

Matthew 5

This chapter begins Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." He has taught that men must repent in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (4:17). These three chapters (5, 6, 7) are some of the fundamental expectations which Jesus has for those who desire to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Many scholars suggest that the Sermon on the Mount continues a theme of Jesus being a "New Moses," with the mountain here in Matt 5 reflecting Mount Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount reflecting a new "Law." This is, supposedly, the first of five major sermons Jesus gives (if you ignore others that aren't "major"), with each section concluding with a similar phrase: 7:28; 11:1; 15:53; 19:1; 26:1. However, Matthew does not state or hint that Jesus is a "new Moses." In fact, the Hebrew writer will say that Jesus is greater than Moses (Heb. 3:5-6). Yet, there are a number of parallels between Jesus and Moses, as we have already seen in the first few chapters of Matthew.

TRANSLATION - 5:1-12:

1 And seeing the crowds, He went up into the mountain, and after sitting, there came to Him His disciples; **2** and after opening His mouth, He taught them saying,

3 Blessed [are] the poor in spirit,
because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed [are] those mourning,
because these will be comforted.

5 Blessed [are] the gentle,
because these will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed [are] those hungering and thirsting for righteousness,
because these will be filled.

7 Blessed [are] those merciful,
because these will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed [are] those pure in heart,
because these, God, they will see.

9 Blessed [are] those peacemakers,
because these, sons of God, will be called.

10 Blessed [are] those having been persecuted on behalf of righteousness,
because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed you are whenever they may insult you and may persecute you and may say all evil against you [lying] on My behalf. **12** You all rejoice and celebrate, because your reward [is] much in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets, those before you.

WORDS:

"Disciples" (ver. 1) is another significant word in the NT, used 261 times (72 times in Matt.). It means "learner, pupil, follower." The Greek word gives us the root word for *mathematics*. For the verb "to teach," see at 4:23. Matthew uses the verb 14 times. The word "blessed" (ver. 3) gives this paragraph its normal designation "beatitude" from the Latin *beatus*. The word for "blessed" is used 50 times in the NT, 13 times in Matthew. It can mean "blessed, happy, fortunate." In spiritual terms, a better interpretation would be "one receiving God's favor." "Poor" is used 34 times, meaning "poor, miserable, impotent." Matthew uses the word 5 times.

"Mourning" (ver. 4) is only used 10 times, twice in Matt. (5:4; 9:15). It means to be "sad, grieve, mourn." For "comforted," see at 2:18. "Gentle" (ver. 5) is found only 4 times, three of which are in Matt. (5:5; 11:29; 21:5). It means "gentle, humble, considerate." "To inherit" is used 18 times, 3 in Matt. (5:5; 19:29; 25:34). It means to "acquire, obtain, receive, or inherit." "To hunger" is used 9 times in Matthew; it is found 23 times in the NT. "To thirst" is found 16

times (5 in Matt.) and can be used, as here, metaphorically for “longing for.” For “righteousness,” see at 3:15. Its fundamental meaning is “being right with God.” “To be filled” is used 16 times, 4 in Matt., for “to feed, fill, satisfy.”

“Merciful” (ver. 7) is an adjective, used twice (here; Heb. 2:17), related to the verb used in this verse: to be shown mercy, which is all one word, used 29 times, 8 in Matt. “Pure” is used three times in Matt. (5:8; 23:26; 27:59), out of 27 times. It means “clean, pure, guiltless.”

“Heart” is used 156 times in the NT, 16 times by Matt. It means the “heart, inner self, mind, interior of man.” “Peacemakers” (ver. 9) is all one word and used only here.

“To be persecuted” (ver. 10, 11, 12) is used also in verse 44; otherwise, Matthew uses the verb at 10:23; 23:34 (out of 45 times). It can mean “to hasten, persecute, drive away, pursue, seek after.” “To insult” (ver. 11) is only used 9 times in the NT, 3 by Matt. (5:11; 11:20; 27:44). It means to “reproach, revile, insult.” “Evil” is used by Matthew 26 times, out of 78 times. When it has the definite article, it likely refers to Satan, as the “evil one.” “Rejoice” (ver. 12) is found 6 times in Matt., out of 74 uses. It can exist also in the form of a greeting.

“Celebrate” is a synonym in this text, perhaps with a little stronger meaning, “overjoyed.” This is the only use in Matt., out of 11 occurrences. “Reward” is found 10 times in Matt., out of 29 uses. It can mean “pay or wage” as well as “reward or punishment.” In other words, it refers to something which is merited. On “prophet,” see 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23. The classic biblical definition of a prophet is Exodus 7:1-2.

GRAMMAR:

The first eight beatitudes are third-person statements (“those”). In verse 11, Jesus shifts to the second-person (“you”) to emphasize the possibility and likelihood of persecution among His followers.

PARALLELS:

The most full parallel to the “sermon on the mount” is Luke’s account of the “sermon on the plain” in Luke 6. We believe these two sermons are different sermons. Since Jesus preached for three years, it is undoubtable that He taught the same things, often times in the same order, yet often times, no doubt, in different words.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

While Jesus does not explicitly quote or directly allude to OT passages, there are a number that appear to be reflected in His teachings. Beatitudes found in 5:3-5 seem to be linked to Isaiah 61:1-3, which Luke will tie to Jesus in 4:18-19. Psalm 37:9, 11 appear to be behind verse 5. In fact, “meek” in Psalm 37:11 is the same word translated “poor” in Isaiah 61:1, linking those two verses. Psalm 107:5, 9 seems to be reflected in verse 6, perhaps even Isaiah 55:1-3. The beatitude in 5:7 seems to allude to Prov. 14:21; 17:5. The “pure in heart” in verse 8 echoes the thoughts of Psalm 24:3-4. The call for peacemakers in verse 9 sounds similar to Psalm 34:14. Some of the prophets persecuted in the OT are: Jeremiah (20:2), Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:21), and Isaiah (Heb. 11:37; the Jewish work *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* written between the Old and New Testaments says Isaiah was cut in half) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-3).

COMMENTS:

Jewish rabbis often sat and taught while the students stood. Jesus does that here. The crowds were assembled around Him and His disciples came to Him. Since only the four fishermen, so far in Matthew, have been called, the group of disciples is likely broader than those four but are found within the crowd mentioned in verse 1. The setting (5:1-2; 7:28-8:1) argues strongly for a single occasion when Jesus sat and taught this sermon. We do not believe that Matthew imagined any of this teaching; he records it for posterity under the guidance of the Spirit of God.

This section is known as the “beatitudes,” from the Latin word, *beatus*, which translates as “blessed.” The best definition this writer has found for “blessed” is being a “recipient of divine favor.” The verb “to bless” is found 419 times in the OT. Some of those are in the forms of “beatitudes;” see Psalm 1:1. There are about 45 beatitudes in the OT and 37 in the NT. Man is blessed by God when he lives out the following virtues in his life. God is blessed by man when He receives man’s worship, honor, approval, and praise.

The “poor in spirit” are those who are humble. Those who recognize their need for help in life, especially their need for salvation, are those who seek assistance from God. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven will be theirs.

Those who “mourn” are those who are sorry for their sins, who mourn over their sins. Jesus promises they will be comforted. That is, they will be forgiven and encouraged.

Those who are “gentle” or “meek” are those who do not allow power or position to make them proud and arrogant. A good definition of “meek” is “power under control.” One has the power or ability or opportunity to respond negatively or harshly but chooses to respond gently. They are humble and easily spoken to. Jesus promises they will inherit the earth. Here, the “earth” is a metaphor for the blessings of God. Jesus is not speaking of the physical earth since this earth will be destroyed when He returns (5:18-20; 2 Peter 3:10-12).

Those who “hunger and thirst” for righteousness are ones who desire, more than anything, more than food and water, to be right with God. Jesus promises that they will have what they seek, to the full.

Those who are merciful are those who do not give to others as they deserve. They control their anger, their mouth, and their actions and are gentle, generous, and compassionate with those who need grace and forgiveness. Jesus promises that they will receive mercy from the Father in heaven.

Those who are pure in heart are individuals who have no greater desire than to be right with God. Their motivations are pure; their minds are concentrated on God. Their outer lives reflect their inner convictions. Purity of heart comes by faith (Acts 15:9) when one obeys the gospel of Christ (1 Peter 1:22).

Those who are peacemakers are those who actively strive to bring reconciliation between two warring parties. They look for a solution that is amicable to both individuals. Jesus says they will be called sons of God, just as He was identified as the Son of God (3:17). He is Son by nature; peacemakers will be sons of God by grace. Yet, being a peacemaker is not always easy in a world that thrives on conflict.

Those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake are those who have lived and taught the gospel of Christ but are persecuted by the evil who do not like to have their wickedness set in contrast to the light of Christians. Jesus promises that the kingdom of heaven will be theirs.

Similarly, those who are insulted and persecuted and lied about in an evil way, because of their walk with Christ, will be blessed. Observe here that Jesus has changed from the third-person to the second-person: “you.” Jesus directs His thoughts directly to His disciples and calls on them to “rejoice and be glad,” because their reward will be great. In fact, they are in great company because the prophets of God from the OT were also persecuted for preaching God’s word.

APPLICATION:

Humility: In 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Paul writes that the gospel finds its strongest appeal among those despised by the world. Jesus is the best example of gentleness: 11:29; 12:15-21; 21:5. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:23). God has always valued humility (Psa. 51:17; Isa. 57:15; James 4:10).

Mourning: Christians should be sorry for their sins (2 Cor. 7:10). That is what compels them to change their minds about their sin (repent) and to change their behavior.

Hunger: Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:35) and the living water (John 4:13-14). He will see that those who hunger and thirst to be right with God will be satisfied.

Merciful: James writes that we will not receive mercy if we show no mercy (James 2:13). Nor will we receive forgiveness if we do not forgive (Matt. 6:15).

Purity: Because we love God and desire to see Him, we will purify ourselves (1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; 2:22; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:1-2). Man has not seen God yet (Exo. 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16) but Christians will (1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 21:3; 22:4).

Peacemaker: God has always valued those who sought peace in a world of conflict: Prov. 6:19; Psalms 34:14; Romans 14:19; Eph. 4:3; Gal. 5:22; Heb. 12:14; James 3:16-17; 1 Peter 3:11. The verb form of the noun “peacemaker” is found in Col. 1:20. God is the “God of peace” (Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23).

Persecution: In 1 Peter 4:13-16, Peter writes that Christians should make sure they are not persecuted because they are doing evil, but rather, because they are serving Christ. See also John 15:18-25; Acts 14:22; 5:41; Phil. 3:10; 2 Tim. 3:12.

Rewards: Jesus will teach that the rewards for faithfulness far outweigh the price of discipleship: 19:29-20:16; 25:2, 23; Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

TRANSLATION - 5:13-16:

13 You all are the salt of the earth. And if the salt may become tasteless, by which will it be salted? For nothing it is able yet except it may be cast outside to be trampled underfoot by men. **14** You all are the light of the world; it is not able, a city, to be hidden, on a mountain being located. **15** Neither will they light a lamp and set [it] under a basket but on the lamp stand, and it enlightens all those in the house. **16** Thus, let shine your light before men. Thus they may see your good works and glorify your Father, the one in the heavens.

WORDS:

“Salt” (ver. 13) is used twice in this text, its only use in Matt. It is used 8 times. Related is the verb “to salt,” used only twice (Matt. 5:13; Mark 9:49). “To be trampled under foot” is all one word in the original Greek, used 5 times, twice by Matt (5:13; 7:6). Metaphorically, it can mean “to treat with disdain.” On “light” (ver. 14), see at 4:16; on “world,” see 4:8; on “city,” see 2:23. “To be hidden” is found 18 times, in Matt., 7 times. “To light” (ver. 15) is used 12 times, once by Matt., meaning “to light, burn, keep burning.” “Lamp” is used 14 times, twice in Matt. (5:15; 6:22); “lamp stand” is related to this word and is used 12 times, only here by Matt. “Basket” is a bushel basket, used only three times (Matt. 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33). “Enlightens” is used 7 times, three times in Matt. (5:15-16; 17:2). It means to “shine, flash, shine forth.” “Work” (ver. 16) is an eminently biblical word, used 169 times, 6 in Matt. It means “work, deed, action, manifestation, occupation, thing.” “To glorify” is used 4 times by Matt. (5:16; 6:2; 9:8; 15:), out of 61 times. It means to “praise, honor, glorify.”

“Father” is used here for the first time referring to God. It is used 413 times in the NT. He will be called “Father” in Matthew 44 times, 16 times just in this sermon. It was not normal for Jews to refer to God as “Father.” He was the Father of the *nation* and of the *king*, but not called Father of individual Israelites. Jesus changed that conception (cf. John 20:17).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

God called Israel to be a “light” to the Gentile nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; Dan. 12:3). It appears that God’s plan was for Israel to remain monotheistic so that when Jesus entered the world, Israel would believe that He was the “only unique Son of the living God” (John 3:16; Matt. 16:16) and then Israel would be the first missionaries to their neighbors. But Israel failed to let her light shine.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

These lamps were made of clay, designed with a hole in the top for oil. A spout or hole was in the side where a wick was inserted. The “basket” may have been a bowl but the basic unit was about two gallons. If the bowl created a vacuum underneath, it is conceivable that the

light would flicker and go out. Yet, Jesus' point is that the light was obscured, not that it was extinguished.

COMMENTS:

In this text of Scripture, Jesus emphasizes the influence that His followers have on the world. Salt was used for many purposes: preservation, flavoring, cleansing, and fertilizer. What each of these purposes have in common is the idea of infiltration or influence. Salt is sodium chloride and is a stable element. Salt drawn from the Salt Sea was mixed with impurities. Jesus' point here is to suggest that saltless salt has no purpose. In the same way, disciples with a negative influence cannot serve Christ's purposes.

The same point relates to the light of the world. Christians should allow their lights to shine, as a city shines on a hilltop. No one would take a lamp and put it under a basket. Lamps were designed to set on lamp stands so they will illuminate all who are in the house.

Just as salt needs to infiltrate food in order to do its work, so Christians need to allow their lights to shine so that others will see Christ living in them and bring glory to the heavenly Father. The good works were called for by John, in 3:8. In 6:1, Jesus will warn His followers not to do good works *to be seen* by others. The difference between this text and that text is one of motivation. Do we want others to glorify God or us?

APPLICATION:

Christians are, indeed, to be lights in the world (Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:5; Titus 2:8; 1 Pet. 2:12), not reflecting their own glory, but the glory of the Son of God and His message (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). "Salt" is also used in connection with discipleship in Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34-35; Col. 4:6.

TRANSLATION - 5:17-20:

17 Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. **18** For truly I say to you, Until when it may pass away, the heaven and the earth, one iota or one stroke will not pass away from the law, until when all may happen. **19** Whoever, therefore, may loose one of these smaller commandments and may teach thus men, smaller he will be called in the kingdom of the heavens. But whoever may do and may teach, that one great he will be called in the kingdom of the heavens. **20** For I say to you that if your righteousness may not exceed greatly the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

WORDS:

"To think" (ver. 17) is used 15 times, 3 by Matt (5:17; 10:34; 20:10). It means to "think, believe, suppose." "To destroy" is an intensified form of the verb "to loose," used in verse 19. It is used 17 times in the NT, 5 by Matt. It means to "throw down, tear down, destroy, abolish." "Law" is used here for the first time in Matthew, out of 8 times in Matt. In the NT, the word is used 194 times. Within the context of Jewish religion, it can narrowly mean the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT, but in its more general sense, it can refer to the whole OT as the Jews accepted the whole 39 books as being God's law. Yet, the Greek word for law can also be used even more generally to refer to "rule, principle, or norm." For "fulfill," see 1:22.

"Truly" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "amen," which is part of the word family with "I believe." The word is used 129 times in the NT, 31 in Matt. The prophets generally said, "Thus says the Lord." Jesus says, "I say to you." "To pass away" is used 29 times, 9 times in Matt. It means "to go or pass by, pass away, neglect, disobey, even come." An "iota" is the small Greek letter ι and is only found here in the NT. The term also designated a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, י. The "stroke" (literally, "little horn") appears to be only a small part of a letter which distinguishes two Hebrew letters, such as כ and ב or ד and ר.

“Commandment” (ver. 19) is found 67 times, 6 times in Matt. “To exceed” is used 39 times, 5 by Matt. (5:20; 13:12; 14:20; 15:37; 25:29). It means to “be left over, exceed, overflow, abound.” For “scribes,” see at 2:4; for “Pharisees,” see at 3:7.

GRAMMAR:

“You” (ver. 20) is emphatic in Jesus’ statement: “You will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

PARALLELS:

For parallels to verse 18, see Mark 13:31 and Luke 16:17. Jesus was the goal, end, or purpose of the Law (Rom. 10:4). Paul writes that the Law was to bring Israel to Christ so that, once Christ came, Israel was no longer under the Law (Gal. 3:23-25).

COMMENTS:

Jesus sternly warns His audience, His disciples, that they should not think that He came to destroy or abolish the Law of Moses and the prophets’ message. Luke 24:44 divides the OT into the “law, prophets, and psalms.” Jesus did not come to abolish the OT message (see 8:4; 23:2-3); He came to bring it to its complete end. The Law of Moses, ultimately, was given so that Israel could have a relationship with God, to be right with God. Just as Jesus told John the baptizer that He came to “fulfill” righteousness (3:15), so here, Jesus says He came to “fulfill” the Law and the prophets, that is, to bring in the righteousness that the Law demanded. Jesus would do so by living the Law to perfection but then offering His perfect life as a sacrifice to others.

The Law was so important, Jesus says, that heaven and earth could pass away but not a single letter (א or ב) would not pass away from the Law until its fulfillment. In verse 19, Jesus challenges His followers to raise their standard of righteousness above the example set by their religious leaders. If one were to “loose” the least of God’s commandments in the Law, and then teach others to do the same, they would be considered the least in the kingdom. To be called “great” in the kingdom, they would need to keep the least of the commandments and teach others to do the same.

The Pharisees were often scrupulous about obeying the law. For example, they gave 10% of their garden herbs (23:23). But they neglected aspects of the Law that were weightier, like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. If Jesus’ disciples were to have a greater level of righteousness than that, they would need to allow love to be the guiding principle behind their fulfillment of the Law’s expectations. Love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10). Jesus said that love of God and love of neighbor were the two greatest commandments (Matt. 22:37-39). As Jesus proceeds in contrasting His expectations from the “older ones,” He will show how love will fulfill the Law’s expectations.

APPLICATION:

Since Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses, He brought it to its completion. He and His disciples further teach that Jews are no longer under the Law of Moses (non-Jews were never under the Law since it was given to the Jews; Deut. 5:1-5); Rom. 7:1-4; 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 3:23-29; Eph. 2:11-17; Col. 2:8-15; Heb. 8. Jesus’ statement about every “iota” and “stroke” being fulfilled indicates that Jesus believed every statement in the OT was guided by God and intended to be fulfilled in Jesus, right down to the very smallest letters!

TRANSLATION - 5:21-26:

21 You have heard that it was said to the older ones, “Do not kill.” But whoever may kill, liable he will be to judgment.

22 But I say to you that everyone being angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever may say to his brother, “raca,” liable he will be to the Sanhedrin; and whoever may say, “Fool!,” liable he will be unto the hell of fire. **23** Therefore, if you may offer your gift on

the altar and there may remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave there your gift before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother and, at that time, coming offer your gift. **25** Be well-disposed to your accuser quickly, while whoever is with you in the way, lest you he may deliver the accuser to the judge and the judge, to the attendant and into prison you may be cast. **26** Truly I say to you, you will not exit from there, until when you may pay back the last chuadrans.

WORDS:

On “to hear” (ver. 21) see 2:3. “Older ones” is used here (5:21, 33) in Matt., out of 11 times. It means “ancient, old.” “To kill” is found 12 times, 5 times in Matt. It means to “kill” or “murder.” There is no distinction in these two latter synonyms. What is different, whether it is authorized or not, is one’s motivation. “Judgement” is found 12 times in Matt., out of 47 times. It can refer to a court where judgment takes place.

“To be angry” is found 8 times in the NT, three times in Matt. (5:22; 18:34; 22:7). “Raca” is an Aramaic word which is found only here in the NT. It is synonymous with “fool” in the next phrase. It was a severe derogatory term. The fact that Matthew keeps the Aramaic word in a Greek document suggests that the term was a common word even among Greek-speaking Jews. “Sanhedrin” is found in Matt. three times (5:22; 10:17; 26:50) but it is found in the NT 22 times. “Fool” is found 12 times, half of those in Matt. It means “foolish, stupid.” “Hell” is also found 12 times, 7 of those are by Matthew. The only time it is used outside of Jesus’ teachings is in James 3:6. See below under “Archaeology.” On “fire,” see 3:10-12.

“To offer” (ver. 23) is used 47 times in the NT, 15 in Matt. It means to “bring, offer, present.” “Gift” is found 19 times, 9 in Matt. “Altar” suggests the altar of burnt offering, used 23 times in the NT, 6 times by Matt. “To remember” is used 23 times, three by Matt. (5:23; 26:75; 27:63). “To leave” (ver. 24) was seen at 3:15. The verb “to be reconciled” is only found here.

“Well-disposed” (Ver. 25) is found only here. “Accuser” is found 5 times, twice in this verse. “Judge” is found 19 times, three in Matt. (twice here; 12:27). “Attendant” would be a court officer or bailiff in this context (the Sanhedrin had two guards) but it may also be a helper, servant, or assistant. The word is used 20 times (twice in Matt: 5:25; 26:58). “Prison” is found 47 times, 10 times in Matt. “To pay back” (ver. 26) is the verb “to give,” with a prefix “from.” It is used 48 times, 18 in Matt. “Chuadrans” is a transliteration of a Roman coin; it is used only twice: here; Mark 12:42.

GRAMMAR:

“You will not exit” (ver. 26) is emphatic.

PARALLELS:

Verses 25-26 are paralleled in Luke 12:57-59.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

This first contrast draws from Exo. 20:13; Deut. 5:17. The penalty for murder was death: Exo. 21:12; Lev. 24:21; Num. 35:16-21.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

“Sanhedrin” (ver. 22) was the council of the Jews, located in various cities around the Mediterranean world. The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was the most influential, with 71 members. It composed the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of Jewish law. It was composed of Pharisees (elders and scribes) and Sadducees (priests).

“Hell” (ver. 22) is the Greek word *gehenna*, which translates the Hebrew phrase Valley of Hinnom. It was a valley in which children were burned as sacrifices to the god Moloch, introduced by King Ahaz of Isaiah’s day (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:31; 19:2; Ezek. 16:20; 23:37), which God had forbid (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5). King Josiah abolished that practice (2 Kings 23:10) and defiled the valley, making it a garbage dump and a burial site for

criminals. By Jesus' day, it was a garbage dump with fires burning regularly. "Gehenna" came to be used to refer to the eternal punishment of the wicked, or "hell" in English.

"Chuadrans" (ver. 26) were the second smallest of the Roman coins, about 3/4". They were worth about 1/64 of a day's wage (a denarius; Matt. 18:28; 20:1-16), or about 7 1/2 *minutes* of an eight-hour day!

COMMENTS:

In the last six sections of this chapter, Jesus draws a contrast between His expectations and what His audience had been hearing from "the older ones." Generally speaking, Jesus is not contrasting His teaching with the Law; He's contrasting His teaching with the contemporary application of the Law.

First, Jesus discusses murder versus anger. If love fulfills the law, then rather than murdering someone, Jesus challenges His followers to not even be angry with them. The law against murder was in Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17. The "court" refers to the Jewish courts. Yet Jesus says that His followers should not even be angry with his brother. Anger will lead one to appear before the Jewish court. Calling a brother "raca," which is synonymous with "fool," could place one before the Jewish Sanhedrin, while despising a brother as a "fool," would land one in the fires of hell. Jesus, Himself, used the term "fool" in Matthew 7:26; 23:17, 19. When Jesus forbids us to call others fools, He has in mind using the word as a term of contempt, despising others as beneath our respect.

In verse 23, Jesus suggests that our worship might not be received by God if we have differences between us and our brother. If we come to the altar of worship and remember that we have problems with our brother, we ought to leave the gift at the altar and be reconciled first. Then we can come and worship.

Jesus further says that, to bring about reconciliation, we ought to agree with our "opponent" while we are on the path with him. Otherwise, the opponent could hand the disciple over to the judge who would then give him to the officer, and the disciple would be thrown into prison. He would remain in the prison for his debt, until he had paid the very last coin owed. Interest rates could be very high in the ancient world, often 100%, sometimes 200%.

APPLICATION:

The point of Jesus' statement here is to seek reconciliation with your fellow Christian as quickly as possible. We ought to take reconciliation and living in peace with each other very seriously (see also Matt. 18:6, 10, 12-17). In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter suggests that the relationship between a husband and a wife could be bad enough that it affects their prayers before God.

There is an appropriate anger directed against sin, a "righteous indignation" (John 7:24), which we see illustrated in Jesus (21:12-17) and God (18:34; 22:7). If Christians are to be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26-27), they should be careful to allow only sin to make them angry. Anger against a brother is nearly equivalent to murder (1 John 3:15; 4:20).

Instead, anger, wrath, and malice are to be put away from a Christian (Eph. 4:26; Col. 3:8; James 1:20). Every human being is made in God's image (James 3:8-10) and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, even if we disagree.

TRANSLATION - 5:27-30:

27 You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery."

28 But I say to you, that everyone looking at a woman for to lust after her already has committed adultery with her in his heart. **29** But if your right eye offends you, remove it and cast [it] from you; for it is profitable to you that it may be destroyed one of your members and not all your body may be cast into hell. **30** And if your right hand offends you, cut it off and cast [it] from you; for it is profitable to you that it may be destroyed one of your members and not all your body into hell may go away.

WORDS:

“To commit adultery” (ver. 27) is one word, used 15 times, 4 times in Matt. (5:27-28, 32; 19:18). It refers to unlawful sexual relations in which one individual is married. “To lust” means to desire strongly, used 16 times. It means to “desire for, long for, lust.” Matthew uses the verb here and at 13:17. It does not always carry negative connotations. “To offend” (ver. 29) gives us the English word *scandal*. It is used 29 times, 14 by Matt. It suggests the idea of “causing to stumble.” “To remove” can mean to “tear out, set free, rescue, select, choose” It is used 8 times, twice in Matt. (here; 18:9). “To be profitable” is used 15 times, four times by Matt. “To cut off” was first seen at 3:10.

PARALLELS:

There is a parallel to verse 30 in Matthew 18:8-9.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

“Do not commit adultery” is found in Exodus 20:14; Deut. 5:18. The penalty for adultery was death: Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22.

COMMENTS:

In the time of Jesus and before, a married man could have sexual relationships with women as long as the woman was not married. Women, however, were expected to have no such relations. She was expected to be a virgin before marriage and to remain faithful after marriage.

Since Jesus is showing that He, and His ethic of love, fulfills the law, Jesus goes behind the act of adultery and warns His followers to be careful even of their hearts. Lust occurs in the heart. It is the impure imagination in a man that goes beyond simply appreciating one’s beauty. Lust is a deliberate, meditated desire to have a sexual relationship with the object of one’s eyes.

Evil comes from the heart (Matt. 15:19), not the hands or eyes. Cutting off a hand or a foot or plucking out an eye would not stop the lust in the heart. Jesus is using hyperbole to emphasize how important it is to get sinful habits under control and behind us in order to enjoy the kingdom of heaven.

APPLICATION:

Paul will write in 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 that if one cannot control his sexual urges, he needs to get married. Peter criticizes those who have “eyes full of adultery” who never cease from sin (2 Peter 2:14). Like Job (31:1), Christians should make a covenant with their eyes not to harbor impure thoughts in their hearts. Pornography, whether printed or internet, is a plague that causes many Christians, men and women, to stumble. It causes women, in particular, to be viewed as objects for the purpose of stimulating sexual desires. Christians should make radical choices to make sure they keep their minds and their hearts pure and clean. Attending public pools and beaches might also be dangerous for such Christians. We do not believe that this “adultery in the heart” allows divorce, as dangerous as the behavior is. Jesus will deal with divorce next.

TRANSLATION - 5:31-32:

31 And it was said, “Whoever may divorce his wife, he must give to her a divorce certificate.”

32 But I say to you that everyone divorcing his wife except for the matter of sexual unfaithfulness makes her to commit adultery, and whoever having been divorced may marry, commits adultery.

WORDS:

“To divorce” (ver 31) is the general verb “to release or let go.” In the context of marriage, it means to divorce. The verb is found 66 times, 19 by Matt. The “certificate of divorce” is only found three times: Matt. 5:31; 19:7; Mark 10:4. This is the first use of the verb “to marry,” found 28 times, 6 times in Matt. “Sexual unfaithfulness” is found 25 times in the NT, three times in Matt. (5:32; 15:19; 19:9). The Greek word, *porneia*, gives us the root word for *pornography*. It refers to any unauthorized sexual behavior. It might be adultery, homosexuality, or bestiality.

PARALLELS:

The extended discussion of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Matthew is found in 19:1-12. Mark’s account (Mark 10:2-12; cf. Luke 16:18) will illustrate that Jesus allows a woman to divorce her husband if he is guilty of sexual unfaithfulness.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

God hates divorce, simply put by Malachi (2:16). The penalty for adultery in the Law was death: Deut. 22:20-22. The primary text behind the Jews’ consideration of divorce was Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The Law was intended to protect a woman from the capricious whims of men.

COMMENTS:

It seems that Jews practically expected a man whose wife was unfaithful to divorce her. Jesus holds out hope that forgiveness and reconciliation is possible but He does allow divorce and a second marriage for sexual unfaithfulness.

In Jesus’ day, there were two schools of thought, dating about two decades before Jesus, relative to divorce and remarriage, based around an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1. The school of Rabbi Hillel, focusing on the phrase “she finds no favor in his eyes,” believed that any reason would be appropriate for a divorce. The school of Rabbi Shammai focused on the term “indecency” and argued that only adultery was acceptable for divorce.

Jesus actually does not side with either rabbi. Adultery was punishable by death under the old law so that Deuteronomy 24 could not be about adultery. Yet, Jesus applies the “love” principle. One should not divorce his wife *at all* unless she has violated her vow to stay sexually faithful to him. If a man divorces his wife for some other reason, she would (presumably) enter a second marriage and, therefore, be guilty of adultery. By the same token, if someone has been divorced, whoever marries the divorced person commits adultery. To put it simply, if someone commits adultery against his or her spouse and he / she is subsequently put away (“divorced”), the guilty party may not remarry. If he / she does, he / she becomes an adulterer as long as he or she is in that marital union. Only an innocent (of adultery) spouse, who has not been divorced, may remarry.

Yet, this text and its companion text in Matthew 19:9 is so narrow and restrictive that men have developed many ways to try to get around the impact of the text.

1. Some suggest that since Matthew records Jesus’ words before Pentecost, therefore His teachings were just for those Jews and does not apply after the kingdom is established. That position effectively makes all that Jesus taught worthless to those living past Pentecost. The truth, however, is that John was preaching the kingdom was coming (3:2) and Jesus was preaching the kingdom was coming (4:17) and the Sermon on the Mount (including Matt. 5:32; 19:9), teaches what God expects out of men in order for them to *enter* into that kingdom and to remain *faithful* in that kingdom.

2. Some teach that *non-Christians*, the world, pagans, are not required by God to obey Matthew 5:32 *until* they become Christians. *Then*, they must submit to the teachings of Christ on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. However, as we have already shown, the Sermon on the Mount gives the ethics which God requires *of everyone* if they are going to enter the kingdom and remain in the kingdom until it is consummated in heaven. This means that one cannot be an adulterer, having entered a marriage he / she was not authorized to enter, and then enter the kingdom of heaven. By what standard of biblical interpretation could such a person argue that

non-Christians are not obligated to live by Matthew 5:32 but they *are* obligated to live by Matthew 5:44 or even Matthew 28:18-19? The truth is, the Gospel is one message, the entire NT (and including the OT in its most broad definition), and the Gospel is God's law for all of humanity after the establishment of the church in Acts 2. Marriage was created by God in Genesis 2; God governs and regulates, even blesses, all marriages which have been contracted with His authority. Additionally, we note from 7:28 and 8:1 that Jesus was teaching the crowds, not just His disciples, about the requirements for living in the kingdom.

3. If one finds himself / herself an adulterer, defined by Matthew 5:32, but has children with the adulterous wife or husband, it would involve breaking up a family. Therefore, the argument is, Matthew 5:32 cannot be understood as it is written. It is only "an ideal." While a man and a woman who bring a child into the world are both responsible for that child's welfare, they cannot be husband and wife, in the marital relationship, without violating Jesus' instructions. See the case of the Israelites in Ezra and Nehemiah's day and observe that having children did not allow the Israelites to remain in unauthorized marriages (see especially Ezra 10:44).

4. Others desire to argue that marriage is a covenant and that adultery breaks the covenant so that adultery would terminate a marriage and then *both* the adulterer and the innocent spouse are free to remarry. In response, this position would entirely negate Jesus' whole discussion here and in Matthew 19. Effectively, He wasted His breath, if this position is true.

5. Still others desire to argue that baptism washes away sin (Acts 22:16), therefore baptism would wash away the sin of adultery for a non-Christian and he or she might still remain in the "adulterous" marriage after baptism. Again, the arguments against this position are numerous. Effectively, prayer does for a sinning Christian what baptism does for a non-Christian. In that case, a Christian could commit adultery, pray for forgiveness, and continue in the adulterous relationship. That would, as in #4 above, negate what Jesus said about marriage and divorce. Secondly, if a behavior or relationship is *sinful* in its nature *before* baptism, it is still a *sinful* behavior or relationship after baptism. Baptism does not automatically create a scriptural divorce and a scriptural remarriage. Third, the relevant verbs in verse 32 are all present tense verbs: "The one *divorcing* his wife except for the cause of fornication *is making* her *to continue to commit adultery* and whoever having been divorced (this is in the perfect tense rather than the present tense), *is committing adultery*." Clearly Jesus is forbidding the *relationship*, not just a one-time-act which baptism could wash away. Baptism does not *change the nature of the relationship*.

Sinful man will do what he can to rationalize the position he desires to take in rebellion against the word of God. But we need to be humble and accept what Jesus says and then have the courage to change our behavior to make it fit what Jesus teaches.

APPLICATION:

There is no reason to teach this text is hyperbole except a desire to weaken God's law on marriage and divorce. God has always upheld with the strictest discipline the sanctity of marriage. It is clear that in order to be pure in God's eyes, one must be pure and innocent of sexual immorality for a second marriage to be entered. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:13-16 do not suggest any exception to this principle. That text deals with divorce but not remarriage. We also note in Romans 7:3-4 that Christ teaches that death ends a marriage relationship so that a surviving partner may enter into a second marriage with God's authority.

TRANSLATION - 5:33-37:

33 Again, you have heard that it was said to the older ones, "Do not swear oaths, but give back to the Lord your oaths."

34 But I say to you, Do not swear completely. Neither by heaven, because the throne it is of God, **35** neither by the earth, because the footstool it is of His feet, neither by Jerusalem,

because the city it is of the great king, **36** neither by your head you may swear, because you are not able one hair white to make or black. **37** But let your word [be] yes, yes, no, no. But beyond this from the evil [one] it is.

WORDS:

This verb “to swear an oath” (ver. 33) is only found here. For “Lord,” see 1:20, 22, 24. It is used 717 times. In reference to Deity, it translated the Hebrew word Jehovah in the OT. When it refers to Jesus, it thus associates Him with Deity. But, it can be more general, in the sense of “sir.” “Oath” is found only 10 times in the NT, four in Matt. The verb, “to swear,” is found 26 times, half of those in Matthew.

GRAMMAR:

The definite article in verse 37 before “evil,” suggests Jesus might have in mind the “evil one,” i. e., Satan. However, He might also be referring to evil as an abstract idea: “evilness” or “wickedness.”

PARALLELS:

The longest parallel to this discussion on oaths is found in 23:16-22.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The teaching on oaths was found in Exodus 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 5:11; 6:3; 22:21-23; 23:21. Yet, God made oaths (Gen. 9:9-11; Luke 1:68, 73; Heb. 6:17-18). He also required some oaths (Exo. 22:10-13; Num. 5:16-22). What were forbidden were not oaths in general, but false oaths, oaths made which were intended to be broken. Every oath is made in the name of Jehovah God. The ancients made oaths, calling on God’s (their gods’) wrath on them if they did not fulfill their oaths. If one were to make an oath involving the name of Jehovah God and then break that oath, he would have used God’s name in vain (Exo. 20:7, 16; Lev. 19:11-12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 5:11; 19:15-20). King Solomon warned Israel not to vow an oath if they were not going to fulfill it (Ecc. 5:4-7).

COMMENTS:

Any oath that is taken, is taken by the name of the God of heaven. The Jews tried to create a hierarchy of oaths so that the further one got away from God, swearing by God’s name, the less binding that oath was. So, they would make oaths by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even by their own head.

Jesus points out that each oath is still tied to God. Even relative to one’s hair color, only God can make the color white or black. Rather, a Christian should live such an honest life of integrity, that he or she has no reason to swear oaths. The “yes” should be “yes” and the “no” should be “no.” Incidentally, even today, a Christian should never feel compelled to use swearing to emphasize his words. Anything further than a simple answer suggests there is evil lurking in the heart.

APPLICATION:

Inspired writers made oaths: Gal. 1:20; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10. Jesus, Himself, answered in the court of law, under an oath (Matt. 26:63-64). Christians ought to live their lives in such an honest way that oaths, or even contracts for that matter, are superfluous (2 Cor. 1:17-24). In the court of law, where a Christian is obligated to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, swearing such an oath would not be injurious to the Christian’s character, as long as he or she, in fact, told the truth. James (5:12) reflects this paragraph of his brother’s teaching. Deceit has no part in the Christian’s heart or mouth (1 Peter 2:22).

TRANSLATION - 5:38-42:

38 You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

39 But I say to you, do not resist the evil; but whoever slaps you on the [your] right cheek, turn to him also the other. **40** And to the one desiring to sue you and your tunic to take, leave to him also the cloak. **41** And whoever you he may force one mile, go with him two. **42** To the one asking of you give, and the one wanting from you to borrow, do not turn away.

WORDS:

“To slap” (ver. 39) is only found twice, both in Matthew (5:39; 26:67). “To turn” is used 21 times, 6 in Matt. It means “to turn, change, return, turn around, or be converted.” “To judge” (ver. 40) is used 114 times, 6 times in Matthew, almost all of them in the sermon on the mount (5:40; 7:1-2; 19:28). The “tunic” is used 11 times, twice by Matt., and was the garment worn closest to the body. By contrast, the “cloak” is used 60 times, 13 in Matt., and was worn on the outside of the other clothing.

“To force” (ver. 41) is a Persian loan word, used in Matt. 5:41; 27:32; Mark 15:21. The Roman mile is found only here in Scripture. “To borrow” (ver. 42) is used only 4 times, three of which are found in Luke’s account of this sermon (6:34-35). “To turn away” is from the same root word as “to turn” in verse 39. This word is only found 9 times, twice in Matt. (here; 26:52).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is known as the *lex talionis* or the “law of retaliation.” When one studies the OT references to such a law (Exo. 21:23-25; Lev. 19:18; 24:10-13, 20; Deut. 19:15-21), it is clear that God was trying to keep justice balanced. That is, He intended for the punishment to fit the crime. Revenge has a way of getting out of hand. It also kept vigilante justice to a minimum. There were legal protections for those tried in court (Deut. 19:15-21) and God required a minimum of two witnesses (Deut. 17:6). By the days of Jesus, the penalty for crimes were largely reduced to monetary fines.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The Roman mile was 1,000 paces which equaled to 4,854’, almost an English mile. Simon of Cyrene is an example of one being forced to carry a load (the cross of Christ; 27:32; Mark 15:21). The verb “to force” is actually a Persian word reflecting the Persian mail system. The noun, related to the verb, was the mail carrier. He had the authority to force or compel other citizens to allow the use of their horses while he was being dispatched under the king’s authority. The Roman government extended the practice. Soldiers could compel citizens to carry loads for a mile.

COMMENTS:

The Law of Moses required a penalty for a crime which was commiserate to the crime itself. That kept criminal law more balanced and just.

Yet, Jesus goes behind the law itself to show how love will fulfill the law. Jesus says, “do not resist the evil person.” Receiving a slap on the right cheek suggests an insulting slap, a slap of contempt. Jesus tells His disciples not to slap back. Rather, turn the other cheek.

If one sues in the court of law to take the undergarment, Jesus wants His followers to value kindness over possessions. Give the outer garment as well. If one is forced to go a mile in performing a duty, go two miles. If someone asks to borrow, do not turn away. Give what is needed. The focus of NT benevolence is on sharing with those who have a legitimate need (Acts 2:45; 4:34; Eph. 4:28).

This text should not be understood to limit the power of the civil government to implement justice as its laws require. God created the civil government (Rom. 13:1-4) and it exists to punish evil doers and maintain a peaceful society (1 Tim. 1:8-9; 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:17).

APPLICATION:

God has always expected His people to be givers (Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 3:27-28; James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:16-18). While Jesus expects His followers to be givers, this paragraph has to

be balanced with other passages. For example, Paul stands for the rights of others (Acts 16:37; 22:25; 25:8-12) and the lazy are not to receive fellowship (2 Thess. 3:6-13) and if one does not work, he should not eat (1 Tim. 5:8). So, we ought to be careful that in giving to others what they ask, we are not encouraging or enabling laziness or some other sinful behavior.

Jesus continues to expect His followers to leave revenge in the hands of the Father (Rom. 12:14-21; 1 Cor. 6:7-8; 1 Thess. 5:15; Heb. 10:30). Paul also teaches that it is better for a Christian to suffer wrong than to take his brother to court (1 Cor. 6:7).

TRANSLATION - 5:43-48:

43 You have heard that it was said, “You will love your neighbor and you will hate your enemy.”

44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you. **45** Thus you will be sons of your Father, the one in heaven, because His sun rises on evil ones and good ones and it rains on righteous ones and unrighteous ones. **46** For if you love those loving you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors the same they do? **47** And if you will greet your brothers only, what greater do you do? Not even the Gentiles the same they do? **48** Be, therefore, yourselves complete as your heavenly Father, complete He is.

WORDS:

“To love” (ver. 43) is used 143 times in the NT, 8 times in Matt. This verb (*agapao*) is often considered the highest form of love in the Greek language. It is not *always* distinguishable from *phileo* love (brotherly love). But, it does suggest the idea of desiring what is best for the other person, regardless of the cost to the one loving. “Neighbor” is found 17 times in the NT, 3 times in Matt. “To hate” is used 40 times, 5 in Matt. The Greek word *miseo* gives us the root word of *misogynistic*, the “hatred of women.” “Enemy” is used 32 times, 7 in Matt.

Here (ver. 44) is the first time “to pray” is found in the NT. The word is used 85 times in the NT, 15 times in Matt. It suggests the idea of “asking toward” someone. “Tax collector” (ver. 46) is found 21 times in the NT, Matthew himself being a collector (9:10-11), uses the word 8 times. “Gentiles” translates a word only 4 times (5:47; 6:7; 18:17; 3 John 7), which means “nations.” It gives us the word *ethnic* or *ethnicity*. “Complete” is found 19 times in Scripture, in Matthew only here and at Matt. 19:21. It translates a Hebrew term which referred to animal sacrifices which were perfect specimens. The idea is complete, mature, or perfect in that sense, not sinless perfection.

PARALLELS:

Rather than “be perfect,” Luke’s account (6:36) says, “be merciful as your Father is merciful.” Leviticus 19:18 is quoted again in Matt. 19:19; 22:39 and will be found in the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The command to love their neighbors is found in Leviticus 19:18. Certainly, no OT passage commanded one to hate his enemies. However, some passages could be forced to draw that conclusion (Exo. 34:12; Deut. 7:2; 23:6; Psalm 26:4-5; 139:21-22). The Qumran community did instruct its members to hate their enemies (1QS 1:4, 10-11; 9:21-26). In Leviticus 19:2, God said, “Be holy for I am holy.” That would be the OT parallel to 5:48. The word translated “complete” in verse 48 reflects the idea of perfection or completeness in the OT: Gen. 6:9; Deut. 18:13; 2 Sam. 22:26.

COMMENTS:

God could not tolerate the idea that hatred of enemies is acceptable. No one should be an enemy in God’s eyes. They are only enemies if they set themselves against God. But that does not mean that God’s children should treat them disrespectfully or with contempt. Rather, Jesus’ disciples should love their enemies, pray for them, bless them, and seek their highest

good. In fulfilling the OT requirements, motivated ultimately by love, then Jesus' followers will be complete, just as their heavenly Father is complete. This challenge echoes what God has expected of His followers since He called Abraham (Gen. 17:1).

APPLICATION:

Jesus did not just teach love for one's enemies; He practiced it (Luke 23:34). God sends a harvest to atheists (Acts 14:16-17). We should do no less. Christians are to be known by their love for their fellowman, including their enemies: Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12; Gal. 5:14; Eph. 4:31-5:2; 1 John 4:7-12; 1 Peter 1:14-25; 3:9; James 2:8. The teachings of Jesus need to be integrated into our character so that we will reflect His nature.