

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Five
Matthew 5:13-42

Day One

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

v. 13 – In the context of Jesus’ message, it would seem to me that living by the principles outlined in the Beatitudes make us the salt of the earth. **What purpose does salt serve?** It is a seasoning and a preservative. It was also used as money in the ancient world, thus the phrase, “He didn’t earn his salt.”

Yet once salt loses the essence of what it is and does, it cannot be renewed or be recycled to become salt once again. I think I have seen this truth in action with some churches I have known. Once a church loses its focus and desire to reach out and “salt” the world or even the neighborhood around the church, it is hard for that church to regain its momentum. That church begins to exist for itself and the benefit of its “members” while serving little useful purpose to a dying world.

vs. 14&15 – The Church is also the light of the world. Light dispels darkness and provides a way for people to function. It can also provide warmth, since in Jesus’ day it usually came by means of a flame. Once you are “on fire” for and by God, you cannot hide your light. God will use you to dispel darkness and provide direction for those who can see. If you live by the Beatitudes, it is impossible *not* to impact the world around you just like it is impossible for a city to hide itself at night once the lights are on.

It makes no sense for a city to light itself and then try to hide, just as no one lights a lamp and then covers it. Instead that person puts the lamp someplace where it serves a useful purpose, the purpose for which it exists – to dispel darkness or provide warmth.

v. 16 – The lesson here is that you are to allow your light to shine before others so they will see your good deeds and praise God. At times, we can be so concerned about our motives that we as the Church tend to hide what we do. We don’t write or talk about it and thus people are free to form their opinions about what the Church is or isn’t doing based on the information they don’t have.

In some sense, we are God’s public relations agents; we advertise for Him and display His works in our lives. **If you hide your light or don’t want to be used to make others thirst after and seek Him, then who else will do that? If you are “dead” in Christ and He can use you however He chooses, then can He really use you, even give you a measure of fame, for His purposes and glory? If He does, then you don’t have the right to refuse. Refusal would not be humility; it would be disobedience! What are**

you doing to make your light shine and your saltiness work for His purposes? What more can you do?

Day Two

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

v. 17 – Jesus came to fulfill the Law so His purpose was not to abolish it. Yet in fulfilling it, He ushered in a new era that was built on the foundation of the Law but superseded the Law:

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Galatians 3:23-25 NAS).

v. 18 – Jesus assured His listeners on more than one occasion that He was telling the truth. What else could He do? He *was* the truth. Yet His truth seemed so bizarre at times because the level of truth in His day was so subnormal that when Jesus presented the normal, people considered it to be abnormal. **Does that make sense?** So He had to preface it by saying in essence, "I know this will sound strange and you won't think it's true, but believe Me, it is!" Jesus assured His listeners that at times He may sound like He was abolishing the Law but He was not. He was the perfect fulfillment of it.

v. 19 – **To which commands was Jesus referring?** He was referring to the Beatitudes. Those commands may have seemed to be something in addition to the Law, but they were its fulfillment, perfectly consistent with the rest of the Law's requirements. Jesus came to give people the means by which they could fulfill God's laws and live a godly life, and that means was the power of the Spirit. The Law was impossible for sinful men to keep, yet many Jews took it upon themselves to try and keep the Law perfectly. They always failed, but they relied on their own abilities and were proud of their efforts. This was futile and Jesus came to deliver them from a futile life:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing

given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:10-14).

v. 20 – This must have shocked His listeners! **How could the common people possibly surpass the righteousness of their leaders, who spent night and day studying and then attempting to live out their conclusions?** Of course, we know that the righteousness that surpasses the Law is faith in Christ. **On what basis are you serving God: Law or faith?** If it is Law, you are doomed to failure. Your faith will require you to keep God's laws but faith gives you the relationship with God and the power to do so. **Does that make sense?**

Day Three

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother[will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. 23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

vs. 21&22 – Jesus went on to describe what it meant to have a righteousness that was greater than the leaders and Pharisees. He started with the commandment against murder. There is no greater sin than acting the part of God and taking someone else's life. Yet Jesus expanded this issue of murder to include hatred; he took it from being simply an external act to an act of the heart. In fact, that is the difference between the old and new covenant. The old stressed external actions, both to do (sacrificial worship) and not to do ("thou shalt not"). The new also focused on external actions but did so by addressing the heart conditions that led to the actions or sins.

Jesus taught that anger against a brother, even if it is only expressed verbally, is a sin against God and makes the holder subject to God's judgment. It wasn't enough not to express hatred externally; Jesus required that hatred be dealt with at a heart level.

"They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 11:18-20).

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3).

vs. 23&24 – God was more concerned with heart matters and relationships than with sacrifices at the altar. Yet the religious system at the time of Jesus had reversed the priorities and made sacrifice the most important thing.

To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3).

A sacrifice is under the control of the giver and is a more convenient means of serving God. When God puts the light on an internal heart matter, the worshipper is no longer in control. That is why some people prefer sacrifice over obedience, religious form over spiritual reality. **Which do you prefer? Don't answer too quickly.**

Are there any relationships that you should repair? Is any broken relationship hindering your worship or service to or for God? If so, you must make that a priority and do what you can to heal that situation.

Day Four

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

vs. 25&26 – I have always urged people with legal issues to settle them as quickly as possible, not letting them linger. I think this pertains as well to personal matters. Don't let them escalate beyond what they should, for the repercussions may be worse later on.

I think this pertains to insisting on the letter of the law instead of extending mercy. If you insist on going before the judge, even if that judge is God, you may find that you are not without fault and subject to judgment as well as your enemy.

I experienced a painful break with a church a few years ago. People familiar with the situation would say to me, "God will judge that situation," or "God won't bless that." I would also respond, "I hope He doesn't judge them, for if He does, He make have to judge me in the process, too!" I would also say, "We don't know what God will and won't bless, so I'll leave that up to Him." I pray that God will indeed bless that church and leadership; I just didn't want to be a part of their team any longer.

Is there a situation where you won't settle for anything less than judgment in your favor against someone else? If so, you may want to reconsider your goal. How will you fare if God uses the same standard of judgment against you as you want Him to use against your adversary? Remember this proverb:

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (James 2:12-13).

vs. 27&28 – Jesus then referred to another commandment, this time the prohibition against adultery – all done so to help the people go beyond the righteousness of the Pharisees and priests. As He did with the issue of murder, Jesus took adultery beyond the external act and made it an internal, heart issue. **Can you imagine how a good Jew**

would have received His teaching? This person had kept the letter of the Law, but now Jesus was taking that person deeper, into heart issues. The pain and surprise of this change was evident in the rich young ruler who came to Jesus. He had kept the commandments of the Law since his youth, but asked what more he should or could do. Jesus took him past the externals to the heart and the man was perplexed and sad:

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth (Mark 10:17-22).

Let's stay focused on these two verses, however, for Jesus was talking about adultery here. **How is your heart where the opposite sex is concerned? Are you victorious in your thought life? Are you thinking anything about anyone that you could not tell your spouse or pastor? What are you watching? Are you using your computer as a tool for righteousness? In other words, are you watching pornography?** When people have problems in the area of sexual sin, they usually go "underground," for these things aren't easily discussed openly with others. I would urge you, however, to press past the awkwardness and get some help from someone you can trust, for sexual sin becomes an external act if the internal problem isn't ruthlessly dealt with.

Day Five

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

vs. 29&30 – Is Jesus talking about literal mutilation here? I don't think so, but I do think He was using hyperbole, extreme exaggeration, to make a point that there is no price too high to avoid sin. Remember that this is in the context of Jesus dealing with the internal aspects of sin as a means to exceed the righteousness of the professional clergy, something new to His listeners. They were accustomed to avoiding the external expressions of sin, while perhaps allowing the thoughts of their heart to go without much notice or confrontation. Now Jesus was "raising the bar," so to speak, and exhorting His listeners to be ruthless with any aspect of their being that was not in line with God's kingdom.

It is easy to become accustomed to sinful habits, which are internal and don't seem to find an external expression. Jesus urged us not to make friends or peace with those "little" internal sins, but to root them out and overcome them, in the power of the Spirit.

12Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:12-14).

vs. 31&32 – Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife, but Jesus explained in another passage that this was not God's will but a concession to protect the woman!

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" "What did Moses command you?" he replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mark 10:2-9).

According to Jesus, the only allowable reason for divorce was and is marital unfaithfulness. I was ministering in a new church last weekend and the speaker asked how many people had been married before their current marriage. Of the 85 people present, about 65 raised their hands! Some were Christians when they obtained a divorce.

I think it is important to study everything the Bible has to say about any topic before rendering a judgment. I had a man in my church who came to the Lord with his wife. Later, his wife returned to a life of drugs and wanted her husband to return with her. He refused and, after much prayer and counsel, divorced his wife. He later remarried, had children and had a great second marriage.

My point here is that some have made marriage the unforgivable sin, insisting on the literal application and interpretation of this verse. While I do believe that divorce is too convenient today and allows many to sidestep their problems, I do think that there is room for divorce in the Christian experience under certain circumstances. **Do you agree? Why or why not?**

Day Six

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

vs. 33-36 – These verses can be confusing, for the making and keeping of oaths is something foreign to our modern culture. I can think of only a few oaths that are common: an oath to become a citizen of the U.S. and an oath to be a truthful witness in a court of law. **So what did people do that Jesus was warning them to do no longer?**

In an attempt to serve God more faithfully and diligently, Jews would take it upon themselves to initiate ways to serve and please God. They would give their word that they would do this or that for Him. This was consistent with the works mentality that went along with the Law, the mentality that man could earn God's favor by doing certain things on God's behalf. They would swear that they would do certain things by invoking the name or image of something great, even invoking death if they failed to fulfill their vows.

Jesus began to wean the Jews from the thinking that they could control God with their own thoughts and desires. They had developed a system of worship that was about to end because that system had as its focus man, his needs and his sin. Jesus had come to restore the focus of worship on God.

I have known people who have tried to use oaths to get God to do something that they needed or wanted. If You do this or that, they tell God, then I will live for you or do something in return. This is trying to make a bargain with God and sometimes God, in His mercy, does perform the act that the person requested. It wasn't, however, because God needed or wanted what that person had to offer.

v. 37 – Jesus actually simplified their lives by instructing them to stop vowing and just obey God. They did not need any other motivation or assistance in doing God's will. They also didn't need to think that they could control or manipulate God, or employ external things, such as the Temple, heaven or their own being to reinforce and strengthen their vows, giving them more "clout" with God.

Is your "yes" sincere God is concerned? Do you serve God without any expectations in what you can get God do for you? Are you serving God or trying to manipulate God?

Day Seven

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

v. 38 – Jesus went on to address the issue of justice and "an eye for an eye," which was established in the Old Testament as punishment equitable for the crime. That is the essence of "an eye for an eye." For example, no one was to be executed for a minor offense. That directive was God's first step in having man understand the issue of

justice. Then Jesus took them on to next level of an understanding of justice and that was mercy.

v. 39 – Jesus gave directives as to how His followers were to deal with evil and these statements have been among the most misunderstood statements He ever made. These statements are also the standards by which the world judges the Church and its members. The world expects to see followers of Jesus **not** retaliate or respond when wronged. It is perhaps what the world expects most to see. (They also expect us to take care of the poor.) When we are able to do that, the world is impressed. When we aren't, it's when they are perhaps most disappointed and cynical about Christianity.

At the same time, Jesus told His followers to turn the other cheek when struck. He didn't instruct them to do it over and over again. Yet I may be reading too much into that statement. The spirit or essence of the statement is to trust God when an evil person takes advantage of you. **Are you trusting God if you happen to have an evil person who is doing your harm?**

v. 40 – This is another tough statement to apply to life, especially today in an American society that is lawsuit-frenzied. **Should a Christian allow anyone who sues to have what they want and more? If someone wants your tunic, as Jesus said, how much does your cloak represent? Everything else you have? Some of what you have? When, if ever, do you resist the unrealistic demands of someone trying to take advantage of you?**

v. 41 – Jesus urged His followers to go the extra mile with someone who was forcing them to walk a way they did not choose or want to go. He said go the extra mile, not to go around the world. **How far is far enough to satisfy the principle that Jesus presented?**

v. 42 – Jesus then instructed His followers to give to anyone who asks for a gift or loan. **Does this mean that you should give to every panhandler and beggar you meet?** When I was in Ethiopia and India, if you reached into your pocket to give to anyone, suddenly a host of other people would appear, pulling on your clothes and reaching into your pocket. It was quite unnerving so I chose not to give those who asked. **Was I disobeying Jesus' command? Did that make me a disobedient or unfaithful Christian?**

What did Jesus intend to do when He issued these statements?

1. Christians are to be different. They are to have different standards of behavior, especially when their rights and property are concerned.
2. Christians are to put their ultimate trust in God to protect their rights and property.
3. Christians are not to exert undue effort in maintaining their rights.
4. Christians are not to take their standards for justice from their culture but from God's word.

5. Jesus was establishing the groundwork for His disciples to understand how He was going to respond when the Jews and Romans wronged Him.

6. Jesus was not asking His followers to do anything that He was not willing to do and model.

Those last two points are important, for Jesus modeled what He wanted His disciples to be during His own life and death. Perhaps it is proper to ask, when confronted with a tough choice of how far to go to defend yourself, **“What would Jesus do?”**

Where do you need to ask and answer that question in your life today?