

Sunday, January 20, 2019

Picking up where we left off last week, in Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus continues to describe how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees in the matter of the Mosaic law. Simultaneously, He is giving one of the greatest lessons on the doctrine of sin in the Bible (its deceitfulness, its danger, its pervasiveness, etc.). He doesn't beat around the bush but jumps immediately into six sins that pretty much define the human existence – anger, lust, divorce, lying, revenge, and hatred. The Pharisees had turned the law into a list of external behaviors, but Jesus is explaining that it is the internal attitude that is important.

As mentioned last week, these take the form of “ye have heard that it was said...but I say unto you...” And that means that “the Pharisees are telling you that the Old Testament teaches this...but I'm telling you that the spirit of those laws is quite different...” So He's not saying that the Old Testament was wrong...He's saying that the Pharisees' interpretation of the Old Testament was wrong. So, as I go through these six things, I'll generally follow the pattern of going over what the Old Testament taught on the matter, what the false interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees was, and what Christ tells us the real meaning is.

They had reduced the Old Testament to a series of “do this and don't do that,” when really it should all have been based on a love for God. That's what God requires of us – for us to love Him. And as a result of that love, we will keep His commandments. So please, understand that Christ is not giving us a legalistic checklist where we can say “if I do these six things, then I am saved.” Rather, He's giving us guiding principles for what it means to be holy. Holiness is not some experience that you have – it is how you live your life down in the day-to-day minutiae based on your love for God and your desire to please Him, and it's something that only people who are born again want to or can do (though none of us can do it perfectly).

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 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. 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. 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. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” (Matthew 5:21-26)

Everyone has heard “thou shalt not kill.” It’s the 6th of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17), and of course the word “kill” refers to murdering people, like it’s fleshed out in Exodus 21:14: “But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.” Murder was the first crime committed when Cain killed Abel, and was energized by Satan, who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). It was so evil that it required the death penalty under the Mosaic law.

Everything that I’ve said so far, the Pharisees would have given a hearty “Amen!” to. But they were able to pervert even this simple command. They taught, “Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” In other words, “If you kill someone, that’s really bad, and you’ll get in big trouble with the law.” Nothing about the judgment of God; nothing about the motives behind the action. Their teaching was very superficial. And this is one of the main ways that they had defined their righteousness. If you’re going to keep just the letter of this law, this is a pretty easy law to keep. People generally don’t go around murdering other people – it’s a relatively rare event. So, they defined their righteousness by a thing that they weren’t likely to do anyway. “The law says not to kill anyone. I haven’t killed anyone. Therefore, I am righteous.”

But Christ comes along and raises the meaning back up to its original intention. He teaches that it’s not only about the physical act of murder, but it has to do with the anger, and hatred, and contempt that you have in your heart. Christ is saying that these internal sins of the heart are just as bad as murder! We’re quick to look at a murderer and say, “man, I just can’t understand that guy – how can someone be that evil? I can’t even imagine doing something like that.” But if what Christ is saying here is true (and we know it is), we are just as evil. He tells us again through the Apostle John that “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). Christ proceeds here in His Sermon to give us three illustrations of what He’s talking about, with the offense and the potential punishment becoming greater as He goes:

1. **Being angry with your brother without a cause.** Let me say first that there is such a thing as a righteous anger (see Ephesians 4:26). Christ was angry (Mark 3:5). God is angry every day (Psalm 7:11). If you’re angry at sin or unrighteousness or God being dishonored or blasphemed, that type of anger is OK, but even with that kind of anger, don’t let the sun go down on it lest it turn into an unrighteous anger and you give place to the devil. The anger He is talking about here, though, is selfish, malevolent, vitriolic, resentful, bitter, and unjustified. If it has anything to do with an affront that you feel that you’ve been on the receiving end of, that’s the kind of anger he’s talking about here. Remember that Cain’s murder of Abel started with anger (Genesis 4:5).

2. **Saying “Raca” to your brother.** “Raca” is an epithet that was used at that time when you wanted to vilify someone. Literally, it means “empty” and would be similar to calling someone “empty headed.” The idea is that it’s a malicious name you call someone when you have contempt for them because you think they’re stupid.
3. **Saying “Thou fool.”** This word is the word from which we get the English word “moron.” It can mean unlearned or imprudent, but it can also mean impious, ungodly, or rebellious. Christ is talking about the latter of those definitions here. This is where you hold someone in contempt and accuse him of rebelling against God. It’s not always bad to call someone a “fool” –Jesus did it. But the person actually has to be rebelling against God for it to be acceptable. If you make such an accusation out of anger or contempt or hatred, you’re in danger of going to hell! And we know from Revelation 22:15 that murderers do go to hell.

He goes on to say that it isn’t just a matter of not doing these things, you also have to take positive action. If you know that your brother is offended against you, it’s your job to make it right. It’s not that you’re angry; it’s that someone is angry at you. God isn’t interested in your worship if you’re in that situation. You can’t say, “well, I’m too busy worshipping and serving God. That should make up for the fact that I’ve made my brother mad at me.” No! You are an offense to God. “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord.” (Isaiah 1:11). “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm 66:18). The message is, don’t show your face before God until you’ve made it right with your brother.

And what is this about agreeing with your adversary quickly? Some take it literally about a debtor/creditor relationship where you may have defrauded someone (or they think they’ve been defrauded), and some take it metaphorically. I’m not going to get into that detail today, but what I see here is that if someone has a cause against you, don’t delay reconciling with the one you’ve offended. Do it now. If you wait, it might be too late, and you’ll find yourself sitting in front of the Judge, unable to pay your debt. Do whatever you can to fix it as quickly as you can before you end up in front of God.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30)

“Thou shalt not commit adultery” is the 7th of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18). Like murder, this was a very serious crime, for which the Mosaic law

demanded the death penalty. And just like the 6th commandment, the Pharisees had a very superficial view of this commandment. They thought that it had to do exclusively with the physical act of adultery, but Jesus tells them the real meaning behind it is what's going on in the heart. Every unchaste thought, look, touch, and action is covered under this commandment. Anger and lust are among the most common sins in human beings, and Jesus kicks off this section of the sermon with a bang, basically saying, "You think you're righteous? Every one of you is a murderer and an adulterer, and you all deserve to go to hell forever."

So, He says that if you look on a woman to lust after her, you have already committed adultery with her in your heart. We are not talking about an incidental glance where someone unexpectedly enters your field of vision. We're talking about a prolonged, conscious, purposeful, repeated, lustful looking. The kind where you keep thinking about it and turning it over and over in your mind, cherishing and nourishing the lust. Pay attention: He says that you have ALREADY committed adultery in your heart. The reason you're looking with lust is because of the vile, adulterous heart that you've already cultivated. The sin has already happened in your heart before you even made the lustful look. The lustful look is just the manifestation of the wicked heart. Truly, "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." (Matthew 15:19). And Peter describes this as "having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." (2 Peter 2:14).

The solution to all of this is to pluck out your right eye and cut off your right hand. What??? How will this help with a heart problem? If the problem is that you have a lustful heart, how will plucking out your right eye and cutting off your right hand help? Well, obviously it won't. This is a hyperbole, meaning that you need to take drastic measures to deal with your sin. The word "offend" here refers to a stumbling block or a trap. Your right eye and right hand are precious – He is saying "if you have to get rid of the most precious things in order to control your lust, get rid of them." You don't nurse and coddle a thing, no matter how precious, if you know that it will be a stumbling block for you, whether person, place, thing, or idea. If looking on someone or something is going to cast a stumbling block and cause you to sin, then don't allow the eye to look on it. If touching someone or something is going to cast a stumbling block and cause you to sin, then don't allow the hand to touch it. Mortify those members. When the first motion of lust appears in your heart, kill it! Your eternal soul is far more precious – take whatever measures you need to take to keep under your body and bring it into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27). Don't make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof (Romans 13:14). Do what Job did and make a covenant with your eyes so that you won't think upon a maid (Job 31:1). Thank God that we don't have to take such drastic measures as mutilating our bodies, because we have the Spirit of God working in our new hearts which allows us to mortify the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13). If you're going to be legalistic about this and literally pluck out your right eye and cut off your right hand and think that will solve

all your problems, then you've missed the whole point and your left eye and left hand that remain will just work double-time to accommodate your lustful heart which hasn't changed.

This passage should settle once and for all the question that we're frequently asked, which is, "if a homosexual doesn't act on his urges, is he still sinning?" And the answer is a resounding yes! Their lust all by itself is enough to damn a person to hell for all eternity, just like it is for everyone else – they don't get a special pass just because they've convinced everyone that their lust is OK. And the fact that they're going around proudly identifying themselves as "homosexual" or "gay" or a "member of the LGBT community" proves that their lust is in full bloom in their hearts and is defining their very existence. They've already committed sodomy in their hearts. And the so-called "churches" nowadays are letting them come in as members in good standing, referring to them as "same sex attracted Christians," including more and more "evangelical churches" who claim to strictly follow what the Bible teaches. It would be as if I presented myself to the church and said, "I define my existence by my anger and my lust for women I'm not married to. That's what I think about all the time. That's my identity. I just don't follow through and actually murder people or commit adultery, so I'm OK." What I ought to say is something like, "I define myself by the fact that I'm a fallen sinner, I'm ashamed of my sins, I believe that Christ has saved me from my sins, and I believe that through the Holy Ghost I can mortify the deeds of the flesh so sin doesn't have the dominion over me." Anyone calling themselves a "gay Christian" or some other foolish moniker is defiling the very name of Christ with their proud lust, and they have the same duty as the rest of us, which is to repent and mortify the deeds of the body. We don't need more churches flapping their collective lips about their faux "love" and tolerance and acceptance and mercy – what we need is more preaching about the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin.

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (Matthew 5:31-32)

This is really a continuation of the previous point about adultery. The Pharisees thought that they were righteous because they didn't commit the physical act of adultery as they understood it. But Jesus tells them that they've already committed adultery in their hearts, and with their multitudinous divorces and remarriages, they were the cause of adultery all over the place. One divorce resulted in four people being involved in adulterous relationships. This is why He referred to them repeatedly as an "adulterous generation" (not to mention their spiritual adultery, going after strange gods).

The Old Testament passage referenced here about adultery is Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and as we find in Matthew 19, it was an allowance given due to the hardness of their hearts. It's not a

command to divorce, and it's not how God originally intended marriage, which was one man, one woman, for one lifetime, and what God has joined together let not man put asunder. The man is to cleave to his wife (i.e., stick like superglue). Marriage is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church, and that union is unbreakable. God hates divorce, period (Malachi 2:16). God has always hated divorce. God will always hate divorce. So, this law in Deuteronomy was not a command requiring them to divorce; rather, it was a recognition of the fact that divorce was happening due to their hard hearts, and that it needed to be regulated by the government so there wasn't complete chaos. The intention of the law was to keep divorce from running rampant – it required a bill of divorcement, which caused people to slow down and think about what they were doing, so nothing was done rashly in the heat of the moment; and it added the restriction that if you divorce and your wife remarries, then you can never have her again, thereby making the divorce permanent and irreversible, which would also cause a person to think twice before rashly doing something.

The Pharisees didn't consider the meaning and sanctity of marriage and had interpreted this law to allow them to get divorced for any reason that they wanted to, as long as they did the paperwork. And I mean any reason. Examples given by the commentators from old Jewish teachings have reasons for divorce ranging from burning or over-salting the food, to having bad breath, to not liking the clothing she wore, to finding a younger woman who was more attractive. They did everything by the book, though. "I'm righteous because when I got my divorce, I went through the process and got a bill of divorcement." You see the same thing today in the Catholic church and their marriage annulments. These Pharisees were writing their bills of divorcement, and before the ink was dry, they had picked up a new wife.

While they were worried about getting the paperwork done, Jesus taught them that they shouldn't be getting divorced at all! And if you do and remarry, everyone involved is committing adultery. Notice that there is an exception here, and that is "fornication." There's no exception for people who are not believers. No exception if it happened before you were saved. No exception because you were young and stupid. No exception if you have irreconcilable differences. Etc. There's one and only one exception, and that is "fornication." The Greek word is "porneia." Now, most commentators interpret this to mean adultery or infidelity within the marriage. They say if your wife cheats on you during your marriage, then you can divorce her and you're then free to get remarried. We don't hold that view in this church. There is another Greek word that means "adultery," and that word is "moichao." If the Holy Ghost had intended adultery here, I believe He would have used the word that means "adultery." It is true that "porneia" can encompass a wide variety of sexual sins, including adultery, but when it's used in the same sentence as "moichao" (which it is here) then it is clearly being used to make a distinction between adultery (that is, during marriage) and every other sexual sin (that is, before marriage). Christ does this same thing in Matthew 15:19

where He refers to adulteries and fornications – He’s making a distinction between the two. Paul does the same in Galatians 5:19 when speaking of the works of the flesh.

We have expounded this notion of “fornication” in the past to refer to Deuteronomy 22:13-21. It is about a man who marries a woman, and upon consummating the marriage, comes to realize that his new bride was not a virgin. He had been deceived. He thought he was marrying a virgin, but she had played the whore before they were married. This man had to immediately deal with that. He couldn’t put it in his back pocket and then pull it out ten years later because he decided he didn’t like her. Likewise, Christ is talking about a man who thinks he’s marrying a virgin, finds out she’s not, and then immediately puts an end to the marriage. Then and only then can he divorce and remarry, without committing adultery. He doesn’t have to – but he can.

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” (Matthew 5:33-37)

There are several passages in the Old Testament that this refers to. For example, the 3rd of the ten commandments – “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11); “And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I *am* the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:12); “If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.” (Numbers 30:2). The idea in the Old Testament is clear – you better not tell any lies in the name of God. If you swear by an oath, it should be on serious occasions, and it should be in the name of God.

The Pharisees abused these laws by saying that you **only** had to be honest if you were swearing in the name of God. Otherwise, it was OK to lie. To make an end-run around the law of God, they would swear by a bunch of other things – heaven, earth, Jerusalem, their own heads. They thought if they could swear by something other than God, then it was alright if they weren’t being truthful. It’s as ridiculous as when you’re a little kid, and you cross your fingers behind your back and pretend that that makes your lies and deception OK. Jesus disabuses them of their foolishness by saying, “You claim that you are telling the truth, but you’re all liars. Stop playing games with swearing by this and swearing by that, because God sovereignly owns and controls it all, so no matter what you do, you’re swearing by Him.

Stop all that kind of swearing; instead, just always tell the truth. Live an honest life so that people can trust your word.”

When He says, “swear not at all,” are we to take that absolutely? Is there never a time where it’s appropriate to invoke the name of God in an oath? I don’t think it’s an absolute statement, and the reason is because I see God Himself swearing by an oath (Acts 2:30, Hebrews 6:13-18), I see Jesus Himself speaking under oath (Matthew 26:63-64), and I see Paul calling upon God as a witness (2 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 1:20, Romans 9:1). Making an oath to God on some solemn occasion can add to the gravity of what you’re saying. And an oath, by the way, is serious – it basically means, “if I’m lying, may God curse me.”

But His point in this passage is to tell them to stop swearing in the way that they’ve been doing it. Don’t be frivolous and careless in swearing oaths in your common, everyday conversations. In that type of day-to-day communication, if you want to say “yes”, then say “yes” and mean “yes.” If you want to say “no”, then say “no” and mean “no.” And if you need to add some emphasis on it, say it twice: “yes, yes” or “no, no.” But don’t throw oaths around left and right to accommodate your deceit. If you feel the need to “swear to God” or “call God as your witness” in order to get someone to believe what you’re saying, it’s because you’ve created a situation where everything you say is suspect and nobody can trust you. And that originated in your evil, lying, deceitful heart. The situation that you should rather be in is that your word is sufficient, and you are known as one who tells the truth and is not full of guile.

This whole world is full of lies, and energized by Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). We’re born as liars (Psalm 58:3). And if you haven’t done so yet, I would strongly recommend going over the 3+ pages of verses that Jon provided at the end of his sermon on December 30, 2018. Whenever you see the Bible talk about the words that come out of our mouth, it’s time to stop and study that passage. It’s vitally important. James said, “If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body.” (James 3:2). Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” (Matthew 12:34).

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”
(Matthew 5:38-42)

This law of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” is commonly referred to as “lex talionis” and can be found in three places in the Old Testament: Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. This law is often accused of being barbaric, but it is the exact

opposite – it was just, and it was merciful. The idea is that the punishment must fit the crime, but it must not go beyond that. Furthermore, the execution of this law was put into the hands of the government; this was not a mandate for vigilante justice. There must be laws like this for society to function; there must be justice. When justice is served, it has a beneficial impact on the entire society, because it keeps people from committing crimes rampantly.

Deuteronomy 19:20 tells us that when a punishment is meted out, the other people “shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.” Arthur Pink says, “Magistrates and judges were never ordained by God for the purpose of reforming reprobates or pampering degenerates, but to be His instruments for preserving law and order, and that by being a terror to the evil (Romans 13), they are to be an avenger to execute wrath on him that does evil.”

But the Pharisees applied this law to the individual. They interpreted this to be a command for them to personally take vengeance and get back at someone who they perceived did them a wrong. They used a misinterpretation of this law to justify a selfish, retaliatory, spiteful, vindictive spirit, and to support vendettas and holding grudges. And if we’re honest, we all have that type of spirit deep down in the old man. No doubt that we all have a sense of justice (i.e., that there is a deserved punishment when the moral laws of God are broken), but our corrupt post-Fall nature has turned that righteous concept of justice into personal, spiteful revenge. We feel like we have to get even. We feel like we have to stand up for our so-called “rights.” When we feel like some injustice has been done to us, we want our pound of flesh, and we generally aren’t happy unless the punishment is disproportionately large when compared to the crime. This is our fallen nature, and the Pharisees did whatever they could to put a righteous gloss on that fallen nature and say, “someone did something to violate my rights, and I got sweet revenge against them because the Bible says, ‘an eye for an eye,’ so I am therefore righteous.”

Jesus rips the pious façade off the Pharisees, exposes their vindictive hearts, and tells them to “resist not evil.” What does this mean? Is He advocating anarchy? No laws? No police? No courts? Of course not. That would be antithetical to everything else we learn in the New Testament. Everything that He is saying here must be taken in such a way that it is not to the detriment of the law. He’s not talking about getting rid of law and justice; He’s talking about our personal relationships with other people. So, what does it mean then? We shouldn’t resist sin? We shouldn’t resist false doctrine? Again, of course not. Jesus resisted that type of evil, and we’re commanded to resist the devil. In the context, it simply means not to set yourself against a person who has wronged you, or has violated your rights, or has otherwise committed an evil against you; don’t set out to get even. “Recompense to no man evil for evil.” (Romans 12:17). Christ then proceeds to provide four illustrations of this precept. Remember, the important thing here is what’s going on in your heart. This is a religion that

has to do with the heart and the attitude. As I said at the beginning, He's not giving us a legalistic checklist; rather, He's giving us guiding principles:

1. **Being smitten on the cheek.** If someone comes up to you and slaps you on the cheek, that is a demeaning, humiliating action. And being backhanded on the face was thought by the Jews to be the most degrading of all. The idea is that when someone doesn't give you the dignity that you think you deserve, don't retaliate. If someone persecutes you, don't seek revenge. Let it happen again. Don't worry about your dignity; don't worry that everyone's going to think you're a coward for not fighting back. Does this mean you have to stand there and be beaten to death? Or on the flip side, to defiantly present your other arrogant cheek and challenge them to slap it too? No. He's not ordering us to be sanctimonious punching bags. We're talking about attitude – are you going to fight back because your pride has been wounded? To defend your honor? To get revenge? Christ gives us an example of this very thing in John 18:22-23 when He is struck by one of the officers. What's noteworthy is that when He is smitten, we don't read anything about Him literally turning the other cheek and waiting for another blow. Instead, He answers meekly and causes them to understand their sin and injustice. No personal revenge or anger.
2. **Being sued.** The message here is that you must not retaliate if a litigious person comes after you in a lawsuit. In fact, you must be so far from retaliating that you would be willing to give more than what he's asking for. It may be hard for us to understand why someone would sue someone for something as trivial as a coat, but garments were a lot more valuable in Christ's day. But even though they were valuable (and to a poor person it would be VERY valuable), in the grand scheme of things, a coat and a cloak are relatively trivial things that can be replaced. I think that's one of the points here – we're not talking about someone taking your entire estate so as to render you unable to serve God and care for your family – we're talking about a couple pieces of clothing. I don't think the message of Christ here is that you have to purposefully go into poverty because some litigious person decides to come after you. Some people interpret this verse to mean that the person bringing the suit actually had a cause to sue you; you did something wrong, and the judgment was your coat. Instead of fighting (which we are wont to do), you give the coat, and to show that you're sorry, you give your cloak also. Others interpret it to mean any lawsuit, even when you've done absolutely nothing wrong and the person is abusing the legal system. Rather than becoming embroiled in a lawsuit, where you're fighting back with a vengeful spirit, do what you can to get out of it and be at peace, even if it means taking a loss, because you'll end up spending a lot more than the coat was ever worth if you're doing it to satisfy your vindictiveness.
3. **Compelling to go one mile.** This is a very interesting one. In the Persian empire, they had something similar to the "pony express." If a rider wasn't able to complete a leg of

the journey, they could compel a citizen to finish it for them. The Romans picked this law up and Roman soldiers were able to compel citizens to transport things for them, but apparently by law, they weren't allowed to compel you to do it for any further than one mile. A good example was Simon the Cyrenian, whom they compelled to carry the cross of Christ. Now, the Romans were the occupying force and were absolutely despised by the Jews. Jesus is telling them if the government requires you to give up your liberty (after all, you had important things to do, places to go, people to see), even if you don't like the government, don't fight it. We can extrapolate this to apply to anyone who is in a position of authority over us who can order us to do something. Don't be resentful. Don't try to come up with ways to undermine it and get your revenge. Rather, be of a spirit that you would be willing to do more than asked.

4. **Give to him that asks.** Here we're talking about our possessions. People love their possessions, and we are so selfish. Our reaction is always, "who does this guy think he is to ask for my stuff? This is **my** stuff!" First, it's not your stuff – you are borrowing it for a while. The idea here is that if you come across a person who has a real need, and you are able to meet the need, then generously provide what you have to meet the need. This, again, is about attitude. If you're selfish, stingy and spiteful, and that's the reason that you aren't helping a person out, that is what Jesus is condemning here. He's not telling us that we need to enable sin, like laziness or fraud or drunkenness or being a deadbeat. And He's not telling us that we need to throw discretion out the window and give handouts to every stranger that crosses our path. "If any would not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10). "A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion." (Psalm 112:5).

All of this is easier said than done, though. How can we possibly follow these things? I would suggest a few ideas. First and foremost, be honest with yourself – what is the real reason you are doing this thing or that thing, or are not doing this thing or that thing? Is it because you're selfish? Offended at someone? Holding a grudge? Has your perceived greatness and impeccable reputation been called into question? And second, consider how selfless Christ was, and how selfless you are not. Self-centeredness is very likely the root motivation of most everything you do, and the root cause of most of your problems.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren

only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

The Old Testament passage referenced here is Leviticus 19:18, which says, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I *am* the LORD.” The teaching in the Old Testament is that your neighbor would include everyone, including your enemy. There is no passage in the Old Testament that commands anyone to hate their enemy. However, there are events like the conquest of Canaan, what we call the “imprecatory psalms” where prayers are made for the destruction of the enemies of God’s people (for example, Psalm 69), and there is language by David in Psalm 139 where he says that he hates God’s enemies with a “perfect hatred” (Psalm 139:22). But none of these things are a command to have a personal hatred for your enemies. These all have to do with judicial outpourings of the wrath of God, and righteous indignation in response to God being attacked and blasphemed. It would be a sin, for example, to pray for the destruction of an enemy because they did us wrong personally and we’re upset with them and we want revenge. But it is good and holy to pray for their destruction for the glory of God’s justice. It would have been a sin for David to have a hatred for his enemies because of some personal offense, but it is a holy thing to have a perfect hatred. And in fact, in that same passage in Psalm 139, David asked God to search his thoughts and his heart, so that he would know that his perfect hatred was not the result of any wickedness in him.

Like every other passage we’ve gone over today, the Pharisees had perverted this one. They had removed the requirement to love thy neighbor “as thyself,” and they had added a requirement that you must hate your enemy. If you say, “love thy neighbor” and leave it at that, it sounds so holy and pious, but if you throw the “as thyself” in there, suddenly this becomes an impossible task. Our love for ourselves is unfeigned, persistent, sincere. We’re always looking out for our own best interest. There isn’t a person on earth who loves their neighbor as themselves like they ought to. Further, the Pharisees had redefined “neighbor” to be whoever they wanted it to be, and everyone else they had free license to hate.

So, what is Christ saying here? For most people, loving and blessing and doing good and prayer is generally reserved for those who love us back. It’s easy to do those things for those who love us. But we’re called to do this for everyone, enemies included – we are to show our love for them in word, deed, and prayer. Now understand, the “love” spoken of here is not some sentimental feeling or a friendly affection...it is a love of action (see 1 Corinthians 13). It is talking about saying and doing things for the benefit of our enemies (including preaching the truth to them). This isn’t a complicated thing to understand, but it’s a monumental thing to do. It’s not a thing that we would naturally do; this requires something supernatural. This is one of those things where it’s so contrary to the flesh that we start looking for loopholes and

explanations and exceptions and counter arguments. But this is one of the things that ought to distinguish us from the rest of the world. Otherwise, we're not any different than anyone else.

But why are we called to do this? I see at least a couple things here. The first is so that we will manifest the fact that we are the children of God. Children have certain characteristics where they resemble their parents, and He's saying that we ought to emulate our Father in this matter. He deals with the unthankful, the evil, and the unjust with kindness and mercy (see Luke 6:35-36). He doesn't make a distinction in His temporal blessings and say, "I'm only going to shine the sun on good people, and the rain is only going to fall on the just." If God treats His enemies this way, who have offended Him infinitely more than anyone could ever offend us, then we should treat our own enemies likewise (and remember, we were all once enemies of God). We are called to be perfect, even as He is perfect. He doesn't lower the standard just because we can't meet the standard. The second reason is to differentiate ourselves from the rest of the world. "What do ye more than others?" What an important question this is to ask yourself. If we're just like everyone else in this regard, we can't presume that we're going to get any reward from God. "What reward have ye?"

Of course, none of this negates the wrath and judgment of God. The same Jesus who taught that we are to love our enemies also pronounced woe after woe on the Pharisees. The same God who provides sun and rain for His enemies will ultimately cast them into hell (unless, of course, they repent). And it is not inconsistent for us to love and pray for our enemies in our personal relationships with them, while in a different sense and in defense of God's glory and honor, we simultaneously hate them with a perfect hatred (Psalm 139:22), pray to be delivered from them (2 Thessalonians 3:2), pray for God to destroy them (Psalm 69:28), and pray for Christ to return in flaming fire and take vengeance on them (2 Thessalonians 1:8). The key is to not lie to ourselves and pretend that our personal hatred and desire for revenge is really a zeal to honor and glorify God.

If I'm not mistaken, everyone listening to this sermon has fallen woefully short of at least five of the six standards that Christ has laid out here, myself included. It's probably hard to listen to, and it's equally hard to say, knowing my own sinful shortcomings. But the good news is that Christ isn't just a holy Lawgiver...He is also a Redeemer for those who understand that they can't establish their own righteousness by their works. I'll mention the imputed righteousness of Christ again – He kept the law of God perfectly, and He has imputed that righteousness to us, such that when a holy God looks upon us, He sees only the righteousness of Christ covering us. Thank God that we can stand in His presence as righteous as Christ; otherwise, we would all be undone. I love you. Amen.