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## *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *The Law is Spiritual (4)*

*June 3, 2018*

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 5:31ff

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 139

Mat 5:38-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' (39) But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (41) And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (42) Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

(43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate

your enemy.' (44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (48) You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Last week in the Sunday School class you heard the following Scripture addressed:

2Ti 3:1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless,

swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.**

Understanding this warning is one of the most important teachings of the Bible for us because it identifies the essence of deceptive, false, counterfeit religion – particularly counterfeit “Christianity.” Many if not most local churches today are infested with it.

Jesus is actually refuting this very thing here in the Sermon on the Mount.

The “difficulty” the Apostle Paul warns Timothy of is, he says, a characteristic of these last days – of the church age. Difficulty for who? For genuine Christians. For the true church. What is the difficulty? *It is that there will be people who outwardly wear a disguise of godliness, but in whom the real power of the gospel is not present. They are not born again. They do not know Christ. Their hearts are unregenerate.* And yet they wear the disguise of holiness, this “form of godliness” as Paul calls it.

At the same time, such people deny the power of godliness. What does that mean? What is the power of godliness? Well, it is the power of Christ in us. It

is the power of the Spirit of Christ through the Word of Christ, the gospel, which regenerates the sinner and makes him or her a new creation. This power of godliness is the Holy Spirit in us leading us to love the Lord and to obey His Word which He has written on our hearts.

The counterfeit with his disguise of godliness however knows nothing of these things. He has never experienced this new birth, nor does he believe that it is necessary. He is the whitewashed tomb full of dead men’s bones. By his evil, hypocritical life and by his false doctrine then, he denies the power of godliness.

Now, it is vital that we all understand this because not only do we not want to be deceived by such people, but we will also find that a clear understanding of this truth will open up the Bible for us. Here are some examples:

1. The Beatitudes and the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount. Notice how Jesus opens up the Sermon. Blessed are...poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart.... Matters of the heart, you see. People who have been made godly by the power

which changes sinners into saints.

He then goes on, as we have been learning these past few weeks, exposing the false form of godliness worn by the scribes and Pharisees and warning us that unless we have a righteousness that radically exceeds that of these hypocrites, we will perish in our sin.

2. Consider another statement made by Paul:

1Ti 1:5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

See it? This is what every true servant of Christ is striving for. This is the goal, in themselves and in those they serve. Not some mere outward shell of so-called “holiness,” but a truly converted heart, a cleansed conscience and a faith that is real. False religion denies all these things because it denies the power of godliness.

3. Here is still another:

1Co 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) And if I have prophetic powers,

and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (3) If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Understand? This is precisely the same thing. A form of godliness that is sooooo convincing it seems. And yet it is devoid of the power of God that changes the heart and brings forth the fruit of the love of Christ.

4. One more example. Is it not true to observe that in most local churches today, people are taught and believe that you can be a Christian and still live a life that is a course and habit of sin? That is to say, that a person can be saved, forgiven by Christ, on their way to heaven, and yet there be no *real* change in their life that evidences the real love and fruit of the Spirit that Christ said are the marks of the real Christian.

All of these and more are examples of having a form of godliness but denying its power. And is it not instructive to us as to the vital importance of this subject that Jesus so early in His ministry, tackled this very issue head

on? He took on the “church” of His day, the scribes and the Pharisees.

And THIS is why Scripture gives us this instruction:

(2 Tim 3:5) having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. **Avoid such people.**

1Co 5:11-13 But now I am writing to you **not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother** if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. (12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (13) God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Unfortunately, and because of their deceptive disguise of a “form of godliness,” the Pharisee cannot be identified by a name tag like this one:



But they are identified by the words of our Lord here in the Sermon. Therefore, if we will grow wise and hear Him, not only will we be challenged to examine ourselves to be certain WE are not “Christian” in outward appearance only, but we will be enabled also to avoid being drawn into a den of robbers or synagogue of Satan parading as a church. I cannot tell you how much grief and discouragement and confusion Christ’s people would avoid if they have a sound grasp on such deception. How many people today want nothing to do with a church or with Christ because of such experiences and all the while they still think that what they experienced was the real thing?

How do we miss this? The Bible is filled with warnings! Yet we miss it.

### The Christian and Enemies

Alright then, let’s return to where we left off last week:

Mat 5:38-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' (39) But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (40) And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (41) And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (42)

Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

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

Now, let's be certain that we are getting a firm, clear grasp on how to understand the Sermon on the Mount. Remember, as Lloyd-Jones has said, we must not approach it as a kind of code of ethics. We must not come to it with the foolish literalness which leads to ridiculous, unjust, and even impossible applications and interpretations:

- Tear out your right eye
- Cut off your right hand
- Do not resist the one who is evil
- Give to the one who begs from you (no matter who they are)

Rather, the Sermon on the Mount is showing us that the Law of God is *spiritual*. That is to say, God's Law requires *obedience from the heart, from a heart therefore that is a new creation, that loves the Lord and loves the Law of the Lord*. Christ is showing us that the religion of the scribes and Pharisees is entirely unacceptable to Him, and *that we must not interpret His words here, therefore, as the Pharisees handled Scripture*.

***We must not come to some situation in our lives and read here that Jesus said "Do not take an oath at all," and therefore teach that taking any oath is forbidden for the Christian.***

***Nor are we to tell victims of evil that they are required to offer themselves to a wicked person for even more oppression because, we tell them, "that is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount."***

***We are not to take Jesus' words here and by them create a universal doctrine that "whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."***

And now as we hear His instruction regarding enemies, we must take care not to err in that manner here. Listen again:

(43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate

your enemy.' (44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

The scribes and Pharisees misused God's Law for their own personal, selfish ends. In this case they used the "Lex Talionis" (eye for an eye) to justify taking personal revenge when someone wronged them. Similarly, they apparently added the phrase "...and hate your enemy" to God's instruction that we love our neighbor.

The command that we love our neighbor is given throughout the Old Testament and in fact is so central to the spirit of the Law of God that Paul could say:

Gal 5:13-14 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (14) For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

But the scribes and Pharisees, always looking for a way to use the Law to justify their self-serving desires, zero'd in on the word "neighbor." We are to love our "neighbor." And this is why Jesus got involved in this interaction:

Luk 10:25-37 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (26) He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" (27) And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (28) And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

(29) But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

(30) Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. (31) Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. (32) So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33) But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. (34) He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. (35) And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him,

and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

(36) Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (37) He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

The scribes and Pharisees twisted the Law so as to justify not showing mercy to someone in need such as the injured Jewish man in this parable. He was not, they claimed, their "neighbor."

And they went on to justify hating someone if they were their enemy. So for them, and in their teaching, one's neighbor was someone who was their friend, someone who loved them, someone who did good things for them. Such people they were to love, but others they could hate.

What Jesus is emphasizing here is that we are to treat people *as God treats them*. We are to imitate His perfection because we are His sons. And how does God deal with His enemies? At least before the Judgment? Well,

***For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.***

God, in other words, practices what is often called "common grace" to all mankind.

Psa 145:9 The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Psa 145:15-16 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. (16) You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Act 14:17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

None of this negates the fact that our enemy is our enemy. We are not required to pretend otherwise. There is no law here that a Christian is not permitted to defend himself or someone else from an enemy. Or that we cannot ask for justice to be served upon our enemy.

But what Jesus is telling us is that the Pharisees were absolutely wrong in claiming they had God's own authority to hate their enemies. How would a Pharisee respond when he met someone on the street whom he regarded as his enemy? Well, he might feel he had the right if not the duty to curse such a person! Or if he had the

chance to do that person some other kind of harm, he could do so. But Jesus forbids such dealings. We are not to curse, but to bless. We are to pray for our enemy.

Listen to Lloyd-Jones:

The Pharisees and scribes said that the 'neighbor' meant only an Israelite; so they taught the Jews to love the Jews, but they told them at the same time to regard everybody else not only as an alien but as an enemy. Indeed they went so far as to suggest that it was their *business*, almost their right and their duty, to hate all such people....The Jews regarded all others as dogs and many Gentiles despised the Jews....

And MLJ continues:

Here, the Lord Jesus Christ is telling us that we are to love our enemies. Turn then to Matthew 23 and listen to Him thundering out woes upon the heads of the Pharisees. How do you reconcile the two things? How do you reconcile the exhortation to love your enemies with these woes pronounced upon the Pharisees, and all the other things that He said with respect to them?

Or, indeed, let us look at it in this way. Here are Lord tells us to love our

enemies, because, He says, that is exactly what God does....There are people who have foolishly interpreted this to mean that the love of God is universal absolutely, and that it does not matter whether a man sins or not. Everybody is going to heaven because God is love; because God is love He can never punish. But that is to deny the teaching of Scripture from beginning to end.

The way to resolve the problem, therefore, is this. We must recognize that, ultimately, there is this judicial element. While we are in this life and world, God does indeed cause His sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He blesses people who hate Him, and he does send rain upon those who defy Him. Yes, God goes on doing that. But at the same time He announces to them that, unless they repent, they shall finally be destroyed.

How do I deal with my enemy? In this present age I deal with him as God does. I may hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness and turn him over to the civil authorities. But at the same time I pray for him and for his salvation and if I find him injured on a road, I stop and genuinely help him. I tell him about Christ if he will listen. I do not seek personal vengeance fueled by some false teaching that I am to hate my enemy.