

“The Law of Righteousness”

A Sermon to the Family of God

Matthew 5:17-48

Pastor Jeff Stivason

October 6, 2017

Jeff: Just a couple of things. I want to publicly take a minute to thank Bill (Obaker) for suggesting that I come and fill in for Bruce while he was absent, and for Sig and Bruce for agreeing with that idea. And I want to thank you men. I appreciate your willingness to listen. And you know, my favorite day of the week is the Lord’s Day. It’s like Christmas every week, you know? But my second favorite day is Friday mornings, (*laughter*), because I really enjoy being here. I appreciate you men quite a bit. So thank you for having me. I appreciate it. (*Applause*)

And the second thing I want to tell you is that I have no fear about the Pens, right? (*Laughter*) We’re just getting warmed up. Look out! (*Laughter*) Don, why don’t you lead us into prayer time? (*Music*)

Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day. We’re thankful for the Lord Jesus, for the Holy Spirit who makes Him known to us, and You, Father, for Your love. We thank You, Father, that Your love flows through the Son and is expressed to us by the Holy Spirit who sheds that love abroad in our hearts. Thank You for these things. Father, as we bow before You, help us to remember how absolutely holy and majestic and infinite and eternal You are. Help us to remember that You are indeed God, and there is no other.

Father, as we go into this last day of the work week, we pray that You will sustain us. We pray that You will keep us and ready us for the Lord’s Day. Father, as we meet together in our different worship groups, the churches that we will meet in, we pray, Father, that You will bless us and do things in us that will last for all eternity. For indeed we know that by Your word You work in our lives, bringing conformity to the image of Christ. Father, it’s in His name that we pray these things. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. So today I want us to continue in The Sermon on the Mount. And sometimes I get a little excited about these things. And so I’m apologizing because I got a little excited and maybe I wasn’t as comprehensible as I could have been. I’ll try to remain calm today, placid, (*laughter*), as we work through these things.

So let me just remind you of the outline that we’re going to be looking at. I talked to you about the overview, the conclusion. I talked to you about lessons in loving others and God, and God and others. And that’s the way in which The Sermon on the Mount unfolds. And I went over that with you the last time.

And today we’re going to be looking at a very large chunk of The Sermon on the Mount. It’s a large chunk, and it’s always better to read the Word than to not read the Word. And so let’s just read this chapter, or most of it, together, and get a context for what we’re going to be looking at today. Let me read you God’s word. Indeed it is the word of God.

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This is verse 17. *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you that until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes 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. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder,’ and ‘whoever murders will be liable to the judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the Council. And whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put into prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the grounds of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but you shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Anything more than this comes from evil.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ 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.” I’m having trouble with those anyones! *“And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.**

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on evil and on

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good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Participant: The word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: You can tell that I don’t have the right responses. *(Laughter)* I said yes. I’m sorry. *(Laughter)*

All right. Today’s outline looks something like this. We’re going to look briefly at an introduction. We’re going to look at Jesus’ relationship to the Law, the believer’s relationship to the Law. We’re going to look at the structure of what we just read. And then we’re going to ask the question, the simple question. Why these topics? So let’s get started.

Let’s look at the introduction. Let’s look at the Law. This is our friend Martin Luther. And Martin Luther said this about the Law. And the reason I talk to you about this is because—well, let me read the quote first.

“Whoever knows well this art of distinguishing between the law and the gospel, him place at the head and call him a doctor of Holy Scripture.” He was recognizing the difficulty of understanding the law, and its placement, its fittedness, into the Christian life. How is it that law and gospel fit together?

Now that’s something that Luther wrestled with quite a bit. And in fact, if you know him, you know that he moved progressively in his understanding even of covenants and testaments, and how they both interacted with the Old and with the New Testament. So he was really applying himself to the question of the relationship of the law to the gospel.

This is John Newton. John Newton is probably one of the wisest pastors of the nineteenth century. And John Newton said a couple of things about the Law that are worth noting. First of all, he said that *“the correct understanding of the harmony between law and grace is to preserve oneself from being entangled by errors on the right hand and on the left.”*

Now we’ve talked about that some as we’ve talked about sanctification. And I’ve said to you that one of the things that we have to be careful not to fall into, either on the right hand or on the left, is *antinomianism* on the one side or *legalism* on the other. The best way to stay on the path between those two poles is to think about union with Christ, because in Christ, in union with Christ, we possess both the forensic aspects of righteousness and the renovative aspects of sanctification. It is in Christ that we possess both our standing before God and the imperative to grow in who we are in Jesus Christ.

So I think that’s what he’s talking about there. But he recognizes the difficulty of that. And I won’t spend time developing that. He has another quote. He says this. *“Ignorance of the nature and design of the Law is at the bottom of most of our religious mistakes.”*

Wow! You know, when I look at that quote from this man, I think to myself, “I need to take to heart the teaching of Jesus about the Law.” And really, that’s what we’re going to look at. If you were paying attention to those things that we looked at today in Matthew 5:17-48, they were all aspects of the Law. And so if Jesus has a three-point

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sermon, or a four-point sermon, depending on how you take The Sermon on the Mount, (and maybe you take it that he has a 42-point sermon!); I don't know. It's up to you. But I'm looking at it as a four-point sermon. I look at this and I say that a large chunk of it has to do with the Law. It has to do with the Law.

These are the danger points. And so it behooves us to what Jesus is saying here in The Sermon on the Mount about the Law. But first of all, it's important for us then to realize Jesus' relationship to the Law. And He wants us to understand that relationship. And so He explains it to us. He helps us with it. So let's look at what The Sermon on the Mount has to say about Jesus' relationship to the Law.

Well the first thing that we notice is this. In Matthew 5:17 he says, “*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets.*” Now that's an important word. And it's a word that's going to have some influence for us as we think about this passage today. The question is what does that word mean?

It could have different translations in your Bibles. Does anybody have anything different than “*abolish?*”: What do you have?

Participant: Destroy.

Jeff: Okay. Destroy. Anything else? Does anybody else have a different translation with a different word? Does anybody have “*annul?*” No? Nobody has *annul?* Okay. All right.

“*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets.*” That word is *catalusi*. It is from the word *cataluo*. Now in Greek *cata* is a preposition meaning “down from,” and *luo* is a basic word. It's oftentimes used as the verb that you memorize in its present tense form. So it's a very familiar word. It means “to loose.”

So when you think about this word *cataluo* or *catalusi*, in its form here in this text, it simply means all of these meanings that we've been talking about. It means to loosen so that it comes down, which would be Don's *destroy*. It can mean *abolish*. It can mean *annul*. And that's what it does mean. The word was actually used for the destruction of Jerusalem. The idea is that the wall is loosened and comes down. The stones come down.

Now let's think about this for just a second. It's not just that that we want to notice, because that's one aspect of Jesus' relationship to the Law. And we'll think about that in just a minute.

But we also want to think about the next part of that phrase. He says, “I did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law.”

Now what do you think He means when He's talking about “fulfill?” Well what do you think that means? When you think about somebody fulfilling something, what do you think that means?

Participant: To complete it.

Jeff: To complete it? I think that is absolutely right. Jesus came to complete something. What did He come to complete?

Participant: A contract.

Jeff: A contract. And what did that contract require?

Participant: Perfect obedience. He came to fulfill righteousness. And we know from last time, from looking at Matthew and The Sermon on the Mount in the context of

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Matthew, we heard something really important. In chapter 3 we learned that Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness. We learn that he had to fulfill all righteousness, because the Beatitudes say that those who would enter into a relationship with the Father as sons and daughters are fundamentally lacking in righteousness. We learned that they hunger and thirst for righteousness, and will be filled.

The question is how will they be filled? Chapter 9 says that they will be filled through faith in Jesus Christ, because they become sons and daughters through faith. Remember that Jesus said in chapter 9 that He did not come for those who are well. “I came for those who are sick. I came for those lacking in righteousness.”

And so we’ve already got this theme together of what it means to be lacking in righteousness, to need a righteousness not of ourselves. It’s an alien righteousness. And Jesus comes to fulfill that need that we have. And He provides us with an alien righteousness.

Now how does He do that? Well let’s think about that with what we’ve already said about the Law. What Jesus is saying is this. “I did not come to tear the Law down and to make the Law, as it were, of no effect, to no point.”

What did Jesus come to do? He came to fulfill the Law. Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. Jesus comes to keep every jot and tittle of the Law, right? And He comes to do that for our salvation. And that is how Jesus fulfills the law of righteousness and becomes the perfect sacrifice. And in becoming the perfect sacrifice, what does He do? He is an atoning sacrifice for our sins, that we might receive forgiveness in Him. And His perfect life becomes the basis for the imputation of His righteousness to me.

So not only do I receive forgiveness in Christ through His passive obedience of dying on the cross. But I have righteous standing before God on the basis of His life imputed or reckoned to my life. So Jesus fulfills all righteousness, that I might be righteous.

Now that’s His relationship to the Law. The question is what about my relationship to the Law as a believer? What is Jesus saying in this portion of the text about my relationship? Well the first thing that we need to ask is who is Jesus speaking to? To whom is He speaking?

Well, you know, the answer to that is a little broad. You could say something like this. Well there were a lot of people on that hill that day. And I think that maybe he’s talking to everybody. And I think there’s a sense in which you would be right.

If you were to look at Romans 2:14 and 15, the law of God is written on the heart of everyone. And so as Jesus speaks about things that are written on their hearts, then there is a sense in which He could be speaking to everyone.

But He’s really not speaking to everyone specifically. He’s really speaking to His disciples, His followers, and the rest are overhearing. So this is really a message to the church. It’s a message to us.

Now it’s fine for people who are not in the church to overhear it. In fact, they ought to overhear it. But this is a word to the church.

Now if this is a word to the church, I want you to notice what He says to us. It’s in 5:19a and 5:19b. Just check it out. Look at what it says. Let me actually read it again. *“Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others*

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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.”

Now I want you to forget about being called great or least in the kingdom of heaven for a minute. Notice this. Whoever annuls them, whoever destroys them, whoever abolishes them,—this is the word *cataluo*. This is the word that Jesus uses to describe His own relationship to the Law. In other words, what is Jesus saying? “I did not come to abolish the Law. And if you abolish the Law, you are not of me. If you keep the Law, you are of Me.” That’s the idea.

Now here’s what we need to think about as we reflect on this for just a little bit. We need to remember that there is a fundamental distinction being made between the person who is righteous and the person who annuls the Law. But before I say that, let me just say this. Jesus has His sights on the Pharisees.

Now in order to understand what I’m saying at this point, you need to remember that the Pharisees did what? They created loopholes in the Law to give the appearance of having kept it. So for instance, there are all kinds of famous ones. And if you look at the different texts like the Mishnah, or even the Babylonian Talmud, you’ll find that these kinds of books talk about loopholes that are created so that one can keep the law, because they recognized that one couldn’t keep the law.

So for instance, if you wanted to travel on a Saturday, which was their Sabbath, what you would do is that you would say, “Look! How far can I travel from my residence and still not be considered away from my residence?” Well, I can travel, let’s say, ten steps away from my residence. But if I need to go further than ten steps away from my residence, what do I need to do? Well then I ask the next question. What constitutes a residence? Well, a residence is constituted by having so much food. So on Friday I would take ten steps away from that much food to that particular spot. And that would be my residence. So then I could take ten more steps. But if I needed to go thirty steps away, what? I’d have to bring enough food to constitute a residence so that I could take another ten steps.

You see, it’s by those kinds of means that the Pharisees were giving the impression of having kept the Law. But what they were doing is that they were short-circuiting the whole thing, because what was the Law meant to do all along? Galatians and Romans says that the Law was always meant—and here’s the one word that was used in Galatians; it’s absolutely fascinating—it was meant to tease out sin. In other words, when you read the law of God and you feel guilty about it, don’t close your Bible and say, “That’s enough of that!” (*Laughter*) No! The Law is doing what it was meant to do. It’s teasing out the sin. Why? So that you can feel guilty, yes. But then you can confess it to the Lord Jesus Christ who provides forgiveness and cleansing of the conscience. The Law is doing what it was meant to do at that point.

The Pharisees didn’t recognize this. You see, this is what Jesus was saying. Jesus is saying that the person who annuls the Law unties the Law. Here’s another way to render it. He unties the Law so as to loosen it. This will actually bring its destruction. “But I didn’t come to loosen the Law.”

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In fact, notice what Jesus says when He talks about the Law. *“You’ve heard what was said, ... but I say to you.”* And you see, what He’s doing is that He’s saying, *“This is how the Law was loosened so as to bring it down.”*

Now I want to tell you something. This is how tight it is. And how far do you need to look? Adultery? Yes, you’ve heard that. But the way that was rendered, that’s a loosening of it. *“I say to you, whoever looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery in his heart.”*

And you go, *“Oh! What is Jesus doing?”* Jesus is tightening the Law. He’s saying this. Forget about the letter of the law, even if it’s an accurate rendering of the letter of the law. Murder? No, no, no! You’re angry with your brother. It goes beyond the mere letter to the spirit of the law. And so Jesus says, *“If you’re angry with your brother.”*

What is He doing? He’s tightening where the Pharisees were loosening. And so He has the Pharisees in His sight in 5:19 when He says that whoever loosens them, whoever unties them so that they are destroyed, brought down, but whoever keeps them, he’s the righteous one. Go ahead, Don.

Don: Is Jesus there speaking of the moral aspect of the law, or all three aspects—civil, ceremonial—because obviously the civil and the ceremonial were not permanent?

Jeff: They were not permanent. But think about it. He’s transitional. So right now they were supposed to go to the temple. They were supposed to have sacrifices. So I think He is talking about the whole law. They were unable to keep the civil aspect to some extent because they were under the Romans. So at this point they are still supposed to go through the ceremony. They can’t even do that because they’re under the Romans. Actually, Don, that’s a good point, because they can’t keep the ceremonial law as stipulated in the Old Testament. But He is talking about the whole law. He uses these transitional figures. But he would have in mind the fact that they’re under the curse. And the reason why they’re not able to keep either one of the civil or the ceremonial laws is because they’re under that curse. They’re under the Romans because they were disobedient to the law to begin with.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: Let me just say one thing about this before we go on. You see this whole idea of keeping the law is not, is not, is not something that ought to be interpreted as legalism, as if we can attain something by our obedience, because the Sermon on the Mount already started by telling us that you and I were fundamentally lacking in righteousness. This is not then a righteousness that attains the favor of God. This is a righteousness that we are to do because we have attained the favor of God by grace. So just keep that distinction in mind.

Now look at verse 20. *“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Now what is He saying? He’s saying what I’ve told you already. He has the Pharisees and the Scribes in mind. When He compares your righteousness to that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, He’s talking about those who annul or untie the Law.

Why do I say this? Because oftentimes, when I’ve heard this explained, this is what I often hear. The Scribes and the Pharisees were so righteous that they tithed on the mint.

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And if your righteousness does not exceed that righteousness, oh, you’re going to burn! That sort of thing, you know?

And that’s not what He’s saying. He is saying that if your righteousness is that kind of righteousness that seeks to untie the law in order to give the appearance of keeping the law, then you fall into the class of the Scribes and the Pharisees that I’m talking about. You ought to be vigorous in your law keeping, knowing that there’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and strength to keep the law progressively, because it brings conformity to the image of Christ.

But He’s not saying that the Scribes and the Pharisees are up here, and boy, you’ve got to get up here! No, no, no. He’s saying that they untie it. And why does He say that? Because the person who continually unties the law is a person who thinks he can keep the law, right? If you untie the law to give the appearance that you’re keeping the law, the law hasn’t done its work in you to show you your need for an alien righteousness. Has everybody got that? All right; good.

So the Father’s expectation does not change in 5:48. But it’s already met fully in Jesus Christ. And this particular portion of Scripture reminds us that we progressively grow toward what we already are in Jesus Christ. These are concepts I’m confident that you know.

All right. Now we’re going to enter into something that you need the outline for.

Transcriber’s Note: Refer to Jeff’s Lesson Plan on Brave Men website.

Jeff: Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to look at the structure of this particular portion of Scripture. And here’s what I want to do. I’m going to put this up on the screen. This is what you’re going to see in your handout. What you’re going to see is that there is an introductory statement followed by a Scripture text, followed by a concluding statement in the first three. And then what you’re going to see in the next three—and I should say this—there are six topics altogether in what we read. We’ll get to those in just a minute. The first three follow this structural format. The second three follow this structural format—an introductory statement, a Scripture text, a concluding statement, and then an imperative that’s added, a command that’s added, okay?

Now I gave you a handout, and that’s exactly what you see. In the first column you see that structure that’s on the left-hand side—an introductory statement, a Scripture text and a concluding statement. On the right hand side you see the next three, and you have the very same thing with the addition of an imperative.

Now what does that look like? Here’s what it looks like. Verse 21—You’ve heard that the ancients were told. Verse 21—“*You shall not murder.*” There’s our Scripture text. “*But I say to you.*”

Verse 33. This is the next side. “you have heard that/the ancients were told.” The two relate—5:21, 5:33. This is the first one of the first three. This is the first one of the second three. “You’ve heard that the ancients were told.”

What I want you to notice is this. Watch how this will change. “You’ve heard that the ancients were told.” “You’ve heard that the ancients were told.” The same thing, the Scripture text. “But I say to you,” and then the added imperative, (*unclear*) Okay?

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Notice this one. “You’ve heard that it was said.” There’s your Scripture text—verse 27. “*You shall not commit adultery.*” “*But I say to you*” now over here.

Verse 38. “*Now you have heard that it was said.*” Same thing, but it’s a change. It’s a change from 21 to 33. The formula has changed.

What is He showing us? And you’re going to see that He’s showing us that there are two sets of three here. This becomes an indicator that we divide the text up in this way appropriately. There’s the Scripture text—“*an eye for an eye*” in verse 38. Then “*But I say to you.*” And then there’s the imperative, “*Do not resist an evil person.*” And then here “it was said,” different from the previous ones. “*Whoever sends his wife away*”—verse 31. And verse 32. It’s simply “*I say*”, not “*but I say.*”

The interesting thing is that he reverts back. It’s not a parallel. It’s the bugaboo in the whole system. Verse 43—“*You shall love your neighbor*”; there’s your Scripture text. *But I say to you.*” Again, it’s an interesting way in which the parallel is not exact. Here’s how I think of it. It’s almost like those rugs that are knit over in India that are almost absolutely perfect in every stitch, except that they make one imperfect. I guess they just do it in order to do it. It’s almost like sometimes, when there’s a structure, you know what I mean? I don’t know why Matthew did it under the inspiration of the Spirit like that, but he did. And then there’s your imperative—“*love your enemies.*” So that’s the structure.

Now that gives you an idea of why I’m going to do what I’m going to do next. But let me ask you a question before we get there. What is this section all about? What’s this section on the Law all about? Well, it’s this. It’s an illustration of untying the Law and tying the Law. That’s what it’s about. It’s an illustration of Jesus saying, “This is the untying of the Law, and I’m going to tie it up for you and show you how I’ve fulfilled it. They abolished it; I fulfilled it.”

Well here’s the question. Why these topics? Now you have to have that structure that I had in mind in order to get the idea. Don, here’s what I was talking to you about. So you have the first three topics—murder, adultery and divorce. Those are the first three topics that we take out of that twofold column.

What are the next three topics? Vows, resisting enemies and loving enemies.

Now the question is why these topics? Why? Well let me tell you what this is. Don asked me, saying, “Are there any chiasms today?” Well here’s the chiasm.

But first, what is a chiasm? Well, you remember that it’s basically an a., b., b., a. pattern. And you can arrange it in this x-like form because that’s what it’s supposed to be like. Cross it. But it can be expanded. And that’s what we have in this particular section. It’s not just a. b., b. a., but it’s a. b. c., c. b. a.

Now in order for that to be the case, in order for it to be a chiasm, the a.s have to match. In other words, they have to go together in some way. And the B.s have to go together in some way.

Now the question is when you look at this, the question then becomes how is it that the A.s go together, the c.s go together and the B.s go together? How is it that they go together?

Well let’s look for a minute at that question. How is it that the A.s go together—murder, and love your enemies? Well, think about it. They do go together, and how so?

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Well, what’s the fulfillment of the command not to murder? To love your enemy. If you’re loving your enemy, you’re not going to murder your enemy, right? That’s an easy one.

Okay, how about the C.s? C.—divorce and vows, because they do go together. How do they go together?

Participant: Marriage is a vow.

Jeff: Marriage is a vow! This is great! Now I know what you’re saying. *(Laughter)* You’re saying, “I think this is not going to work.”

Participant: Yes it does.

Jeff: It does.

Participant: Focus.

Jeff: Focus.

Participant: Focus. If you focus on the vow that you made, you will not commit adultery by giving into the sins that are going to attack you by your enemy.

Jeff: See, this man’s got it. He’s got insight. *(Laughter)* Adultery and resisting an evil person have a relationship. What’s the relationship that they have? It’s a textual relationship. Look in the text. What are the similarities between 5:27 and following and 5:38 and following? There are three. Check it out. An eye is in both of them. The subject of the eye is in both.

What else? If this, then that. There’s this formula that says, “If this.” Look at 5:27. *“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.”* For that is better than that your whole body be thrown into hell, right? *“If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”* And then back in 5:38, but really in 5:39, *“if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*

The idea then is if this, then go ahead and give him that. There’s that structure that’s there. It’s interesting.

And then this. In the first one, 5:27, cut off body parts that cause you to stumble. And then in 5:38, cut off personal belongings. If they want your tunic, give them your cloak too. If they want one mile, give them a second mile.

First of all, cut off personal body parts. This is metaphorical now. *(Laughter)*

Participant: How do you know that? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I’ll tell you how I know that. It’s because if your eye causes you to lust, it’s not really your eye that is causing you to lust. It’s in here.

Transcriber’s Note: The heart.

Jeff: If you’re really going to follow that, you’d better give yourself a lobotomy, because it’s your brain that’s doing that. Your mind is doing that.

Participant: We can test that out on Sig, though. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Whoa! What did you say?

Participant: What did he say?

Jeff: We can test that out on Sig, though. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Take Sig’s glasses. *(Laughter)*

Second Participant: I’ve always taken that as being the principle of radical surgery, taking radical steps.

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Jeff: Yes. Take radical steps, like getting rid of the computer if you need to, right? Take the radical step.

So there are similarities between both of these passages. All right. Having that in mind, think about this. Murder is easy and divorce is easy. Well, we understand the principle of loving your enemies and keeping your vows. Adultery and resisting enemies go together textually—the eye, the pattern, the cutting off. They go together.

What’s the lesson here? In the case of adultery, we are to resist our desire for another person. That’s the personal aspect. Cut off the body parts. In the case of an evil person, we are to resist ourselves again by not resisting the evil person, cutting ourselves off from property or goods. Here, take it. Or take my time. I’ll go with you the second mile.

There’s a parallel lesson. Both of those lessons talk about resisting ourselves, don’t they?

Murder, loving our enemies. Divorce, keeping our vows. Adultery and resisting our enemies. In this one we’re to resist ourselves when we’re tempted to another. In this one we resist ourselves through our belongings.

Now let’s think about this. More lessons here. In the case of adultery, we resist ourselves to the point of cutting off or plucking out body parts—hands and eyes. In the case of resisting an evil person, our resistance takes the form of cutting ourselves off from belongings—cloaks and tunics. Or putting it another way, in both cases Jesus brings us back loving our neighbor and our enemy. We love those closest to us—our spouse to whom we are married—and those who are furthest away, our enemies, who we would like to murder, by resisting ourselves.

What’s being taught in Scripture? Here in these six, in this way of looking at it, we’re being taught to love our neighbor. And our neighbor is the closest person to us, our spouse, and the person furthest away from us, the person we’d like to murder. How do we love them? In the one case by resisting my own desires, cutting off body parts, if necessary, to keep myself faithful to the one closest to me. How do I love the one I want to murder? By being willing to cut myself off from my belongings, if necessary, in order to love them. Do you see how that works?

Participant: No.

Jeff: You don’t?

Participant: No. I do not want to murder my wife. I do not want to murder my neighbor.

Jeff: But Jesus says that in your sinful heart the worst part of you does want to murder your neighbor.

Participant: I don’t agree with you. I don’t have to do that.

Jeff: No, you don’t have to. But what about the Lord who says that if you are angry with your brother—

Participant: I lay down my life for my neighbor. I love my neighbor. I love my wife. I did lay my life down. She laid her life down for mine in Africa when we were missionaries.

Jeff: So—

Participant: I really don’t get what you’re saying. I apologize.

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Jeff: No, that’s okay. So I’m trying to figure out why you don’t get it.

Participant: Or maybe you don’t get it. Not everybody has to believe the way you believe. I love my neighbor and I love my wife. I don’t want to murder them.

Jeff: So let me ask you a question.

Participant: Let’s move on.

Second Participant: Let’s move on. Good.

Third Participant: It’s almost time to go.

Jeff: It’s almost time to go, but—

Participant: If somebody murdered your wife, would you still love him?

Second Participant: I don’t know that. That’s hypothetical. That’s extreme.

Jeff: Let me just say this, and I’ll give you the last word if you’d like. But here’s what I’m saying. I’m saying that with the sin that remains in us, the power of sin has been broken. And that’s why I can love even my enemy. But the presence of sin that remains still has that residue where I can become angry with the person whom I deem my enemy. Do you see that?

Participant: I feel sorry for you. I’ll pray.

Jeff: Please do that.

Participant: The thing I think you’re pointing out to me, Jeff, is that it’s much harder to love our neighbor than we might have thought.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: There’s a lot more to it than just the person like you were saying before, like being the person who happens to live next door, or the person who would be in close proximity.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: But my enemy who is far off is really my enemy, or my neighbor.

Jeff: But Jesus acknowledges the reality of the fact that I might look at a woman lustfully who is not my wife, and I need to resist my temptation to do that.

Participant: I’m not sure about how I feel this morning. I worked till midnight last night.

Jeff: Yes, you’re tired.

Participant: No. I figured that I’m not loving my health and my sleep so well.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: That’s as close as I can come to. I love and I hate. It’s a love/hate situation. There are things that we do, and we don’t know that we hate somebody. We don’t know when we hate. But we do. So it’s within me to hate something, not necessarily by a physical hatred. It is so.

Jeff: Well the idea is that the Lord is saying that as a Christian you’re not permitted to hate your neighbor. You’re supposed to love your neighbor. But He’s acknowledging the presence of sin that remains by saying that this is the temptation to be angry. And this is the temptation to be lustful. And you need to put those temptations to death if you are a follower of Christ. Bill?

Bill: I’m going to go out on a limb here. To me this is so radical.

Jeff: Yes.

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Bill: What Jesus is saying. It’s supernatural.

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: In a sense.

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: It’s beyond us.

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: But back in Ezekiel God says, “I’m going to make a new covenant. I’m going to give you a new heart.”

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: “I’ll take out the heart of stone. And that new heart will be careful to keep My commandments.”

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: We’re not going to keep them perfectly.

Jeff: That’s right.

Bill: But be careful. I think that maybe this is what our brother is saying. Although we can love our neighbor and lay down our life for our neighbor, that’s supernatural. It’s not something we manufacture. It’s not really who we are. It’s supernatural. God created it in us when we were born again.

Jeff: Right. And I think that what you’re saying is that we’re growing into the righteousness that has been imputed to us. So we are catching up to our righteous standing before God in our obedient life. We’re already righteous by virtue of what Christ has done for us. But we’re growing into that righteousness.

Bill: But since it’s so supernatural, He has to do it.

Jeff: Well I’m devoid of righteousness. Remember the Beatitudes. I hungered and thirsted for something I did not have. It had to be provided for me by Christ.

Participant: John the apostle says that if anyone hates his brother he is a murderer. So anything that comes short of loving your neighbor is an infraction of the commandment to love your neighbor.

Jeff: Right.

Participant: So no matter what the degree, whether it’s actually taking the life or twisting something to get him angry, to get even with him, any infraction of loving your neighbor is a form of hate.

Jeff: Yes. Bill?

Bill: We shouldn’t be focused on the word *neighbor*, thinking that it’s Sally or Sam across the street.

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: It’s all humanity. And we have plenty of evidence today that humanity has quite a bit of evil. The challenge that we have, then, is how do we have a positive response to these things?

Jeff: Yes.

Bill: And that’s a supernatural issue.

Jeff: That’s right. Well let me just bring it back to this last side. And that is this. What Jesus is teaching us is how to be sons. So He ends this section in verse 48 by saying that

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you are to *“be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* In other words, you’ve been given this righteousness by My Son, that you might grow into or become conformed to His image. And what is that image? That image is perfection. So you are growing into what you already are in His Son.

This is about sonship. And it just takes us back to what we talked about last time. The first four chapters are about sonship. Then we transition to fatherhood. Then in 8 and 9 we transition into “you are My daughter by faith. You are My son by faith,” because they acknowledged that they needed the righteousness that only Christ can provide, that He came to fulfill. So it’s about sonship. That’s all I have.

So let me pray with you before I let you go. Father in heaven, thank You for this day, for the time You’ve given. Thank You for the love You’ve shed abroad in our hearts by virtue of Your Spirit. Thank You, Father, for Your word. And thank You for the truth of it. And thank You, Father, that You confirm what You have worked in us. We pray, Father, that we would continue to live it out. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)