



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Five

Summary of Chapter Five

This is the great manifesto of the Kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the disciples, not to the crowds that he had drawn. It is not intended to be a social Gospel or to bring an end to suffering and wars. It is not for the future for it concerns the Kingdom age that Jesus introduced and will continue until his Second Coming.

Jesus was teaching his group of close followers some key Kingdom principles and correcting some of the main misinterpretations of the law, so that the Gospel could be properly explained by these men when it came time for them to take it out to the world.

Jesus started with a number of short statements that have become popularly known as The Beatitudes for each one starts with 'blessed are'. They show just how God bestows his favour on those that society often overlooks, revealing the type of heart characteristics he wants to see displayed in his people.

By stating that disciples are salt and light, Jesus informed them of the fundamental role they would have in proclaiming the Gospel and demonstrating its principles through their own lifestyles. All Jews, and today all disciples of Jesus, understand the power of God's grace. They are called to show that same grace to all other people they encounter, for grace is transforming as well as forgiving.

Jesus also wanted to make it clear that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it, for the law was given by God and was therefore perfect. Jesus was the primary focus of all that had been written about in Scripture.

Jesus then went onto to teach in short statements about various aspects of life that had become distorted through the misunderstanding of Scripture. These were matters of the heart, including the unacceptable consequences of anger, adultery, divorce, swearing falsely in God's name and retaliating to situations where reconciliation should be sought.

Jesus concludes the chapter by showing that love for neighbour, a key commandment in the Law of Moses, also means love for an enemy, for they too are neighbours, created in God's image.

IV Matthew 5:1-7:29 - The Authoritative Message of the Messiah: Kingdom Life for His Disciples (First Discourse)

This is the first of five major discourses in Matthew as recorded in Chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18-20; and 24-25. This one is better known as 'The Sermon on the Mount'. There is debate among scholars whether this constitutes a single historical discourse or is the composite of several teachings. There are valid arguments supporting either viewpoint. However, that does not detract from the validity of the teaching that is contained or how it can be adapted to meet the demands of living in the 21st Century.

Jesus summons those who would be his followers to radical devotion and radical dependence on God. His followers must be meek, must not retaliate, must go beyond the letter of the law to its spirit, must do what is right when only God is looking, must depend on God for their needs and pursue his interests rather than their own, and must leave spiritual measurements of others' hearts to God. In short, true people of the Kingdom live for God, not for themselves.

Speaking to his disciples, Jesus expounds the reality of discipleship lived in the presence and power of the Kingdom of God but within the everyday world. Some interpreters have thought the purpose of this sermon was to describe a moral standard so impossibly high that it is relevant only for a future millennial kingdom. Others have thought its primary purpose was to portray the absoluteness of God's moral perfection and thereby to drive people to despair of their own righteousness, so they will trust in the imputed righteousness of Christ. Both views fail to recognise that these teachings, rightly understood, form a challenging but practical ethic that Jesus expects his followers to live by in the present age.

The sermon, commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, is probably a summary of a longer message, but the structure is a unified whole. It has similarities to the Sermon on the Plain recorded in Luke 6:17-49, but there are also significant differences.

The three main theories about their relationship are:

1. They record the same sermon but Matthew and Luke give summaries that report different sections and emphases.
2. They record two different sermons, given on different occasions but repeating much of the same content, as itinerant preachers often do.
3. Either Matthew or Luke, or both, have collected sayings that Jesus gave on different occasions and put them together in a sermon format.

View (3) seems to make Matthew's presentation of this as a single historical event untruthful, and evangelical commentators have not generally adopted it. Views (1) and (2) are both possible, and it is difficult to decide between them.

IV.a Matthew 5:1-16 - Setting, Beatitudes, and witness of the Kingdom of heaven

Jesus' teaching and miracles had drawn crowds from all around the region, but here he addresses his growing group of disciple directly, for they are the ones who need to comprehend what the Kingdom is about.

In his Beatitudes, Jesus makes pronouncements to the crowds and religious leaders and gives instructions to his disciples concerning the nature of life in the Kingdom (vv.3-12).

He follows this with two piercing metaphors on salt and light to illustrate the impact that the disciples will have on the world around them (vv.13-16).

IV.a.i Matthew 5:1-12 - The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes all begin with 'Blessed are'. They are called beatitudes from Latin *beatus*, which means blessed or happy. These short statements summarise the essence of the Sermon on the Mount.

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Matthew 5:1

Jesus saw the crowds. The events told here follow on immediately from the preceding chapter: <<*And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judæa, and from beyond the Jordan*>> (Matthew 4:25).

Mountain. Although Matthew does not pinpoint the location, the traditional site of this sermon is above Tabgha, near Capernaum, on a range of hills northwest of the town that provide a magnificent view of the Sea of Galilee. A 20th Century church marks this site today, although down the hill in Tabgha there are the remains of a small Byzantine chapel, probably from the 4th Century, which also commemorated the sermon. This area is also likely where Jesus went to a deserted place: <<*Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns*>> (Matthew 14:13), and: <<*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed*>> (Mark 1:35), as well as where he went up on the mountain: <<*And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone*>> (Matthew 14:23), and: <<*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them*>> (Matthew 28:16).

He sat down. Teachers in Judaism typically taught while sitting: <<*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat*>> (Matthew 23:2), a position Jesus regularly assumed with the crowds standing: <<*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach*>> (Matthew 13:1-2), <<*After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of*

Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down>> (Matthew 15:29), <<*When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' Jesus answered them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray*>> (Matthew 24:3-4), and: <<*At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me*>> (Matthew 26:55). What Matthew is illustrating here is that Jesus had taken up the posture that would have been associated with the Teachers of the

Law or scribes. Jesus would later clarify that he was far superior to such men: <<for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes>> Matthew 7:29).

² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Matthew 5:2

Then he began to speak. The eternal Word now started to teach in earnest, not so much about what people should believe in, but what they should be doing. The last of the OT prophets had left an unanswered question: <<*Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'*>> (Malachi 3:7). Jesus would now begin to show them just how they could and should return to God. This was certainly part of wisdom's call as noted by Solomon: <<*Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand*>> (Proverbs 8:1-2).

While Jesus was seated, he taught them, i.e. his disciples who had come to him (v.1). Disciples, more precisely the Greek word for learners, were those who had made a commitment to Jesus as the Messiah; the crowds (v.1) were those who were curious and often astonished by his teaching and ministry: <<*Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes*>> (Matthew 7:28-29), yet for the most part they remained neutral and uncommitted. However, Matthew had deliberately mentioned the presence of the crowds for it is clear that Jesus wanted them to hear the Gospel message as well, for some of them may well become his disciples as a result.

It is also clear from the Gospels that Jesus taught them as much without words, i.e. by his manner, lifestyle and display of love, grace and compassion for all. Here, though, Jesus was again fulfilling prophetic Scripture: <<*All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children*>> (Isaiah 54:13). What he taught was: <<*the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness*>> (Titus 1:1b).

³ 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

Blessed is more than a temporary or circumstantial feeling of happiness, it is a state of well-being in relationship to God that belongs to those who respond to Jesus' ministry. In Deuteronomy 27:11-26, Moses describes how six tribes would be required to stand on Mount Ebal to read out the twelve explicit curses that would befall all Israel should they fail to stay with God. While in Deuteronomy 28:1-14, the other six tribes would stand on Mount Gerizim to read out the blessings, many of them implied, that would be theirs for remaining close in obedience to him. The fulfilment of this prophecy is recorded in Joshua Chapter 8. Here, the blessings are more explicit and aimed at a much wider group who would display the eight graces of a disciple.

The poor in spirit are those who recognise they are in need of God's help and show it in all humility. This is not weak in faith but being content to empty themselves of all their worldly desires; those content with their status and calling in life, not complaining and not proud of themselves for any personal achievements. Job demonstrated **poverty in spirit** by acknowledging that God gives and removes: *<<He said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord>>* (Job 1:21). Paul gave up most of his worldly privileges to become **poor in spirit**, which he acknowledges freely, such as: *<<For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God>>* (1 Corinthians 15:9). He has undoubtedly received his reward.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It belongs to those who confess their spiritual bankruptcy. In contrast to the first seven beatitudes, Jesus would later pronounce seven woes on the scribes and Pharisees as recorded in Matthew 23:13-36.

⁴ **'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

Matthew 5:4

Those who mourn. The spiritual, emotional, or financial loss resulting from sin should lead to mourning and a longing for God's forgiveness and healing: *<<For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death>>* (2 Corinthians 7:10). The repentant sinners are like **mourners** in their grief: *<<Put on sackcloth and lament, you priests; wail, you ministers of the altar. Come, pass the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God! Grain-offering and drink-offering are withheld from the house of your God>>* (Joel 1:13), and: *<<Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you>>* (James 4:9-10).

That **they will be comforted** links Jesus' promises to those of Scripture: *<<to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn>>* (Isaiah 61:2). There would shortly come a time for those who would soon mourn Christ: *<<and said to him, 'Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it'>>* (Ezekiel 9:4),

<<And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn>> (Zechariah 12:10). However, they would also be comforted by the knowledge of what his death and resurrection would bring: <<Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy>> (John 16:20).

⁵ **‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

Matthew 5:5

The meek are the gentle in heart and spirit, as was Jesus: <<Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls>> (Matthew 11:29). They are those who do not assert themselves over others in order to further their own agendas in their own strength, a quality Paul commands for believers: <<Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone>> (Titus 3:1-2), but who will nonetheless inherit the earth because they trust in God to direct the outcome of events. David had expressed a similar sentiment to that of Jesus here: <<But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight in abundant prosperity>> (Psalm 37:11).

⁶ **‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

Matthew 5:6

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness recognise that God is the ultimate source of real righteousness, so they long for his righteous character to be evident in people’s lives on earth. The imagery here is strong, for people who are genuinely hungry and thirsty will do whatever it takes to assuage their needs. That it is for the righteousness of God shows their hearts are right. God holds out a promise for such people: <<I will satisfy the weary, and all who are faint I will replenish>> (Jeremiah 31:25).

They will be filled or they shall be satisfied by responding to his invitation to be in relationship with him. There is also an association here that the Jews would recognise in the way God had sustained his people physically and spiritually during the wilderness years.

In the complimentary account in Luke’s Gospel, some commentators believe the emphasis to be more on physical hunger, although this is not clear: <<Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled>> (Luke 6:21a), whereas Matthew interprets Jesus’ words as spiritual, with believers trusting in God for all things, whether they have them or not: <<As a deer thirsts for streams of water, so I thirst for you, God. I thirst for the living God. When can I go to meet with him?>> (Psalm 42:1-2 NCV).

7 ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Matthew 5:7

The kindness and forgiveness that the merciful show to others will also be shown to them by their heavenly Father, although that should not be their motivating factor. Sadly, there are also too many people in the opposite camp: <<*Those who withhold kindness from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty*>> (Job 6:14). This should not deter those whose heart reflects the nature and character of God: <<*Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble*>> (Psalm 41:1).

8 ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matthew 5:8

The pure in heart are those whose pursuit of purity and uprightness affects every area of life. In contrast to Jewish traditions that overemphasised external ritual purity, Jesus taught that purity of heart was most important. Their reward will be to see God in the next life but they will also receive his care in this one: <<*Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation*>> (Psalm 24:4-5), as well as: <<*Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart*>> (Psalm 73:1).

They will see God. Note the ultimate fulfilment in: <<*Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads*>> (Revelation 22:3-4). Although there are instances where people have seen glimpses of God’s image, such as Moses: <<*And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, “The Lord”; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But’, he said, ‘you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live’*>> (Exodus 33:19-20), only Jesus had ever fully seen and known God the Father: <<*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known*>> (John 1:18).

9 ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

The peacemakers. The whole Gospel message is one that shows just how far God was prepared to go in order to restore peace with his creation. Therefore, he will not countenance his children to be at enmity with one another, or anyone else.

Those who promote God’s messianic peace, Hebrew *shalom*, i.e. total well-being both personally and communally, will receive the ultimate reward of being called children of God, for they reflect the character of their heavenly Father. Although the Jewish nation were God’s chosen people, Jesus opened up a new relationship with God for all people to become his true offspring: <<*But to all who received*

him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God>> (John 1:12), and: <<But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith>> (Galatians 3:25-26).

Within a decade of Matthew's Gospel coming into circulation, the Jewish converts especially would have been able to reflect on the relevance and truth of these words in light of the folly of the Roman-Jewish War of AD66-73 that had resulted in the destruction of the Temple, much of Jerusalem and in essence the whole Jewish state of Israel. Paul confirms his understanding of Jesus' teaching: *<<If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all>> (Romans 12:18)*. Jesus' teaching extends this to not just living peaceably but living in harmony.

¹⁰ **'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Matthew 5:10

Those who are persecuted are those who have been wrongly treated because of their faith. God is pleased when his people show that they value him above everything in the world, and this happens when they courageously remain faithful amid opposition for righteousness' sake.

¹¹ **'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you, on my account. Jesus switches to the second person plural for this final blessing, directed specifically on those listening to him, and by association all disciples ever since. Just as Jesus experienced opposition and persecution, his disciples can expect the same. Their reward may not come on earth, but it surely will be theirs in heaven. The apostles were indeed among the first to suffer persecution after being severely flogged on the orders of the Sanhedrin, yet: *<<As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name>> (Acts 5:41)*, something they had repeatedly been warned would happen: *<<If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you>> (John 15:18)*, and: *<<They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God>> (John 16:2)*.

In the same way they persecuted the prophets. Throughout history, beginning with Cain's murder of Abel: *<<Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him>> (Genesis 4:8)*, and: *<<We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him?*

Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous>> (1 John 3:12), there have been those who oppose God's people. This will always be so in this life.

Servants of God have always been treated this way: <<*The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy>> (2 Chronicles 36:15-16), <<As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord>> (James 5:10), and they always will be. In fact, Paul promises: <<Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted>> (2 Timothy 3:12).*

IV.a.ii Matthew 5:13-16 - Salt and Light

Here Jesus reveals the important role that disciples are to play by demonstrating Kingdom principles through the way they live their own lives. He also shows that one who professes to be a disciple and yet does not live by Kingdom principles has little or no value whatsoever. The faithlessness of nominal Christians can always be used as an excuse for non-believers remaining in their unbelief.

¹³ **'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.**

Matthew 5:13

Just as salt is beneficial in a number of ways, e.g. as a preservative, seasoning, for cleansing wounds, etc, so too are disciples of Jesus, who influence the world for good. Jesus is not so much referring to the good deeds that are the natural outworking of faith but the good character that is inherent through true faith in Christ, which Paul alludes to in relation to the spoken word: <<**Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone>> (Colossians 4:6).**

Well kept salt is enduring in all its qualities, therefore God used it to describe his everlasting covenant: <<**All the holy offerings that the Israelites present to the Lord I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due; it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord for you and your descendants as well>> (Numbers 18:19). Likewise, the Gospel is everlasting.**

Salt is a key component of all the sacrificial offerings: <<**You shall not omit from your grain-offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt>> (Leviticus 2:13), showing how God honours the qualities represented in good salt. Indeed, Pliny wrote: 'Without salt human life cannot be sustained'.**

It is no longer good for anything. Once salt has lost its saltiness, there is nothing that can restore it to usefulness. One commentator writes: 'A disciple whose life reveals none of the Father's works is like invisible light for vision: useless'.

14 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:14

Light of the world. Jesus' disciples have the Kingdom life within them as a living testimony to those in the world who do not yet have the light. The true light is Jesus: <<*in him was life, and the life was the light of all people*>> (John 1:4), <<*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'*>> (John 8:12), and: <<*I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness*>> (John 12:46). The light was reflected in Paul's words: <<*For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light*>> (Ephesians 5:8), which is beneficial to the believer and will attract non-believers to the faith like moths to a flame.

A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. Towns and cities were often built on hills as this offered natural protection against attack. Jerusalem was built on a series of hills and thus one always went down from or up to Jerusalem: <<*At that time the servants of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged*>> (2 Kings 24:10). This was the same with others: <<*As they went up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and said to them, 'Is the seer here?'*>> (1 Samuel 9:11), and: <<*He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he fortified the hill, and called the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill*>> (1 Kings 16:24), where Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the split. They also represented significant landmarks that could be seen from a great distance away. Likewise, disciples of Jesus are to be recognised as such for what they naturally do.

15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matthew 5:15

The typical lamp of a Jewish home was fairly small and was placed on a lampstand to give maximum illumination. The analogy here is that believers must reflect the light of Christ that is in them through their lifestyle choices, so that others will be attracted to him through what they see. A Christian is not meant to be hidden in the crowd but the one that stands out of a crowd, illuminating all who are around them, for they have the Spirit of Christ within them.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

The world will see the light of the Kingdom through the good works done by Jesus' disciples, then and now, with the result that the Father in heaven will be glorified, something that was always close to Jesus' heart: <<*glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you*>> (John 17:1b). Disciples of Christ should be clearly

visible for who they are and what they represent. This is often seen through what they do for others as it reflects the character of Christ: *<<He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds>>* (Titus 2:14).

This is nothing new for God had always required his people to be a light for the whole world: *<<I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations>>* (Isaiah 42:6), and: *<<he says, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'>>* (Isaiah 49:6).

IV.b Matthew 5:17-48 - The messianic Kingdom in relation to the law

As if Jesus' words in vv.3-16 were not strong enough, he presents even more stringent demands of the Kingdom in these verses. While various groups of Christians today may differ concerning exactly how Jesus intended his disciples to interpret the law, one point is clear: Jesus was not an antinomian. He expected his followers to understand and apply the moral principles already revealed in Scripture, then to build Kingdom principles on top of that foundation.

Verses 17-20 explain how Jesus and the Kingdom fulfil the Law of Moses; this is the key to interpreting the Sermon on the Mount and indeed the whole of Jesus' ministry. Jesus then offers six antitheses (vv.21-48) that contrast proper and false interpretation and application of the OT.

IV.b.i Matthew 5:17-20 - The Law and the Prophets

This passage seems to suggest that an uncommitted Christian is not a Christian at all. Like other Jewish teachers, Jesus demanded whole obedience to the Scriptures; unlike most of his contemporaries, however, he was not satisfied with the performance of scribes and Pharisees, observing that this law observance fell short even of the demands of salvation. After grabbing his hearers' attention with such a statement, Jesus went on to define God's law, not simply in terms of how people behave, but in terms of who they really are.

Jesus made it clear that his teaching in no way contradicted or superseded the Scriptures, for he was the fulfilment of them. These two elements of Scripture were crucial to life for a Jew and any misunderstanding of Jesus' purpose would have harmed his message. What Jesus' teaching would do was to correct misunderstandings that had come into Jewish thinking and teaching over the generations through their traditions.

¹⁷ 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.

Matthew 5:17

Abolish the Law or the Prophets. The Law or Torah refers to the first five books of the OT, while the Prophets includes much of the remainder of the OT, although all of the OT was held to have been written by prophets: *<<This was to fulfil*

what had been spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world'>> (Matthew 13:35), which quotes Psalm 78:2.

This announcement by Jesus would have been received as good news to the pious Jews among his disciples, for they were brought up on the Scriptures and would have identified with them closely. It should also be remembered that Jesus was himself a devout Jew: *<<But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children>> (Galatians 4:4-5).* He was circumcised on the 8th day, kept the Sabbath, honoured his father and mother, but above all brought glory to his Father. This passage also shows that Jesus did not come to establish a new religion or faith system but to correct misunderstandings about an ancient one, fulfilling the promises it held for those who would seek God. He would turn an outline sketch into a beautiful painting.

The Law and the Prophets are a recurrent theme in the NT: *<<In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets>> (Matthew 7:12), <<For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came>> (Matthew 11:13), <<On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets>> (Matthew 22:40), and: <<But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets>> (Romans 3:21).* They were at the heart of Jewish life.

But to fulfil them. Jesus clearly conveyed his faithfulness and adherence to Scripture. Jesus fulfils all of the OT in that it all points to him, not only in its specific predictions of a Messiah but also in its sacrificial system, which looked forward to his great sacrifice of himself; in many events in the history of Israel which foreshadowed his life as God's true Son; in the laws which only he perfectly obeyed; and in the Wisdom Literature, which sets forth a behavioural pattern that his life exemplified: *<<and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son'>> (Matthew 2:15), <<He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here>> (Matthew 12:3-6), <<But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! The queen of the South will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!>> (Matthew 12:39-42), and: <<Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he*

interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures>> (Luke 24:27). Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom does not replace the OT but rather fulfils it, as Jesus' life and ministry, coupled with his interpretation, complete and clarify God's intent and meaning in the entire OT.

¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18

Until heaven and earth pass away. Jesus confirms the full authority of the OT as Scripture for all time: <<*and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*>> (2 Timothy 3:15-16), even down to the smallest letter of the written text: the *iota*, letter I, is the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, or more likely the *yod*, letter Y, of the Hebrew alphabet, and one stroke of a letter refers to the tiny dots and marks used to differentiate between Hebrew letters, which are known as *niqqud*.

Apparently, when God changed Sarai's name: <<*God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name'*>> (Genesis 17:15), the *yod* disappeared from Scripture and did not reappear until another name was changed: <<*These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua*>> (Numbers 13:16). The name Joshua in Hebrew is virtually the same as Jesus.

Pass from the Law. The OT remains an authoritative compendium of divine testimony and teaching, within which some elements, such as sacrifices and other ceremonial laws, predicted or foreshadowed events that would be accomplished in Jesus' ministry, and so are not now models for Christian behaviour. They have not been dropped from the law, been superseded or circumvented. In the coming of Christ, they were fulfilled.

Until all is accomplished points to Jesus' fulfilment of specific OT hopes, partly through his earthly life, death, and resurrection; then more fully through his Second Coming to perfect his work and claim his inheritance.

¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks 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.

Matthew 5:19

These commandments refers to all the commands in the OT, although many would be applied differently once their purpose has been fulfilled in Christ. The rabbis recognised a distinction between light commandments, such as tithing garden

produce, and weighty commandments, such as those concerning blasphemy, idolatry, murder, etc.

Breaks one of the least of these commandments. Jesus demands a commitment to both the least and the greatest commandments, yet condemns those who confuse the two: *<<Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!>>* (Matthew 23:23-24). The entire OT is the expression of God's will but is now to be taught according to Jesus' interpretation of its intent and meaning, which tends to raise the bar to new heights.

Ultimately, Jesus is saying that disciples cannot pick and choose between parts of Scripture to adhere to and which they can ignore. All commands are to be kept.

Called least in the kingdom of heaven seems to imply that there is still hope for such people to come to saving faith and will not necessarily be excluded from eternal life. Later on, Jesus said: *<<Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he>>* (Matthew 11:11), which may seem contradictory. It is not, for it reflects the fact that those in the Kingdom of Heaven have the greater privilege because they have actually entered the Kingdom, in its new covenant reality, and become partakers in the new covenant through the blood of Christ, whereas John died before the crucifixion and was therefore part of the old covenant. Ultimately though, those who served God faithfully under the old covenant will surely partake fully in the new life to come.

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20

Jesus calls his disciples to a different kind and quality of righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees. They held high office, knew the Scriptures, or at least their interpretation of them, were diligent in ceremonial duty and taught others to do likewise. They took pride in outward conformity to many extra-biblical regulations but still had impure hearts: *<<They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long>>* (Matthew 23:5), and: *<<Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness>>* (Matthew 23:27-28). Jesus calls for his disciples to give to God not just what is outward but all that is innermost - the heart and the whole self.

Kingdom righteousness works from the inside out because it first produces changed hearts and new motivations: *<<But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of*

teaching to which you were entrusted>> (Romans 6:17), <<*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*>> (2 Corinthians 5:17), <<*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things*>> (Galatians 5:22-23), <<*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*>> (Philippians 2:12), and: <<*This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*>> (Hebrews 8:10), so that the actual conduct of Jesus' followers does in fact exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

God never intended that people should simply follow the rules; he wants them to seek holiness just as he is holy and therefore he provides guidelines that help those who worship him to seek that path to holiness and true life.

Jesus never doubted the commitment to God of the religious leaders or their right to teach the people. It was their lack of understanding what God really required them to address, and then conform to the correct teaching as seen in Jesus, so they could in turn pass that on to others. Jesus would later explain this to Nicodemus: <<*Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'* Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?>> (John 3:5-10). Peter grasped what Jesus was saying: <<*You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God*>> (1 Peter 1:23).

IV.b.ii Matthew 5:21-26 - Concerning Anger

Jesus is forthright in correcting misunderstandings of traditional teaching, showing that unwarranted anger against others people is as bad as a physical assault on them. Jesus calls for reconciliation to be sought even before bringing a sacrificial offering to God, which generally means coming into communion with him.

²¹ 'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement."

Matthew 5:21

You have heard was an accepted way of teaching by Jesus' contemporaries and was understood that they were not about to contradict a point of law but explain it more fully. It also indicates that Jesus was speaking to Jews and those well versed in Scripture. Jesus will use this statement five times in this chapter. It is

used perhaps in the spirit intended by the prophet: <<*You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known*>> (Isaiah 48:6), and was subsequently picked up by other NT authors: <<*Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*>> (2 Timothy 1:13), <<*Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful*>> (James 5:11), <<*And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning – you must walk in it*>> (2 John 6).

Premeditated murder or such murder that results from anger, is prohibited by the sixth commandment: <<*You shall not murder*>> (Exodus 20:13), and under OT law carried the death penalty: <<*Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is subject to the death penalty; a murderer must be put to death*>> (Numbers 35:31). The prohibition is grounded in the fact that humans are created in the image of God: <<*Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*>> (Genesis 1:26-27), and: <<*Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind*>> (Genesis 9:6). Concerning unpremeditated killing, i.e. unintentional manslaughter or self-defence, the law made provision by building cities of refuge throughout the land to which the perpetrator could retreat in order to avoid retribution from the relatives of the victim of the accidental killing.

There is debate among scholars whether this should read murder or kill. The imperative is against unlawful killing resulting in bloodguilt. The Hebrew Bible contains numerous prohibitions against unlawful killing, but also allows for justified killing in the context of warfare, capital punishment, and self-defence. The law does not prohibit fighting in wars to protect one’s own land or the values their country holds. Whether any particular war is justifiable depends on whose side you are on. God will be the ultimate judge of those who call for war and of those who fight in them, especially if they commit atrocities in doing so.

²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool”, you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Matthew 5:22

Angry. The dangerous and destructive effect of human anger is likewise stressed throughout Scripture: <<*The dread anger of a king is like the growling of a lion; anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself*>> (Proverbs 20:2), <<*One*

given to anger stirs up strife, and the hothead causes much transgression>> (Proverbs 29:22), *<<For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder>>* (2 Corinthians 12:20), *<<Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions>>* (Galatians 5:19-20), *<<Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice>>* (Ephesians 4:31), *<<But now you must get rid of all such things – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth>>* (Colossians 3:8), and: *<<You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness>>* (James 1:19-20).

Anger typically entails a desire to damage or destroy the other person, either in some personal way or literally in the form of murder (v.21), and: *<<Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask>>* (James 4:1-2).

Anger in itself would not be liable to judgement in a human court but is clearly going to be judged when the Day of Judgement comes, therefore be liable to the council is not intended to refer to the Sanhedrin but the heavenly court. John sees hatred and anger towards fellow believers on par with murder: *<<All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them>>* (1 John 3:15), showing his understanding of the Kingdom principles that Jesus was teaching.

Angry with a brother or sister does not refer just to a natural sibling or, as often used elsewhere, a fellow Jew. The tone intimates that Jesus means that everyone is a brother or sister for all are created in God’s image.

Calling someone a fool is closely related to anger, something reflected by Solomon’s words: *<<Do not be quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools>>* (Ecclesiastes 7:9). For it represents a destructive attack on one’s good name, character and identity. Thus Jesus warns that the person who violates another person in this grievous way is liable to the hell of fire, that is, eternal damnation.

Of course, Jesus intends it here in the context of calling a person a fool as an insult, borne out of anger, and not in the context of warning them of their foolish behaviour, such as: *<<You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?>>* (Matthew 23:17), and *<<But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”>>* (Luke 12:20), where in each case it is used in grieved indignation and not meant as a personal insult, or intended to be in anyway harmful. In terms of righteous anger, Paul’s advice is: *<<Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger>>* (Ephesians 4:26).

²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:23-24

First be reconciled. Reconciliation with the person who has something against you must take precedence even over offering one's gift in worship, which includes time in prayer, a church service, or formal communion. The one who initiates the reconciliation here is the one who has wronged the other person. However, the wronged person can also seek genuine reconciliation without in any way lessening the offence that was committed against them.

A believer's relationship with God is reflected in their relationships with others. Therefore, the command is to leave your gift there before the altar and go because the gift is not acceptable to God until the heart is right to offer it to him.

²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Matthew 5:25-26

Come to terms quickly. The importance of reconciliation is illustrated by the example of the person who is about to be judged in court. Not to be reconciled will have disastrous consequences on a human level but much more so if one is not reconciled to God before this life ends.

Your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard. This statement is plain enough in human terms but offers up some conundrums in Kingdom terms. The accuser is Greek *antidikos* which Peter uses once to describe the devil: <<*Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour*>> (1 Peter 5:8), with judge, Greek *krites*, being the one who has ultimate authority to pass judgement, probably indicating Christ: <<*While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead*>> (Acts 17:30-31), with the guard being an angel, who would carry out the appropriate punishment. It is not possible to consider God as judge and Christ as guard, or vice versa, for the Greek word used for guard is *huperetes*, which is a lowly position. Christ is a fair and faithful judge but one to be feared by the unrepentant: <<*Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated*

on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'>> (Revelation 6:15-17).

Thrown into prison refers to hell in Kingdom terms and there will be no chance of release once this life is over.

You will never get out until you have paid the last penny applied literally for those imprisoned for unpaid debt. In Kingdom terms, the debt is fully paid for those who repent and believe, but for those who choose not to, the debt will never be paid. Through a variety of terrible images, Jesus indicates that when believers damage their relationships with others, they damage their relationship with God, leading ultimately to eternal punishment. Believers must profess their faith with their lives as well as with their lips.

The last penny, Greek *kodrant*, was the second smallest coin in circulation and was equivalent to only a few minutes' wages for a labourer. This demonstrates the high standards that Jesus is setting for those who would follow him. There are no half measures.

Wherever possible, disputes between believers should be either reconciled by the individuals concerned, or with the help of appropriate disinterested church leaders who have no personal bias or vested interest in the outcome. However, in serious legal matters there is nothing in Scripture that says a believer should not bring a law suit against another, for the civil authorities have been instituted by God to bring justice in this life: <<*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*>> (Romans 13:1).

IV.b.iii Matthew 5:27-30 - Concerning Adultery

Adultery had always been a serious offence morally, legally and culturally. Jesus once again confirms what the law teaches and raises the bar on its interpretation.

²⁷ 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."

Matthew 5:27

Adultery was considered an extremely serious offense: <<*You shall not commit adultery*>> (Exodus 20:14) because, in addition to violating another person, it broke the marriage covenant: <<*You ask, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant*>> (Malachi 2:14), that was a reflection of the relationship between God and his people.

²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5:28

Look at a woman with lust, for which the Greek is literally ‘for the purpose of lusting for her’. This teaching would have been a blow to many of Jesus’ listeners as sexual lust was considered a normal and healthy pastime for many males. This remains in evidence in many 21st Century cultures. There are plenty of Christians who agree with Jesus’ teaching and yet do not obey it! Job set the right standard: *<<I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?>>* (Job 31:1).

Lust begins in the heart, the centre of a person’s identity and will. It is not enough to maintain physical purity alone; one must also guard against engaging mentally in an act of unfaithfulness, which here is rightly classed as sin: *<<But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death>>* (James 1:14-15), and: *<<They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!>>* (2 Peter 2:14). Jesus is not adding to OT law but correcting how it should be interpreted, for even in the Ten Commandments God had required purity of heart: *<<You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour>>* (Exodus 20:17), confirmed by: *<<But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’>>* (1 Samuel 16:7), *<<Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer>>* (Psalm 19:14), and: *<<Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully>>* (Psalm 24:4). It is worth noting that the Greek word used for covet in the 10th Commandment is the same word that Jesus uses here for lust.

In a literal sense, the 10th Commandment was not enforceable in human terms. Therefore, Jesus converts it to align with the Commandment on adultery, which was enforceable by the Jewish courts. For Paul it was this commandment that highlighted the true potency of sin and its power to lead all into unrighteousness: *<<What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me>>* (Romans 7:7-10).

Many Jewish writers commanded that women should be veiled to avoid lust. Even Paul teaches: *<<For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil>>* (1 Corinthians 11:6). However, Jesus clearly places the responsibility on the one doing the lusting! It should be noted that love and lust are antithetical.

In light of such lustful intent, committed adultery with her in his heart, can be extended to committed pre-marital fornication in his heart where applicable to those who lust after single women.

The Greek construct indicates the deliberate harbouring of desire for an illicit relationship and therefore excludes the natural recognition of attractiveness between the two sexes. After all, this was part of God's design for procreation.

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5:29-30

Right eye, right hand. The right side often stood for the more powerful or important as the majority of people are right-handed. The eye is the medium through which one is tempted to lust, and the hand represents the physical actions that result from lusting.

Tear it out and throw it away. Gouging out one's eye cannot prevent lust; people can still lust with their eyes closed. Thus Tertullian warns that Christians need not blind themselves as Democritus did, but must simply guard their minds; he contends that 'the Christian is born masculine for his wife and for no other woman', Apology 46.11-12. Jesus is declaring in a graphic manner that by whatever means necessary, one should cast off this sin.

Cut it off. Jesus uses deliberate overstatement to emphasise the importance of maintaining exclusive devotion to one's spouse. Even things of great value should be given up if they are leading a person to sin. Many countries have adopted amputations as punishment for transgressions. However, it seems unlikely that this is what Jesus intended here. It is more likely an indication of just how seriously he views all transgressions of this nature.

Jesus is clearly teaching just how much value God places on marital and pre-marital fidelity. At a time when the issue of gay marriage in church is causing a lot of soul searching, it seems strange that nothing is said of the many churchgoers who live with a partner, openly have casual relationships, or indeed the churches who are prepared to marry couples who have no intention of honouring God, and Christening their children with godparents giving oaths they do not understand to a God they do not know. It is no wonder that people do not want to go to such churches.

IV.b.iv Matthew 5:31-32 - Concerning Divorce

By Jesus' day, the laws of divorce had become too loosely translated by some, causing misery for many women through no fault of their own. The school of Hillel allowed a husband to divorce his wife for almost any reason, including burning his dinner (Mishnah, Gittin 9:10). However, the school of Shammai interpreted the law

more narrowly, allowing divorce only in the case of adultery, which is more in keeping with what Jesus taught.

³¹ 'It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 5:31-32

A certificate of divorce in the ancient world gave a woman the right to remarry, e.g. Mishnah, Gittin 9.3: The essential formula in the bill of divorce is 'Lo, thou art free to marry any man', and reflects the fact that divorce and remarriage were widely accepted and practiced in the 1st Century world. The man requesting such a divorce would need to do so in the presence of two or three credible witnesses, probably including a priest, and the documents formally drafted.

But I say to you indicates that Jesus does not accept the practice of easy divorce represented in v.31. Because divorce was widespread in ancient times, God had instituted a regulation through Moses that was intended to uphold the sanctity of marriage and to protect women from being divorced for no reason. Here and in Matthew 19:3-9 Jesus bases his teaching on God's original intention that marriage should be a permanent union of a man and woman as one flesh: <<"**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.**" So they are no longer two, but one flesh>> (Mark 10:7-8). Divorce breaks that union.

Unchastity or sexual immorality translates the Greek word *porneia*, and can refer to adultery: <<**Because she took her whoredom so lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree**>> (Jeremiah 3:9); prostitution: <<**Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries, and peoples through her sorcery**>> (Nahum 3:4); incest: <<**It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife**>> (1 Corinthians 5:1); or fornication: <<**About three months later Judah was told, 'Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom.'** And Judah said, 'Bring her out, and let her be burned'>> (Genesis 38:24), <<**'You are indeed doing what your father does.'** They said to him, 'We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself'>> (John 8:41), <<**'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food', and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body**>> (1 Corinthians 6:13), and: <<**Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself**>> (1 Corinthians 6:18). Scripture prohibits any kind of sexual intercourse outside of marriage, thus forbidding the practice of homosexuality and bestiality as well.

Except on the ground of unchastity. This implies that when a divorce is obtained, by the injured party, because of the sexual immorality of one's spouse, then such a divorce is not morally wrong. But when a man divorces his wife wrongly, i.e.

when his wife has not been sexually immoral, the husband thus causes her to commit adultery when she remarries. Even though some female Jewish divorcees would have gone back to live with their parents in shame, many would have sought to remarry, which seems to be the typical situation that Jesus is addressing here. Jesus is thus indicating that such second marriages begin by committing adultery, since the divorce would not have been valid in God's eyes. As to whether the adultery is considered a one off or continual sin, refer to comments made on Matthew 19:9. However, Jesus places primary blame on the husband who has wrongly divorced his wife, by stating that the husband forces his ex-wife to commit adultery.

Whoever marries a divorced woman is not an isolated statement that applies to all divorced women, or it would contradict the 'except' clause that Jesus had just given, as well as the further exception: <<***But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you***>> (1 Corinthians 7:15). The statement rather continues the same subject that Jesus had mentioned earlier in the sentence, and thus means, whoever marries such a wrongly divorced woman commits adultery.

This passage can cause many people a lot of grief unless understood in the context of rhetorical overstatement that Jesus uses throughout this chapter. God clearly intends lifelong marriage between one man and one woman. However, where there is irreconcilable breakdown in a marriage, perhaps involving physical or psychological violence, then surely God would not expect the injured party to live in such a sham marriage, especially if they had done all within their power to be a good spouse. After all, there is more to faithfulness in a marriage than sexual fidelity. Jesus seems to be focusing more on the legality of divorce than the illegality of the second marriage. There is certainly no indication that he intended discrimination by the church against people who have been married more than once. Each case should be treated on its individual circumstances and merits.

There is a document concerning biblical issues around marriage, faithfulness and divorce in the About section of the website.

IV.b.v Matthew 5:33-37 - Concerning Oaths

Under both the law and according to custom, Jews often made vows to God, whether through a formal process such as a Nazirite vow, or a promise made to God in prayer. All such vows were binding on the individual until external circumstances existed that made it impossible to fulfil the vow. The religious leaders had brought in traditions and interpretations to relax the rules, making it acceptable for people to make oaths to God in public that they had no real intention of keeping.

The key point of this passage is integrity. Jesus teaches that oaths to God are sacred and should not be made unless they are real commitments of the heart. This is in keeping with the law: <<***Whatever your lips utter you must diligently perform, just as you have freely vowed to the Lord your God with your own mouth***>> (Deuteronomy 23:23), but Jesus is also alluding again to the Ten Commandments for the 3rd states: <<***You shall not make wrongful use of the***

name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name>> (Exodus 20:7). All oaths, whether made to God, in the name of God or something associated with him, to or by anything else should always be kept by his followers. However, the best advice is to avoid them, but live a life true to God that does not require oaths in the first place.

³³ ‘Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.” ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No”; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33-37

To swear an oath or make a vow involved invoking God’s name, or more often substitutes for it, in order to guarantee the truth of one’s statements: <<*When a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth*>> (Numbers 30:2).

Jesus’ disciples are not only called to not swear falsely, they are not to swear at all. King Solomon was in agreement: <<*When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfil what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfil it*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5), so too James: <<*Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your ‘Yes’ be yes and your ‘No’ be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation*>> (James 5:12), where he seems to be quoting from Jesus directly, as his epistle pre-dates the Gospels. Instead, the character of Jesus’ disciples should be of such integrity that their words can be believed without an oath. His point is not so much that the oath is wrong but it is the heart’s motivation behind making the oath that is the issue.

By heaven, the earth, by Jerusalem, by your head. It had become common practice among the Jews not to give an oath in God’s name but by something closely associated to him. The further removed the item was from God, the easier it was for them to fail to keep the oath.

You cannot make one hair white or black does not refer to the use of hair dyes but to the fact that one cannot change the natural hair pigmentation or prevent the aging process that often turns it white.

Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No”. Disciples are to be truthful and to keep their promises. They are to say what they mean and mean what they say. After all, it is God who will judge them and before him all is revealed: <<*So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known*>> (Matthew 10:26).

Comes from the evil one. Those who fail to keep their word are shown to be more than unreliable, they make themselves out to be liars, just like Satan: <<*You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies*>> (John 8:44).

The strict Jewish sect the Essenes avoided taking oaths and sought to live by the truth of Scripture. Josephus records that 'you could trust the word of an Essene more than another man's oath.' Jesus would wish this to be said of all of his disciples.

The bible records the sad story of Jephthah's vow: <<*And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt-offering'*>> (Judges 11:30-31), where it was his only daughter who came to meet him, causing him deep distress in keeping the vow.

IV.b.vi Matthew 5:38-42 - Concerning Retaliation

Jesus teaches that when someone is hurt in some way, their first reaction should be to seek reconciliation and resolution to the problem, and not to seek retribution. However, he does not teach against the principle of self-defence, avoiding conflicts or seeking justice when seriously wronged.

³⁸ 'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Matthew 5:38

An eye for an eye. This law of retaliation, Latin *lex talionis*, was God's means of maintaining justice and purging evil from among his people: <<*The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot*>> (Deuteronomy 19:20-21). It was intended to prevent inappropriate punishment, for the punishment should fit the crime, being the least that would match the damage caused, and was expected to be imposed by the civil authorities rather than by individuals. Jesus is calling for a response of humble faith and trust in God rather than for people to seek their own ideas of justice, which should always be qualified with mercy and grace.

³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

Matthew 5:39-41

Do not resist an evildoer. Jesus is not prohibiting the use of force by governments, police, or soldiers when combating evil. Rather, Jesus' focus here is

on individual conduct, as indicated by the contrast with v.38, which shows that he is prohibiting the universal human tendency to seek personal revenge.

Paul would show that his own understanding of this extended to not resisting the legal requirements of government, even if it were a government of foreign occupation as was Rome, qualifying his reasoning: <<*Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement*>> (Romans 13:2).

Dietrich Bonhöffer, a pacifist Christian who opposed Hitler's regime, ultimately decided to participate in an assassination attempt against Hitler. He preferred to 'do evil rather than to be evil', arguing that tolerating such an evil as Hitler was tantamount to supporting that evil. The plot failed, and Bonhöffer was executed with his co-conspirators. Pacifism is a matter of the correct balance and degree to which evil should be tolerated for the greater good.

If anyone strikes you on the right cheek pictures a backhanded slap intended as an insult, as a right-handed person would use the back of the hand to slap someone on the right cheek; Mishnah, Baba Kamma 8.6. The word strikes translates the Greek word *rhapizō*, i.e. to slap or to strike with the open hand. Such a slap is not so much painful or physically damaging, as to a public affront to a person's dignity. The prophet wrote that: <<*to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults*>> (Lamentations 3:30), would be better than responding in like manner.

Good prophets were often slapped by those who opposed their message: <<*Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and said, 'Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?'*>> (1 Kings 22:24), <<*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting*>> (Isaiah 50:6), and: <<*with a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek*>> (Micah 5:1b), the latter two were both messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus' mistreatment: <<*When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?'*>> (John 18:22-23), and: <<*Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophecy!' The guards also took him over and beat him*>> (Mark 14:65).

Turn the other also. One should not return an insulting slap, which would lead to escalating violence. In the case of a more serious assault, Jesus' words should not be taken to prohibit self-defence or fleeing from evil: <<*Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear; but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. David fled and escaped that night*>> (1 Samuel 19:10), <<*They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way*>> (Luke 4:29-30), and: <<*In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas set a guard on the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands*>> (2 Corinthians 11:32-33), for often a failure to resist a violent attack leads to even more serious abuse, benefitting no one.

Those who are secure in their relationship with God have little regard for their personal honour. By not retaliating and receiving dishonouring abuse with grace they demonstrate a strong allegiance to Christ.

Give your cloak as well. Jesus is alluding to the law that made it illegal for anyone to keep a poor man's outer garment as an overnight pledge for it acted as his bedcover to keep him warm at night: <<*If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbour's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbour cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate*>> (Exodus 22:26-27). Thus Jesus demands that believers surrender the very possession the law explicitly protects from legal seizure. To force his hearers to think, Jesus provides a shockingly graphic, almost humorous illustration of what he means by non-resistance. His hearers who fail to accept his teaching show they value honour and possessions more than they value the Kingdom.

If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Roman soldiers had the right to conscript anyone into forced labour and it was not unusual for them to require someone to carry their equipment for a distance of **one mile**, before finding another conscript to continue the work. Yet 'going the extra mile' represents not only submitting to unjust demands but actually exceeding them, showing the oppressors that they are loved and the believer takes no offense at their actions. While early Christians responded to their persecutors with defiant love and humility that the persecutors often viewed as arrogance, many politically zealous Christians today guard their rights so fiercely that they are easily given to anger, which opponents also view as arrogance.

Acting in love toward an attacker: <<*And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"*>> (Matthew 22:39), as demonstrated in v.42, will often include taking steps to prevent him from attempting further attacks. Jesus' teaching must be applied with wisdom in the light of related Scriptures that address similar situations.

⁴² **Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.**

Matthew 5:42

Give to everyone who begs from you. Christians should help those who are truly needy, and therefore forced to beg, but they are not required to give foolishly: <<*Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you*>> (Matthew 7:6), or to a lazy person who is not in need and where there are opportunities for them to help themselves out of their situation: <<*For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:10), or where giving would bring harm rather than benefit. This is often seen where money or even items of food that can be sold are given, and the gift used in exchange for alcohol or drugs.

Ultimately, this is another test for believers to demonstrate how much they value Kingdom principles and their trust in God to provide for all their needs. In

Jesus' day, a strong work ethic and giving to beggars were the norm, for beggars generally did so because they had no other choice. Jesus places no cap on giving. There is no mention of a 10% tithe. Jesus leaves it up to each individual to seek their own heart and belief system to determine how they view what they have and how much of it they are willing to share with others.

IV.b.vii Matthew 5:43-48 - Love for Enemies

Again, Jesus corrects the interpretation of Scripture for in reality everyone is a neighbour and therefore should be loved. Jesus demonstrates his point by highlighting the common grace of God, which is poured out on all people in all circumstances, irrespective of their relationship with God.

⁴³ 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy."

Matthew 5:43

You shall love your neighbour is a directive from God and a key principle in Jewish society: <<*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus identified it as one of the two great commandments that should shape the lives of all believers: <<*One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these*'>> (Mark 12:28-31).

Jews had traditionally accepted that love for neighbour meant one of their own race. On one occasion Jesus was discussing eternal life with a lawyer, with Jesus agreeing with him on the two great commandments: <<*But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'*>> (Luke 10:29). In reply, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), in which it was the foreigner who comes to the aid of the injured Jew. Jesus thus shows that the term neighbour is global.

This concept of love your neighbour counteracted the interpretations that some put on Scriptures such as: <<*Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies*>> (Psalm 139:21-22), for the hatred should be for people's sinful thoughts and deeds, not directed against the people themselves. This also gives rise to debates over teaching such as: <<*Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple*>> (Luke 14:26). However, there is no contradiction for the term translated hate actually means love less!

You have heard that it was said, hate your enemy. The OT never says that anyone should hate his or her enemy. This shows that, in his you have heard statements (v.21, v.27, v.33, v.38, and here) Jesus is correcting not the OT itself

but only misinterpretations of the OT. God's hatred of evil was a central theme in the OT, clearly illustrated by David: *<<For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you. The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers>>* (Psalm 5:4-5). Consequently, those who embodied evil were understood to be God's enemies, and it was natural to hate them: *<<I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked>>* (Psalm 26:4-5), and: *<<Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies>>* (Psalm 139:21-22), as recently noted, but such hatred is never commanded by God; it comes from the corrupt hearts of mankind. However, evil and all other sin should be forcefully opposed by believers. It is not the sinner that God hates but their sin.

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Matthew 5:44-45

But I say to you shows that this is a commandment that has just as much divine authority as the Ten Commandments and all other laws given by God. Jesus will later identify himself with a further commandment to love: *<<I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another>>* (John 13:34-35).

Love your enemies. God hates evil, but he still brings many blessings in this life even to his enemies (v.45), by means of common grace, which is the favour that he gives to all people and not just to believers, showing his love for all of his creation. These blessings are intended to lead unbelievers to repentance: *<<yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy>>* (Acts 14:17), and: *<<Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?>>* (Romans 2:4). Of course, there is a sense in which God hates those who are resolutely and impenitently wicked: *<<The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers>>* (Psalm 5:5), *<<The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and his soul hates the lover of violence>>* (Psalm 11:5), and: *<<All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else>>* (Ephesians 2:3). However, God's blessings of common grace constitute his primary providential action toward mankind here and now.

That Jews should love your enemies had been implied by the actions they should take in circumstances where an enemy required help. This is recorded in: *<<When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back. When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden*

and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free>> (Exodus 23:4-5). Such practical demonstrations of love should help to win over an enemy to become one who is considered a friend.

Christians do not have a monopoly on love for neighbour or enemy and its practical outworkings. During 2013 a right-wing organisation held a protest outside a small mosque in York, protesting the murder of a UK soldier in London by two self-alleged Islamists. Members of the mosque offered tea and biscuits to the protestors, talked with them and then invited them into their building, organising a friendly 5-a-side football game with them. Such demonstrable love for a potential opponent can only be applauded and is to be emulated by Christian believers.

Pray for those who persecute you. It is assumed that Jesus means that the persecuted should pray for good things to come upon such people rather than calling for retribution against them. Whereas prayers for justice have their place: <<*King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, 'May the Lord see and avenge!'*>> (2 Chronicles 24:22), and: <<*Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds*>> (2 Timothy 4:14), a believer's attitude to those who cause them harm should be one of love and forgiveness. This was demonstrated by Stephen: <<*While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died*>> (Acts 7:59-60), and Jesus himself: <<*Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing'*>> (Luke 23:34a). To forgive someone is not to forget what they have done and does require an attitude that actually wishes them well.

The children of the heavenly Father are those who respond to his will as expressed in the ministry of Jesus: <<*But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'*>> (Matthew 12:48-50).

Makes his sun rise indicates that it is God who has designed how the planets work in conjunction with each other to provide light and heat on the planet Earth, as well as all the other wonders of the universe, seen and unseen, known and unknowable. The whole purpose of the heavens was to provide for all of God's creation: <<*God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good*>> (Genesis 1:17-18); for: <<*Upon whom does his light not arise?*>> (Job 25:3b).

Sun, rain. God shows grace and care upon all of his creatures; therefore Jesus' disciples are to imitate God and love both neighbour and enemy.

What is intended in Scriptures as here and in the creation account is to show that God created the ecosystems to sustain life. He doesn't decree whether it will rain or be sunny, hot or cold on a particular day. Similarly, natural

disasters occur all around the world but particularly along the fault lines where the tectonic plates meet. That many parts of the world have become barely habitable, with more and more famines, can mostly be traced to man's intervention in the natural order such as deforestation and industrialisation.

On the righteous and on the unrighteous. This is the whole consequence of common grace that all benefit from it irrespective of the state of their hearts or their attitude towards God as their provider and sustainer. Just because they do not know him, believe in him or care much about him, does not stop him for taking care of all their needs, in the same way as he does for all the needs of those who are seeking to be faithful. Those who believe should not feel hard done by but should rejoice and be thankful for knowing such a benevolent God.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Matthew 5:46-47

In Palestine, tax-collectors were representatives of the Roman governing authorities, although they were often directly employed by Herod Antipas and his government. Their tendency to resort to extortion made them despised and hated by their own people: <<*The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector"*>> (Luke 18:11). Christians should not merely do the same as unbelievers; their transformed lives should result in behaviour that shows significantly greater love.

In a similar vein, Gentiles were at best tolerated by Jews, who would trade with them but would have no social contact, for they were perceived to be ceremonially unclean.

⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Scripture is a reflection of God himself as he has made his will and character known to his people. As Christians seek to live in conformity to Scripture, they are in fact pursuing the very perfection of God. This verse provides the conclusion and summary to the antithesis section (vv.21-48), showing that all the Law and the Prophets find their perfect, Greek *teleios* or *telos*, fulfilment in the perfection of the Father, which is what all Jesus' disciples are called to pursue. The aim is to be Christ like. Life is a journey toward that goal.