

**SERMON ON THE MOUNT: FIRST TASK (5:13-48)**

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<sup>1</sup> Outline is a modification of Dale C. Allison, "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* 106 (1987): 423-45 and Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* (2003).

## Summary: Be salt and light (5:13-16)<sup>2</sup>

**Matt 5:13-16** 5:13 You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

### A. Parable on Salt (13)

1. Indicative: You are the salt ...
2. Question: but if...
3. Answer: it is no long good...

### B. Parable on Light (14-16)

1. Indicative: You are the light...(14a)
2. First illustration: A city (14b)
3. Second illustration: A lamp (15a)
3. Imperative: Let your light shine... (16)

## A. Parable of Salt (v. 13) [[return to outline](#)]

What is the significance of “salt” in this parable? Allison provides eleven possibilities:<sup>3</sup>

- Salt is an element added to sacrifices (Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24)
- There is mention of “salt of the covenant” (2 Chr 13:5; Jub 21:11; 11Qtemple 20:13)
- Elisha performs a miracle and uses salt to purify bad water (2 Kgs 2:19-23)
- Salt is a condiment for food (Job 6:6)
- Salt is a preservative (Ignatius, *Magn* 10)
- Water and fire and iron and salt are basic needs (Ecclus 39:26)
- Eating salt with someone is a sign of loyalty (Ezra 4:14)
- Salt is linked with peace (Mark 9:50)
- Speech should be seasoned with salt (Col 4:5)
- Salt is associated with wisdom (*m. Sota* 9:15)
- Salt is beloved of the gods (Plato *Tim* 60E).

Thus, salt can have several symbolic associations and cannot be limited to one referent. However, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it would be reasonable to think of there is a connection between the character encouraged by the beatitudes—poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, desiring righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking—that makes disciples to be salt. As such, they would be the “wisdom” of the world, “purifying” and/or “preserving” the world, “sacrificing” for the world, or adding “taste” to the world.

<sup>2</sup>The statements in 5:13 and 5:14-16 are quite general and function as a heading for the core of the sermon and serve as a transition to move the speaker from promises of future blessing (5:3-12) to the demands of life in the present (5:17 - 7:12). So Allison, 1987: 431.

<sup>3</sup>W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison. *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Volume I:I-VII (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 472-3.

Can salt loses its saltiness or taste? The Greek is literally, what if “salt becomes foolish.” Salt can be mixed with impurities or so diluted that it loses its strength and becomes useless. Verse 13a suggests that Israel is no longer the salt of the earth, which the followers of Jesus are; however, it also implies that Christians can lose their strength (saltiness) too.

A qualities of salt worth noting: As Luther wrote: “Salt is not salt for itself, it cannot salt itself.” Salt is not for itself, but serves something beyond itself.

### **B. Parable of Light (vv. 14-16) [[return to outline](#)]**

Christians are the locus of God’s activity on earth. God is light (2 Cor 4:6; Ps 4:6; 18:28; 31:16) and shines through them as he shone through Jesus (4:16). Is the city Jerusalem? Possibly, but any city will do (Sepphoris was on a hill across from Nazareth).

The lamp (λύχνος) in mind was probably a terra cotta (large unglazed) oil lamp. One would not put it under a container (μόδιος = grain bucket), but on a lamp stand (λυχνία), which refers to the *menora* (LXX). By analogy, the disciples’ purpose is to bring God’s light to the world. To hide themselves (in context “not show Torah obedience” and thus faithfulness to God) would betray God. Talents must not be hidden (25:14-30), so also light must not be hidden.

Verses 13-16 are transitional. They transition from the blessed future and an emphasis on God’s grace (5:3-12) to how disciples participate in God’s grace (5:17-7:12). It is a transition from gift to task. Readers or hearers are to identify with salt and light, which characterize those who live the demands expressed in the remainder of SOM (5:17-7:12).

It is not Israel, the Torah, or the Temple that is the salt or light of the world (as in Isa 60:1-3; Bar. 4:2; or *b Ber* 28b). Rather, Israel’s vocation to be salt and light to the nations is taken over by Jesus’ followers. They are salt and light *to the world* (cf. 5:16; 28:19-20).

Both parables follow the pattern of putting the indicative first (you are), then the imperative (let us). The indicative, “You are the salt (of the earth) and you are the light (of the world),” is followed by the imperative, “Let your light shine.”

### **First Task: In Relation to the Torah, keep it as Jesus instructed (5:17-48) [[return to outline](#)]**

#### **A. General Principles: Jesus and the Torah (5:17-20)]**

**Matt 5:17-20** 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 5:18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 5:19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of

the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

## 1. Christians and the law [[return to outline](#)]

The question Jesus begins to answer in verse 17 is whether he and his followers are bound by the Torah. Many Christians don't have a clear understanding about the relevance of the OT Law.

- Some people believe that Jesus abolished the Torah/Law, so that the Torah/Law is no longer necessary.
- Others believe that various parts of the Bible pertain to certain “dispensations” or periods of time, and the OT Law belonged to a bygone era.<sup>4</sup>
- Still others believe that Jesus gave us a new commandment, namely, to love one another. And that is all we need and this one commandment replaces all the OT commandments.<sup>5</sup>
- Lastly, there is the very popular view among many Christians today that since we are saved by grace, we don't need the Torah/Law or need to obey it.

## 2. Jesus fulfills the Torah (v. 17) [[return to outline](#)]

In verse 17, Jesus affirms the Torah.

<sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I have come to abolish (*katalusai*) the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish (*katalusai*) but to fulfill (*plērōsai*) (Matt 5:17; NRSV).

Apparently, Jesus and his followers were accused of abolishing the Torah. The word for abolishing (*katalusai*) means “to throwing down, destroy, or doing away with something.”<sup>6</sup> Specifically, Jesus and his followers were accused of not keeping the Sabbath, not keeping the dietary laws, and perhaps not keeping the moral law as well.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Many dispensationalists view scripture and history as divided into seven periods or dispensations of time: (1) *Age of Innocence*, which ended with expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden; (2) *Age of Conscience* [Gen. 3:23]; (3) *Age of Human Government* [Gen. 8:20]; (4) *Age of Promise* [Gen. 12:1]; (5) *Age of Law* [Ex. 18:8]; (6) *Age of Grace* [Jn. 1:17]; (7) *Age of the Future Kingdom* [Eph. 1:10]. In this view, the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are not for this time, the *Age of Grace*, but for the *Future Kingdom*, making the Sermon irrelevant for today!

<sup>5</sup> Some believe that if we walk in love, we will never break the OT commandments. Others believe that if we love one another we can break the OT commandments, since they have been abolished.

<sup>6</sup> F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker (eds.), *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (2nd Edition; University of Chicago Press, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps Jesus did not have the Oral Torah (Mishnah) in mind, since elsewhere we find that Jesus had some dispute regarding the Oral Torah (Mark 7).

How does Jesus respond? He denies the charge. He didn't come to abolish or throw down the Torah. Rather, he came to fulfill it. Look at verse 17. Jesus says he came to fulfill (*plērōsai*) the Torah.

The question is, what does “fulfill” (*plērōsai*) the Torah mean? Dale Allison presents at least six ways it has been understood by Christians.<sup>8</sup>

- (1) Fulfill really means “add.” Jesus’ imperative go beyond and so add to Moses’ law. Jesus intensifies the Mosaic law.
- (2) Fulfill means to “do” or “execute” or “obey”. Jesus and his followers will fulfill the law in that they will obey it as Jesus taught.
- (3) Fulfill means that Jesus brings the law to perfection with a new law of his own.
- (4) Fulfill means that Jesus enables others to keep the Torah.
- (5) Fulfill refers to love; Jesus reduces everything to love, which is the fulfilling of the law.
- (6) Fulfill refers to Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible.
  - Allison’s position: Jesus fulfills the Hebrew prophecies and expectations as it is said throughout Matthew (1:22; 4:14; 12:17; etc.). He will be like the prophet Moses (Deut 18:15-20). Jesus’ new teaching brings to realization that which the Torah prophesied (Allison, Sermon, 59). But Allison does not rule out the other possibilities either.
  - Gardner’s position: “The law remains valid until all that the law intends is fully revealed in Jesus’ teaching and fully reflected in Jesus’ community.”<sup>9</sup>
  - Buttrick’s position: Jesus’ teaching is in continuity with the OT—everything present in the SOM has precedent in the Hebrew Bible (so Buttrick).

I believe Jesus is saying that the Torah continues to be valid and Jesus’ followers are to keep or obey the Torah as Jesus interpreted it.

### **3. The Torah continues to be valid (v. 18) [[return to outline](#)]**

Verse 18 reinforces verse 17. Jesus and his followers will obey the Torah to the smallest detail just as he taught them.

<sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (*genētai*) (Matt 5:18; NRSV).

The Torah will be fulfilled by the Jesus-community as Jesus interpreted taught—not as the Pharisees or Rabbis taught.<sup>10</sup>

We might be puzzled by verse 18, because Paul taught that some of the Torah did not need to be followed by Gentile believers:

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<sup>8</sup> Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 59.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Gardner, *Matthew*. BCBC (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991) 104.

<sup>10</sup> The assumption is that “the law will be taught as redefined by Jesus.” So Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew*, BCBC (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991) 104.

- They did not have to offer sacrifices, because Christ was their sacrifice (Heb 9:11-14; 10:8-10),
- They did not keep circumcision laws, dietary laws, or religious festivals, because those practices were specifically for Jews (Col 2:9-11, 16-17).

So Jesus is addressing Jewish believers, whereas Paul is addressing Gentile believers. Keeping the Torah was a privilege of the Jews, but not incumbent on Gentiles, though it is thought that Gentile converts to Judaism could benefit from Torah observance.

For these reasons, some Christians distinguish between the *moral law* and the *ritual law*. Jews are to keep both the *moral* and *ritual* law, whereas Gentiles keep the *moral* law.

*Examples of moral Law:* Not to take revenge (Lev. 19:18); not to bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18); to leave the unreaped corner of the field or orchard for the poor (Lev. 19:9); to love the stranger (Deut. 10:19).

*Examples of ritual Law:* Not to build an altar of hewn stone (Ex. 20:22); not to extinguish the fire on the altar (Lev. 6:6); that every animal offered up shall be without blemish (Lev. 22:21); not to offer up sacrifices outside the Sanctuary (Deut. 12:13).

The problem is that moral and ritual law are not easily distinguished or separated. Jesus never makes the distinction between moral and ritual law.

#### **4. Keep and teach the Torah (v. 19) [[return to outline](#)]**

In verse 19, Jesus encourages his followers to keep and teach the Torah.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks (*lusē*) one of the least of these commandments, and teaches (*didaxē*) others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does (*poiēsē*) them and teaches (*didaxē*) them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Here Jesus presents a sharp contrast between breaking and keeping the Torah.

- Breaking or “loosing” (*luō*) the Torah and teaching others to do the same will be least in the KG.
- Keeping or “doing” (*poieō*) the Torah and teaching others to do the same will be called great in the KG

Notice also that followers of Jesus are strongly urged to not only live the Torah, but to teach it to others, to pass it on to future generations. This is very Jewish. Jesus is alluding to Moses’ teaching:

**Deut 6:7-9.**<sup>7</sup> Recite them [commandments] to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead,<sup>9</sup> and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (NRSV)

## 5. Greater Righteousness (v. 20) [[return to outline](#)]

When we hear verse 20, we get to the real issue.

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (NRSV).

The battle is over different the different ways teachers “teach” and “do” the Torah. The Pharisees (Rabbis) don’t keep or teach the Torah the way Jesus advocates. Their interpretation falls short of Jesus’ expectations for his disciples.

Pharisees developed their own system of interpretation—the Oral Torah reflected in the Mishnah. Jesus’ perspective differs dramatically from theirs. As Matthew tells it, the Pharisees (Rabbis) had become fixated on observing external rules and practices.

**Matt 23:23.**<sup>23</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. (NRSV)

It is not that the scribes and Pharisees were teaching the wrong things, but they were fixated on trivial matters and missed God’s righteousness.

**Matt. 23:2-5.**<sup>2</sup> "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; <sup>3</sup> therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

When we looked at Matt 5:10, we discussed the meaning of righteousness (Heb. *tzedakah*; Gk. *dikaiosuē*). To summarize that discussion, “righteousness” refers to a “right” or “just” relationship with God, others, and one self. It is peace, harmony, covenant faithfulness, and reconciliation.

It is inward reconciliation (peace with one self), horizontal reconciliation (peace with others), and vertical reconciliation (peace with God).

Righteousness is another way of talking about salvation. When people receive and participate in God’s righteousness, people are delivered “from slavery and from oppression and restores community relations.”<sup>11</sup>

In verse 20, Jesus tells his disciples’ that their righteousness (Heb. *tzedakah*) must “exceed” or be “greater than” (περισσεύση ... πλεῖον) the scribes and Pharisees.

<b>5:20</b>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">ἐὰν μὴ</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">περισσεύση</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">ὑμῶν</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">ἡ δικαιοσύνη</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">πλεῖον</td> <td>τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">unless</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">be present in abundant</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">your</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">righteousness</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">more or greater than</td> <td>the scribes and Pharisees</td> </tr> </table>	ἐὰν μὴ	περισσεύση	ὑμῶν	ἡ δικαιοσύνη	πλεῖον	τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων	unless	be present in abundant	your	righteousness	more or greater than	the scribes and Pharisees
ἐὰν μὴ	περισσεύση	ὑμῶν	ἡ δικαιοσύνη	πλεῖον	τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων								
unless	be present in abundant	your	righteousness	more or greater than	the scribes and Pharisees								

The Pharisees (Rabbis) were not teaching the wrong things—they were teaching the Torah after all—but they were not embodying or keeping the Torah properly. What “greater righteousness” means becomes evident in the six sayings in Matt. 5:21-48.

**Excurses: How many commandments?**

According to Jewish tradition (e.g., Maimonides’ twelfth-century *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* or *Book of Commandments*, there are 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions in the Torah (613 total).<sup>12</sup> In Hebrew, *tzedakah* (righteousness) is reflected in the commandments, but has come to mean “charity.”<sup>13</sup>

Example of positive *mitzvot*: “Believe in God, love God, study and teach Torah, build a sanctuary for God, participate in synagogue services, say the blessing after meals, spiritually cleanse in a ritual bath (*mikvah*), leave gleanings for the poor, tithe to the poor, rest on Shabbat eat *matzah* on Passover, fast on Yom Kippur, and give charity.”<sup>14</sup>

Example of negative *mitzvot*: Don’t believe in any other God, don’t worship idols, don’t get tattoos (or decorative scars), don’t enter the sanctuary intoxicated, don’t delay payment of vows, don’t eat an unclean animal, don’t eat blood, don’t eat leavened products on Passover, don’t fail to give charity, and don’t convict someone on the testimony of a single witness.”<sup>15</sup>

Of the 613 commandments, over 200 cannot be observed any more because it would require priests in a functioning Temple in Jerusalem. Additionally, 26 of the 613 require living in the land of Israel (e.g., leaving a portion for a field unharvested for the poor).<sup>16</sup>

“All the negative commandments pertain to both men and women, but women are exempt from the positive, time-specific *mitzvot* because of the demands of child-rearing and taking care of the home. This is why it’s not incumbent on women to wear the *tallit* (prayer shawl) or attend daily synagogue worship.”<sup>17</sup>

**B. Six triads of antitheses/sayings (5:21-48) [[return to outline](#)]**

<sup>11</sup> Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 34.  
<sup>12</sup> Ted Falcon and David Blatner, *Judaism for Dummies* (New York: Hungry Minds, 2001) 45.  
<sup>13</sup> See inset in Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 46.  
<sup>14</sup> Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.  
<sup>15</sup> Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.  
<sup>16</sup> Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.  
<sup>17</sup> Falcon and Blatner, *Judaism*, 45.

In the remainder of Matthew 5, Jesus provides six representative samples of Jesus' teaching regarding how to interpret and keep the Torah to attain "greater righteousness". Each of the six representative samples provides a window to how Jesus interprets the Torah generally.

## 0. Preliminary questions<sup>18</sup> [[return to outline](#)]

### a. What is the structure of the six sayings? [[return to outline](#)]

(1) The six antitheses form two triads:

- a) The phrase, "You have heard that it was said to *men of old*," appears only in verses 21 and 33, the beginning points of the first and fourth antitheses.
- b) The adverb *palin* (again) occurs only in verse 33, which seems to indicate another beginning point.
- c) In the first three antitheses, the phrase, "You have heard it said," is immediately followed by *hoti* and a substantival participle.
- d) In the last three antitheses, the phrase, "You have heard it said," is immediately followed by an imperative.<sup>19</sup>

(2) "You have heard it said" is in the past tense and "I say to you" is present tense. Why the contrast in tenses, if the past/present dichotomy wasn't pointing to disagreement? Allison says, "The past/present dichotomy most naturally involves—although it admittedly does not necessitate—two authorities separated in time (Jesus and Moses)."

(3) "Although Jesus' words are contrasted with the words of torah, the two are not contradictory." Cf. Matt 5:18.

### b. Are they antithetical? [[return to outline](#)]

Many commentators refer to the six sayings as the "antithetical sayings," because each begins with the saying, "You have heard it said... but "I say to you." In this way, Jesus seems to contradict the Torah—"the Torah says this, but I say something else."

Allison and Davies write: "In Matthew, δε, unlike αλλα, does not always signal a strong antithesis or contrast. The particle, δε, can mean "and yet" or even "and"; and the continuative function of δε is well attested: Matt 6:29; 8:10-11; 12:5-6."<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore they write: "We would translate the so-called 'antitheses' this way: 'You have heard that it was said to the men of old ... but I (in addition) say to you ...' The contrast involves not contradiction but transcendence."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol. 1, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) 506-7.

<sup>19</sup> Allison (1987): 432-3.

<sup>20</sup> Allison & Davies, *Matthew*, Vol. 1, 507.

<sup>21</sup> Allison & Davies, *Matthew*, Vol. 1, 507.

**c. Does Jesus intensify the Torah?** [\[return to outline\]](#)

Jesus seems to intensify the Torah. For example, murder is wrong, but it is even wrong to be angry (5:21-22). Jesus goes beyond or transcends Moses.<sup>22</sup> Anyone following Jesus' teaching in 5:21-48 would not be in violation of any Jewish law. This has led some to propose that 5:21-48 supplies a "hedge" about the Torah as did the Rabbis (cf. *m. Abot* 1:1).

**d. Does Jesus present "transforming initiatives"?** [\[return to outline\]](#)

Stassen and Gushee argue that the "antithetical sayings" (5:21-48) should be read as *three-fold transforming initiatives*.<sup>23</sup>

Usually the antithetical sayings are read as two-fold statements. First, Jesus quotes the law and then Jesus prohibits anger, lust, divorce, oaths, resistance to evil, and commands that we renounce rights.

In contrast, Stassen and Gushee propose that each saying has three elements: (i) traditional righteousness, (ii) vicious cycle, and (iii) transforming initiative. The emphasis is placed on the third element, which provides "the realistic way of deliverance through the transforming initiatives."<sup>24</sup> For example, look at the following chart on Matt 5:21-26.<sup>25</sup>

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative
<p><b>Matt 5:21.</b> <sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'</p> <p>(Above: In Greek, "shall not" and "shall be" are not imperatives, but futures; but they do imply a command.)</p>	<p><b>Matt 5:22.</b> <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.</p> <p>(Above: No imperatives in the Greek.)</p> <p>(Right: Underlining mark imperatives)</p>	<p><b>Matt 5:23-26.</b> <sup>23</sup> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> <u>leave</u> your gift there before the altar and <u>go</u>; first <u>be reconciled</u> to your brother or sister, and then come and <u>offer</u> your gift. <sup>25</sup> <u>Come to terms</u> quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.</p>

<sup>22</sup> "The contrast involves not contradiction, but transcendence." Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, Vol. 1, 507.

<sup>23</sup> Glenn H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity 2003) 125-145.

<sup>24</sup> Stassen & Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (2003) 133.

<sup>25</sup> Stassen & Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (2003) 135.

In this way, Jesus cites tradition, then exposes cycles that destroy relationships—and destroys righteousness by the way—and then Jesus offers ways to participate in the transform the vicious cycles.<sup>26</sup>

## 1. Murder & Anger: Righteousness creates peace (5:21-26) [[return to outline](#)]

5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' 5:22 But [And] I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. 5:23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 5:25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 5:26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (NRSV)

### a. Affirms the Torah (v. 21) [[return to outline](#)]

First, Jesus affirms the Torah or “traditional righteousness.”

<sup>21</sup> You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder (*ou phoneuseis*); and 'whoever murders (*phoneuseē*) shall be liable to judgment' (NRSV).

“Those of ancient times” (*archaios*) refers to the Hebrews who received the Sinai revelation. The passive form indicates God’s revelation is in view, not simply Jewish tradition. It is a reference to the law against murder (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17) and the legal liability (Exod 21:12; Lev 24:17; Num 35:16-17; Deut 17:8-13).

### 2. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 22) [[return to outline](#)]

Second, Jesus diagnoses the problem.

<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire (*Gehenna* of fire).

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<sup>26</sup> Following Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

Notice that Jesus is not saying, “Don’t be angry.”<sup>27</sup> Anger is an emotion and you can’t prohibit emotions. Emotions happen!

Rather, Jesus is says, “If you are angry”—it is present tense participle, meaning “if you continue in anger.” If you *persist in anger* it will lead to other destructive behaviors like insulting people and going to court all of which is like living in “the hell (*Gehenna*) of fire”—a reference to the refuse dump south of Jerusalem.

Notice that Jesus has shifted the attention from the outward act (murder) to an inward state (anger). But just like murder, ongoing anger and public humiliation of another person destroys human beings and their relationships.

Ongoing anger harms human beings. We know “that continuing to live in anger shows up in an ulcer, heart attack, bitterness, sometimes physical abuse, and even murder.”<sup>28</sup>

The point is *prolonged anger*—not anger in itself—is personally and relationally destructive. Gardner writes: “every act or emotion that threatens life in one’s community violates God’s will.”<sup>29</sup> (cf. Eph 4:26; Jam 1:19-20). Similarly, Allison says, “The point is that it is insufficient to refrain from the act of murder, for the latter is simply the symptom of something else.”<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Offers transforming initiatives (vv. 23-24) [[return to outline](#)]

Third, Jesus shows the way out of the anger—the “transforming initiative”—toward peace. He offers two transformative initiatives:

#### a. First Initiative: Be reconciled (23-24) [[return to outline](#)]

In the first initiative, Jesus says making peace is more important than “sacrificial acts” or “religious duties” and gives concrete instruction

<sup>23</sup> So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift (NRSV).

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<sup>27</sup> Some believe Jesus is prohibiting anger altogether, since to be angry is to be liable to judgment; thus anger is prohibited. But this is problematic. Is there not justified anger? Ps 4:4 and Eph 4:26 allow for anger, but not sin. God is said to be angry (Exod 4:14) and so did Jesus (Mk 3:5). Yet Col 3:8 and Ps 37:8 seem to say something to the contrary.

<sup>28</sup> Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 65.

<sup>29</sup> Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew, Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1991) 105.

<sup>30</sup> Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 92.

Notice the imperatives in quick succession: “leave ... go ... be reconciled ... offer your gift.” It suggests we need to take care of matters swiftly. Without feeding our anger, we need to take care of it before it gets out of hand.

Notice the priority of action. You would think that religious duty to God would first, but Jesus inverts expectations. Making peace with others is prior to making peace with God.<sup>31</sup>

When we make peace with others, we “participate” in the redemptive grace of God; we embody the virtues (principles) and practices (rules) of the KG.

**b. Second Initiative: Change attitude (vv. 25-26) [[return to outline](#)]**

In the second initiative, Jesus instructs us to change our attitude and do it quickly!

<sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with [lit. *be well-minded quickly toward*] your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny (NRSV).

The NRSV says, “Come to terms quickly with your accuser.” The Greek literally says, “Be well-minded quickly toward your accuser” (ἴσθη εὐνοῶν τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου ταχύ). The word “well-minded” (*eunoeō*) suggests an inner work.

Whereas the first example dealt with the *outer work* of reconciling a relationship, the second example points toward an *inner work* of changing our attitudes.

Cognitive psychotherapists tell us that one of the primary causes of destructive anger is our addiction to power and control. We strive to control our environment and other people to meet our perceived needs. We worry about losing what we have—money, relationships, prestige, security. We make demands of our selves, others, and God. When we don’t get what we, we get angry. Anger is another way we try to dominate others. The down side is that anger provokes everything from counter-attacks to heart attacks.

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<sup>31</sup> “Going to make peace with your brother [or sister] is exactly what God does for us in Jesus Christ. God has reason to be angry with us but does to stay distant; God comes to us in Jesus and makes peace with us.” Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 68.

Jesus offers a “transformative initiate”: He says change your mind and attitudes quickly; stop demanding, defuse anger.

## 2. Adultery & Lust: Righteousness remedies craving (5:27-30) [[return to outline](#)]

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust [*pros to empithumēsai*] has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. (NRSV)

With the matter of Lust & Adultery, we pick up the second of six sayings of Jesus in the SOM. Jesus affirms the Torah, diagnoses a problem, and then offers a “participative” way of deliverance.<sup>32</sup>

### a. Affirms the Torah (v. 27) [[return to outline](#)]

First, Jesus affirms the Torah: “You shall not commit adultery” (5:27; cf. Exod 20:14). “Technically, adultery refers to a married person engaging in sexual intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse.”<sup>33</sup>

Adultery was considered a type of theft by depriving a married person of his or her exclusive rights to their spouse. The Torah prescribed the death penalty for this offense (Exod. 20:14; Lev 20:10).

### b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 28) [[return to outline](#)]

Second, Jesus diagnoses the problem.

5:28 But [and] I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust (*epithumia*) has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:28; NRSV).

Jesus confronts the underlying cause adultery. He connects the *external* act of adultery with *internal act* of lust. The focus shifts from for our relationship *with others* (adultery) to our relationship *with our own self* (lust).

### (1) What is lust (*epithumia*)?

<sup>32</sup> Following Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> William W. Klein, *Become What You Are: Spiritual Formation According the Sermon on the Mount* (Tyrone: Authentic, 2006) 98.

What is lust? The Greek word, *epithumia*, refers to *strong desire* or *unrestrained craving*. “Jesus is not talking about emotions, but intentions.”<sup>34</sup>

First, the use of the present tense indicates this is not a momentary glance, but a continuous gaze. Second, the use of the prep + an articular infinitive indicates purpose. That is, “Lustful looking is looking with an intention to act.”<sup>35</sup>

Thus the text could be translated, “Everyone continuing to look (*pas ho blepōn*; πᾶς ὁ βλέπων) at a woman *in order to lust*” (*pros to epithumēsai*; πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι).

## **(2) What’s wrong with *epithumia*?**

What’s wrong with lust? Why is it so bad? Perhaps Jesus is ignorantly attacking human biology and the sexual impulse to reproduce?

The type of lust or craving Jesus is talking about—*epithumia*—goes beyond sexual lust. *Epithumia* has an inner and outer dimension. Jesus is not attacking fun or reproductive biology. He is exposing the root of what destroys human relationships and inner unhappiness.

Inner: *Epithumia* is an attachment (addiction) to something we are unwilling to give up, something we say to ourselves “we must have” in order to be happy. It takes control of us. We lose our freedom. It causes us to do things that are inconsistent with our values. *Epithumia* makes us unhappy. It is never satisfied. It always wants more. In this way, *epithumia* undermines our own inner peace and freedom.

Outer: When *epithumia* is directed at another person the other person becomes an object for self-gratification. *Epithumia* treats a subject like an object, a person like a thing. *Epithumia* undermines healthy relationships.

*Epithumia* sabotages our internal peace and external relationships and causes:

- Jealousy that someone may steal our source of fulfillment
- Anger when the world doesn’t give us what we want
- Bitterness when people don’t give us what we desire

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<sup>34</sup> Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 74.

<sup>35</sup> Charmé Roberts, “Heads without Eyes and Arms without Hands” in *Preaching the Sermon on the Mount*, edited by David Fleer & Dave Bland (St.Louis: Chalice, 2007) 111.

- Fear and anxiety when we think our security is threatened

Implicitly, Jesus is saying that people are responsible for their natural impulses.<sup>36</sup> People can control their desires. Desire is not the master. Humans are free and not determined by hormones or neurobiology.

**c. Offers a transforming initiative (vv. 29-30) [[return to outline](#)]**

Third, Jesus offers a “transforming initiative” on how to cut off *epithumia* by “participating” in God’s grace.

5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. (NRSV)

When Jesus says “cut off the hand and tear out the eye and throw them away,” he’s being dramatic for shock value. Jesus is using humor and hyperbole. He is saying, “It is better to be a maimed and live in KG ... than to have all your parts and live in *Gehenna*.”

He is speaking figuratively. He can’t be speaking literally, because amputating limbs wouldn’t solve the problem of lust or *epithumia*.

This teaching means we need to take *radical action* or make *radical sacrifice* to “tear out” or “cut off” *epithumia* at its roots. It is spiritual warfare.

- You can “cut off and throw away” the cause of lust by avoiding certain situations where you are vulnerable (shopping malls, certain people) or getting rid of things like the televisions or the internet.
- Or you can “cut out and throw away” certain thoughts that led to craving.

The good news is that Jesus thinks people can control their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. People can continue craving, continue being bound or addicted, they can relinquish craving and end the suffering.

**3. Divorce: Righteousness keeps commitments (5:31-32) [[return to outline](#)]**

**Matt 5:31-32.** <sup>31</sup> "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'  
<sup>32</sup> But [And] I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her

<sup>36</sup> So Dale C Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 74.

to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (NRSV)

**a. Affirms the Torah (v. 31) [[return to outline](#)]**

First, Jesus affirms the Torah:

<sup>31</sup>It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."

In the first century, there was a great debate regarding divorce among Jews. Moses taught that God allowed a man to divorce his wife if she does something offensive, but he must give her a certificate of divorce.

**Deut 24:1.** Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him [lit. "finds no favor in his eyes"] because he finds something objectionable [lit., "a naked thing"] about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house

The "certificate of divorce" (סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוּת; *sepher keritut*) was for the sake of the woman. It showed that the woman was free and could remarry. Without the certificate, a woman could not remarry and, if she did, it was considered adultery.

Rabbis in the first century debated on what grounds a man could divorce his wife. On one side, Rabbi Shammai argued that a man could divorce his wife for "something objectionable" by which he meant adultery only. Rabbi Hillel argued that a man could divorce his wife for "something objectionable" by which he meant anything whatsoever that displeased the man, such as the wife's cooking.<sup>37</sup> This became known as the "any cause divorce."<sup>38</sup>

Jesus sided with Shammai, but Hillel's interpretation—Divorce for "Any Cause"—won the day. It was divorce on demand.<sup>39</sup>

**b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 32) [[return to outline](#)]**

Second, Jesus identifies a vicious cycle produced by the practice of divorce of his time:

<sup>37</sup> This is what certain Pharisees ask Jesus in Matt 19:3: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" (NRSV).

<sup>38</sup> David Instone-Brewer, "Divorce for 'Any Cause';" <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Brewer/PPages/DRC/WhitefieldBriefing.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Before "Any Cause" divorce became popular, Judaism had four grounds for divorce, including adultery (Deut 24:1) and neglect for food, clothing, and/or love (Exo21:10f). Exod 21:10f refers to a slave-wife, who could be free of her marriage if her husband neglected her. Thus, the rabbis surmised that if a slave-wife had these rights, a neglected free-wife or a neglected husband had the same rights as well. David Instone-Brewer, "Divorce for 'Any Cause';" Source: <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Brewer/PPages/DRC/WhitefieldBriefing.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> But [And] I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

### **(1) A divorce certificate didn't alter the fact of marriage**

Here, Jesus is counter cultural. He rejects “Divorce for any cause.” Jesus rejected the notion that men could give their wives a certificate of divorce, which included the phrase, “You are free to marry any man” [*m. Git. 9:3*].<sup>40</sup>

Divorce was harmful to women, because most women had difficulty supporting themselves without a husband (think of widows under the Taliban). For Jesus, a divorce certificate didn't alter the fact of marriage and the husband's obligation to support his wife.

If a man gave his wife a divorce certificate, and thought he was free from his wife, Jesus says, “Think again!” Jesus is saying to men, “You are still married. What's worse, you force your wife to give herself to another man in order to survive. Essentially, you force her to be an adulterer as well as the man she has a relationship with.” So, Jesus places the full responsibility on the husband trying to divorce his wife.

### **(2) Except on the ground of unchastity (*porneias*)**

Jesus allows for one exception to what he has just said: “Except on the ground of unchastity” (*parektos logou porneias*). What does that mean?

Unchastity (*porneias*) can have several meanings, including prostitution, incest, and other forms of sexual unfaithfulness. If the situation involved *porneias*, then Jesus allows for divorce.

### **(3) Six considerations**

- Jesus believed marriages remain intact despite certificates of divorce.
- Jesus believed if there was *porneias* (marital unfaithfulness) the “innocent partner” was free to remarry.
- Jesus' focus was on protecting women, who were being forced out of the house and unable to provide from themselves.

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<sup>40</sup> A Jewish certificate of divorce assumed that remarriage was possible and it is likely that Jesus assumed the same thing. Paul's statement in 1 Cor 7:15, “not being enslaved,” make precisely the same point about remarriage.

- Jesus is primarily trying to stop a vicious social practice, rather than making an absolute legal pronouncement; that is, Jesus is concerned about covenant relations and the vicious cycles that break relationships.
- We should not draw any final conclusions about marriage, divorce, or remarriage from this text alone. There are other biblical texts to consider in a comprehensive treatment of the topic.<sup>41</sup>
- After considering the teaching on divorce was clarified, expanded, and qualified in at least four different ways—(i) Mk. 10:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:10, (ii) Lk 16:18b, (iii) 1 Cor. 7:10-16, and (iv) Mt 5:32, 19:19—Allison concludes by saying, “Early Christian tradition did not everywhere receive the ruling against divorce a *san inviolate* law to be applied literally, without imagination.”<sup>42</sup>

### c. Transforming initiative implied [[return to outline](#)]

Of the six antithetical sayings, this one lacks the third element, the transforming initiative. Stassen suggests we have already heard about the transforming initiative that pertains to this case in Matt 5:24: “Go, be reconciled.” It is a short hop to “Go, be reconciled *to your wife*.”<sup>43</sup>

Stassen finds support for his “audacious” guess about what Jesus must have taught when he reads Paul in 1 Cor. 7:10-11: “To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord... be reconciled.”

#### *Excursus: Three Views on Divorce Among Christians*<sup>44</sup>

##### 1. Divorce is never permitted

This position is argued on several grounds, including the idea that man and women become “one flesh” (Gen 2:23), that marriage is a covenant (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14) and Yahweh demands that covenant be kept (Num 30:2), Yahweh “hates divorce” (Mal 2:16), Jesus rejected divorce (Matt 5:23).

##### 2. Divorce is permissible under certain circumstances

This position argues that a spouse’s unfaithfulness can permit the innocent spouse to get a divorce, that desertion of the believer by an unbeliever permits divorce.

##### 3. Divorce is permissible under many circumstances

Divorce is allowable under more conditions than sexual unfaithfulness and desertion. Marriage is not indissoluble and Jesus and Paul’s teaching are only illustrations, not the whole counsel of God.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., Gen 2:23-24; Deut 24:1-4; Mal 2:16; Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11-12; Matt 19:1-12; 1 Cor. 7:10-11, 15; 1 Cor. 7:39 and Rom 7:2; and Church Fathers.

<sup>42</sup> Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 81.

<sup>43</sup> Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> H. Wayne House, “The Bible and Divorce: Three Views”; <http://www.navpress.com/EPubs/PrinterFriendly/a/a.75.2.html>.

*Reflections on Jesus' teaching on divorce*

1. I think our experience verifies that, generally speaking, divorce is painful and has a negative impact on individuals and society as a whole.
2. Just as we see the problems of divorce in our society, so Jesus saw them in his. He recognized that adultery was a primary cause of divorce and the root cause of adultery was lust (*epithumia*). Lust knows no boundaries. It crosses boundaries like Attila the Hun. Jesus encourages us to defeat lust and assures us that we can.
3. Jesus was alarmed by the divorce practices in his culture. He was especially alarmed by the fact the society's most vulnerable people—wives, mothers, and children—were caught in a vicious cycle driven by lust and adultery. So Jesus taught openly that love keeps commitments—that marriage was permanent—though he allowed exceptions.
4. In our culture marriage is under attack. Many people in our society view divorce as a good thing. It allows people to escape from painful relationships and move on. The assumption is that people deserve happiness, sexual fulfillment, pleasure, having what they want and, if a marriage is in the way, it has to go. Many people in our society—especially in Hollywood and in the entertainment business—view the concept of lifelong marriage as uninformed, quaint, and limited.
5. What about Jesus' followers? Are we to conform to the prevailing trends and fashions? Are Jesus' words relevant and applicable to us today?

#### 4. Oaths: Righteousness speaks the truth (5:33-37) [[return to outline](#)]

**Matt 5:33-37.** 5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' 5:34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 5:35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 5:36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 5:37 Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one. (NRSV)

##### a. Affirms the Torah (v. 33) [[return to outline](#)]

**5:33** "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.'

First, Jesus affirms the Torah (Lev 19:12; Num 3:2; 30:3-15; Deut 23:21)..

**Lev. 19:12** And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.

Jesus is not talking about “swearing” in the sense of saying, “Oh, my God!”—which is not unimportant, but it’s not what Jesus is talking about here. He is addressing the issue of “oath taking” as a solemn pledge to tell the truth, especially in a court of law.

Jesus lived in an oral culture. Oral cultures are based on trust and orally sworn statements. We live in a written culture, which depends on written contracts. During Jesus time, taking oaths was a common and crucial practice.

**b. Identifies a vicious cycle (vv. 34-36) [[return to outline](#)]**

Second, Jesus now offers identifies a “vicious cycle” (so Stassen).

**5:34-36.** 5:34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 5:35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 5:36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Like the other antithetical sayings, there is a switch from future verbs in the first element (affirmation of Torah) to a present tense forms in the second element.

There were two problems with oath-taking. On the one hand, taking an oath to guarantee what is said is “true” implies that a person can be less careful about telling the truth when not giving an oath. On the other hand, during Jesus’ time some people were dishonest and deceptive when they took oaths. Worst of all, they used God’s name to back up their oaths, which broke the commandment not to misuse God’s name (Exod 20:7).<sup>45</sup> Here’s an example from Matthew 23:

**Matt 23:16-17.** <sup>16</sup> “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.’ <sup>17</sup> You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?” (NRSV).

People made promises that sounded genuine, but they used God’s Name or invoked God—with circumlocutions like, “heaven, earth, Jerusalem”—to deceive people. They invoked God to betray those who trusted them. It was vicious deception!

**c. Offers a transforming initiative (v. 37) [[return to outline](#)]**

Third, Jesus offers a transforming initiative: Speak the truth. Jesus says, “Let your word by ‘Yes, Yes’ and ‘No, No’.” In other words, the way of escaping the deceit and distrust of oath-taking is simply to tell the truth. Practice truth-telling and oaths will not be necessary. Truth-telling rather than deceit is characteristic of the Reign of God.

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<sup>45</sup> “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name” (Exod. 20:7).

In the Hebrew tradition, truth (Heb. *emeth*) is inextricably linked to “faithfulness” (Deut 32:3). You could even say, *truth is faithfulness—faithfulness to facts* (speaking the truth) and *faithfulness to relationships* (being loyal). Jesus invites his disciples to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

Speaking the truth:

- Creates right relationships (righteousness) with God and others,
- Pushes back the darkness of dishonesty and deception,
- Resists the harm which evil brings.

#### **d. Questions**

##### **(1) What about oaths in the OT?**

The OT describes people and even God swearing oaths. Abraham swore an oath to God in Gen 14:22. The Angel of the Lord swore an oath to Abraham in Gen 22:16. And there are many other examples.

When Jesus says, “Don’t swear oaths at all,” do we have a contradiction between Jesus and the OT? Should we understand Jesus’ injunction “not to swear oaths” as an example of exaggerate speech to make the point about telling the truth? Or was Jesus addressing an abuse of oaths and the underlying problem of disregard for the truth?

##### **(2) What about Anabaptists and oaths?**

Oath-taking has been a defining issue for Anabaptists. Early Anabaptists wanted to do what Jesus taught. So, when they heard Jesus, “Don’t swear oaths,” they didn’t. They took Jesus’ words literally and seriously.

This caused serious problems for Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. At that time, people swore oaths to governing authorities when they joined guilds and when they were in court. Oaths held society together. To refuse to take an oath was to reject society.<sup>46</sup>

This made Anabaptists very suspicious and outcast. Their commitment to Christ—as they understood him—put them at odds with society.

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<sup>46</sup> C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press 1995); see 183-224 on “Sword and Oath,” especially 186.

Many Mennonites refuse to swear oaths in courts of law, oaths of allegiance to governments, or oaths in secret societies.

### **(3) What's wrong with dishonesty?**

American culture has become comfortable with dishonesty and duplicity. Relativism, the postmodern denial of truth and the ease at which people can deceive others with text-messaging, online claims, and advertisement, has moved our society toward increasing levels of sophisticated deception.

Recent books, such as David Callahan's *The Cheating Culture* (2004) and Ralph Keyes's *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life* (2004), provide the ample details.

The problem is dishonesty destroys *outer* and *inner* peace and stability. On the one hand, dishonesty creates distrust and distrust damages relationships and damaged relationships undermine social order and *outer peace and stability*. Dishonesty and distrust produces disorder, insecurity, and anxiety on a social level.

On the other hand, dishonesty ruins *inner peace and stability*. When we're dishonest, we not only view others as unreliable, but ourselves as well. Our positive sense of self-worth and integrity is threatened. An internal war within ensues with a cacophony of inner voices.

- Some voices tell us, "It's okay to lie and deceive. It's fast and easy. Who will know?"
- Other voices worry, "How can we protect the lies we've started? What if we are found out?"
- Still others say, "Dishonesty is wrong, not just because of the consequences, but because it betrays truth, disappoints God, and does not help us nurture basic trust in God."

There is inner war and *inner peace*.

To put it differently, dishonesty and distrust undermine righteousness; they undermine peace with others and peace within our own selves.

### **(4) What good is honesty?**

The practice of honesty among families, tribes, and communities engenders trust. Trust creates healthy and stable relationships. Trust creates a sense of order, security, and serenity. Honesty invites peaceful and just relationships. Honesty gives us peace of mind and creates just and peaceful relationships. In a word, honesty

helps contribute to having right relationships with God, others, and one's self, which, in biblical terms, is righteousness

As suggested above, there are advantages to truth-telling regarding inner peace. Mark Twain said, "If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything." You won't get tangled in a web of lies. Edgar J. Mohn said, "A lie has speed, but truth has endurance," an allusion to the story of the race between the rabbit and the turtle. The truth, like the turtle, will outlast the lie.

Truth-telling reduces the conflict of inner voices and thereby increases inner peace.

### **(5) Are there "permissible" lies?**

Should we always be absolutely honest? Are there times when we should not be truthful? Are there "permissible lies"?

Generally speaking, I think Jesus would say, "Be truthful." Certainly, we shouldn't intentionally deceive people to get what we want. I think the temptation to lie correlates with a lack of trust in God. We lie because we think God will not give us what we want or need.

However, in my mind, there is an exception truth-telling when it might lead to harming another person. For example, let's say the Nazis came and demanded that we tell them where we're hiding Jews. If we tell the truth, the Nazis will kill the Jews; if we lie, the Jews will live. So we choose to lie.

In this case, we have a rule: "Don't lie." But the reason why we have that rule is because it generally helps preserve healthy human functioning and elevates inner and out peace. However, in the case of the Nazis searching for Jews, truth-telling would not preserve healthy human functioning. It would undermine the underlying principle. So there are exceptions to rules, but only when they conflict with the underlying principles.

## **5. Retaliation: Righteousness takes nonviolent action (5:38-42) [[return to outline](#)]**

**Matt 5:38-42.** 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 5:39 But I say to you, Do not resist (*antistēnai*) an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; 5:40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat (*chitōn*), give your cloak (*himation*) as well; 5:41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 5:42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

This pericope has been called the *law of nonresistance*—“resist not evil” (KJV). However, I argue it should be called the *law of nonviolent action*.

**a. Affirms the Torah (v. 38) [[return to outline](#)]**

**5:38** "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

Jesus is quoting Exod 21:23-24:

<sup>23</sup> If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (NRSV) <sup>47</sup>

This is the principle of *proportionate justice* or *lex talionis*. It goes back to the Code of Hammurabi (1700 BCE) and is found in many ancient law codes. The *lex talionis* was probably intended to restrain vendettas or escalation of violent payback.

**b. Identifies a vicious cycle (v. 39a) [[return to outline](#)]**

<sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist (*antistēnai*) an evildoer.

**(1) Traditional: “do not resist an evildoer”**

Traditionally, *antistēnai* is translated “resist”. Jesus is saying, “Do not resist or oppose evil.” In this view, Jesus is advocating *nonresistance* or *nonretaliation* against evil. This is the interpretation of the KJV, NIV, NRSV and supported by Allen, Buttrick, and Banks.

However, this interpretation—submission to evil without resistance—poses ethical and practical questions and it is in tension with Jesus own activity. Jesus resisted evil, after all. Aren’t Christians supposed to resist evil with every fiber of the being?

**(2) Alternative: “do not react violently against/with evil”**

There are two issues.

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<sup>47</sup> See also Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21.

First, what is the meaning of “evil” (*tō ponērō*; τῷ πονηρῷ). The noun, *ponēros*, can mean (*the*) *evil one*, (*the*) *evil doer*, or *evil*. More importantly, the noun *ponēros* is in the dative case, *ponērō*, which can be taken in several ways:

- i. Dative of disadvantage: “against evil”
- ii. Dative of association: “with evil” (indicates person or thing accompanying the action)
- iii. Dative of manner: “with evil” (indicates how the action happens)
- iv. Dative of means: “with, by, by means of evil” (indicates the instrument of action); the context suggest this 4<sup>th</sup> reading

Second, we have to address the meaning of the word “resist” (*antistēnai*; ἀντιστηναί). The word, *antistēnai*, comes from *anti-* meaning “against” and *stēnai* meaning “to stand fast” (middle or passive). It was a military term meaning, “to stand ready for battle.” When *anti-* and *stēnai* are conjoined, we get *antistēnai*, which means “to stand ready for battle over against (an opposing force).”<sup>48</sup>

Put all this together and Jesus is saying, “Do not resist violently. Do not revolt. Do not offer armed resistance.” Put with the dative, *ponērō*, Jesus is saying, “Do not resist violently by means of evil.” Of course, this leave open the possibility of resisting evil with nonviolent or means, which is supported by the four transforming initiatives below.

This makes all the more sense when we realize that many first century Jews were Zealots, Jewish nationalists ready to take up arms against the Roman forces occupying Palestine. The Jewish War of 66-73 CE and the Bar Kochba Rebellion of 132-35 CE proves the point.<sup>49</sup>

This saying of Jesus constituted his thought about armed rebellion against Rome and the Jewish Nationalism that advocated violent retaliation against the Roman occupation forces.

Jesus rejected violence. As we will see, Jesus calls his followers to resist evil in nonviolent ways. This is in harmony with the Hebrew Bible:

- Lev 19:18 “you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself”
- Prov 20:22: “Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the Lord, and he will help you.”
- Prov 24:29: “Do not say, ‘I will do to others as they have done to me; I will pay them back for what they have done’.”

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<sup>48</sup> N.T. Wright and Walter Wink concur. See Walter Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus’ Third Way Matt 5:38-42 par.” in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, Willard M. Swartley (ed.) (Louisville: Westminster/John Know, 1992) 102-125; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) 291.

<sup>49</sup> See “Israel in Revolt,” in *Early Judaism: The Exile to the Time of Jesus*, by Frederick Murphy (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002) 376-404.

**c. Offers transforming initiatives (vv. 39b-42) [[return to outline](#)]**

Next, Jesus offers four transformative initiatives—four concrete actions that his disciples can use to resist evil—turn the other cheek, give your clothes, go the second mile, give to those who ask—forms of nonviolent resistance or civil disobedience.

**(1) Initiative: Turn your other cheek (v. 39b) [[return to outline](#)]**

Jesus offers the first transformative initiative in 5:39b. Jesus envisions a person receiving a back handed slap by a person of superior status.

To strike someone on the right cheek with the back of the hand was an insult. “A backhand slap was the usual way of admonishing inferiors. Master backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. *We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation would be suicidal.*”<sup>50</sup>

Shockingly, Jesus instructs victims to turn the other (i.e., left) cheek. By turning the left cheek, the victim forces the oppressor to hit him or her a second time as an equal, not with a backhand, but with the right first, which acknowledges the victim as a peer. (Note: The left hand would not have been used to strike a blow, because it was used for sanitary purposes.)

*[Ask for a volunteer and demonstrate how this looks.]*

In this way, the victim regains dignity without violence. It is like the followers of Martin Luther King, who didn’t “retaliate against the segregationist racist, but marched nonviolently in the face of stones, police dogs, beatings, and fire hoses.”<sup>51</sup> It opened the eyes of the world to see the racial injustice and respect nonviolent protest.

Jesus is not teaching retaliation, but the use creative and nonviolent ways to resist evil. Social psychologists tell us that aggression begets more aggression; violence begets violence. In contrast, Jesus’ strategy defuses aggression by breaking the cycle of violence.

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<sup>50</sup> Walter Wink, “Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus’ Third Way Matt 5:38-42 par.” in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, Willard M. Swartley (ed.) (Louisville: Westminster/John Know, 1992) 105.

<sup>51</sup> Glen Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 92.

The general principle: Do not retaliate against evil, but use creative, nonviolent ways to provocatively challenge (resist) evil. Social psychologists tell us that aggression begets aggression; violence creates violence. In contrast, Jesus' strategy defuses aggression by breaking the cycle of violence. Questions: Are there any times when one should not turn the other cheek?

**(2) Initiative: Give your clothes (40)** [[return to outline](#)]

Jesus offers the second transformative initiative in 5:40. Jesus envisions a poor person being sued in court for his “inner garment” (*chitōn*), no doubt for unpaid debt.

[Note: In the OT, the outer garment was used as a pledge by a borrower (Exod 22:25-27). Matthew 5:40 and Luke 6:29 disagree on whether the outer, *himation* (Luke) or the inner, *chitōn* (Matthew) garment is demanded.]

Rather shockingly, Jesus tells the victim to give up his “outer garment” (*himation*) as well. The victim gives away both garments and stands naked before the court and the oppressor.

In this way, the naked victim shames the greedy creditor, who now stands with both garments in hand.<sup>52</sup> Of course, it's hyperbole. But it communicates the point that victims should protest against systems that lead to poverty.

Again, Jesus is not teaching retaliation, but to use creative and nonviolent ways to challenge and resist evil.

**(3) Initiative: Go the second mile (v. 41)** [[return to outline](#)]

Jesus offers a third transformative initiative in 5:41. Jesus envisions a Jewish person being forced to carry the belongings of a Roman soldier, who was part of the occupation force.

In first-century Palestine, Roman soldiers were allowed to force citizens to carry their gear.<sup>53</sup> They could treat people like pack-animals. There is at least one inscription and several ancient texts that talk about Roman soldiers abusing this practice. So, there was a one-mile limit for how far soldiers could force people to carry their stuff.

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<sup>52</sup> Nakedness was a taboo in Judaism (see Gen 9:20-27)

<sup>53</sup> For an example in the NT, see Simon of Cyrene in Matt 27:32.

Again, notice Jesus doesn't advocate armed resistance, revolt, or refusal to the hated enemy, but shockingly advocates going a second mile! Jewish Zealots must have regarded Jesus' advice as treasonous.

But Jesus' disciples understood what he was driving at. Offering to go a second mile puts the initiative into the hands of the victim. The legionnaire is caught off-guard. He is made to question his action of impressing people into service. Why does this Jew want to carry my stuff? What is he up to? Is he insulting the legionnaire's strength? Is he trying to get the legionnaire in trouble? Again, Jesus is suggesting a creative, nonviolent response to evil.

Just like the first two example, Jesus does not advocate retaliation, but resisting evil through nonviolent measures.

**(4) Initiative: Give to everyone who asks (v. 42) [[return to outline](#)]**

Jesus offers a fourth transformative initiative in 5:42. Jesus envisions a world of debt and economic inequality. With this initiative, Jesus advises to give to everyone who begs or wants to borrow.

[Luke's version is more radical: Lend without expectation of repayment or interest (Lk 6:34-35), an egalitarianism of sharing all things in common the family of faith (Acts 2:43-47).]

During the time of Jesus, there were soaring interest rates and taxes. Many Jews were forced to foreclose on their property and go into debt. To give to people in need is away to protest against greed and economic in justice. It is a prophetic challenge against the domination system of his time.

Giving to everyone is impossible, so Jesus is using hyperbole. The hyperbole emphasizes the need for compassion over covetousness and sharing over hoarding.

In this final example, notice again that Jesus does not advise being passive or becoming a doormat for evil. Rather, Jesus is advising us to resist evil in creative and nonviolent ways.

**d. Questions**

**(1) Does this deal with personal or communal ethics?**

Does this passage address only personal ethics or does it offers initiatives for the communal or social level as well?

On the one hand, Allison believes that 5:38-42 is addressing personal attitudes and behaviors—Jesus is rejecting the *lex talionis* – eye for eye, tooth for tooth – as a principle for individual acts of vengeance.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Jesus is not repudiating Exod 21:23-24 for all spheres of life, but only the personal. “He is not overthrowing the principle of equivalent compensation on an institutional level.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, Jesus assumes the validity of civil courts of law (Matt 5:22); he is not abolishing the legal system as Tolstoy thought.

On the other hand, Luise Schottroff believes that 5:38-42 must be applied to areas of politics.<sup>56</sup> The Matthean community would have understood Jesus’ teaching in two different ways; one within the community and the other toward the world. Within the community, it would have precluded insurrection or violent resistance. Toward the world, it would have been used to show that Christians were peaceable and not revolutionaries.

## **(2) What about participation in war?**

Although there is a spectrum of views, there are two widely held beliefs.

One the one hand, before Constantine, Christians rejected participation in the Roman army and cited this text as grounds. Later, Anabaptists, Quakers, and other groups insisted that one cannot be both a disciple of Jesus and a soldier, for a soldier cannot turn the other cheek. Jesus exemplifies meekness: He rides a donkey, not a warhorse into Jerusalem (21:5) and he does not resist arrest (Matt 26:47-56). Also, Matthew’s perspective is sharply contrasted with Jewish Zealots, who took up arms against Rome (see Allison 95ff.)

On the other hand, Augustine believed in the possibility of a “just war” in which Christians could participate. If the state was Christian, then it may be necessary for the common good to engage in war against the destructive powers of evil. But, Augustine insisted that private self-defense had no place in the Christ life. Only the state could wage war (see criteria for Just War).

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<sup>54</sup> Allison, Sermon (1999) 93.

<sup>55</sup> Allison, Sermon (1999) 93. Jesus accepts the principle of equivalent compensation elsewhere. In Matt 5:32-33, Jesus says, if people acknowledge him before others, then he will acknowledge them before God; if they deny him before others, he will deny them before God. In 6:14-15, Jesus says, if you forgive others, you will be forgiven; if you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven.

<sup>56</sup> Dorothy Jean Weaver, “Transforming Nonresistance: From *Lex Talionis* to “Do Not Resist the Evil One,” in *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament*, Willard M. Swartley (ed.) (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 35-36.

### (3) How have Anabaptists understood Jesus' teaching on nonviolence?

This text has been very important in the ongoing debate over pacifism, which has been a defining issue for Anabaptist. Since the sixteenth century, Anabaptists have understood that nonviolence and peace are inseparable from the Gospel. Peace is not simply a goal that can be attained by any means whatsoever. Rather, if you want peace, peace is the way!

Of course, this puts Anabaptists at odds with society, which values revenge and war. Revenge and war is undergirded by the *myth of redemptive violence*—the myth of redemptive violence refers to that belief that violence and war can triumph over evil and can right the wrongs of the world.<sup>57</sup>

In recent years, our nation has gone beyond simple retaliation and self-defense. Our nation has taken a stance of preemption—we strike first before they strike us.

In this type of society, which believes in preemptive violence, Anabaptists are viewed as traitors and numbskulls. The same probably happened to Jesus. Jewish Zealots probably saw him as a traitor. The Roman military viewed him as a numbskull.

For followers of SOM, violence is out of the question. That does not mean becoming doormats for evil. It means actively resisting evil and injustice in creative and nonviolent ways.

## 6. Enemies: Righteousness loves enemies (5:43-48) [[return to outline](#)]

**Matt 5:43-48.** 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 5:44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NRSV)

This passage is the most important and difficult of commands.<sup>58</sup>

### a. Affirms the Torah (v. 43) [[return to outline](#)]

<sup>57</sup> Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 42-62.

<sup>58</sup> Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 99.

First, Jesus begins by quoting Jewish tradition, but in this case a text from Qumran, 1QS 1:9-10, with a partial citation from Lev. 19:18.

**Matt 5:43.** <sup>43</sup> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

**1 QS 1:9-10.** "... to love all the sons of light ... to detest all the sons of darkness."<sup>59</sup>

**Lev. 19:18.** <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Most people and societies assume they are to hate the enemy. That sentiment seems to be deeply ingrained in the human societies, part of the meme code.<sup>60</sup> When someone opposes us, we naturally want to fight back, defend ourselves, meet violence with violence, hate with hate. It's part of our lower nature (false self system). But Jesus calls us to a higher nature (true self).

#### **b. Offers a transforming initiative (vv. 44-45) [[return to outline](#)]**

Second, unlike the previous five sayings, Jesus reverses the order by offering the transforming initiative before identifying the vicious cycle. As with the other transforming initiatives, this one begins with the imperative.

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Jesus gives two imperatives, "love your enemies and pray for your persecutors," followed by an explanation, "so that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

#### **(1) Imperative: Love your enemies (v. 44)**

The notion of "loving neighbor" (v. 43) is expanded to the widest possible connotation so the neighbor now includes the enemy (v. 44). The context helps clarify the meaning of love. It is love that "does good" for them (v. 45), doesn't expect a reward from God (v. 46), and greets them like family (v.47). This is love without attachment, without self-interest, without anticipating a reward. It is unselfish interest in the welfare of others.<sup>61</sup> We can see that, while not excluding emotions, Jesus focused actions that benefit others.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Second Edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 3.

<sup>60</sup> Like biological genes, "memes" are units of cultural information passed on from person to person by songs, stories, beliefs, fashions, technology, language, etc. Coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976.

<sup>61</sup> This is very similar to the Buddhist idea of love or *metta*. See "*Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love*" at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/buddharakkhita/wheel365.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 100.

**(2) Imperative: Pray for your enemies (v. 44)**

Presumably it means more than asking God to change their behavior or attitudes. The context suggests that it involves a serious attempt to see them from God's perspective.

**(3) Explanation: "So that..." (v. 45)**

When we love our enemies, we show we belong to God (children of God) whose love is without limits. God loves friends and enemies alike, proven by the fact that the *sun shines* and *rain falls* equally on the fields of the wicked and the godly (v. 45). God's love is impartial.

If we are children of God, we imitate God. Like God, we don't put boundaries on our love. We love neighbors and enemies like God. As Matt 5:9: Peacemakers—those who love without limit—will be called children of God.

**c. Identifies a vicious cycle (vv. 46-47) [[return to outline](#)]**

Third, Jesus identifies a vicious cycle.

<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Jesus offers two hypothetical scenarios to expose the problem. Both make the same point. If we claim to have God's love, we can have no ulterior motives. God has no hidden motives when God loves the wicked and the righteous.

If we do an act of love expecting something in return, then we're not representing God, because God expects nothing in return for his love.

When we love without limitations, without conditions, we imitate God, develop Christ Consciousness, and become instruments of God in this world.

**d. Summary injunction: Be complete (v. 48) [[return to outline](#)]**

Finally, this section ends with an injunction:

<sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48).

This is about imitating God. The verb “be” is an indicative, future, plural (*esesthe* ; ἔσεσθε). I can be translated “you will be” (promise) or “you shall be” (imperative). The word for “perfect” is *teleios*, which can be translated “perfect,” “complete,” or “mature”.

So this last injunction is about “God’s completeness in including the evil and the good, the unrighteous and the righteous, in God’s love. God is complete and all-inclusive, giving sunshine and rain to all, even enemies.”<sup>63</sup>

It is not about God being perfect in the sense of some abstract ideal about flawless perfection, much less about human perfection. It is about God’s complete love and our call to imitate that love.

Luke 6:36 gives the same teaching as Matt 5:48, but instead of saying, “Be complete,” it says, “Be merciful as you Father is merciful.”

Put together, Jesus is saying we should be complete in our love, we should love without limit, without boundaries, without expecting anything in return. That is to be merciful as God is merciful (Lk 6:36), complete as God is complete (Mt. 5:48).

[\[return to outline\]](#)

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<sup>63</sup> Glen Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 105.