

November 7, 2021

“Living in Harmony With Others”
Lesson 2 of Unit

Matthew 5:17-26

Intro

In last week’s lesson, Jesus was teaching about the qualities needed to belong in the kingdom of heaven. Being a peacemaker. Having humility. Showing mercy. Having a hungry spiritual heart.

In the next part of the sermon, Jesus changes His focus from our kingdom qualities to the qualities needed to get along with our fellow human beings. We have all experienced some kind of conflict when dealing with others, whether at work, in the home, or elsewhere. That conflict is present because of human sin. Our rebellious natures not only put us in conflict with God—they put us in conflict with each other.

Today’s lesson passage deals with how God’s will for human behavior is to be put into practice in His kingdom.

Read Matthew 5:17-26

1. vs. 17: This verse acts like a set-up of the ideas Jesus will be developing in the sermon.

His ideas may sound radical to some, but they are based in the OT Law of Moses
He isn’t “replacing” Moses’ teaching; He is bringing those Laws into fulfillment

His words do two things:

- 1) He is verifying the value and the sacredness of God’s word through Moses
- 2) He is showing that the God of the OT is the same in the NT—no change

2. vs. 18: “I tell you the truth”

Jesus is establishing that He has authority to explain what God’s Word means

Not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will disappear

He uses this connection to the Hebrew writing to make a big point

Some letters in Hebrew are very small—a single line

Some have a small curve on one corner of them

Jesus compares those small writing elements to God’s OT words

Not the smallest part of God’s word will disappear before Jesus fulfills the OT Law

That fulfillment comes when He dies on the cross

not the fulfillment of the Law that most expect, but He is notifying them now

3. vs. 19: Two types here: those who live God’s life and teach others to do so, and those who break those commands and teach others to do that

Those that obey God’s laws will be “great” in His kingdom

Those who disobey will be the “least”

There is likely a subtle warning here about listening to Jesus vs. other teachers

4. vs. 20: Jesus here directly warns the people who not to follow closely

Follow God will result in a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees/law teachers

No doubt this would be a shocking idea to most of the people

Pharisees follow a strict line in observing the Law of Moses

Teachers of the Law were experts in what the Law said.

How can someone be more righteous than these two groups?

In the first part of the sermon, Jesus told them, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (5:7)

If being part of the kingdom requires a righteousness greater than the most righteous leaders of the time, then no one belongs based on personal righteousness.

If personal righteousness was the standard, then no one would need mercy

Also, the religious leaders’ righteousness is based on external behaviors

But Hosea 6:6 says, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”

God is looking for a heart bent toward holiness, not outward shows

People in His kingdom must have a righteousness from the heart

God desires this “heart holiness” more than following rules without understanding

5. vs. 21: Jesus gives His first example to true righteousness

“You have heard it said...”

He isn’t showing a different teaching than the Law

He is showing a difference between His teaching and others’ teaching re: the Law

6. vs. 22: Jesus’ point isn’t that the Law of Moses is incorrect to be against murder

“Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment”

The issue isn’t murder alone; it’s how one defines one’s righteousness

Avoiding murder doesn’t guarantee one is righteous.

Judgment belongs to God alone (see Matt. 7:1-2)

Before being angry with another, we should recognize our own sinfulness

We are subject to the same judgment as others; we aren’t different/better

His second example is calling someone “raca” (“empty-headed” in Aramaic)

This word is almost a swear word

Speaking this way is insulting another who, like us, was created in God’s image

The “punishment” of insulting another is to appear before the Sanhedrin

They were the judicial as well as the religious body of Judaism

The point being made is that a person who insults another in this way is just as guilty before the court as if they committed a murder

The third part is calling someone a “fool”

In Jesus’ day, that suggested the person was ignorant of God

A person saying this is passing judgment on that person’s relationship w/God

They are saying that person is not part of God’s people

A person trying to judge what only God is allowed to is in danger

7. vs. 23: How do we deal with conflict that will occur at times in relationships?

We imitate God

We seek reconciliation and to restore harmony in the relationship

He made reconciliation with Him possible by taking the first steps

We follow His lead and seek reconciliation with others first

Jesus talks about bringing a gift to the altar

The gift on the altar is there to seek forgiveness of sin from God

It is a very sacred and solemn act to take

The implication is that the one with the gift realizes a problem with another exists

That other person is also someone who God loves

That realization causes a different set of actions

8. vs. 24: “leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Jesus’ words tell his listeners that there is something more important to God than sacrifices

Reconciliation

All things in God’s kingdom have value and importance

Reconciliation with others comes before many of them, before sacrifice here

9. vs. 25: These last two verses deal with resolving conflict

Jesus uses the example of two people going to court over their conflict

Jesus encourages the same process as in vs. 24—seek reconciliation first

In vs. 25, there is a third party involved—the judge

A judge may rule against you even more harshly than the other person would have

The idea here is to act while there is still time

There is urgency to act before the judgment is final

For we Christians, there is an obvious application

We, as His followers, must seek reconciliation before it’s too late

Christ did that for us, and we are called to follow this example

Reconciliation is at the heart of our relationship with God

We need to reconcile with Him while there is still time

We need to reconcile with others quickly as well, so as not to miss an opportunity to show what God is like, and to show ourselves truly His followers

10. vs. 26: This verse shows the penalty in Jesus’ day

A debtor’s prison was harsh—you don’t get out until you pay

How do you pay back when you’re stuck in prison?

Getting out of the debt here seems nearly impossible

This idea isn’t meant as a way to show what eternal punishment is like

Jesus in the passage is stressing proper actions toward other people

The message in this verse is to seek reconciliation to avoid something uglier later

Application: God wants His people to do His will. In this passage, we fulfill His will by being reconciled to each other. This begins with a heart that is tender toward thinking and acting in a Christ-like manner. If we find ourselves in conflict with another person, especially another believer, we are called to take the first steps toward resolving that conflict. He did that for us, so we are called to act in that way toward others, for both their benefit and our own benefit.

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Prayer: Father God, thank You for reconciling us to Yourself through the death of Jesus. We used to be Your enemies, but now we get to claim You as our Father. We ask for You to help us break down any division between ourselves and others, whether in the church or outside of it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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