

Matthew

Chapter 5

By
Don Stewart

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 5

The contents of the Sermon on the Mount is the first of the five major discourses that Jesus delivers and that Matthew records. This sermon is recorded only by Matthew. The contents are, at heart, *Jewish*.

The practical application of the sermon, at a number of points, has been the subject of much debate. Some interpreters see it as an impossible standard that no one can attain while others feel it is something that all believers can reach. There are many variations between the two views. The following are some of the major views on how to interpret this portion of Jesus' teaching.

1. Many interpreters have seen two levels of commandments in Jesus' teaching. The stricter requirements are for those who wish to find a higher level of righteousness, such as the clergy, while the less strict are for the ordinary believer.
2. The sermon is to Jesus as the Law to Paul—an impossible standard. Both the Law and the Sermon on the Mount reveal the depths of our sinfulness and drive us to God in repentance.
3. Some have applied the sermon in a strict literal fashion. This has led to such things as castration and pacifism.
4. Protestant liberals use the sermon as their design for the social gospel—to feed the poor and help the downtrodden. They accept the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount without accepting the authority of the Teacher.
5. Classic Dispensationalism has limited sermon to the future millennial kingdom. Jesus offered a legitimate kingdom to the Jews but they rejected it. Therefore the requirements of the Sermon have been postponed until after Christ's second coming.
6. Seemingly, the best way to interpret the Sermon is that it remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age. However this ideal will never fully be realized until the kingdom age is brought into its fullness at Christ's return.

Part of the problem concerns the paradoxical statements of Jesus. For example in 5:16 He says "let your light shine before men, but in 6:1 He states "don't do your righteousness before them." In 5:34 we are told "do not swear an oath" yet in 26:63,64, Jesus gave a statement under oath. There are, of course, solutions to these paradoxical statements but their inclusion has led to diverse interpretations of Jesus' sermon.

Whatever the interpretation is, the Sermon clearly teaches we cannot earn salvation. The teaching of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount drives us to His cross for forgiveness. It shows us how that we should live, but that none of us have fully arrived at that place. It clearly shows us our need for a Savior.

Secular psychiatrist, J.T. Fisher gives a fitting description of the Sermon's influence:

"If you were to take the sum total of all authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental hygiene—if you were to combine them and refine them and cleave out all the excess verbiage . . . and if you were to have these

unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount. And it would suffer immeasurably through comparison. For nearly two thousand years the Christian world has been holding in its hands the complete answer to its restless and fruitless yearnings. Here . . . rests the blueprint for successful human life with optimism, mental health, and contentment” (J. T. Fisher and L. S. Hawley, *A Few Buttons Missing*. Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1951, p. 273).

THE SETTING FOR THE SERMON (5:1-2)

Jesus will withdraw from the multitudes and go up to a mountain to deliver this discourse to His disciples.

Matt. 5:1 And after seeing the crowds, he went up into the mountain and sat down. His disciples came to him,

Note on a variant reading: *Codex Vaticanus*, a few other manuscripts, do not have *to Him*.

And after seeing the crowds, he went up Jesus now moves away from the multitudes.

into the mountain This is not necessarily a specific place. It could be a general term as we might say “into the hills.” In two other places Jesus goes up to the mountain (14:23 to pray and 15:29 where He sat down and healed multitudes).

In Matthew, mountains are places where special events occur (4:8, the mountain of temptation, 17:1, the mountain of transfiguration; 28:16 the mountain of the resurrection appearances) though the exact mountain is never specified.

and sat down. It was customary in Judaism for the Rabbi to teach from a seated position. Thus Jesus sat down before He began to teach (cf. 13:2; 24:3).

His disciples came to him, The setting is similar to the Olivet discourse (24:3) where Jesus sat down and the disciples came to Him. It was a special time of teaching. This is the first time the word “disciples” is used in Matthew though the disciples are not yet specified.

Matt. 5:2 and he opened his mouth and began to teach them, saying,

and he opened his mouth and This is a Semitic idiom used at the beginning of a public address (see Acts 8:35; 10:34).

began to teach, The sermon is teaching, not proclamation. It has a beginning (5:1,2 and an end 7:28,29). Matthew sets the stage for the first and most impressive of the five discourses he records.

There may be an attempt to compare Jesus with Moses and his giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Jesus, like Moses, is on the mountain when He gives the authoritative interpretation of the Law. But Jesus is far more than a new Moses and His teaching is not to be understood as a new Law. Jesus can teach as He does because of His identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. It is His teaching alone, not the oral tradition

of the Pharisees, that gives the full meaning to the commandments of God. Jesus therefore assumes authority and explains to His disciples the way of righteousness.

them saying This sermon is for the disciples, not the general public. No call to repentance is given which assumes they have already repented.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM (5:3-12)

Jesus begins by telling His followers the blessing that will come for those who belong to His kingdom. He begins by giving us eight beatitudes. The word *beatitude* come from the Latin and means “blessings.”

Matt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed The word means “one who is deeply fortunate” or “well off”—the inner joy of experiencing God’s salvation. The blessed ones are the deeply or supremely happy.

are the poor in spirit, Who are the poor in Spirit?” Some believe it refers to those who are economically poor (see Luke 6:20 “blessed are the poor”). It is argued that the two phrases “the poor” and “the poor in spirit” were synonymous at Jesus’ time. Jesus is referring to the condition of those who are financially poor—they have no recourse but to turn to God for their hope. The righteous poor were objects of God’s special concern (Psalm 9:18; 40:18; Isaiah 57:15; James 2:5).

Others believe that the words “in spirit” immediately tells us that the thought here is not of material poverty (as in Luke 6:20). The phrase alludes to an Old Testament theme which underlies all the beatitudes—the ‘poor’ or ‘meek’ are those who humbly trust God in contrast to the wicked who arrogantly set themselves up against God, and persecute His people. The emphasis is on piety and suffering, and on dependence on God, not on material poverty as such. The Bible says that Jesus became poor for us.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)

for theirs The good news has that has now come to the poor is that the kingdom is “*theirs*” (which is emphatic in Greek).

is the kingdom of heaven Jesus emphasized this at the beginning of His Galilean ministry (Luke 4:18-19 citing Isaiah 61:1,2). Note the present tense of the verb, “is theirs.” The kingdom is theirs now, however, it will also be in the future when they will inherit its fullest blessings “they will inherit the earth,” “they will see God,” “great is your reward in Heaven.” These are sacred paradoxes referring to both present and future blessings.

Matt. 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Note on a variant reading. Some manuscripts switch the order of verses 4 and 5. This places *heaven and earth* next to each other. After *mourn* some manuscripts read *now*.

Blessed are those who mourn, Here we have a second allusion to Isaiah 61:2. The One anointed by the Spirit will comfort those who mourn. The Messiah will comfort the downtrodden and poor. The Rabbis accordingly referred to the Messiah as the “Comforter” because of His mission in the Messianic age. Those who mourn do so because of the slowness of God’s justice but now its time to rejoice because the kingdom has arrived.

for they will be comforted. God is the One who will comfort them (the so-called divine passive), where God is the unnamed source of comfort.

Matt. 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are the meek, This is the same Old Testament theme. The meek refers to those who do not throw their weight, about but rely on God to give them their due. It was used of wild horses that had been tamed—power under control. Meekness is a characteristic of Jesus’ own ministry (11:29; 12:15-21; 21:5). The promise is quoted from Psalm 37:11.

for they will inherit the earth. All will be theirs.

Matt. 5:6 Blessed are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, For spiritual hunger and thirst see Psalm 42:1,2; Isaiah 55:1,2.

for they will be filled. God will satisfy them.

Matt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the merciful, The importance of mercy and its reciprocal nature is stressed in Matthew (6:12, 14,15; 9:13; 12:7; 18:21-35; 23:23).

for they will receive mercy. Those who give mercy will receive mercy.

Matt. 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the pure in heart, This means those who love God with all his heart (Deuteronomy 6:5).

for they will see God. See God in the sense that they will be in His presence.

Matt. 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they themselves will be called sons of God.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not read *they themselves* but simply *they*. *They themselves* is emphatic in Greek, while the other reading does not place the same emphasis.

Blessed are the peacemakers, The peacemakers are the ones absence of selfish ambition (see Psalm 34:14).

for they themselves This is emphatic in Greek.

will be called sons of God. God is the supreme peacemaker (Ephesians 2:14-18; Colossians 1:20)

Matt. 5:10 Blessed are the ones persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the ones persecuted Persecution will be their experience.

for the sake of righteousness, Righteousness is more than just doing good, it refers to ones entire life dedicated to the things of God.

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This rounds off the series of beatitudes (cf. v. 3)

From a general description of the disciples character the sermon now turns to a direct address of Jesus to His disciples. This indicates the effect that character will have on their life and witness.

Matt. 5:11 Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you [falsely], on account of me.

Note on variant readings: Instead of *they insult you* some manuscripts read *the men insult you*. After *evil* many manuscripts read *word* or *thing*. There is a question whether *falsely* should be in the text or not. Some manuscripts do not have it. Instead of *on account of Me* two manuscripts read *on account of righteousness*. There are two Syriac manuscripts which read *on account of My name*.

Blessed are you when they insult you, and persecute you, Insult and slander are the forms which persecution of Christians have taken place since the earliest of times (10:24,25, 1 Peter 3:16; 4:4, 14-16).

and say all evil against you [falsely], on account of me . They will accuse believers of things that are not true. The reason they do this is because of their hatred of Jesus.

Matt. 5:12 Rejoice, and be very glad, because your reward is great in heaven; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Note on a variant readings: One Syriac manuscript does not have *who were before you*. After *who were before you* a few manuscripts have *their fathers*.

Rejoice, and be very glad, When this occurs we are to be happy.

because your reward is great in heaven; Believers will be rewarded for their withstanding persecution.

for in this same way they persecuted the prophets The prophets were persecuted and killed (see 23).

who were before you. The disciples of Jesus are the true successors to the Old Testament prophets.

SALT AND LIGHT (5:13-16)

Jesus gives the analogy of salt and light to His disciples.

Matt. 5:13 You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown outside and trampled under foot by men.

You are the salt of the earth; Believers are now compared to salt.

but if the salt becomes tasteless, The question is how can salt become tasteless.

how will it be made salty again? It cannot be made salty again.

It is good for nothing anymore, Once salt loses its purpose it becomes valueless.

except to be thrown outside and trampled under foot by men. There are many opinions as to what salt has reference to:

- (1) To give flavor.
- (2) As a preservative to prevent corruption.
- (3) Wisdom.

The Rabbi's commonly used salt for the image of wisdom (see Colossians 4:6). This may explain why the Greek word translated "lost its taste" actually means "become foolish." The believers in Jesus will make the earth a better place to live by their distinctive character.

Matt. 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city set upon a hill cannot be hidden.

You are the light of the world. Believers are compared to light. Jesus Himself is the true light (John 1,9).

A city set upon a hill cannot be hidden. Light, like salt, affects its environment by being distinctive (see examples in the next verse).

Matt. 5:15 Neither do they light a light and place it under the bushel basket, but upon the lampstand, and it gives light to all the ones in the house.

Neither do they light a light and place it under the bushel basket, An obvious truth, nobody lights a light with the idea to hide it.

but upon the lampstand, and it gives light to all the ones in the house. A secret disciple is of no benefit.

Matt. 5:16 In this same manner, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

In this same manner, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Your father a favorite expression of Matthew reflecting a major emphasis of Jesus' teaching.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS BROUGHT BY CHRIST (5:17-20)

Jesus will explain that He has come to bring a fulfillment to the Law of Moses.

Matt. 5:17 Do not every think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

Do not every think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; Jesus does not want us to ever imagine that His purpose was to abolish any part of the Old Testament.

I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. Fulfill in what sense?

- (1) Accomplish, obey.
- (2) Bring out the full meaning.
- (3) Complete—bring to its destined end.

This is the best answer. Jesus' coming fulfilled that which the Old Testament looked forward to. Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10:4) He fulfills it and transcends it.

Matt. 5:18 Truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke will by any means pass away from the Law, until everything is fulfilled.

Note on variant readings: Some manuscripts read *and the Prophets* after *the Law*. One manuscript reads *heaven and earth will pass away but My words will not pass away after fulfilled*.

Truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth pass away, In other words, never.

not the smallest letter The smallest letter in Hebrew is the *yod* .

or stroke The smallest stroke is the stroke that distinguishes some similar Hebrew letters

will by any means pass away from the Law, Not even this much will pass from the Law.

until everything is fulfilled Everything written will be fulfilled.

Matt. 5:19 Whoever therefore will break one of the least of these commandments, and will teach others to do the same, he will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever will do and teach them, he will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Note on a variant reading: A few manuscripts (including *Sinaiticus*) do not have the phrase *but whoever will do and teach them, he will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*.

Whoever therefore will break one of the least of these commandments, One of the insignificant commandments.

and will teach others to do the same, Those who teach others that is not important to follow everything Jesus said.

he will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; If they ignore the least, they will be the least.

but whoever will do and teach them, Those who teach the entire counsel of God's Word.

he will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Like the two previous verses this emphasizes the importance of the entire law.

Matt. 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Note on a variant reading: One manuscript does not have verse 20.

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, These two groups were known for their strict outward observance of the law.

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. This verse dispels any suspicion of legalism. The ethical teaching of Jesus the Messiah, is the true meaning of the Law. As the Messiah, Jesus has come to bring both the law and the prophets to their intended meaning. God's purposes have a unity; yet a new stage in His purposes has been reached. Jesus alone and not the Pharisees can interpret the Law finally and authoritatively.

vs 21-48 should be read as a whole. It is six units of teaching introduced by "You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you." It shows how the principles Jesus has set down can be put to practice.

JESUS' VIEWS ABOUT MURDER (5:21-26)

For Jesus, anger is the basis for murder. Therefore He speaks about the need to reconcile problems with fellow believers before the anger escalates into something greater.

Matt. 5:21 You heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You will not murder; and whoever does murder, he will be liable to the judgment.

You heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You will not murder; The word is murder. "Kill" is an inadequate translation.

and whoever does murder, he will be liable to the judgment. This refers to the death penalty (Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:12-14; Numbers 35:16-34).

Matt. 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to the judgment; and whoever will say to his brother, “Raca,” he will be liable to the council; whoever will say, “You fool,” he will be liable to the gehenna of fire.

Note on variant readings: After the words translated *his brother* many manuscripts have the phrase *without a cause*. Some manuscripts have the phrase *to his brother* before *You fool*.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother Jesus goes behind the act itself to declare that the hatred which gives rise to murder is no less guilty in the sight of God.

will be liable to the judgment; This is not human judgment but the judgment of God. Notice that Jesus says nothing to abolish the death penalty as some have contended.

and whoever will say to his brother, “Raca,” *Raka* literally means ‘empty.’ It is an Aramaic term of abuse, “idiot.”

he will be liable to the council; Either the supreme Jewish council or local court. Here it symbolizes a more ultimate judgment.

whoever will say, “You fool,” This was another derogatory term.

he will be liable to the gehenna of fire. Gehenna was the name of the place where Jerusalem’s rubbish was burnt. Used regularly by Jesus and Jewish writers to refer to the place of ultimate punishment. In contrast to human courts, Jesus threatens divine judgment on anger expressed in everyday insults.

Matt. 5:23 If, therefore, you are offering your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you,

If, therefore, you are offering your gift at the altar, This has reference to the offerings brought to the temple. It would make no sense to write this after A.D. 70 when there was no temple or altar.

and there you remember that your brother has something against you, There is a problem between you and a fellow believer

Matt. 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

leave your gift there before the altar, The person in this situation is to cease his offering.

and go first and be reconciled with your brother, The priority is the reconciliation with his brother.

and then come and offer your gift. If God will punish anger, we cannot worship Him with grudges unsettled.

Matt. 5:25 Agree with your adversary quickly, if you meet him in the road, lest your adversary deliver you over to the judge, and the judge to the attendant, and you may be thrown into prison.

Note on a variant reading: One Syriac manuscript does not have the phrase *and the judge*. After *the judge* many manuscripts read *he will deliver you over*.

Agree with your adversary quickly, This illustration expresses the urgency of reconciliation.

if you meet him in the road, This is a chance meeting between you and someone whom you have not reconciled the matter.

lest the adversary deliver you over to the judge, Unsettled matters can bring you before the judge.

and the judge to the attendant, The judge in turn delivers you over the man who can put you in prison.

and you may be thrown into prison. A grievance can lead to court and prison. Compare this illustration with Luke 12:58-59 and Matthew 18:23-35.

Matt. 5:26 Truly, I say to you, you will never come out from there, until you pay back the last penny.

Truly, I say to you, you will never come out from there, until you pay back the last penny. The penny refers to the smallest Roman coin. God's judgment, if not stopped by repentance and reconciliation, knows no half-measures.

In His interpretation of the truest meaning of the Mosaic commandment—and presentation of the level of righteousness required by the kingdom—Jesus goes far beyond the letter of the text. Jesus penetrates to the spirit of the commandment, since the person's conduct is one of the heart, or inner person, the transforming power of the kingdom must be experienced there.

JESUS' VIEWS ON ADULTERY (5:27-30)

The Lord shows that adultery starts by having the wrong desires. Therefore we should not even begin to entertain these thoughts.

Matt. 5:27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You will not commit adultery.’”

Note on a variant reading: Several manuscripts have *to the ancients* after *said*.

You have heard that it was said, “You will not commit adultery.” In the ancient world generally it was held that a married man could have sexual adventures as long as it did not involve a married woman (which would involve the rights of her husband).

Matt. 5:28 But I say to you, that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

But I say to you, that every one who looks at a woman lustfully Almost always used of a married woman or wife (here probably wider meaning ‘any woman’).

has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Jesus intention is to prohibit not a natural sexual attraction but the deliberate harboring of desire for an *illicit* relationship. The seventh commandment is treated like the sixth; not only the act of adultery is wrong but the desire that causes it is condemned.

Matt. 5:29 But if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna.

But if your right eye causes you to sin, If something causes you to sin. Exaggeration for sake of emphasis.

tear it out and throw it from you; Not to be understood literally.

for it is better that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna. Again we have exaggeration for emphasis.

Matt. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better that one of your members might perish, than for your entire body be thrown into Gehenna.

Note on a variant reading: A few manuscripts do not have this verse.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, Another example of exaggeration for emphasis.

cut it off and throw it from you; As with the previous example, not to be taken literally.

for it is better that one of your members might perish, than for your entire body be thrown into Gehenna. More exaggeration for emphasis. Self-mutilation is not to be taken literally. It indicates that the avoidance of temptation may involve drastic sacrifices which may include *severing relationships or the renunciation of favorites activities*. The alternative is the loss of the whole body (the complete person).

Jesus again deepens the Old Testament commandment by interpreting it to include what occurs in the heart prior to and as the foundation of the external act. Thus, again He shifts the attention from the external act to the internal thought. Disciples are called to a standard of conduct that includes even their realm of thinking.

JESUS' VIEWS ON DIVORCE (5:31-32)

Instead of agreeing with the liberal attitude that many Jews held, Jesus will limit the grounds for a divorce to unfaithfulness in the marriage vow.

Matt. 5:31 And it was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give to her a certificate of divorcement.'

And it was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, Those men who divorce their wives, the wives did not have power to divorce their husbands.

let him give to her a certificate of divorcement.' These words are based upon Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In other passages in this section Jesus is dealing with specific commands of God but people were never

commanded to get divorced. A woman was not permitted to divorce her husband, though she could petition the court and they would direct the husband to divorce her.

In Jesus' day there was the school of Shammai who took a hard line and allowed divorce for adultery. The school of Hillel was more liberal allowing divorce for a wide range of things including spoiling the man's dinner. Rabbi Akiba allowed divorce, "Even if he found another fairer." Against this background Jesus called people to appreciate the true meaning of marriage. We should bear in mind that He is laying down great principles that should guide conduct, He is not making laws or giving a precise list of occasions where divorce might take place.

Matt. 5:32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of marital unfaithfulness, is making her commit adultery, and whoever marries the divorced woman, he is committing adultery.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *everyone* some manuscripts read *whoever*. Some manuscripts read *everyone* instead of *whoever*.

But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, The subject is now divorce.

except for the cause of marital unfaithfulness, This qualifies the otherwise absolute prohibition.

is making her commit adultery, Jesus regards the remarriage of the divorced woman as adultery both on her part and on the part of her husband. Notice the blame is put firm on the man, not the woman.

and whoever marries the divorced woman, This brings another person into the picture.

he is committing adultery. The Mosaic Law allowed divorce, making provision for the divorced woman by the certificate of divorce. Later in the gospel, Jesus will comment on the reason for this legislation (19:3-12). In the present passage Jesus introduces the new and shocking idea that even properly divorced people who marry a second time may be thought of as committing adultery. The Old Testament, though allowing divorce, does not regard those who remarry as committing adultery.

This new and dramatic way of speaking is directly related to the absolute prohibition of divorce by Jesus. Marriage was meant to establish a permanent relationship between a man and a woman, and divorce should *not* be considered an option for the disciples of the kingdom. As will appear in 19:3-12, the original idea for man and woman was one of permanent marriage. The fulfillment brought by the present existence of the kingdom demands a return of the disciples to that original standard. Divorce is therefore to be shunned. The ethics of the kingdom are of a high standard (5:48).

The point of speaking of remarriage as involving adultery is simply to emphasize the wrongness of divorce. The conclusion is drawn by some interpreters that while divorce may be allowable for the Christian, on the basis of this passage remarriage is prohibited because it involves adultery. A divorce however, without the possibility of remarriage is, however, in the context of this discussion really only a separation and not a divorce. Moses allowed divorce and remarriage—it must be noted, without designating the remarried as adulterers—because of the hardness of the hearts of the people. Followers of Jesus, recipients of the Kingdom, are still not in this new era rid of hard hearts, divorce and remarriage will continue to occur

among them, just as it did among the people of God in the Old Testament. We must forgive those who fail yet we must also strive after the ideal that Jesus gave us.

JESUS' VIEWS ON OATH'S (5:33-37)

Jesus speaks out against second class oaths that avoid using the name of God.

Matt. 5:33 “Again, you have heard that it has been said to those of ancient times, ‘You will not swear falsely, but will keep the oaths that you have made to the Lord.’

Note on a variant reading: Two manuscripts do not have the phrase *to those of ancient times*.

“**Again, you have heard that it has been said to those of ancient times, ‘You will not swear falsely,** These two passages summarize the Old Testament teaching rather than quote it explicitly. Swear falsely can mean to break an oath.

but will keep the oaths that you have made to the Lord.’ The Old Testament emphasizes that oaths have a binding character (Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; cf. Zechariah 8:7).

Matt. 5:34 But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God

But I say to you do not swear at all, Though Jesus rejected oaths this ideal is not to be taken as a rigid rule, i.e. this does not refer to oaths in court where Jesus Himself responded to the High Priest when He was under oath (26:63,64), and by occasion oaths of the New Testament 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20, cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:27; even God can use an oath (Hebrews 6:13-17).

either by heaven, for it is the throne of God Jesus rejected the use of second class oaths which avoid the name of God (and therefore are not binding). Firstly, they do not in fact exclude God, as heaven and earth and Jerusalem are inseparably linked with God and even your head is God’s creation and under His control. Secondly, the oaths should be unnecessary. A simple yes or no will do (vs. 37). All our words are binding.

Matt. 5:35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

or by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet, Earth is symbolically where the heavenly king places His feet.

or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. The oath of a binding character, and to swear by heaven, or anything else one might mention is more significant than it may initially sound.

Matt. 5:36 Nor will you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Nor will you swear by your head, Another form of oath taking.

for you cannot make one hair white or black. All oath taking implicates God, is in effect to swear in His name, and thus all oath taking is to be understood as possessing an absolute character.

Matt. 5:37 But let your, ‘Yes,’ be ‘Yes,’ your ‘No,’ ‘No;’ for anything more than this is from the evil one.

Note on a variant reading: A couple of manuscripts (including *Vaticanus*) read *Your word Yes will be yes*. A few manuscripts have and after *be Yes*. A couple of manuscripts have *the* before *No*.

But let your, ‘Yes,’ be ‘Yes,’ your ‘No,’ ‘No;’ A sincere, “Yes,” and a sincere, “No” is all that we need.

for anything more than this is from the evil one In the ethics of the kingdom there is no need for taking oaths. Matthew refers to the evil one i.e. Satan or the Devil (cf. 6:13;13:19,38) more than does any other evangelist or any other New Testament book except 1 John.

Although in the Old Testament practice of oath taking was encouraged, or at least allowed, as a means of strengthening one’s personal resolution to do something, as it evolved it apparently became a way by which some persons avoided responsibility. Jesus affirms the binding character of oaths and implicitly denies the subtle distinctions that some used to invalidate their oaths (Matthew 23:16-22). Yet at the same time, Jesus lifts the matter to a new level by denying the necessity of oaths altogether. The ethics to which Jesus calls His disciples are those of the kingdom and its perfection. A persons words should be relied upon without qualification and without the need of the further guarantee an oath might afford. Oaths are rendered superfluous. With the dawn of a new era comes a wholly new standard of righteousness. The issue is nothing less than and nothing more than truthfulness.

JESUS’ VIEWS ON RETALIATION (5:38-42)

Rather than retaliating against an attacker, Jesus urges pacifism.

Matt. 5:38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’

Note on a variant reading: A few manuscripts do not have *and*.

“You have heard that it was said, This verse lacks the reference to “the ancients”

‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is cited in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21.

The principle of proportionate retribution was older and more recognized than the Mosaic law.

Matt. 5:39 But I say to you, do not resist evil. But whoever slaps you upon your right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Note on variant readings: Many manuscripts read *whoever will slap* instead of *whoever slaps*. Some manuscripts (including *Sinaiticus*) do not have *your*. Other manuscripts do not have *right*.

But I say to you, do not resist evil. Not the evil one (Satan) or an evil person is in view. As we learn from the context do not render evil for evil, that is the evil deed. What Jesus is opposing is the insistence

on legitimate retribution. This statement of His would be shocking in light of the principle of justice defended by the Old Testament texts.

But whoever slaps you upon your right cheek, Since most people are right handed a slap on the right cheek means one with the back of the hand – not a closed fist. Even today in the East, a slap expresses the greatest possible contempt and extreme abuse. It was punished by a very heavy fine. This is Jesus' first example of nonretaliation.

turn to him the other also. Vengeance is the Lords (Romans 12:19, 21; 2 Corinthians 11:20; and 1 Thessalonians 5:15, cf. Deuteronomy 32:35).

Matt. 5:40 And to the one wishing to sue you and take your tunic, give to him your robe as well.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *to the one wishing* some manuscripts read *the one who wishes*. Some manuscripts have *robe* instead of *your robe*.

And to the one wishing to sue you and take your tunic, Those who have what they believe is a legal grievance against you.

give to him your robe as well. The principle is not the avoidance of lawsuits but an unselfish attitude towards ones own rights and property. The second illustration refers to legal action (in a court). The result of which could be the loss of one's tunic or inner garment. Jesus teaches not only that one should give up what one is sued for but that one should also voluntarily give up the more essential outer garment, robe or cloak as well (Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:7 for Paul's similar attitude).

Matt. 5:41 And whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *two* some manuscripts read *yet another two* while other manuscripts have *another*.

And whoever forces you to go one mile, This is a specific term for the Roman practice of commanding civilian labor in an occupied country to bear his load (see 27:32).

go with him two. One should not only go the required Roman mile but go an extra mile. Thus unjustifiable requests should be complied with and the response should exceed the request. Again the perspective of the kingdom of God is contrary to the perspective of the world.

Matt. 5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away the one wishing to borrow from you.

Give to the one who asks you, We are to be unselfish.

and do not turn away the one wishing to Unselfishness extends to our own property.

borrow from you. This word is only found elsewhere in Luke 6:34,35.

JESUS' VIEWS ON LOVING OUR ENEMIES (5:43-48)

The mark of the Christian will be love. First, for one another (John 13:33,34) and then for our enemies.

Matt. 5:43 You have heard that it has been said, ‘You will love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

You have heard that it has been said, What they know the Scripture says.

‘You will love your neighbor From Leviticus 19:18.

and hate your enemy.’ In the Old Testament “hate” often signifies “love less” or “not love” (compare Luke 14:26 with Matthew 10:37). Although here it may have same meaning as our word hate. See also Matthew 6:24; Romans 9:13; Genesis 29:30,31. The Old Testament and Judaism expected a greater love for the fellow-members of the people of God than for those outside.

Matt. 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray on behalf of those who persecute you,

Note on variant readings: Instead of *pray on behalf of those who persecute you* some manuscripts read *bless those that curse you* others have *and do well to the ones hating you* while still others read *pray for those spitefully using you*.

But I say to you, love your enemies, In contrast to what others teach.

and pray on behalf of those who persecute you, Jesus rejects this distinction. Love is not just a sentimental feeling but the earnest desire for their good.

Matt. 5:45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the righteous and unrighteous.

so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; This is not teaching salvation by works.

for he causes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, To love your enemies is crucial importance to the very identity of a disciple. Undiscriminating love will be the mark of the Christian. To participate in the kingdom relates the disciple to the Father in a unique way, and that unique relationship involves doing His will.

and sends rain upon the righteous and unrighteous. This represents a stylistic variation to the previous “evil and good.” These people are the enemies of God.

Matt. 5:46 For if you love the ones loving you, what reward do you have? The tax gatherers do the same thing, do they not?

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *the same thing* some manuscripts read *in this manner*. A few manuscripts read *this thing*.

For if you love the ones loving you, Returning love from others.

what reward do you have? What have you really done?

The tax gatherers do the same thing, do they not? The disciple must not be on the same level as others, he must do more.

Matt. 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? The Gentiles do the same thing, do they not?

Note on variant readings: Two manuscripts do not have this verse. Many manuscripts read *friends* instead of *brothers*. In some manuscripts the reading is *tax collectors* instead of *Gentiles*.

And if you greet only your brothers, What is normally expected.

what are you doing more than others? Again the person is doing the minimal.

The Gentiles do the same thing, do they not? His behavior must be above that of the Gentiles and tax collectors.

Matt. 5:48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts have *just as* instead of *as*.

Therefore you are to be perfect, You is emphatic in Greek.

as your Father in heaven is perfect. This is an ideal stated for disciples. He is not speaking about sinless perfection or being without sin. The term is equivalent to the Hebrew word *tamim* which is used in the Old Testament about moral uprightness (Genesis 6:9;17:1; 2 Samuel 2:22:24-27). God's requirements go beyond the legal conformity. The word means more than moral perfection; it indicates a person's total life should be consistent to the will of God thus reflecting His character.

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER FIVE

The Sermon on the Mount is well-organized with clearly defined divisions. The exact way in which we interpret and apply its teachings has been the subject of continuing debate.

The best way seems to have it as the law for the kingdom age, which is still future, yet the principles are for the disciples in this age.

In the first section, (2-16), Jesus speaks of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven and illustrates their character and blessedness. He does this by giving a series of beatitudes or blessings for those who are citizens of the kingdom.

In the next part, (13-16), He describes their relationship to the world as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Both salt and light have the idea of penetration. As believers we are to penetrate into the dark, saltless world by being lights.

The righteousness of the kingdom is then set forth with the high standard of life demanded for those who follow Him (17-19). Jesus has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and Prophets. He coming is to fulfill, not destroy.

Jesus, however, is not in agreement with the current traditions of the elders that were given equal status to the Old Testament teaching (20-48). As He cites the Old Testament and comments upon a number of precepts, He speaks with absolute authority. He points out that such things as adultery and murder have their origin in things such as lust and hate. These emotions and feelings will eventually lead to sin if they are not kept under control.

Consequently we are to love our enemies and pray for the ones who persecute us. This is in contrast of reacting the normal human way with hatred and a desire for revenge. It is God's responsibility to avenge His children, our responsibility is to love our enemies and trust that God will rectify the situation.

The last verse of this chapter sums up Jesus' teaching on discipleship in one all-embracing demand. We are to be like our Father in heaven. Of course, this is impossible in our own fallen nature. We must trust the Holy Spirit to continue to change us so that we will become more Christ-like in our actions and our attitudes. This maturing process is something that occurs over our entire lifetime, with no shortcuts to true spirituality.