

LIVING IN HARMONY WITH OTHERS Sunday School- November 6, 2011

Unifying Topic: FORGIVING AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Lesson Text

I. The Fulfillment Of The Law (Matthew 5:17-20)

II. Jesus' Teaching On Murder (Matthew 5:21-26)

The Main Thought: Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (Matthew 5:23-24, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People wonder if good, harmonious relationships are possible. Can we all just get along? Jesus teaches us that forgiveness is crucial to Christian living.

Lesson Aim: To explore Jesus' teachings concerning relationships and reconciliation.

Life aim: To help students experience the joy of forgiving, being forgiven, and making reconciliation a priority in their lives.

- 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.
- 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.
- 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.
- 5:21 Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:
- 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.
- 5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;
- 5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.
- 5:25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.
- 5:26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

HISTORY:

The beatitudes (Chapter 5:1-12) are followed by a summary statement of the basic character of the Christian's life as salt and light. **Ye are the salt of the earth (v13)** indicating that only the genuinely born-again person is salt and can help meet the needs of the world. The salt adds flavoring, acts as a preservative, melts coldness and heals wounds. Thus it is a very appropriate description of the believer in his relationship to the world in which he lives. **V13b ...but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?** The term "*lose its savor*" refers to its essential saltiness.

5:13c It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Jesus was actually saying that if the salt has lost its saltiness, it is worthless. The implication of this statement is that if a Christian loses his effectiveness, his testimony will be trampled under the feet of men. Lukewarm Christians will not make the final cut. God will spew lukewarm Christians out like lukewarm water. Sold out to God Christians are the salt of the earth.

5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. This describes the essential mission of the Christian to the world. He is the condition (salt) to meet the world's needs and he has a mission (light) to the world. This Light of Jesus should be so brightly shining, that no one need ask if you are saved; but they should be quick to see the glow of this Light within you. It will be visible! Sin has a way of being hidden in the darkness, but when we apply the Light, it does away with darkness. You are the light only in the Lord. Christ is the "*true*" or "*original*" light. Citizens of the kingdom are simply "*luminaries*" reflecting the One True Light, just as the moon reflects the sun. You cannot hide a city that's lit on a hill. Its brightness will be seen just as Christians must be visibly seen. If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing what Christ is like.

5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. The word rendered "*candle*" means any portable light, as a lamp, candle, or lantern. When people light a candle, they do not conceal the light, by putting it under a basket, but they place it where it may be of use.

Inconsistent living and unconfessed sin in the life of the believer will become a basket-like covering which hides the light of God. Let your testimony be seen to all that hear it.

5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Let your light shine through a clean life before the Lord and before the world in which you live. Two purposes:

1. Believers are to let their light shine in order to show forth good works. Let your holy life, your pure conversation, and your faithful instructions, be everywhere seen and known.
2. Believers are to let their light shine in order to stir men to glorify God. Those who see your good works may be brought, not to glorify you (which was the things the Pharisees aimed at, and it spoiled all their performances), but to glorify your Father which is in heaven. Note: The glory of God is the great thing we must aim at in everything we do in religion.

Conclusion, light has one purpose and that is to shine before men. If there are no people, there are no eyes to see the light. Therefore, believers are not to seclude themselves from others. The more light that is put out in the darkness, the more the darkness is eliminated. Believers are not the only ones who are to glorify God; they are to go out and cause those in darkness to glorify Him.

LESSON:

Matthew 5:17-20 The Fulfillment Of The Law

5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. We say this verse all the time. Now let's break it down. ¹Jesus here began a long discussion of the law, and wanted to make it clear that He did not oppose what God gave Israel in what we call the Old Testament. The Law referred to four different writings to the Jews.

1. It referred to the *Ten Commandments*.
2. It referred to the *first five books of the Bible* that is *the Pentateuch*.
3. It referred to the *law and the prophets*, that is, all the Scripture of the Old Testament.
4. It referred to the *oral or the Scribal Law*.

God's Law, given in the Old Testament was not enough for the Jews. They reasoned that if the law was really God's Word, then it must include—have embodied within it—every rule and regulation for conduct. Therefore they took the great principles of the law and reduced them to thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations. These rules and regulations became the "*oral or Scribal Law*."

²The Law in the Old Testament, and in fact the Old Testament itself, is a type and shadow of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. The Word of God never changes. God's law (Old) is made more glorious in the New. The Old Testament constantly prophesied about Jesus coming to fulfill all prophecy. Jesus was the fulfillment. The law was not bad, just misunderstood. Jesus has fulfilled the law and reconciled us to God the Father. Jesus was not, and is not, a destroyer; He is a builder. He did not come to destroy the Word of God, but to free it from the way the Pharisees and Scribes had wrongly interpreted it. He does not release men from, the duty and responsibility of the law; He fulfills and strengthens and even enlarges the law. It means that a person is now free to serve God in the spirit and life of the law, not just in the letter of the law.

- To "*fulfil*" is to "*fill full*." The most significant way Jesus fulfilled the law was to complete its purpose. The law told what was right and what was wrong before God. It let people know that they were sinners, not good enough to receive eternal life (Rom.3:19, 20). It was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, by whom our sins are forgiven. When we come to Christ and are forgiven, the law is fulfilled. Its purpose is accomplished. And we are no longer under the schoolmaster (Gal.3:24-26). Consider one example of how to apply this principle. The law required a sinner to sacrifice an animal to atone for his sin. But the sacrifice of an animal is not enough to take away the sins of anyone. Such sacrifices were offered repeatedly until Jesus' death on the

¹ <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/4005.htm>

² <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/matthew/11.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

cross, through which sins really are taken away. Thus the law is fulfilled, and animal sacrifices are no longer necessary (Heb.10:1-18).

5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. To draw attention to the authority of His message, He says, verily, which means truly, certainly, or amen. Before one jot or tittle of the law fail, heaven and earth would have to pass away. There would be no change at all, until it was all fulfilled. One jot or one tittle refers to the minutest marks and letters of the Hebrew alphabet. A **jot** is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, called *yodh*. A **tittle** is a small projection on the edge of certain Hebrew letters to distinguish them from one another—"Not one dot of an "i" or not one cross of a "t" will pass from the law till all is fulfilled. He explained that even the smallest statement in the law must be fulfilled, for He had come to fulfill the law and its fullest implications.

5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Everything that is in the *Law is important. It is easy to keep some parts of the *Law and to neglect other parts, however, the man that breaks the least commandment and continues and continues to break it thereby teaching others to treat the law that way was unacceptable, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. Such continued disobedient behavior teaches that the commandments of God are not really all that important. But the one who teach men to live by God's law must also practice what they preach; then they will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. This simply means that God will reward the faithfulness and effectiveness of our lives and there will be varying degrees of blessing and reward in the kingdom.

5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Note three facts:

1. Righteousness is necessary to enter into the kingdom of heaven.
2. The religionist, the Pharisees, and the Scribes had some righteousness. They just didn't have enough. They worked at obeying thousands and thousands of rules and regulations, however, they lacked the one essential: loving God so much that they would deny themselves and seek their righteousness in His Son, Jesus Christ!
3. A person must have more righteousness than a strict religionist to enter heaven. What did Christ mean? Who can enter heaven if a strict religionist cannot?

³The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was outward, ritualistic, and not from the heart. It was an external righteousness, a scrupulous legalism. Jesus' listeners cannot enter the Millennial Kingdom with outward righteousness. Human righteousness can never match God's righteousness. What the Saviour demands is a kind of righteousness that is so godly that it cannot be the product of human effort but must be the gift of God. This righteousness Christ would establish, in His life and death, would be made available as God's free gift. This is the righteousness that would exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus' Teaching On Murder

In communicating the depth of His message, Jesus used a series of contrasts between the outward demand of the law and the inner attitude of heart desired by God. Jesus now turns to what He does require for His kingdom (5:21-48). He selects six subjects to distinguish His teaching from that of the Scribes and Pharisees. We are only covering one in this lesson.

LAW	SPIRIT
Murder (vv21-26)	No anger
Adultery (vv27-30)	No lust
Divorce (vv31-32)	Commitment
Oath-taking (vv33-37)	Speak the truth
Retaliation (vv38-42)	Forgiveness
Hate your enemy (vv43-48)	Love your enemy

5:21 Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, "Thou shalt not kill"; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: The reference to killing is clearly understood in its context in both the Old Testament and New Testament as referring to an act of murder (the sixth commandment – Exo.20:13). Jesus identified wrong attitudes as triggering other sins. He is giving a fuller understanding of why God made that law in the first place. For example, when Moses said, "*Do not kill*," it must be remembered that the God who commanded the

³ <http://versebyversecommentary.com/matthew/matthew-520/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

children of Israel not to murder one another, also commanded them at times to kill an enemy in order to defend their nation. Jesus goes even further, "*Don't even become angry enough to murder for then you have already committed murder in your heart.*" Jesus was not altering the terms of the law in any of these passages. Rather, he was correcting what they had heard—the rabbinical understanding of the law.

5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:

Killing is a terrible sin, but anger is a great sin too because it also violates God's command to love. Christ is saying that man has a problem. Man applies it only to the outward act; in this case, to the act of murder. He fails to look inward—within himself—to the cause. Murder is deeper than just an outward act. It is also an inward act. Murder is born from within from an uncontrolled spirit, from an unregulated urge, from an inner anger. Anger itself is the real sin, the sin that breaks the law of God. Reasons why people get angry and develop feelings against others:

- To seek revenge and to hurt.
- To show ego or authority.
- To reveal passion or secure some end.
- To show hurt, resentment, and bitterness.
- To express disagreement and displeasure.
- To correct a wrong (a justified anger).
- To give warning.

Unresolved anger will fester and grow to become dangerous. It can become uncontrollable and give birth to murder.

Three steps in the growth of anger:

1. When anger broods, that is selfish, harbors malice; it will not forget; it lingers; it is a seething brooding bitterness; it wills revenge and sometimes seeks revenge.
2. When anger holds contempt (*raca*), despises; ridicules; arrogantly exalts self and calls another person empty and useless. This is an anger that is full of malice. It despises and scorns (*raca*). It arises from pride—a proud wrath (Prov.21:24). Such feelings of anger walk over and trample a person. It says that whatever ill comes upon a person is deserved.
3. When anger that curses, seeks to destroy a man and his reputation morally, intellectually, and spiritually.

If a person has an angry nature—if he flies off the handle at the drop of a hat—he has a character flaw of which he must repent. If this is so, Jesus is saying that even getting angry—with or without a "justifiable" cause—puts one in danger of breaking this commandment! After reading those things, we surely don't want any of that to start growing in us. The Bible does permit anger against sin (*righteous indignation*) but not anger against another person. Even righteous indignation is always disciplined and controlled.

5:22b ...and whosoever shall say to his brother, *Raca*, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, *Thou fool*, shall be in danger of hell fire.

"*Raca*" literally means empty-headed, a Hebrew or Aramaic expression of contempt, worthless one! When saying this to his brother, they are in danger of going before the Jewish religious council called the Sanhedrin in that day. "*Thou fool*" (Gr *mōros*) means stupid. We have developed the English word "*moron*" from this term. Those using such a malicious expression would be in danger of hell fire. "*Hell fire*" or "*Gehennā*" (*geenna*) is used eleven or twelve times in the New Testament, and in every case it is spoken by Jesus except in the Epistle of James. It illustrates the terrible truth of the second death, of man's final separation from God. Jesus pointed to the burning, repulsive dump outside the city limits of Jerusalem and referring that it was exactly what hell was like. The dump was called Gehenna (in the Valley of Hinnom [Slaughter] which served as a public incinerator. Hanging over it was a layer of thick, smoldering smoke arising from what seemed to be an eternal flame).

The idea clearly seems to be that if one makes light of his fellow man he will be in danger of slander. But if one makes bitter, damning statements with reference to hell toward his fellow man, he shall actually be in danger of hell himself. The point is: violence is to be judged—not only before the councils of the world, but before the council of God. God's judgment will be just as swift on anger as it will be upon murder. Anger keeps us from developing a spirit pleasing to God. Self-control is good, but Christ wants us to practice thought-control as well—think before you speak! Jesus said we will be held accountable even for our attitudes.

5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Having made a comparison between the command not to murder and the inner motive and heart intention of hatred, Jesus then illustrated the seriousness of this matter by referring to one who would attempt to buy off his conscience by giving something to God without clearing his conscience with his offended brother. He reminded that if thou bring thy gift to the altar without reconciling with the offended party, God will not receive the intended gift. Bringing a gift to the altar refers to bringing it to the Temple in order that it might be consecrated.

5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. It looks like reconciliation is far greater than just bringing a gift to God. Jesus commands that we leave our gifts before the altar. Do not complete your offering; first be reconciled to your brother. At this particular time we are dealing with temple worship in Jesus' day. The time for worship is after reconciliation. "*To be reconciled*" means to be brought back into fellowship or favor with our fellow man. Therefore, if conflict exists between any two people in our day, it is God's desire that they reconcile the conflict before attempting to give a gift or an act of service unto the Lord. Many people try to suppress the guilt of their sin by not thinking about it and thereby display an outward act that they hope will please God in some way. God is not tricked by outward display; He always knows the heart. Reconciliation is more important than worship! And it is the answer to anger. I don't care how much you want to dismiss it!

- Reconciliation is always to precede worship. Some people try to worship while there are bad feelings between themselves and other people; some try to pray with wrath in their heart; some try to say, "*I love God*" while they hate their brother; And each person thinks he is acceptable to God! God does not accept the worship of a person who holds malice against Him or against any of His people.
 - A break with another person means a break with God.
 - Unforgiveness toward another person means unforgiveness by God.
 - Not being right with another person means not being right with God.
 - Broken fellowship with another person means broken fellowship with God.
 - Bad feelings toward another person mean unacceptance by God.
 - Anger against another person means rejection by God.
- Worship is a time for a person to reflect and to examine his heart and life to see if there is any wicked way within him (Ps.139:24). It is essential that he search his heart. It's impossible to offer the Lord a "*sacrifice of praise*" and ignore Him at the same time. And it's hard to sing songs of His Lordship, and disobey at the same time. It's impossible to say "No, Lord" because if you say no, then He's not your Lord. Some people say they stay away from worship because they have something against a brother. Christ has fulfilled the law and you are made righteous in Christ, so understand that you can't stay away from Him! The point of Christ is clear: get right with your brother and get in worship. One sin heaped upon another is twice as dangerous and shall bring forth double judgment.
- Reconciliation should be attempted immediately...
 - while a person is still in a brother's presence: while thou are in the way with him (v25).
 - before the sun goes down on a person's wrath: "*be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath*" Eph.4:26.
 - because a person cannot truly worship with barriers existing in the heart.
 - because a person cannot offer acceptable prayers with barriers existing in his heart.
 - because a person could die before reconciliation takes place and be forced to face judgment with some unconfessed sin.

Having resolved the personal conflict, we have then but to return and perform the act of service unto the Lord.

5:25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; "*Adversary*" speaks of one's opponent or accuser in a law case. Agreement was to be settled out of court. Jesus calls for reconciliation to be sought eagerly, aggressively, quickly—even if it involves self-sacrifice. It is better to be wronged than to allow a dispute between brethren to be a cause for dishonoring Christ. **5:25b ...lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.** In Jesus' day it is to their advantage to reconcile with their adversary before they were delivered to the judge (If the case went to court, the offender might be

imprisoned). If someone couldn't pay a debt, they were delivered to the judge who would deliver them to the officer (guard) and then be thrown into prison (debtor's prison) until the debt was paid. Unless someone came to pay the debt for the prisoner, he would probably die there. It is practical advice to us to also resolve differences with our enemies before their anger causes more trouble (Prov.25:8-10). You may not get into a disagreement that takes you to court, but even small conflicts mend more easily if we try to make peace right away. In a broader sense, these verses advise us to get things right with our fellow man before we have to stand before God.

- There is an earthly danger: ranging from legal suits to imprisonment.
- There is an eternal danger: life does not last and the day of final judgment is coming.

5:26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. Jesus is saying, be assured of this; I tell you the truth that you won't even get out of this until the last penny is paid. The Sanhedrin of 70 men would send this person to prison until he paid his debt. Before the judgment there is a chance; after it there is nothing but payment.

SUMMARY:

⁴Here Jesus explains the Christian's relationship to the law, and that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The Old Testament continues until all things are accomplished. He warned the disciples to do and to teach all the commandments, and that a better righteousness than the Pharisees' is needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. And how can we keep God's laws? We can't. The Pharisees' couldn't, and that is one reason why they created their own set of laws. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that empowers us and convicts us.

God's Word does not change. Jesus gives illustrations of our relationship to the Law. The Pharisees often taught about people's actions, but Jesus always goes further...he speaks of our thoughts, emotions, and attitudes of our hearts. So what does he begin with...? What is the most condemning sin you can think of? Murder. Jesus expounds on this and says that wrong attitudes and words count the same as murder. How could that be? Murder begins with anger, unforgiveness, hatred, contempt, envy and bitterness. All of it sin. To be full of such things reveals a heart condition that is condemning.

What is the remedy? It is the spirit of love and reconciliation. We must be reconciled with each other, no matter who the fault may lie with. Come to one heart and mind with that person, so that we can have an open relationship with the Lord.

APPLICATION:

It is so important when things run smoothly, and that can only be done by the choice of our will— the choice to settle matters quickly; the choice to forgive; and the choice to love. We all may not want to quickly forgive or love, but if we want a right relationship with God, we must humble ourselves to the will and way of God. When we are in the will of God, we have right fellowship, when we bring our gift to Him in worship!

⁴ <http://kimolsen.wordpress.com/2011/06/24/summary-of-sermon-on-the-mount/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>