

**St. Paul's Anglican Church;
6th Trinity; July 28, 2019
Matt 5:21 to 48**

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Jesus' earthly mission was to call all people to repentance and to sacrifice Himself on the cross so that our sins can be cleansed from us. His preaching and teaching often gave instruction as to how to be forgiven and receive eternal life through faith in Him. But his Sermon on the Mount is different; its purpose is to teach people of faith how to live a Christian life. He teaches and demonstrates through his words and actions that we must go beyond outwardly obeying the Old Testament "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not."

Our Lord teaches us that the better we control our thinking, the more likely we will avoid sin and present a proper Christian witness. In today's reading (Matt. 5:21-48), He focuses on anger, adultery, divorce, taking oaths and loving our enemies; next week's topics are almsgiving, prayer and fasting.

This is what He said about anger: **You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not kill; But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.** To most people even in this morally twisted world, murdering the innocent is not acceptable behavior. Our Savior takes this much deeper by showing how our thoughts and emotions can bring us close to committing an external evil action. Unjustified anger towards another, possibly due to religion, race, political preference, etc., is sinful, so, if we harbor unjustified anger, we must seek forgiveness and make amends.

But even justified anger can be a destructive emotion. Unfair acts against us, and horrendous evil in the world can destroy us if we simply internalize them. If we forgive those who offend us, even if they do not apologize, the Holy Spirit will remove the negative energy within us. If we pray and work to eliminate the

world's evil and ungodly activities, we again can lessen the negative effect of our justified anger.

Next our Lord addresses a commandment that brought notoriety to Jimmy Carter when he was our president: **You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say to you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.** Jesus addresses this issue from a man's perspective, but it is equally true in reverse.

Eyes pointed in the wrong direction can be the first step to many sins. The brazenness of TV commercials and the affluence surrounding us can lead us to lust after that which we have no business desiring, whether it is a person or a thing. We must be aware and quickly block unhealthy thoughts and misdirected eyes.

In Matthew's 19th chapter, Jesus quotes the Book of Genesis saying when a man and woman marry, they become one flesh. Then He added, **What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.** In spite of the teaching in Genesis, it became accepted practice for Israelite men to write a Certificate of Divorcement for any reason.

Here is our Lord's teaching on divorce in his Sermon on the Mount; **But I say to you, whoever puts away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery.**

Divorce at will is a very controversial subject in our society, but Jesus gives sexual immorality by either spouse as the only justification for it. There are others reasons to justify leaving a spouse, and I think abuse is at the top of that list.

With so many Christians having experienced divorce, how does the Anglican Church deal with it? We have a process through which the divorced can legitimately be permitted to remarry. It begins by acknowledging the true cause of the divorce, and may include seeking forgiveness for any wrong doing in actions or judgment. And, a sincere understanding of the sanctity and lifelong commitment of marriage must be present in each party.

Next Jesus addresses swearing or oath taking. The law prohibited **forswearing**, or swearing falsely, but loop holes had been established to virtually allow lying in their oaths even those made to God. Our Lord simplified the process by saying there is no need to swear about anything if you **let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay**. Let your “Yes” truly mean “Yes,” and your “No” always mean “No”. In other words, if we always speak truthfully, there is no need to emphasize our truthfulness by swearing we are telling the truth.

Jesus’ final teaching in this segment is to love our enemies. He said **It has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and you shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy**. In Old Testament times, seeking revenge was encouraged; but our Lord changed this philosophy when He said, **I say love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which persecute you**. The famous Anglican Theologian, John Stott, called this the most difficult to practice of all Christ’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Somewhere around 1960 schools were integrated in Anne Arundel County. I remember African-American and Caucasian kids engaging in friendly and cordial conversation on my bus from the very first day; but this was not typical in many parts of our country.

I was stationed out of the country for several years, so I have no first-hand knowledge of the violence which later ravaged many of our nation’s neighborhoods. So, when I saw a book titled, *The Best of Enemies* by Osha Gray Davidson, about the relationship between a leader of the local KKK and an African American woman who was an effective civil rights leader, in 1960’s Durham, NC, I had to read it. Though it contained painful rhetoric and unconscionable name calling, it opened my eyes to what was too prevalent in our country. More importantly, the book gives an emotional true story about learning to love our enemies.

C. P. Ellis and Ann Atwater lived in an area where distrust and hatred were considered family values. They had so many run-

ins they considered violence against each other. Then they were appointed co-chairs of a committee to deal with court ordered desegregation which had been grossly ignored for several years.

The hostility in their relationship lessened only slightly; and then one day they found themselves sitting in a room by themselves. As they engaged in conversation about life in general, they began to realize they had common problems. Suddenly, this hardened, bigoted, Exalted Cyclops in the KKK began weeping uncontrollably. And, through her own tears, equally hardened and resentful Ann Atwater placed her hand on C. P. and said, "I'll pray for you." You cannot hate someone that you hold up in prayer.

Did their relationship improve? At C. P.'s funeral in 2005, for family members only, when Ann was asked by the funeral director how they were related, she said, "He's my brother!" Later she explained that that was how it was with them. Ann Atwater loved C. P. Ellis when they were still enemies; before they were "hug you whenever I see you" friends.

Why did Jesus give us such hard commands; why did He compel us to **Be therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.** (Only God is truly perfect and incapable of sin; so perfect here means for us to be complete.) We are completed through our faith in Jesus; we are completed by God's forgiveness and in return we are to do our best to model his love. By doing so, with humility, we may encourage others to come to faith in Jesus Christ, and to even love their enemies.

I believe that is why He calls us to live by a higher standard than the unbelievers of this world; that is how we help to complete his mission to call all to repentance and faith. And, by striving to live up to a godly standard, seeking his forgiveness when we fail, the Holy Spirit will enable us to continue to seek the perfection that we can only realize after we join our Savior in eternity.

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, power, dominion, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:21-48 Sermon on the mount series

²¹ Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

²² But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

²³ Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

²⁴ Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

²⁵ Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

²⁶ Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

²⁷ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

²⁸ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

²⁹ And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

³⁰ And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members

should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

³¹ It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

³² But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

³³ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

³⁴ But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

³⁵ Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

³⁶ Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

³⁷ But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

³⁹ But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

⁴⁰ And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

⁴¹ And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

⁴² Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

⁴³ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

⁴⁵ That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁶ For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

⁴⁷ And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

⁴⁸ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Romans vi. 3.

KNOW ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 57:13b-19

He that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the

souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him.