

Date : 4 Aug 2024
Theme : Kingdom living from the Sermon on the Mount
Topic : Examining Our Attitudes Behind Our Actions
Passage : Matthew 5:33-48
Key verse : Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Sermon on the Mount serves as a citizen's handbook for the kingdom of heaven. Jesus began by defining His expectations for all who follow Him. This is discipleship living for those in covenant relationship with God.

Why did the Lord begin by saying in verse 17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets..."? Jesus had explicitly stated that He did come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it and provided several examples to illustrate the true intent of the Law.

Today, we will examine 3 of these examples, referencing the 10 Commandments and Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes.

1. Keep your word (Matthew 5:34-37)

A. Understanding the Law (Do not break your Covenant vows to the Lord)

- Pharisees' perspective:
Matthew 5:33 – Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfil to the Lord the vows you have made.'
 - This Law is from the 3rd Commandment Exodus 20:7 – *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*
 - The Pharisees emphasised the importance of keeping formal oaths, especially those made in God's name, were binding and serious. They allowed the breaking of oaths that did not invoke God's name, considering them less binding. They focused on outward compliance and missed the broader principle of righteousness and purity that the commandment intended to promote.
- Jesus' teaching:
Matthew 5:34,37 – But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all..... All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.
 - Jesus was not condemning formal oaths (e.g., entering into covenant relationships such as marriage vows or oaths made in court) but rather the casual, deceptive use of God's name.
 - The essence of the 3rd commandment is to treat God's name with reverence and be truthful, reflecting God's character in our speech and actions.
 - Jesus teaches that in normal conversations, we should not need oaths to guarantee our truthfulness in speech and action.
 - Jesus' beatitude of a pure heart is transparent and honest and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be truthful in their speech and actions.

B. What is the Problem?

- Sin of hypocrisy:
 - Hypocrisy is a pretence of showing good outwardly, but your thought process reveals you have no intention of doing it.
 - In Acts 5:1-11, Ananias and Sapphira made a pretence of having given all the proceeds, but actually gave only part of it. They lied to Peter (and to God) that they had donated the entire proceeds of the land to the Church.

- God is holy. He is looking for the pure in heart in His Church and He abhors the sin of hypocrisy. This sin was dealt with swiftly and decisively.
 - Do not make a show of piety in your giving or generosity. Trying to get praises of the Church for your generosity but acting out of covetousness and hypocrisy all play a part in the death of this couple. Their dramatic deaths serve to purify and warn the Church then and now. (*...great fear seized the whole Church... - Acts 5:11*)
 - Right from the start of the Church's infancy, God made it plain that hypocrisy was not tolerated.
- Making promises to others lightly:

Proverbs 29:20 – Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them.

 - Examples:
 - I promise to pray for someone but do not intend to do so.
 - I promise to spend time with my child but do not make plans to do so.
 - I tell my girlfriend I love her but have no plan to marry her.
 - I tell my parents I will be back for dinner but already plan to eat out.
 - Speaking rude, swear words:
 - Like invoking God's name.
 - Examples:
 - Oh my God! or Jesus Christ! (are exclamations without reverence)
 - Damn it...
 - Holy cow...

C. How should we practice?

- Speak the truth in love:
 - Giving honest feedback kindly.
 - Instead of criticising, offer constructive suggestions for improvement in a compassionate manner.
 - Do not use God's name in normal conversation, like, 'God tells me...'. Just speak sincerely.
 - Avoid all forms of deception, including white lies, half-truths, and deceitful omissions.
 - If you're running late, instead of making an excuse, honestly explain the situation.
- Keep your word:
 - Keep time commitments without saying, 'I swear...'
 - Say what we mean and mean what we say.

2. Law of Retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42)

A. Understanding the Law

- Pharisees' perspective:

Matthew 5:38 – You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

 - This Law is referenced from Deuteronomy 19:21 – Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, was intended to prevent excessive revenge, to ensure punishments were proportional to the crime. These punishments were to be administered by authorities, not individuals seeking personal revenge. It's about civil justice, not personal retaliation.

- Problem: The Pharisees twisted the Law and emphasised that each person had the right to exact personal revenge. Rather than upholding God's justice, they were more concerned with personal satisfaction.
- Jesus' teaching:
 - Matthew 5:39 – But I tell you, do not resist an evil person...*
 - Jesus calls His followers to resist seeking revenge for petty and temporal insults.
 - He calls for meekness which is self-control under provocation. We are to respond to wrongs with submission and patience rather than aggression or revenge.
 - In 1 Samuel 24, David, while fleeing from King Saul who was driven by jealousy and fear that David would replace him, had an opportunity to kill Saul. Despite being unjustly hunted and having the chance to exact vengeance, David submitted to Saul in the fear of God. Instead of retaliating, David demonstrated meekness by cutting off a corner of Saul's robe to show that he could have harmed him but chose not to. David's action of sparing Saul shows that he did not stand up for his rights when wronged unjustly but waited on God to avenge the evil person.

B. What is the Problem?

- We tend to retaliate. It is our inclination to return harm for harm, example, road rage.
- We are easily offended.
- We refuse to forgive.

C. How should we practice?

- Response to insults: *v39 – If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.*
 - When insulted, we should demonstrate love by not retaliating.
 - If a coworker criticises you in a meeting, instead of responding with anger or a cutting remark, choose to remain calm and address the issue constructively later.
- Response to injustice: *v40 – And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.*
 - Willing to give more than what is demanded.
 - By willingly giving up material possessions, even to the point of seeming foolish to the world, demonstrates a commitment to Jesus and His teachings. It shows that you are willing to be "fools for Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:10), prioritising the opportunity to win souls over your own comfort and security.
- Response to additional work: *v41 – If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.*
 - Stretch our capacity even if it seems unfair.
 - If your boss assigns you an additional task that seems unfair, take it and do it, instead of complaining or doing the bare minimum. This is to glorify God.
- Response to those in need: *v42 – Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*
 - Give freely to those in need but do it wisely.
 - If someone on the street who is hungry asks for money, instead of giving them money, consider buying him a meal.

3. Treating your Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)

A. Understanding the Law

- Pharisees' perspective:
Matthew 5:43 – You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'
 - The Pharisees added the phrase "hate your enemy" and minimised the command to "love your neighbour" (Leviticus 19:18) in a limited way. (*Leviticus 19:18 – Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.*)
 - They defined neighbours as Jews who were like them, people they liked and associated with. Consequently, anyone who did not fit this narrow definition could be treated as an enemy.

- Jesus' teaching:
Matthew 5:44 – But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
 - Jesus expands the command to love our enemies, even praying for those who persecute us. He redefined the meaning of 'neighbour' using the story of the Good Samaritan.
 - Jesus commanded us to show a distinctive kind of love. When we only greet those who are familiar or friendly that is not enough to mark us as distinct followers of Christ. Even those who do not follow Christ show kindness to those who are like them. (*Matthew 5:47 – And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?*)
 - This teaching aligns closely with the Beatitude - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).
 - Loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us is a profound act of peace-making.

B. What is the Problem?

- We choose who to love:
 - We tend to love those who love us back and treat us well and ignoring or mistreating those who are different or challenge our beliefs and preferences.

- We show disdain to enemies:
 - Our reaction towards enemies or those who have wronged us is often one of disdain, resentment, or even hatred. This can manifest in negative thoughts, harsh words, or retaliatory actions.

C. How should we practice?

- Love our enemies:
 - Do not take revenge, be proactive to do good.
 - If someone at work actively undermines you, respond not with retaliation, but with kindness. Offer help or support in areas where they may need it. Fortunately, God doesn't require us to like our enemies, but He does call us to love them. This means we should extend courtesy for the sake of the Gospel.

- Pray for those who persecute us:
 - Make a conscious effort to pray for those who have wronged you and seek their well-being, demonstrating genuine concern and love.

- Reflect God's perfect love:
 - Show kindness and generosity to those who do not reciprocate.
 - Just as God shows His love to all, regardless of their actions, so should we. We do so because we are children of God, seeking to glorify our Father in heaven. ~END~