

PURSUING THE PERFECTION OF GOD

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

FEBRUARY 16, 2020

SCRIPTURE READING

MATT 5:21-30; 43-48 (ESV)

“21 ¶ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’

22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

**23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother has
something against you,**

**24 leave your gift there before the altar and go.
First be reconciled to your brother, and then
come and offer your gift.**

25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

27 ¶ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

...

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” (Mt 5:21-30 ESV)

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Matt 5:43-48

Matt 5: “43 ¶ (ESV)“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

**46 For if you love those who love you,
what reward do you have? Do not even
the tax collectors do the same?**

**47 And if you greet only your brothers,
what more are you doing than others? Do
not even the Gentiles do the same?"**

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“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:43- 48 ESV)

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THESE ARE THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

**THANK YOU JESUS FOR TEACHING US ABOUT
A CHANGED HEART**

AMEN

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has very clear teachings for his disciples. He did not address the multitudes but his disciples (5:1).

He begins the sermon on the Mount by enumerating nine categories of those who are blessed because or as a result of their relationship with God.

He then talks about the role his disciples who are described as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Their presence is to be felt and seen in this world.

We are not to hide that we belong to Jesus, that we belong to the kingdom of God. Salt, although unseen, gives flavour; light illuminates. It is not to be hidden.

Christ then clearly states that he has not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfil them.

He then goes to describe attitude of the heart that people of the kingdom are to have. The following are the ones he specifically addressed.

During today's sermon, we are going to think about three of these but not all because of limited time. Each could be the subject to a sermon. We will touch on some of the

highlights of what Jesus says.

They are: (next slide)

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1. Anger

2. Lust

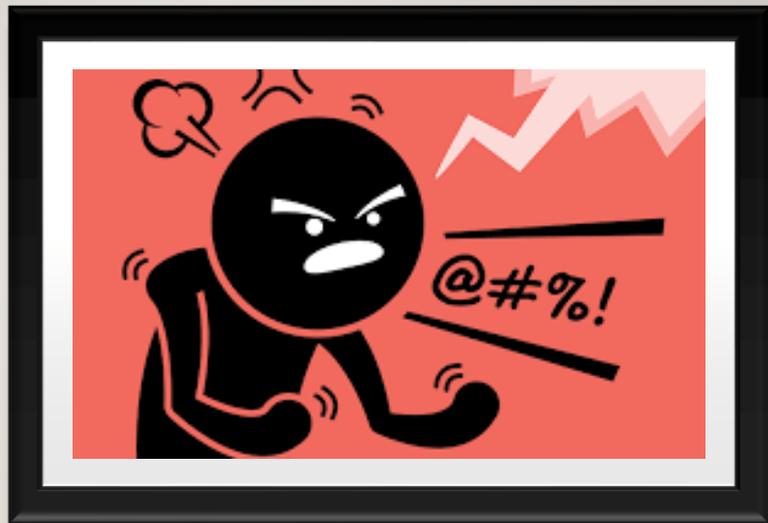
3. Divorce

4. Oaths

5. Retaliation

6. Loving Our Enemies

ANGER



From bphone.com

God the Father has created the whole universe through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul also tells us that Jesus is the rock that followed the Israelites. God gave the 10 Commandments and inspired the Old Testament. We always need to remember that God is one in 3 distinct persons. When we talk of Jesus, this does not eliminate the role of the Father or of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus being the second person in the Godhead, and the Word sent forth by the Father, tells us the right intent of the Old Covenant/Testament. The intent of the Old Testament, when it came to the attitudes of the heart, were misunderstood. Jesus corrects these faulty attitudes and ruinous attitudes which were never and are never God's intent.

During his life on earth, Jesus had a perfect understanding of the intent of the law and the prophets. He lived on the earth as a one of us but differently because he perfectly did God the Father's perfect will.

Jesus' heart and attitudes as he lived in our flesh were perfect. Although tempted just like we are, he never sinned.

As stated before, Jesus being divine and human in his person represents all of us. He

took our sins upon himself at the cross to liberate us from the consequences of sin which is death.

Coming back to the Sermon on the Mount, ***“The historical level is important to keep before us. Jesus is speaking in a religious context in which the teachers of the law and the Pharisees held sway over the lives of the common people. The Pharisees had mapped out what they considered to be the proper course for attaining righteousness through their interpretation and application of the Old Testament. One facet of this regimen was a tendency to require legalistic, external obedience to the law without calling attention to an inner obedience from the heart.”*** Wilkins, Michael J.. The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew (p. 241). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

In Matthew 5:21 Jesus addresses the question of murder. Murder has to do with intentionally taking another person’s life and includes taking our own life.

Murdering another person stems or begins from an attitude of the heart. Jesus addresses this poisonous attitude directly.

The apostle John in his first epistle writes that everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and he does not have eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15).

When we nurture destructive anger in our hearts, we harbour an attitude which is completely contrary to God’s attitude. Jesus came to the earth not to condemn and destroy but to save (John 3:16-18).

Calling another person of “Raca” is a grievous sin. During the time Jesus lived, this term meant **“empty-headed”**. In the Jewish society, this was very insulting because it took away a person’s identity.

We can see that this attitude is still very problematic today for anyone who harbours it. It is demeaning, condescending, robbing the other of his or her dignity.

To call somebody **“a fool”** which has the connotation of an “idiot” is also sinful because with that attitude we look at the other person with contempt, disdain, scorn and derision and mockery.

Once we receive the new life in Christ and receive the mind of Christ, our attitude toward other fellow human beings changes. Having the mind of Christ means that we have a new life. Jesus is living in us through the person of the Holy Spirit. He changes our hearts and perception of others, even those we would not naturally love.

We see evidence of the mind of Jesus, of his personality in his ministry. He went toward the sinners, the sick, the poor, the rich like Zacchaeus, the lepers and the

ordinary people of his day. He did not shy away from people. He came to the earth to rescue all from the slavery of sin and death.

Having a relationship with God also means that we will do all that we can, as far as it depends on us, to have a reconciling attitude when we face conflicts. In Matthew 18, Jesus instructs us how to deal with conflicts with people in the church. You are encouraged to read it.

When we have conflicts with others we are to make every effort to reconcile. He told the disciples that if they had disagreements with one another they were to reconcile before offering a gift in worship.

He addresses 2 situations:

- 1 – when one is angry with a brother;
- 2 – when a brother has something against us.

This means that we are to be proactive in making every effort to live in peace with other disciples of Jesus.

Certainly this teaching can apply to everyone but in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses his disciples specifically.

It is very clear in first John that we cannot say we love God and hate our brothers (1 John 2:1-10).

God equips us to control our thoughts and attitudes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. **Part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control.**

As human beings, it is so easy to fall in the trap of having condescension for others especially if we have been hurt or deeply disappointed by a fellow believer or anybody else for that matter.

Anger is said to be a secondary emotion erupting from such emotions as hurt, betrayal, disappointment, etc.

Jesus is clearly telling us how to deal with conflicts within the church. He is primarily addressing attitudes of the heart which results in attitudes of love towards others promoting harmony and peace in relationships.

MATTHEW 5:27-30



From ministrytoyouth.com

Again, in these verses, Jesus looks more deeply than the outward behaviours. He addresses directly what is going on in the heart.

Adultery in the Old Testament involved sexual intercourse with mutual consent between a man, married or unmarried, and the wife of another man.

Wilkins, Michael J.. The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew (p. 244). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.)

Adultery and infidelity are sins against God.

Joseph, in Genesis 39, was said to be handsome in the form and appearance. Potiphar's wife lusted after him and wanted to have an intimate sexual relationship with him. Joseph, in no uncertain terms told her that he would not betray Potiphar. He said, **"How then can I do there is great wickedness and sin against God"** (Genesis 39:9).

Jesus tells them that if a man looked at another woman with lustful intent in his heart that he had already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Using analogies, he told him to go to great extent to avoid the sin of the heart. **"If**

your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell"
(verse 29).

This is not men literally, of course. It is a metaphor.

Lust was a problem during Jesus' day and it is still a major problem today. It knows no international boundaries.

In our modern day, the problem is made even worse by the wide dissemination of Internet pornography. **"Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry of cruel, body punishing acts of making hate to women. This is the world your average boy is catapulted into when he types 'porn' into Google".**

The average age of exposure to pornography today is between 11 and 13 years of age, a time when the sexual template of most children is a blank state.

(HOW PORNOGRAPHY HARMS, What the Church Needs to Know, from Evangelical Fellowship of Canada page 17.)

From the same book could on pages 23–25, **we read that the number of websites devoted to pornography is 4.2 million.**

Unfortunately, Christians access online pornography to disturbing degrees. Statistics show the use of pornography by regular church member attenders mirrors that of the general population. According to certain surveys, it is reported that 50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women say they are addicted to pornography.

In a conference I recently attended, it was said that 7/10 Christian men watched pornography quite regularly. As God's people, we are to get away from those behaviours by putting on the new self, the new life. We are to stop serving our passions. This is what the apostle Paul said to the church in Colossae,

"4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 ¶ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 ¶ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Col 3:4-10

ESV)

Some encouraging news is that practising Christians are three times less likely to use porn. 100% of Christians, of the disciples of Jesus, should leave these practices behind as they are so destructive. They have no place in the hearts of believing people as the Holy Spirit is transforming us into the perfect likeness of the man Jesus.

Sin enslaves people and pornography supports and promotes human trafficking, the dehumanizing of women and men as well as children. It is a source of modern slavery affecting mostly women but also young men.

Jesus is implying the following, "The purity of marriage includes exclusive devotion to one another with every aspect of their lives, and this commitment excludes wanting another person or giving oneself in any way to another person. Looking lustfully at another woman breaks the bond of oneness that a man has with his wife."

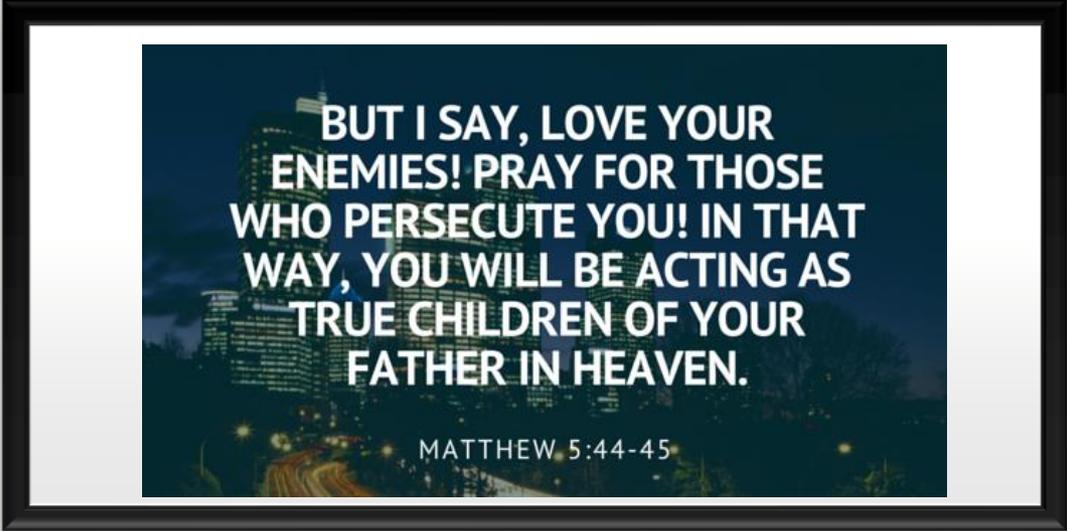
Wilkins, Michael J. The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew (p. 245). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

When David confessed his sin after lusting and committing adultery with Batsheba, Uriah's wife, he said to God, ***'Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment'*** (Psalm 51:4 ESV).

If all Christian men took these instructions seriously, the number of divorces in the church would practically ground to a halt.

As we read God's word, it is very clear that sexual intimacy is meant to be expressed in a faithful, loyal marital relationship between a husband and a wife. Any type of sexual relationships outside of marriage between a husband and wife is sinful and goes against God's will.

I encourage you to read for yourself what Jesus said to his disciples about **divorce, oaths and retaliation**. In a short sermon, it is difficult to do justice to all of these. As we study the sermon on the Mount, it is also important that we read them in the context of the entirety of the biblical text both in the Old and New Testaments.



**BUT I SAY, LOVE YOUR
ENEMIES! PRAY FOR THOSE
WHO PERSECUTE YOU! IN THAT
WAY, YOU WILL BE ACTING AS
TRUE CHILDREN OF YOUR
FATHER IN HEAVEN.**

MATTHEW 5:44-45

From: <http://tapestryministry.org/>

Again, this attitude is rooted in God. It is God's desire that everyone will come to repentance. (**"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."** [2 Pe 3:9 ESV].

As disciples of Jesus, with the Holy Spirit indwelling us, we are to pray for those who do not like us and for those who are causing us harm. We are to pray for those who persecute us.

We are not to love only those who are nice and pleasant people. We are told to love our enemies and to pray for them.

The apostle Paul, inspired by God, writes the same thing in Romans 12:14 **"bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"**. In the last verses of this chapter, the apostle Paul tells us not to take vengeance on our own but to the contrary, **'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give them something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.'** **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

This is not a natural human response, is it?

Jesus reflects this wonderful attitude when he prayed to God the Father and asked his in our Father to forgive those standing at the foot of the cross. ***'And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.'*** [Lu 23:34 ESV]

Because we have the mind of Christ, Jesus told his disciples to be different in their thinking and behaviour from the unbelievers or the Gentiles.

He then follows with this extraordinary command [Next slide]

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MATTHEW 5:48



From: Pinterest.com)

The ESV Bible Commentary writes the following about this verse (Next slide)

"Scripture is a reflection of God himself as he has made his will and character known to his people. As Christians seek to live in conformity to Scripture, they are in fact pursuing the very perfection of God. This verse provides the conclusion in summary to the antithesis section (versus 21-48), showing that all of the law and the prophets find their perfect fulfilment in the perfection of the Father, which is what Jesus disciples are called to pursue."

"Taken from the ESV® Study Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."

We must realize that until the resurrection we will always have struggles with sin. On our own, we can never have the righteousness of God. It is a gift given to us in grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

God knows our struggles. He is faithful. As we stay attached to him, he will bring us at the resurrection to complete perfection. We will experience this perfection fully for all eternity.

Because we have struggles of various kinds in this life, we are not to get discouraged. In the faith that leads to obedience, we are going to do our human best to live up to God's standards.

This is what Jesus said, **"34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (Joh 8:34-36 ESV)

In Jesus Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. We have been set free. Let us make every effort, empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in this wonderful freedom!

In conclusion, I would like to quote the apostle Paul who gives us such encouragement as we journey through this life.

(1Co 1:3-9 ESV)

“3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,

5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—

6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—

7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1Co 1:3-9 ESV)

Let us live in this confidence.

Let us pray!