational Christian ministry, all for the sake of bearing the cross Jesus laid upon his shoulders (Matthew 16:24 and Acts 9:15-16) to the utmost glory of God. Even Paul struggled with human pride though. When slapped across the face, he rebuked the authority of the one who commanded he be slapped. Though he repented, we see that he too struggled with the total surrender to which Christ calls us.

Jesus' second example involves allowing another who has sued us to take both our coat AND our cloak without resisting. Understanding both the historical context and meaning of the words is very important to this passage.

A SHIRT, A COAT, AND A LAWSUIT

A coat (KJV) is a tunic or shirt worn next to the body. The cloak (KJV) is a robe or outer garment, more akin to our concept of a coat. The historical context for Jesus' words is found in Exodus 22:25-27. There we read that it was a common practice for a borrower to offer a pledge or collateral for a loan. This specific law requires that a lender not require a garment, translated by some as a cloak, as collateral for a loan. The reason is that the garment was used for both modesty and warmth. At the time this was written, it was common for people to wear their day clothes for warmth at night. There were limits as to how far a lender could go in exacting payment and insuring their debt in Jewish society. This level of greed and cruelty was not to be tolerated.

There is an important condition to this commandment: "...if any man will sue thee at the law..." How does this affect our understanding of what Jesus is asking of us? Also read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

When we are taken to court and we lose the case, it is implied that we were found at fault. Having our shirt taken is part of making restitution. Having our cloak taken is just additional restitution found appropriate by the court. Jesus is teaching us to go to whatever lengths are deemed necessary to make restitution for any crime we commit, even if it leaves us in want or need.

We see the spirit of this command fulfilled in a man saved by Jesus. Read Luke 19:1-10 and discuss. When Zacchaeus was saved he was saved from a life of deceit and greed. He was a tax collector, one who often extorted their own countrymen for personal gain. When Jesus saved his soul, he knew he was guilty of unlawfully taking money from others and volunteered to restore fourfold what he took. Although no one had taken Zacchaeus to court, he knew the guilty verdict was upon him and was willing to do anything to remove the blight of sin on his name and on the name of the Lord He now professed.

The third example provided by Jesus involves compulsory service. Again, historical context is an important key to grasping the meaning of this passage.

WALK WITH ME

“Roman law gave a soldier the right to force a civilian to carry his pack for a million, a Roman mile, which was slightly shorter than our modern mile. The law, designed to relieve the soldier, not only caused great inconvenience to civilians but was made even more despicable by the fact that the oppressed were made to carry the equipment and weapons of their oppressors. Outside of combat the Roman soldier was probably never more hated than when he forced someone to carry his pack.”

- *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 334-335*

What is Jesus teaching us here? How do we apply this in our nation?

We hold our liberties very dear in this country. They were fought for and purchased by the blood of patriots and are precious. Yet, the freedom from sin we find in Christ is even more precious because it was purchased with the blood of God's own Son. We are called to live as children of light, upholding His standard of righteousness, even when it costs us our liberties. Jesus is teaching us that we need to willingly surrender our liberties, even when it is costly or inconvenient to us (Luke 20:25). The only liberty we must never surrender is our freedom in Christ to know Him, love Him, and proclaim Him. Whether or not these freedoms are supported by our government, we must exercise them.

Read Matthew 17:24-27. How does Jesus illustrate the principles of this passage?

Even the King of Kings and Lord of Lords submitted Himself to human government on this earth, paying the tribute to Caesar. If ever any man should be exempt from this onerous requirement, it should be Jesus. He humbled Himself to pay, but God also miraculously provided the means.

Remember that God gives us the grace to turn the cheek, surrender the cloak, and go the extra mile.

Finally, Jesus teaches us to give to those who asks (also translated as beg) of us or would borrow from us, don't turn your back on them. We must always interpret Scripture with Scripture. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and James 1:27. What are the guiderails we have for giving and lending?

We are to love men even when it costs us something. Loving mankind means giving of our abundance (time, money, resources) to fill their need. There is sometimes a disparity between needs and wants. When someone asks of us, we must discern where their need is and give to the need. Our convenience and comfort should bear no weight on the equation. Knowingly enabling sin is not love, only self-love.

A Call to a Higher Love (5:43-48)

As we come to the close of Chapter 5 and a point of transition in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides one last clarification. This clarification is a summation of much of what He has taught since verse 17. We need the full righteousness of the law; we must not hate our neighbor; we must remain faithful to our marriage covenant; we must keep our word to others; and we must not resist personal offences. How can so much of the law be summarized? Read Matthew 22:36-40.

It is summarized in love... love toward God and love toward our neighbor. True love will provide the basis and motivation for all that Christ has taught us here.

Jesus begins by reminding them of what they had “heard”. Remember that Jesus is dealing with their misunderstanding of Scripture. Where did the confusion come from? Read Leviticus 19:18, Exodus 23:4-5. What limitations on the commandment to love could be read into these passages?

The passages in Leviticus and Exodus teach us to love our neighbor, but the breadth of the term is not clearly defined, at least not here. Some may have looked at these commandments to require love towards fellow Jews but not toward Gentiles. Others may have more narrowly interpreted it.

We must also consider some of the Psalms that appear to promote a hatred of enemies. Read Psalm 69:22-28 then look at the broader context of the passage (especially verses 7-9 and 20-21). Also consider John 2:17. Where does David’s anger originate?

David was suffering for the sake of the Lord and his zeal was based on his desire to see God’s name glorified. David’s frustration, therefore, was not specifically directed toward the difficulty he faced but upon the way God’s name was tarnished. He prayed that those harmed the Lord’s name would be punished. This was the same spirit in which Jesus cleansed the temple.

As Jesus later clarifies in Luke 10:25-37, what is the breadth of the term, “neighbor”?

The Pharisees tried to create a comma where God put a period. The term, “neighbor” was not meant to be parsed and classified. It was meant to be an all-encompassing statement. It is synonymous with “your fellow man”. This shows how the Pharisees limited the definition of the word, “neighbor”.

We now better understand the misunderstanding of the Pharisees but we need to go further and understand what Jesus asks of us. He sets forth four commands illustrated by four descriptions of how we may be treated by men. Briefly discuss each command below:

- Love your enemies – Every use of the word love in this passage is the Greek word, “agape”, which means, “love-feast”. Enemy here means, “haters”. We are called to make a love-feast for our haters.
- Bless them that curse you – To bless is to speak well of someone and ask God for their prosperity and well-being. To curse is to invoke doom upon another. We are to ask for God’s good graces to abound upon those who desire our doom.

- Do good to them that hate you – To do good is to show kindness and benevolence. Those that hate us detest us and would seek our harm. We are to show kindness to those seeking to do harm to us.
- Pray for them which despitefully use and persecute you – We know what prayer is, but what would we pray for? 1 Timothy 2:4 gives us guidance. God wants us to pray for the conversion and blessing of all men. To be despitefully used is to be insulted, slandered, or falsely accused. The term persecution implies that they aren't just passively slandering us, they are pursuing us and our destruction. In turn, we are to pursue their blessing and conversion.

Jesus' reasoning behind these commandments is that we might be "children of your Father". What does He mean by this?

He is seeking a spiritual family resemblance. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit means that the Divine moral nature of God, our Father, dwells within us. He wants that nature to be manifest in the world through our actions. He wants people to know that we are of Him.

Jesus now broaches a topic too deep for us to fathom... the love of God toward all humanity. We know that there is a special love He has for His people. Yet, there is a love He has for all humankind. It is sometimes called, "common grace", but there is nothing common about it. Read Acts 17:27-28 and Romans 2:1-4 and discuss why God sends His rain upon both the just and the unjust.

He shows compassion to saved and lost alike by providing for their basic needs, even blessing them in their pursuits from time to time. All of this is done to demonstrate His love for all humanity and to draw men, by His compassion, to salvation. This "common grace" is wondrous, especially in light of our natural hatred and rejection of Him. Yet, common grace pales in comparison to the grace demonstrated in the provision of Christ for our sins.

Finally, Jesus draws a line of contrast in the sand to conclude this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. If our affections are only natural (what we can do of our own strength), how will we shine as lights and act as salt? If we only love those who love us, how are we different than anyone else? Jesus isn't just preaching the same old song. We are called to be radically different than the world, a difference that is only fueled by the presence and empowerment of the Spirit of God in us.

We are called to be a different people of a different Kingdom.

Jesus ends with one last admonishment, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The word perfect here means what it sounds like, perfect or complete moral character. Our desire to please our Lord, glorify His name, and reach lost souls should drive us to be different, a difference that is only realized by striving to be what the natural man cannot be alone... perfect.