

The next portion of The Sermon on the Mount, though spanning 35 verses, should be considered together to appreciate the context. Jesus began this pivotal sermon by reestablishing the source of true happiness in godliness (a.k.a. the beatitudes). He now calls His fledgling church to take on the role of being salt and light across the entire world by allowing men to see their radical righteousness. Even though Jesus' sermon appears to turn Judaism upside down, He is actually revealing the love behind the law and calling His church to live up to this greater standard. Mankind will witness this righteousness by the way we treat one another and also by the way we treat them.

Begin by reading Matthew 5:13-48. What are the broad themes that span this passage?

- Jesus calls His church to be a _____ to the world
- Jesus clarifies that His ministry does not conflict with Old Testament revelation, but _____ it
- Jesus reveals the spirit of _____ behind the O.T. law regarding _____ relationships that He desires His disciples to attain to.

Being Salt (5:13)

In this passage, our purpose is very succinct: be the salt of the earth. The remainder of the passage is devoted to the danger of losing our "saltiness", without which we have no real use in this world. Let's begin by seeking to understand the purpose of salt.

THE MEANING OF SALT

Salt has always been valuable in human society, often much more so than it is today. During a period of ancient Greek history it was called *theon*, which means divine. The Romans held that, except for the sun, nothing was more valuable than salt. Often Roman soldiers were paid in salt, and it was from that practice that the expression "not worth his salt" originated...

Salt was frequently used in the ancient Near East to bind a covenant, somewhat in the way an agreement or contract is notarized in our day. When the parties to a covenant ate salt together before witnesses, the covenant was given special authentication. Though no particulars are given in the account, we learn from 2 Chronicles 13:5 that God made a covenant of salt with David. God prescribed that all sacrificial offerings in Israel were to be offered with salt "so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking" (Leviticus 2:13).

In numerous ways Jesus' hearers – whether Greek, Roman, or Jewish - would have understood salt of the earth to represent a valuable commodity. Though most could not have understood His full meaning, they knew He was saying that His followers were to have an extremely important function in the world.

Whatever else it may have represented, salt always stood for that which was of high value and importance. (Emphasis added)

- *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 241*

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SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

We know that salt functions today as seasoning and as a preservative. Especially in the absence of freezers and refrigerators, salt is essential to survival. The message of Jesus is clear in this passage: when His church is functioning properly, it is essential to the welfare of this world. However, if we lose our savor (saltiness), we are no longer essential but worthless.

Our goal now turns to defining our savor. What is it that makes us salty? This illustration is quoted by two other gospel writers and is placed into different contexts that will help us understand its meaning. Read Mark 9:38-50 and Luke 14:25-35 and answer the following questions.

What are the two points Mark makes in this passage (vs. 50) and what does it mean to be salty?

How does Luke describe what it means to be salty?

Now return to Matthew 5:13. Having just studied the Beatitudes and having read the passages following Matthew 5:13, do you believe this illustration is used in the same way here? Why or why not?

We can broadly say that losing our devotion to Christ causes us to lose our savor. What does that mean specifically, though? Read the following passages and identify some of the corrupting influences.

- Developing too close of a _____ with those who are _____. (1 Cor. 5:6, 2 Cor. 6:14)
- Adopting the _____ of men (2 Timothy 2:16-17)
- Observing or _____ ourselves with sin (2 Peter 2:7-8)

As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"

As we look around this country at organizations that are labeled "Christian" but are so in name only, we see that they do not have any redeeming quality, but rather have served to further corrupt our country and made Christianity into a joke for many. In other words, there is so much worthless salt that has lost its savor that the world thinks that all "salt" is equally useless. Every generation of Christianity faces challenges. This is the challenge of our day. We must strive more diligently to be distinctly salty so that our value to this world may be realized.

Being Light (5:14-16)

We need to consider the concepts of salt and light together. We are an essential influence on this world, but not an influence that is to be quietly milling around in the background. We need to be seen, or rather, Christ needs to be seen in us.

THE IMAGERY OF LIGHT

The physical light of this world is the sun. It really is the catalyst of all life on this planet (Genesis 1:3). Without it, not only would we experience great darkness, but also a loss of heat. Without light and an external source of heat, all life on this planet would eventually die because the plants would quit producing oxygen. Without the sun's gravitational pull, the earth would wander off of its orbit and drift into space aimlessly. The moon would no longer be seen as it reflects the light of the sun. The surface of this planet would eventually freeze. There is no physical life on this planet without the physical light of this world. Jesus chose powerful imagery when He called the church the light of the world. Rather than bringing physical light and life, His emphasis was on bringing spiritual light and life. What would life be like without the church being the spiritual "light of the world"?

By calling this gathering of disciples (His newly established church) the light of the world, He was doing at least four things:

- He was calling them to a _____ role in the world: _____ light, not _____ light; (Acts 4:12)
- He was _____ a role to them; (John 1:4-9, 9:4-5, 12:46)
- He was defining the _____ of their ministry (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8); and
- He was _____ the role they would play in the world.

The role these disciples would play was a continuation of the work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke was recorded to share both what Jesus taught and what He did during His ministry on earth (Acts 1:1), essentially His talk and His walk. Read 1 John 1:5-7, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and 12:27 and discuss how we continue the illuminating work of Christ in this world.

What happens when we speak truth but do not embrace it in a tangible way in our life? Read Romans 2:17-24 and Matthew 15:13-14, and 23:15.

The next imagery Jesus uses is to call His church a city set on a hill. A city upon a hill can be seen both day and night because of its position. Jerusalem was a city upon a hill, providing a strong military advantage. Those who traveled there were said to go “up to Jerusalem” regardless of which direction they traveled from (John 11:55, Galatians 1:17-18) because it was located at a higher elevation than the surrounding areas. In Revelation, Jesus speaks of His church as the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12, 21:2,9-10) that comes down from heaven. The point of this picture is that the light we are given is meant to shine upon this world, not be hidden.

HIDE IT UNDER A BUSHEL... NO

Under the bushel . Not a bushel. "The figure is taken from lowly cottage life. There was a projecting stone in the wall on which the lamp was set. The house consisted of a single room, so that the tiny light sufficed for all" (Bruce). It was not put under the bushel (the only one in the room) save to put it out or to hide it. The bushel was an earthenware grain measure. "The stand", not "candlestick." It is "lamp-stand" in each of the twelve examples in the Bible. There was the one lamp-stand for the single room. "

– A.T. Robertson's *Word Pictures*

Discuss the connection between the “candlestick” (candle stand) we read about here and the use of the same imagery in Revelation 1:9-20 and 2:5.

The purpose of the light is for men to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. The phrase, “good works” means, attractiveness or beautiful appearance. This is the beauty of God working in your life. We don't do our good works as a show, but as we live before the Lord in obedience, it will affect the way we live, what we say, and the way we treat others. Without this tangible difference in our life, Satan will effectively reduce our message to one of a million philosophies marginalized in the minds of men. Our mouths must be involved as much as our actions. We must turn the praise to God and give Him glory! If you want to be used by God, you must be willing to direct the glory to Him.

As Ephesians 3:21 reminds us, “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

The Reality that Cast the Shadow (5:17-18)

Much of Jesus' ministry flew in the face of the Jewish rules and traditions that they believed were just as precious as the law of God itself. In fact, they truly believed their traditions were the natural expression of God's law. As Jesus lived out the gospel in His life, some of His actions were in direct contradiction to their customs. He healed on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2), ate with sinners (Luke 7:34), allowed His disciples to eat with unwashed hands (Mark 7:1-5), and directly contradicted the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 15:3-6).

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This untraditional behavior required Jesus to set some things straight with His disciples. He was not provoking them to lawlessness. In fact, Jesus takes quite the opposite stance. He is calling His disciples to a higher righteousness than they have ever known (verse 20). Instead of standing against the law, Jesus declared that He came to fulfill the law... every bit of it.

What is meant by the “law and the prophets”? Read Matthew 11:13, 22:34-40 and John 1:45.

How is the law compared to the revelation of Christ in the New Testament? Read John 1:17, Colossians 2:16-17 and Hebrews 10:1. What had the Jews done with the law prior to the coming of Christ?

The Scriptures teach us to live a life of purpose and vision. Jesus Christ is the prime example of this principle. How did Jesus demonstrate this purpose? Read John 2:4, 9:4, 13:1, and 19:30.

This passage is the perfect prelude to the upcoming passages where Jesus reestablishes and expands upon the meaning of God’s law. He expands upon it even further by His life. Read John 1:17, 13:34, 15:9-13, and Philippians 2:5-8 and discuss how Jesus expanded upon the law by His life.

Read Romans 7:7-13 and Philippians 3:4-15 and discuss how this truth affected the Apostle Paul’s life.

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The Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of Scripture (5:18)

I want to treat this subject separately though it is essential to grasp how completely Jesus fulfilled God's law. Among the many fronts upon which Satan attacks Christianity and the church, one of the greatest is the inerrancy of Scripture. God's Word is attacked by evolutionists, humanists, liberal theologians, and even some well-meaning Christian book companies. If Satan can bring the foundation of God's Word down, everything else crumbles too. See the illustration below, created by Answers in Genesis.

The title of this section is the Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of Scripture. This is based upon Jesus' statement that, "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." If we believe Jesus is God, which we do, His view of Scripture is authoritative.

What are a jot and a tittle?



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What does this have to do with the "verbal" inspiration of Scripture? Read Psalm 12:6 and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

While we are discussing the verbal inspiration of Scripture, we should also mention the "plenary" inspiration of Scripture. Plenary means full, entire, or complete. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and Revelation 22:18-19 and discuss whether God has given us a plenary (complete) revelation in His Word.

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SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

When it comes to translating Scripture, there are three theories of translation commonly used throughout modern history:

Literal -

- Pros:
- Cons:

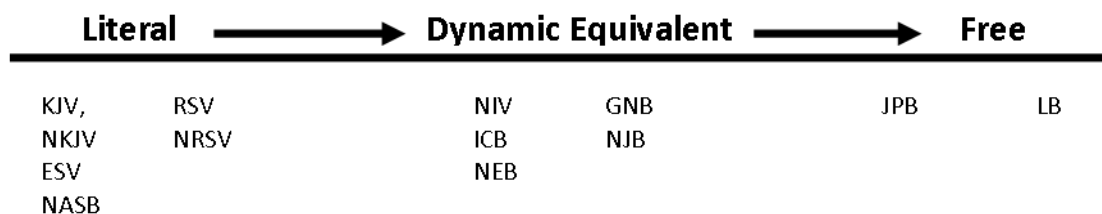
Free -

- Pros:
- Cons:

Dynamic Equivalence -

- Pros:
- Cons:

The chart below shows a continuum of translation theories and the versions that are translated in accordance with those theories.



King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New International Version (NIV), International Children's Bible (ICB), New English Bible (NEB), Good News Bible (GNB), New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), J.P. Phillips New Testament (JPB), Living Bible (LB)

We now need to make this practical. How does a conviction in the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture guide us in selecting a Bible translation for our personal authoritative study and preaching and teaching in the church?

How does a conviction in the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture guide us in interpreting Scripture?

A New Life with an Old Law (5:19-20)

Verses 17 and 18 of this chapter demonstrate the commitment of Christ to not only uphold God's law, but to fulfill every facet of it. Sometimes good-intentioned Christians will proclaim Christ to have fulfilled the law so that we can live outside of the law. Christ did fulfill the law, but He never told us to live outside of the law. In fact, reality is quite the opposite. We are no longer under the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2), meaning that those who are saved do not face eternal death as a result of breaking God's law. There is no condemnation for those who have put their faith in Christ (Romans 8:1). However, we are called to live in accordance with the law in the context of the work and revelation of Jesus Christ. This may sound a bit confusing right now, but that is exactly what Jesus seeks to explain (and we hope to illustrate) throughout the remainder of this sermon.

We are first taught that whoever, "shall break" one of the least commandments and teach others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. The word, "break" is also translated as "annul" in other literal translations and means to loose, release, dissolve, or melt. Obviously, men cannot alter or destroy God's Word in any way. He will preserve it. How do we annul God's Word?

Jesus refers to the "least commandments". Are some commandments more important than others? Are they all the same? Read Matthew 22:36-40, and 23:23.

What connection does Jesus make between how we personally keep the law and what we teach others about the law?

When we think of teaching the Word of God, many think of pastors and teachers standing publicly in the church? Is this the complete context of the passage? Who are the teachers that need to beware? Read Deuteronomy 6:7, Proverbs 22:24, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Peter 3:1-2.

Truly, religious hypocrisy has done more harm to the cause of Christ than outright opposition.

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The consequence of breaking the law and teaching others to do so is to lose esteem in the eyes of God, in His kingdom. On the other hand, keeping the law and teaching others to do so is to increase our esteem in the eyes of God, in His kingdom (1 Samuel 2:30). We aren't threatened with losing our salvation, but with losing our rewards. How does this agree with other Scriptures that teach about our eternal rewards? Read Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:24-26, 2 John 8, Revelation 3:11.

“It is possible to lose in the second phase of our Christian lives what we built up in the first”

- The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 271

When we try to reconcile Jesus teaching about keeping the law with the rest of the New Testament, it is important to make some clarification. As we read in Matthew 5:17, Jesus came to fulfill the law. That is exactly what He did. Some of the aspects of the Old Testament law were merely shadows of the reality of His coming. We no longer need to look to the shadow, but rejoice in reality. Also, some parts of the Old Testament law were written for circumstances which do not currently exist.

Generally speaking, there are three categories of law given in the Old Testament: Moral law, Judicial Law, and Ceremonial Law.

Moral Law –

Judicial Law –

Ceremonial Law –

How did the people Jesus preached to esteem the scribes and Pharisees?

How did God esteem the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Read Matthew 23:27-28 and Romans 3:9-11.

What was Jesus' purpose in telling them that their righteousness had to exceed the scribes and Pharisees? Read Philippians 3:4-9.

More than Don't Kill... Don't Hate (5:21-26)

We now see Jesus become more explicit in His teaching and He assumes a position of authority in both interpreting the Old Testament law and providing them with new commands. The command, "thou shalt not kill" is found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13). The consequence for premeditated murder was death (Exodus 21:12-14). However, the Jews at the time of Christ were no longer following the full extent of the Jewish law, partially because they were under Roman authority and could not put a person to death without Roman approval, and partially because they had made murder a civil offence. One who murdered was to be brought before the council for judgment.

Jesus now describes three scenarios, each dealing with attitudes and actions that fall short of the act of murder. The consequences of these actions, however, meet or exceed the consequences the Jews had for the crime of murder.

1. Anger Without Cause

Anger is not always sin. Jesus became angry and cleansed the temple of money changers. Scriptures teach us to be angry without sin (Ephesians 4:26). Many times, this involves resolving the cause of our anger. The type of anger described by Jesus is the "slow burn" wrath and bitterness that can sometimes set up in our heart without a word ever being spoken. Specifically, Jesus speaks of being angry without a (good) cause. What does Scripture teach us about this kind of anger? What are its consequences? Read Acts 8:18-23 and Hebrews 12:15.

2. The Insult, "Raca"

Raca –

3. The Insult, "Thou Fool"

There is a difference between calling someone "Raca" and a fool. The difference is best understood in the context of Scripture. What does the Bible teach us about fools? Read Psalm 14:1, Proverbs 17:10,21, 26:3.

What is the difference between the insult, "Raca" and "thou fool"? Why is there a more severe consequence for the latter insult?

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Each of the responses above is an expression of hatred. Read 1 John 3:15 and discuss the connection between hatred and murder.

Why is murder such a grave sin? Read Genesis 9:6.

Review the consequences of the sins listed by Jesus: judgment, the council, even hell fire. Why are such strong sentences passed for simple words? Why are our words so important? Read Matthew 12:34, 18:6, and James 3:1-12.

THE JUDGMENT, THE COUNCIL, HELL FIRE

We see both a progression in the crime and consequence in this passage. To the Jew, the Judgment was a typical court or tribunal held regularly to decide matters that came up from day to day. Moses was instructed by his father-in-law, Jethro, to appoint men to hear matters so that he would only have to address the more difficult issues (Exodus 18:13-22). The Judgment was similar to appearing before one of Moses' appointed judges. The Council, however, was the high court, the Jewish Sanhedrin. They presumed to sit in the seat of Moses and were made up of the Jewish leaders, such as the high priest (Matthew 23:1-3, Acts 23:1-5). They addressed matters of greatest significance and their rulings were the final word in Jewish society (ignoring the fact that the Jews were under Roman control at the time of Christ). Hell Fire, however, is translated literally as "Gehenna fire". Gehenna was located in the Valley of Hinnom, basically the Jerusalem landfill, where a continual fire burned the refuse brought from the city. This perpetual burning of refuse was used symbolically by Jesus to represent the fires of eternal destruction in hell.

How does Jesus' assignment of consequence compare to the Jewish assignment of consequence?

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The consequence for the first two crimes is assigned to the courts of men, but the consequence for the third crime is taken from the hands of men and judged by God. How does this harmonize with the rest of Scripture? What does the unrepentant commission of the third crime indicate? Read 1 John 3:14-16 and Revelation 21:8.

What priority is given to maintaining relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ in verses 23-24? Why? Read 1 John 4:20-21.

Jesus' instruction regarding loving our brethren extends even to those who are lost and are our adversaries. We are told to be willing to reconcile with our opponent quickly. To do this, we must maintain a spirit of love and kindness toward all men. The Scriptures give us strong admonition regarding how we are to walk in our dealings with the world. Complete the following statements as you read each passage.

- Walk _____ before all men in this world (Romans 12:16)
- Live _____ with all men as much as possible (Romans 12:18)
- Do not seek _____ against those who do you harm (Romans 12:19)
- Go out of your way to show _____ to your enemies (Romans 12:20)
- Mix both kindness and _____ into your speech before all men (Colossians 4:5-6)

A believer might hear or read the Sermon on the Mount and assume that because the meek are promised the earth that we have some sort of upper hand when dealing with temporal matters in this world. What does the Lord tell His disciples will happen if they are taken to court and they are in the wrong?

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More than a Casual Glance (5:27-30)

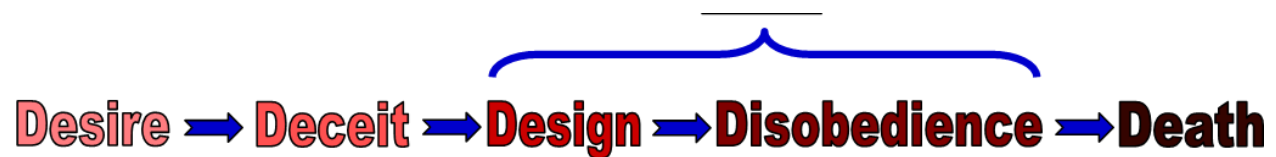
In the last section, Jesus taught us that the very presence of sinful anger in our heart is the spirit of murder. To a God that looks upon the heart, that attitude is simply “murder in miniature”. This same principle is now carried forward to the sin of adultery. Like the law against murder, this law was also based on the 10 commandments. Unfortunately, adultery and divorce were extremely common among the Jews. I have heard it said that a Jewish man could divorce his wife if she displeased him in any way... even if she burned his dinner.

Harkening back to Old Testament law, what was the consequence for adultery? Read Leviticus 20:10.

Was this punishment practiced by the Jews of Jesus’ day? Read John 8:1-11.

As with premeditated murder, adultery does not begin with the act itself but can be traced back further to the heart. Read Mark 7:21 and James 1:13-15. Where does all sin begin?

If we were to unravel the process of sin, from beginning to end, we would end up with a diagram like the one shown below. Define each of the terms below scripturally. How would we classify design and disobedience?



Desire (James 1:14) –

Deceit (James 1:14) –

Design (James 1:15) –

Disobedience (James 1:15) –

Death (James 1:15) –

This understanding of the progress of sin is very consistent with Scripture and explains to us why God looks at our heart with such disdain when we have yielded our hearts and minds to uncleanness. The Bible teaches that life begins at conception. When we are formed in the womb by God, all of our days are known; every physical characteristic is carefully programmed into our DNA. We may still be simple and unformed, but we are alive, in possession of an eternal soul, and have a standing before God. This same principle is true of sin. Even in the infantile form of lustful thoughts played out in our mind, the full DNA of adultery is present.

Is it a sin to be tempted? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

If we were to try and stop this progression of sin before it actually becomes sin, how would we do that? Consider both of the precursors to sin (desire and deceit). What can restrain and overcome them?

We find that God's Word lays out a plan taking aim at the very heart of sin and deals it a death blow when we remain committed to follow God's path to victory.

In Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus offers one necessary and important step to overcoming sin. What is it?

The _____ necessary to overcome sin is far less than the _____ of sin.

Is this principle found in the rest of Scripture? Read 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14; 2 Timothy 2:22.

Jesus does not provide us with an exhaustive lesson on overcoming sin in the Christian life. He does, however, address one important aspect that is part of any realistic plan for spiritual victory. Based on our earlier discussion of how sinful desire can be overcome, why would God require us to flee rather than just change our heart?

Till Death do us Part (5:31-32)

The issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are involved and often controversial. God gives us clear guidance on the issues but the frequency of failed marriages and the strong emotions involved often taint perspectives. Our goal in this section is to understand this explicit command Jesus gave and allow it to be a building block in our understanding of God's view of marriage.

As we stated earlier, divorce was rampant in Jesus' day. The Jews justified their behavior by stating that Moses allowed divorce. Read Matthew 19:3-9 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Why did Moses allow divorce?

How did Jesus' disciples feel about His view of the permanence of marriage? Read Matthew 19:9-12.

There are two questions we need to consider with this teaching. First, why does God desire marriage to endure over the entire span of our lifetime? Second, why is fornication a reason for divorce? Let's begin by looking at the first question by considering what marriage is.

- Marriage is a _____ of God. (Matthew 19:10-11, 1 Corinthians 7:7-9)
- Marriage is the _____ of two lives. (Genesis 2:23-24)
- Marriage is a _____ institution. (Mark 10:9)
- Marriage is a _____. (Malachi 2:14, Song of Solomon 8:6)
- Marriage is a _____ of the relationship of Christ and the Church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

All of the above are primary reasons to maintain the marriage relationship over the span of a lifetime.

Our second question concerns why fornication is considered a Biblical reason for divorce. To understand this we have to first understand the proper place and nature of sexual intimacy. Let's begin by defining, "fornication".

Fornication –

Unfortunately, the very concept of sex has been corrupted by our society. Let's wash our minds with a bit of God's Word on the subject.

Let's be clear. The Bible does not call sexual intercourse or romantic love evil. Any sexual activity outside of the confines of marriage, however, is a sin.

- Sexual intercourse and romantic love is lawful, proper, and _____ by Scriptures (Hebrews 13:4, Song of Solomon 4:8-16)
- Sexual intercourse is the _____ representation of the oneness that occurs in marriage (Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:16)
- Fornication is a unique sin because it is a sin against our own _____ (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).
- Fornication is a unique sin against our _____ because it:
 - Betrays our _____ with them (1 Corinthians 6:15-16, 7:1-4)
 - Creates challenging emotional issues that are _____ (but not impossible) to overcome (Jeremiah 2:20-22, 3:1)

While Jesus said you could get a divorce because of adultery, He didn't say you have to.

The believer who is seeking to be obedient to God's Word needs to prayerfully consider what the Lord would have them to do if they are a victim of adultery. It seems the Lord gives the believer the option to leave their spouse under that circumstance, but does not require it and in fact may guide them by His Spirit to seek reconciliation, just as the Lord did with unfaithful Israel.

What about remarriage after divorce? Again, every circumstance is not contemplated by this passage. There are other Scriptures that speak to the issue that should be considered. The passage does teach, however, that remarriage after an improper divorce constitutes adultery. What would be considered an improper divorce? Read Matthew 5:32 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.

Why is remarriage after an improper divorce considered adultery?

Simply put, to marry someone who has a biblical obligation to reconcile with their former spouse is adultery. The biblical obligation to reconcile exists when a divorce has occurred for any reason beyond those listed in Scripture: adultery or the abandonment of a believer by an unbeliever.

This leaves one final question to consider in order to bring us to a bit more closure. Can Christians who are “scripturally” divorced remarry? There are three passages in 1 Corinthians 7 that provide guidance. Remember, one of the most important principles of Scriptural interpretation is the harmony of the texts. This is a book written by God and is therefore internally consistent (it doesn’t contradict itself). We must interpret each passage in a way that harmonizes with the other texts addressing the subject. Read each passage and discuss.

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 –

1 Corinthians 7:25-28 –

1 Corinthians 7:39-40 –

How Good is your Word? (5:33-37)

Vows and covenants are both found and condoned in Scripture. God Himself entered into covenants with men (Genesis 9:9, 15:18, Luke 22:20) and has sworn by Himself/made a vow (Jeremiah 51:14, Amos 6:8) to perform certain acts. In the New Testament, we see that the Apostle Paul made an unnamed vow (Acts 18:18), shaving his head a symbol of that vow, and also used a vow as a point of emphasis in his epistle to the Romans (Romans 9:1).

Why are vows necessary? Read John 8:44-45 and Psalms 58:3.

Why would the Lord make vows seeing that He never lies? Read Hebrews 6:13-19.

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When we look at our text at face value, it appears the Lord is nullifying the use of vows altogether. That interpretation is not consistent with the whole of Scripture. As we have studied each of the surrounding passages, Jesus is setting right a corruption to God's Word that occurred because of the wicked traditions of men. Let's first understand the actual commands God gave regarding vows. Read Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21-23 and summarize their teaching.

Now let's play lawyer. How might someone try get around these teachings to make vows they don't feel obliged to keep? The Pharisees of Jesus' day were experts at this type of contortion. Read Matthew 23:16-22 and describe what the Pharisees were doing to vows.

Do we see this corruption reflected in our text, Matthew 5:33-37? If so, how? Also consider James 5:12.

How does Jesus negate their faulty logic of swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or their own bodies? Read Matthew 23:16-22 and also Psalm 24:1, 50:10, and Haggai 2:8.

What did Jesus prescribe as the remedy for this perversion of truth?

Ultimately, God's Word is both truth and power. We are to follow our Father's example.

A Cheek for an Eye (5:38-42)

Of all the passages we have studied heretofore, this is one of the most difficult to apply because of how our human nature resists this level of humility and submission. Jesus begins by reminding his audience of the Old Testament laws regarding punishment of crime as found in Exodus 21:22-27, Leviticus 24:19-20 and Deuteronomy 19:19.

Yet, when we look at other Old Testament passages, we find what at first appears to be conflicting guidance. Read Exodus 14:14, Proverbs 20:22 and 24:29, and explain how these passages harmonize.

A stellar example of how these concepts harmonize is found in Joseph, the step-father of Jesus. Read Matthew 1:18-20 and discuss.

Unfortunately, the Jews of Jesus' day do not appear to have understand the harmony of the Old Testament principles and discarded mercy for overzealous judgment and personal vengeance (See Matthew 23:23). Jesus appears to have lived in a litigious society full of selfish people seeking vengeance and their pound of flesh. It is part of our sin cursed nature to seek vengeance over a real or perceived slight. Why isn't this appropriate for us? Read Genesis 4:3-8 and 4:23-24.

After establishing the problem, Jesus provides the solution and gives us four points of application of this truth dealing with our dignity, property, convenience, and benevolence. Undergirding the teachings of this passage are principles of humility, patience, and faith. Read Romans 12:17-19 and discuss how this teaching integrates with Matthew 5:38-42.

The first thing Jesus teaches us is that, "ye resist not evil". This should be clarified. He is not teaching us to accept evil. On the contrary, we are fighting a great battle against sin (Ephesians 6:12). This passage is a bit unclear as translated in the King James. It is speaking of an evil person. Again, Jesus is not teaching us to be passive against sin. This interpretation is not consistent with Scripture either (Matthew 3:7, John 2:13-16). He is speaking exclusively about personal offences committed against us.

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIGHT & LAW (5:13-48)

The first example regards turning the other cheek. A slap across the face is one of the most insulting expressions of contempt known to man. Jesus Himself suffered this abuse by the Romans as part of the violence leading up to the crucifixion (Matthew 26:67-68). When Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek, is He telling us to physically offer our other cheek to be slapped or something else? Read Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Peter 2:21-23 and discuss.

It is important to note at this point that what Jesus asks of us is challenging. In fact, I believe this is impossible to accomplish in our flesh. We need the aid of the Spirit of God to do this. Look at the example of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1, 4-6, 12 and Acts 23:1-5, and discuss how he succeeded and struggled with consistently apply these concepts.

Jesus' second example involves allowing another who has sued us to take both our coat AND our cloak without resisting. Understanding both the historical context and meaning of the words is very important to this passage.

A SHIRT, A COAT, AND A LAWSUIT

A coat (KJV) is a tunic or shirt worn next to the body. The cloak (KJV) is a robe or outer garment, more akin to our concept of a coat. The historical context for Jesus' words is found in Exodus 22:25-27. There we read that it was a common practice for a borrower to offer a pledge or collateral for a loan. This specific law requires that a lender not require a garment, translated by some as a cloak, as collateral for a loan. The reason is that the garment was used for both modesty and warmth. At the time this was written, it was common for people to wear their day clothes for warmth at night. There were limits as to how far a lender could go in exacting payment and insuring their debt in Jewish society. This level of greed and cruelty was not to be tolerated.

There is an important condition to this commandment: "...if any man will sue thee at the law..." How does this affect our understanding of what Jesus is asking of us? Also read 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.

We see the spirit of this command fulfilled in a man saved by Jesus. Read Luke 19:1-10 and discuss.

The third example provided by Jesus involves compulsory service. Again, historical context is an important key to grasping the meaning of this passage.

WALK WITH ME

“Roman law gave a soldier the right to force a civilian to carry his pack for a million, a Roman mile, which was slightly shorter than our modern mile. The law, designed to relieve the soldier, not only caused great inconvenience to civilians but was made even more despicable by the fact that the oppressed were made to carry the equipment and weapons of their oppressors. Outside of combat the Roman soldier was probably never more hated than when he forced someone to carry his pack.”

- *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 334-335*

What is Jesus teaching us here? How do we apply this in our nation?

Read Matthew 17:24-27. How does Jesus illustrate the principles of this passage?

Remember that God gives us the grace to turn the cheek, surrender the cloak, and go the extra mile.

Finally, Jesus teaches us to give to those who asks (also translated as beg) of us or would borrow from us, don't turn your back on them. We must always interpret Scripture with Scripture. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and James 1:27. What are the guiderails we have for giving and lending?

A Call to a Higher Love (5:43-48)

As we come to the close of Chapter 5 and a point of transition in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides one last clarification. This clarification is a summation of much of what He has taught since verse 17. We need the full righteousness of the law; we must not hate our neighbor; we must remain faithful to our marriage covenant; we must keep our word to others; and we must not resist personal offences. How can so much of the law be summarized? Read Matthew 22:36-40.

Jesus begins by reminding them of what they had “heard”. Remember that Jesus is dealing with their misunderstanding of Scripture. Where did the confusion come from? Read Leviticus 19:18, Exodus 23:4-5. What limitations on the commandment to love could be read into these passages?

We must also consider some of the Psalms that appear to promote a hatred of enemies. Read Psalm 69:22-28 then look at the broader context of the passage (especially verses 7-9 and 20-21). Also consider John 2:17. Where does David’s anger originate?

As Jesus later clarifies in Luke 10:25-37, what is the breadth of the term, “neighbor”?

We now better understand the misunderstanding of the Pharisees but we need to go further and understand what Jesus asks of us. He sets forth four commands illustrated by four descriptions of how we may be treated by men. Briefly discuss each command below:

- Love your enemies –

- Bless them that curse you –

- Do good to them that hate you –

- Pray for them which spitefully use and persecute you –

Jesus' reasoning behind these commandments is that we might be "children of your Father". What does He mean by this?

Jesus now broaches a topic too deep for us to fathom... the love of God toward all humanity. We know that there is a special love He has for His people. Yet, there is a love He has for all humankind. It is sometimes called, "common grace", but there is nothing common about it. Read Acts 17:27-28 and Romans 2:1-4 and discuss why God sends His rain upon both the just and the unjust.

Finally, Jesus draws a line of contrast in the sand to conclude this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. If our affections are only natural (what we can do of our own strength), how will we shine as lights and act as salt? If we only love those who love us, how are we different than anyone else? Jesus isn't just preaching the same old song. We are called to be radically different than the world, a difference that is only fueled by the presence and empowerment of the Spirit of God in us.

We are called to be a different people of a different Kingdom.

Jesus ends with one last admonishment, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The word perfect here means what it sounds like, perfect or complete moral character. Our desire to please our Lord, glorify His name, and reach lost souls should drive us to be different, a difference that is only realized by striving to be what the natural man cannot be alone... perfect.