

(Matthew) ch.5:21-48

by Zac Poonen

God expects us to overcome anger, sexual lust, and lying, and to seek Him for grace to live according to the standard that He has prescribed for us in the New Covenant.

Duration: 55:17

Scripture: Matthew 5:13, Matthew 5:21 - 6:1, James 5:12

Topics: "Stewardship", "Humility"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing that everything we have belongs to the Lord. He explains that when someone asks for something, we should seek permission from the Lord before giving or lending it. The speaker warns against seeking the honor of men for our religious actions, highlighting the danger of pretending to give everything for show. The sermon also discusses the concept of our work being tested by fire, emphasizing that it is not the quantity but the quality and intention behind our actions that matter to God.

Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. In our last study, we were considering how Jesus began his description of nine wrong attitudes at Matthew 5.21, and the first of those wrong attitudes was anger towards a brother. There may be cause for it, but where it concerns our own rights and our own honor and our own self, the word of God is very clear. We must not be angry with our brother.

Many Christians have never overcome anger because they have never taken this command seriously. They live under the old covenant, following Moses, not Jesus Christ. Think of a command like this, Ephesians 4, verse 31.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you. Let all wrath and all anger be put away from you. And yet in verse 26, there is a verse which many believers like to remember.

Be angry, yet do not sin. Let not the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity. Many people justify their anger saying that is just righteous indignation.

Whatever name you may call it, the Bible calls it anger. And yet people may say, doesn't it say, be angry and yet do not sin? That's right. But five verses down in Ephesians 4, verse 31, it also says, let all anger be put away from you.

Compare scripture with scripture. And if you are honest, you will discover that that anger which is caused by the harm or hurt or injury or inconvenience that another person has caused to me is selfish anger and must be put away completely. What then is the anger which is free from sin? It is an anger that concerns the purity of God's house.

For example, when Jesus came to the temple and saw people making money there in the name of religion, he was angry with them. When Jesus once went into a synagogue in Mark chapter 3 and the people there were so selfish that they didn't want a man with a withered hand to be healed, it says he looked at them with anger in Mark 3, verse 5. But when the people pulled out the hairs from his face and spat on him, he was not angry. What do we learn from Jesus Christ? That he was never angry when it concerned anything done to his own person, whether they called him the devil or spat on his face.

But when it concerned the purity of God's house, when it concerned other people being delivered from their satanic bondages and people hindering them, then he was angry. He was angry in things that concerned God and other people, but never in anything concerning himself. Anger, which has its root cause in some inconvenience or injury done to me, is always sinful and must be put away one hundred percent.

The anger that we need to retain is the anger that we should feel when God's house is being dishonored, God's name is being dishonored, His house is being abused, the church is being abused to make money in the name of religion, etc. Unfortunately in many Christians it is the other way round. They see evil in God's house and they are not angry at that, but they are angry when it concerns themselves and somebody hurting them.

Take it seriously, dear friends. God wants you to overcome anger. And then he goes on to say in verse 27 about another thing.

In the old covenant it was written, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you, for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you, it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to go to hell.

It is amazing how Jesus spoke about going to hell. In the Sermon on the Mount he says, if you are angry with your brother and you don't control it, you go on to call him raka and fool. Verse 22, you can go to hell.

Likewise he says in relation to adultery. If you don't control those dirty thoughts and overcome them and it leads on to sin with your eyes, verse 29, and with your right hand, verse 30, your whole body can be thrown into hell. How many people believe that? How many people believe that sinning with the eye can lead to a person being thrown into hell? Many have never taken God's word seriously.

They think that God doesn't mean what he says. Jesus said in John chapter 12, he said, I do not judge anyone. In the final day, if somebody has rejected me, John 12, 48, and does not accept my sayings, the word that I spoke will judge him at the last day.

And here are the words that Jesus spoke. If your right eye causes you to stumble, tear it out. It's better for you that one of your parts of your body perish than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

What is the context? The context is looking, verse 28, on a woman to lust for her. You haven't touched her, you haven't gone anywhere near her. You have looked.

Your right eye has caused you to stumble. Right eye or left eye, it doesn't matter which. But it's caused you to stumble.

It's caused you to sin. And you haven't taken it seriously. This is the standard that God expects of us in the new covenant.

You say, that's far too high a standard. That's right. That's why it's impossible, humanly speaking, to attain to it.

That's why we need grace. That's why we need the power of the Holy Spirit. That's why we need to come to the throne of grace and ask God to give us grace.

And we'll find that grace is sufficient, as he told Paul, for every need of ours. My grace is sufficient for you, even to overcome dirty looks, dirty thoughts. I wonder how many people have taken seriously this matter of keeping our eyes pure.

Even in the Old Testament, Job considered this as a very serious offense. He lived before Old Testament times. We read in Job 31 verse 1, I made a covenant with my eyes.

He made a covenant with his eyes. How then could he look upon a woman sinfully? So there we see that it was a serious thing, even in Job's eyes, before the Old Covenant was given. How much more today? To look and lust is a sin, Jesus said.

Jesus expects purity in the inside, in our thoughts. And if a man's committed adultery in his mind, Jesus said, as far as he's concerned, that is adultery. He has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

And in that context, he said, deal with it radically. It's not the physical pulling out of the eye, of the right eye. It obviously cannot mean that, because you could still sin with your left eye.

No, it means a radical attitude towards sin. Lest your whole body be thrown to hell. So Jesus used hellfire as a means to warn people to stay away from sin.

Then he went on to speak about divorce. In verse 31 and 32, whoever divorces his wife, in the Old Testament it was said, let him give her a certificate of dismissal. And as we considered in a previous study, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 19, that was due to the hardness of men's hearts, that God permitted that under the Old Covenant.

Now that the Holy Spirit is given, Jesus says in Matthew 5.32, I say to you, that everyone, and there is no exception here, whether he calls himself believer or unbeliever, who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity. There is one exception. Unchastity, where divorce is permitted, even under the New Covenant.

That's where a man or a woman has broken their covenant in marriage. In such a case, it's permitted, but for any other reason. If a man divorces his wife or a wife divorces her husband, they are committing adultery.

And if you marry a divorced woman, you commit adultery. For the cause of unchastity, divorce is permitted. But remarriage is not permitted, even in such a case.

And that is very clear when you look at the parallel passages, which are mentioned in Mark chapter 10 and Luke chapter 16 and 1 Corinthians 7, verse 11 onwards. It's clear that though divorce is permitted in the New Covenant for unchastity, remarriage is not. Whoever, without exception, marries a divorced person, commits adultery.

We need to establish these standards once again in these days of compromise, where Christians consider divorce and consider marrying those who are divorced and marrying again. Everyone, without exception, the Lord says, who divorces his wife, except for unchastity, commits adultery. And so we see that in this sexual area, there is a very high standard that God expects in the New Covenant.

In the area of anger and sexual lust, two wrong attitudes. In the area of anger and sexual lust, God expects us to overcome, to seek Him for grace, that we might live according to the standard that He has prescribed for us under the New Covenant. Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5 and verse 33, continuing our study on the nine wrong attitudes that Jesus said we are to be delivered from as New Covenant disciples if our salt is to remain strong and with taste and if our light is to shine so that we fulfil our function as the light of the world, as Jesus spoke of in verse 13 and 14 of this chapter.

In contrast to the nine right attitudes that we need to have, which Jesus described in the first few verses, Matthew 5, verses 3 to 12, he goes on to describe nine wrong attitudes. First of all, anger. Second, sexual lust.

And third, in verse 33 to 37, he speaks about lying. You have heard, he said, that the ancients were told, you shall not make false vows, but shall fulfil your vows to the Lord. But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be yes, yes, or no, no, and anything beyond these is of evil. In Psalm 58, in the Old Testament, there is a verse which says, that the children of men go astray from their mother's womb, telling lies.

Psalm 58, verse 3. They speak lies from the mother's womb. In other words, it's when they are babies, they begin to tell lies. Which means, it is not just a question of speaking words from the mother's womb, which means that they can tell lies without speaking.

And this is what we need to see, that it is possible for us to tell a lie without opening our mouths. In other words, lying is more than just the words. It's speaking about deception by expressions, by a certain impression that we convey on others.

In other words, it's referring to this whole area of hypocrisy. Consider Ananias and Sapphira, for example, whom we read of in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 5, where Peter spoke to them and told them, Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, he says in verse 3. And yet, if you read that passage, you find that Ananias had not opened his mouth. And yet, Peter says, you have lied to the Holy Spirit.

It's possible to tell a lie without opening our mouths. We lie when we do something or act in a particular way to give people a certain impression about ourselves, which is not true. In that particular case, Ananias came into the meeting of the church, bringing some money with him, giving the impression that he was

giving everything when he was not giving everything.

There was no sin in holding back part of the money. But there was a great sin in pretending. And he was judged not for giving all his money.

God doesn't want one pie of our money. But he was judged for pretending in the presence of others, for being a hypocrite. And in contrast to the Old Testament standard, which said that you must speak the truth when you are under oath, Jesus says here, don't make an oath at all under any circumstances.

There are people who lay their hands on the Bible and take an oath. Notice what it says here in James 5, verse 12. Above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, even by laying your hand on the Bible.

Let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you may not fall under judgment. James is repeating what Jesus said. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

There is no need to take an oath and to say, I swear by the Bible or I swear by God or any such thing. The very Bible on which you lay your hands tells you very clearly in Matthew 5, verse 36 and James 5, verse 12 that you are not to make an oath. That's clear.

And he who has ears to hear will hear. These are the small commandments of God's word that we can take so lightly. You are not to make an oath.

For as we said in an earlier study, what is a person saying when he's taking an oath? He's saying that I tell lies most of the time, but right now I'm speaking the truth because I'm under oath. But that's not the testimony a Christian should have. The testimony of a Christian is, I speak the truth all the time, and so I don't need to take an oath.

Your yes is yes and your no is no. When you have to qualify your yes and no with other things, but this and but that, Jesus says in Matthew 5, verse 37, that is all evil. It's evil.

It's not just substandard. It's evil. And we need to see it as evil.

So there we see the seriousness of telling lies. We notice that with children, how easy it is for them to tell lies, and we need to teach them right from childhood, as parents, the seriousness of lying. Children need to be punished severely for telling lies when they seek to deceive their parents.

That's one of the most serious things that children can do, to tell lies to their parents. And if parents don't take the lies that their children say seriously, they can prepare their children for hellfire. Notice the emphasis on hellfire, hellfire, hellfire, again and again, in these first three attitudes.

Anger, Matthew 5, verse 22, you are in danger of hellfire. Sexual lust, Matthew 5, verse 29, you are in danger of hellfire. Sexual abuse, Matthew 5, verse 30, you are in danger of hellfire.

And telling lies, Revelation 21, verse 8, it says, all liars will have their part in the lake that burns with fire in Brimstone. All liars, black liars, white liars, every type of liars, it says in Revelation 21, 7, 21, 8, and in verse, it's repeated, in verse 27, all those who practice lying will be outside the city. All those who practice lying.

In contrast to this, we read in the book of Revelation, a group of people described in Revelation 14, who stand with Jesus on Mount Zion. And it says about them in Revelation 14, 5, no lie was found in their mouth. Here are people who were born of the same race of Adam, but who had received Jesus Christ and who had taken their Christian life seriously, not like many other Christians, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and who had cleansed themselves of this lying nature that they had inherited from Adam.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 12, and verse 36, and 37, that every careless word that men shall speak, they will render account in the day of judgment, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. And so we see here that our words are very serious, because by our words we can be condemned. Have you been cleansed from all lying, from giving a wrong impression to others? Is it only when you are under oath, that you speak the truth? Or has speaking the truth become a way of life with you? Think of a situation in your office, when you are in a tight spot.

And you can tell a lie and get out of that tight spot. Or, you can speak the truth and perhaps lose your job, or get into a difficult situation. What will you do? The devil comes to you and says, a lie is powerful now, a lie is almighty, it can deliver you from this tight spot.

The Holy Spirit says, God is almighty, He can deliver you, if you will honor Him by speaking the truth. Now it's a question at that point, whether you are going to believe the devil, or you are going to believe the Holy Spirit. Whether you believe a lie is almighty, to deliver you from a tight spot, or whether God is almighty.

Many, even those who call themselves believers, very often in a tight spot they tell a lie, because they believe the lie is almighty. They lose faith in the almighty power of God, at that situation. And here is where our faith is tested.

And that's why lying is very serious. If we have lied, and hurt others, we need to go and make restitution, and confess it and set it right. Anyone, who wants to be salt that has not lost its taste, light that's burning brightly, will take these commandments seriously.

Lying is a wrong attitude, that dwells deeply in our flesh. We will lie, when it's convenient for us, when we will gain something from it. Think of the false statements people sign in offices, in order to make a little profit.

Many things are covered under this commandment. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no. Take this seriously dear friends, so that, we can be cleansed from this evil nature, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and live as Jesus wanted us to.

Honest and truthful, under all circumstances, whatever the pressure. Let's turn now to, Matthew's Gospel chapter 5, and verse 38. Continuing our study, in the Sermon on the Mount, having looked at the nine right attitudes, that Jesus described at the beginning, in verses 3 to 12.

He continues, with nine wrong attitudes, that we need to be cleansed from, beginning at Matthew 5.21, which he prefaced with this introduction, that unless your righteousness, surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. The first wrong attitude, that he said we need to really be cleansed from, is anger, verse 21 to 26. The second one, sexual lust, and all that arises from that, verses 27 to 32.

The third one is lying, which we considered in our last study, verses 33 to 37. And the fourth one, that Jesus speaks of here, is vengeance. All these wrong attitudes, are wrong attitudes, that dwell deeply

within our flesh.

Anger, sexual lust and lying, have penetrated every fiber of our being. So also the desire for vengeance, to take revenge on someone, who has hurt us or inconvenienced us, in some way. And Jesus said here in verse 38, you have heard that it was said, this was an Old Testament law, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

That is mentioned in Exodus 21, verse 24. And also in Leviticus 24, verse 20. And in both those passages, what the Old Testament law said was, that if a person took another person's life, you must take his life.

Life for life. And if in a fight that two people had, one person knocked out another person's tooth, the punishment is that you take out, one of the offending person's tooth, one of his teeth. And if he injured a person's eye, so that it was damaged, you take out that person's eye, as a punishment.

Now, this does not mean, that we are to do it. In the Old Testament, a person, who was God's representative in the state, as his authority was to do it, were not to take the law into our own hands. But under the New Covenant, the Lord says, I am teaching you a higher standard.

Forgiveness, where you don't take vengeance. If somebody has taken out your eye, there is no need to take out his eye. Do not resist him who is evil, in this sense.

We must not misunderstand that verse, by taking it out of context. Do not take his eye, if he has taken yours. But whoever slaps you, on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if someone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, that is your inner garment, let him have your outer garment as well. And whoever forces you to go one mile, that is the Roman soldiers who compelled the Jews, to carry their burdens for one mile, have a good attitude towards him, and help him and carry it for two miles. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him, who wants to borrow from you.

This is quite a high standard. Jesus is not saying here, that there is no need to have law, where people's rights are protected. That if someone steals your property, you just let him take it.

He is speaking about personal attitudes here. He is not speaking about established law in society. But about a personal attitude of vengeance.

He says, we must not have that. In other words, don't take the law into your own hands, and slap him back. But have an attitude, which is free from covetousness, and from the love of material things, and from defending your own personal rights.

Leave that to God. In Romans chapter 12, we read, the Lord says, never take your own revenge, Romans 12, 19. Beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God.

Let God do it. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord, if somebody has harmed you, God will repay him. Leave it to God.

As far as you are concerned, forgive him. What should you do then, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

Overcome evil with good. We will come to that a little more, when we come to the next section. But for the moment, on the matter of revenge.

That is a quotation, there in Romans 12, from Proverbs 24. So, we find that this was something that God commanded even in the Old Testament. Proverbs chapter 24, verse 17 and Proverbs 25, verse 21 onwards.

What is the right attitude towards an enemy? If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him to drink. Proverbs 24, 17 says, do not rejoice when your enemy falls.

That would be an attitude of revenge. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls. But, have an attitude of love.

There are many ways in which we can seek to take vengeance on others. It is possible for parents to take vengeance on their own children, when their children cause them some inconvenience. There are many countries today where child abuse has become so bad that people torture and there are even cases of people who pulled out their children's eyes in anger and burnt their tongues in anger because those children caused inconvenience to them.

Now, we may say we never do such things, but consider something lesser than burning their tongue or burning their eyes or maiming them. It is right that we must discipline our children when they are disobedient. Not because they cause us inconvenience, but when they are disobedient.

But consider a case like this. Supposing you were to ask your child to drink up its milk and it is disobeyed and you don't take it seriously. You just keep on telling it until finally the child spills the milk and it falls all over your clothes.

Then you whip him. You need to ask yourself whether your whipping the child at that time is for its disobedience or because it has caused you so much inconvenience by messing up your clothes. It may not be discipline, but revenge.

We can take revenge against our own children. It is amazing how evil, how much evil dwells in the flesh. And so we need to cleanse ourselves from this revengeful attitude to be happy as we read in Proverbs 24, 17 when your enemy falls.

Somebody who has done some wrong to you. Are you happy when God judges him? Then you have a revengeful attitude. Even though you didn't take revenge yourself, your attitude is one of revenge that you rejoice when your enemy falls even under the old covenant that was forbidden.

No. We are not to have an attitude of revenge even in our hearts. As I said, Jesus was not teaching the abdication and the abolition of all law.

If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. What did Jesus himself do? In John chapter 18 we read in verse 23 that when he was standing before the high priest and somebody slapped him, Jesus replied, If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness of the wrong, but if rightly, why do you strike me? He didn't turn the other cheek. He asked for justice.

But when it was not given to him, then he accepted it. What does that teach us? We have every right to ask for justice on the basis of John 18.23. But we do not fight for it. If they continue to slap us, we do not hit back.

That's the point. We can ask for justice. Law has not been abolished in society.

But it's a question of attitude. What about this verse which says, Give to him who asks of you and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. Here again we need wisdom.

Jesus said that no one can be his disciple if he does not forsake all that he has. Luke 14.33. Everything that we have, we need to forsake if we are to be disciples. And this commandment is only for disciples.

Supposing you have earned your salary on the first of the month, maybe a thousand rupees. You need to forsake that to God if you want to be a disciple. Not 10%, but 100%.

In other words, you need to recognize that that entire salary which you have earned that month belongs to God. God allows you to use it for house rent, food, clothing, children's education and many other things. But it belongs to God.

Now, we need to obey the commandment which says, Give to him who asks of you and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. When somebody comes and asks you for that money, if it's yours, you can give it. If it belongs to God, what shall you do? You have to ask God, Shall I give it to this man? Just like if you were keeping money with you that belonged to somebody else, you couldn't give it away without asking the owner's permission.

And there's not a single pie that we have in our home or in our bank account that should really belong to us. It should all belong to the Lord. Then we understand how to obey this command.

That when somebody asks of us, we go and ask the owner. We say, I have to ask the owner, the Lord. If he permits me to give it to you, I give it to you.

Otherwise I cannot. If he permits me to lend it to you, I lend it. Otherwise I cannot.

Thus, we can obey even this command in all situations. It's all a question of attitude. When we are disciples, we understand how to do everything right in all situations.

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 43. We were considering in these last studies the wrong attitudes that Christians can have that they need to cleanse themselves from if they are to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Having described the nine right attitudes in verses 3 to 12, Jesus begins to describe the nine wrong attitudes that we need to cleanse ourselves from.

First of all, verse 21 to 26 of Matthew 5, anger. Second, verse 27 to 32, sexual lust. Third, lying, verse 33 to 37.

Fourth, vengeance, the spirit of vengeance, from verse 38 to 42. Now we come to verse 43 to 48 where Jesus speaks about selectiveness in love as a wrong attitude that we need to cleanse ourselves from. He said, you have heard that it was said under the old covenant, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

Of course, the children of Israel when they came into the land of Canaan were taught to show no mercy to their enemies, to the Canaanites. There was a reason for that. The Canaanites had indulged in various types of evil described in Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 19.

And the Lord said very clearly there that there were all types of abominations and idolatry and in the areas of sex that they had indulged in, that if they had been permitted to live, the Israelites were not strong enough to resist the temptation that would come through the evil of these people around them and they

would have been corrupted and the testimony of God in Israel would have been corrupted. Their hearts were hard. They were not yet ready to resist the evil around them and therefore the only way to keep the testimony pure was to destroy the people around them.

And that's why there was a command to destroy all the Canaanites. It's something like cutting off a gangrenous hand or leg. We love the hand and leg, yet it needs to be cut off lest it corrupt and destroy the whole body.

We need to see Old Testament destruction of Canaanites in this light. But in the New Covenant, God has given us the Holy Spirit. There's no need to destroy the people around us in order to keep ourselves pure.

We live in the Spirit by the power of the Spirit and grace that strengthens our heart, we keep ourselves pure. So this is the context in which we need to understand this Old Testament commandment about hating your enemy. It was never God's will.

It was for a period because of the hardness of the hearts of people. But Jesus said, Now I will tell you what God's will has been from the beginning. Love your enemies.

That's God's nature. God doesn't hate His enemies. He loves His enemies.

Pray for those who persecute you, Jesus said, in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, for He causes His Son to rise on the evil and the good and sends the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Here is a standard God has given for us to follow that Jesus has given to us. To be like our Heavenly Father.

How does God make the sun shine? He makes the sun shine on evil people and on good people. Does God send rain on the fields of the righteous only? No. There are unrighteous people whose fields are prospering because God sends rain on them.

Why? If God were to bless only the righteous with material things, that is, then the unrighteous would have a terrible time on this earth. No. Why does God send rain and sunshine equally on the just and the unjust, on the evil and the good? Because He does not want people to turn to Him merely for material things.

That is one reason. If God blessed only the righteous with material things, a lot of people would become righteous, not because they love God, but because they wanted the blessing of material things. If God sent rain only on the fields of righteous farmers, a lot of farmers would become righteous, not because they loved righteousness, but because they wanted their farms to get rain.

There is a fundamental principle here that we need to understand, that God has made it easy for a man to be unrighteous if he wants to be, because he wants that man to turn from unrighteousness because he loves God, not because he wants material blessing. And so God's nature is this, that He is good and kind to unthankful people as we read in the parallel passage in Luke chapter 6. And Jesus says, in the Old Testament they couldn't be sons of their father. Remember, they had to just wipe out the Canaanites.

But now, be a son of your heavenly father. And if you want to be a son of your father, you have to behave like this. Here He is not telling us how we can be children of God.

We become children of God according to John 1.12 by receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord. But, to become a son which is speaking about maturity, there is a difference between a son and a child. We have to

behave like our heavenly father.

That's what He says. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you can become sons. So that, this is the condition.

Otherwise we are not sons. Just like we considered in verse 9 of chapter 5. Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons of God. It's more than children.

Here also, to have the same attitude towards people who are good to us and evil to us. Look at the sun in the sky for example and learn a lesson. If you were to smile at the sun, the sun would shine back at you.

If you were to frown at the sun, it still shines back at you. It's attitude towards you does not depend on your attitude towards it. You can praise the sun, it will shine at you.

You can curse the sun, it will still shine at you. And there, we can learn a lesson as to how God wants us to be towards other people. That when people curse us or praise us, our attitude towards them remains the same, one of love.

Further on, verse 46, Jesus said, If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Do you love all the good brothers and sisters in your church who love you in return? According to this verse, you don't get any reward for that. Did you know that? Verse 46 is very clear. If you love those good brothers and sisters in your church who love you in return, you have no reward for that.

Because, even tax collectors do the same. We could say today, even unconverted people do the same. And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the heathen do the same.

If you love and greet only those who greet you, you are no better than the heathen, you are no better than evil godless atheists who love one another. The communists love one another. But, if you can love those who don't love you, then you are a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And it is very good for you to check up personally, dear friend, as to how many people who hate you, do you love? How many of your enemies do you love? How many people who persecute you, have you prayed for? How many people who have done evil to you, have you done good to? To how many people who frown at you and despise you and do evil to you, have you shone upon like the sun in the sky? This is the difference between human love and divine love. Human love, this is a very easy way to distinguish the two. Human love is manifested when there is a response of love from the other party.

Or when the other party shows love. It's easy to love those who give us gifts. What about those who rob us? Leave alone give us gifts, they take away what is ours.

What about those who inconvenience you? Take away your rights, take away your reputation, scandalize you. Dear friend, whether you got God's love in your heart or not, is tested by this. Your attitude to those who despise you, speak evil of you, and who have harmed you in some way or the other.

And we need to take this seriously. If your righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, leave alone the Pharisees, righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of sinful people who love those who love them, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. That's clear.

We need to take seriously this matter of being selective in our love. Loving certain people, being warm towards them, being cold towards others. That is hatred.

Coldness does not come from love. It comes from hatred. Some things which we don't call hatred, you may say, I don't hate him.

But you don't love him either. That coldness towards that person is born out of hatred. That is not a child of love, that's a child of hatred.

It may not be fully grown up, mature hatred. It may be a little baby, that cold shoulder that you give to that other person. But it is part of the family of hatred.

And so this is a high standard. And it is in this context that the Lord says, you are to be perfect, verse 48, as your heavenly father is perfect. There is one area in which the Lord asks us to be perfect as our heavenly father and only one.

In Luke 6.36 it's explained more clearly. Be merciful just as your father is merciful. This is the parallel passage.

We cannot be perfect as our heavenly father is in wisdom or in knowledge or in power or perhaps even in holiness. But we can be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect in one area and that is mercy. We cannot be perfect as he is perfect in love or holiness on this earth.

But in mercy, in other words, as he forgives everyone, we can forgive everyone. As he is good to all, we can be good to all irrespective of their attitude towards us. If others serve Satan by being evil, why should you serve Satan by being evil towards them? Be like Jesus who said, Forgive them father for they know not what they do.

Then we also can be sons of our heavenly father. Let's turn today to Matthew 12 chapter 5 and verse 1 and verse 13. Beware of practicing your righteousness before men otherwise you have no reward with your father who is in heaven.

In the previous studies we have been considering what Jesus was speaking to his disciples about the right attitudes that a disciple of Christ should have. Nine right attitudes that Jesus mentioned in Matthew chapter 5 verses 3 to 12 followed by nine wrong attitudes that he warned his disciples to beware of in the following verses. We consider the wrong attitude of anger mentioned in chapter 5 verse 21 to 26 and the wrong attitude of sexual lust verses 27 to 32 lying in verses 33 to 37 vengeance in verses 38 to 42 and selectiveness in love in verses 43 to 48.

And now we come to a sixth wrong attitude which is seeking the honor of men. And the Lord spends eighteen verses on this more than on any of the other subjects that he dealt with. This matter of doing that which is right but with a wrong motive.

He speaks here particularly about three things. One is our righteousness in verses 1 to 4 prayer in verses 5 to 15 and fasting in verses 16 to 18. All of these are legitimate activities good activities activities that Jesus himself practiced and encouraged all his disciples to practice and that we are to practice till the end of our days.

But the significant thing here is that the Lord says that all these actions and good activities become corrupt when they are done with the wrong motive. In the Old Testament there was not so much emphasis on motive because the Old Testament dealt only with the man's external life. The Lord could touch a man punish a man correct a man only in that part of his life which was external which was visible by others.

In the new covenant Jesus said in Matthew 5.20 that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. And when we studied that verse I mentioned how in the following verses Jesus explained how our righteousness is to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. We have seen in Matthew 5.21-48 that that which was fulfilled externally in the Old Testament is to be fulfilled internally in the New Testament inwardly.

In other words it was not just a question of not committing murder but also of not being angry not just of not committing adultery but also of not lusting in the heart. And in chapter 6 in the first 18 verses he speaks about how our motive in doing these good things must also be pure. And this is where our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.

They gave alms they did external acts of righteousness they prayed and they fasted but their motive was wrong selfish seeking their own honor. And here Jesus said your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in that when you do good it must be for the glory of God. Remember what we thought of when we looked at chapter 5 verse 16 that when our light shines before men it must be in such a way that when they see our good works they must glorify not us but our father who is in heaven.

And so in verse 1 of chapter 6 he says beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them. And if we are honest we will confess what a tremendous lust and longing there is in our flesh to get honor from men for being spiritual. In fact the first sin that was judged in the early church that we read of is in Acts chapter 5 the first few verses where we read of Ananias and Sapphira who were punished with death because they gave only part of the money which they obtained through the sale of their property.

The important thing that we need to recognize there is that they were not punished for not giving all of their money which they got from selling the property but because they pretended that they were giving everything. And so we see here that the danger is of trying to get the honor of men for our religious actions. The Holy Spirit says in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 10 to 15 about the day that will come when all our work is going to be tested by fire it says in verse 13 there 1 Corinthians 3.13 that all of our work will be tested and revealed by the fire and it says very specifically in verse 13 that the fire will test not the quantity but the quality of each man's work.

In other words not the amount of righteousness that we did but why we did it. Not how much we prayed but why we prayed. Not how much we fasted but why we fasted.

In the eyes of men it's quite different. They evaluate us by quantity in terms of the amount of work done. If you have done a lot of righteous deeds you get honor before men and yet all of that may be wood, hay and straw according to 1 Corinthians 3.13 to 15 just because the motivation for those righteous actions was selfish.

In men's eyes we get a lot of honor if we are known as those who pray for a long time but God places value on the reason why we pray rather than how much we pray. It's not a question of whether we spent

six hours on our knees it's a question of the motive with which we prayed whether it was the glory of God or honor for oneself or perhaps some satisfaction for our conscience. And we will discover according to that verse that we looked at in 1 Corinthians 3 that in the final day when we stand before the Lord the important question will be not what we did but why we did it.

In 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 31 Paul says that even our eating and drinking ordinary everyday activities like that must be done for the glory of God. Think of that every single thing that we do eating and drinking is the most ordinary thing that we do every day of our lives and he says there whatever you do whether you eat or drink do all to the glory of God. In the Old Testament there was such a thing as religious activity mostly done on the Sabbath and secular activity that people are engaged in the other six days of the week.

But when we come to the New Covenant there is no such distinction between the sacred and the secular. Everything is sacred. We are to do everything for the glory of God.

Jesus Christ is our example. For the first 30 years of his life he did not engage in what we would call religious ministry but he was glorifying God making stools and benches and working in his carpenter shop and obeying his earthly parents and there we see what it means to follow Jesus. It's not a question of preaching and healing the sick it's a question of doing everything for the glory of God.

A mother with children who does not have the opportunity to travel around preaching like other men can who are gifted can live for the glory of God and get as great a reward as a world traveling preacher if she does everything she does for the glory of God. The question is not how much a person travels or what he does but why does he do it. This is the main emphasis in all these verses verses 1 to 18.

Be careful. Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them otherwise you have no reward with your father who is in heaven. That's a very strong word.

That means that we can spend a lifetime engaging in righteous acts and doing all types of good things for the work of God and yet at the end of it get no reward from God at all. In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 it speaks about a man's work being burned up 1 Corinthians 3.15 in such a way that he suffers loss everything he lived for and did is burnt up but he himself is saved. It's speaking about a born again person who spent his lifetime doing a whole lot of good things not a heathen not someone who lived in a false religion but one who did everything for Christ and yet he sought honor for himself in it.

The result is that his life's work is burnt up. And so we see that it's not enough to say that we have like the couplet goes only one life and it will soon be past only what's done for Christ will last it's not enough to do it for Christ it's also necessary that we do it for the glory of God or the glory of Christ not our own personal glory in other words only what's done for the glory of Christ will last. There are a lot of other things that I do for Christ but in which I'm seeking the honor of men and in a sense of course that's not done for Christ at all it's just done for my own honor so we need to distinguish between work for the Lord and work done for the glory of God if we make that distinction then we shall see that our life's labors remain when they are finally tested by fire in the day of judgment.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/8/SID8303.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/matthew-ch521-48/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net