

“BUT I SAY TO YOU...”
Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Matthew 5:21-48
February 15 & 16, 2020

“Chuck Yeager, the famed test pilot, was flying an F-86 Sabre over a lake in the Sierra Mountains when he decided to buzz a friend's house near the edge of the lake. During a slow roll, he suddenly felt his aileron lock. Says Yeager, "It was a hairy moment, flying about 150 feet off the ground and upside down."

“A lesser pilot might have panicked, with fatal results, but Yeager let off on the G's (pulled back on the throttle), pushed up the nose, and sure enough, the aileron unlocked. Climbing to 15,000 feet, where it was safer, Yeager tried the maneuver again. Every time that he rolled, the problem reoccurred.

“Yeager knew three or four pilots had died under similar circumstances, but to date, investigators were puzzled as to the source of the Sabre's fatal flaw. Yeager went to his superior with a report, and the inspectors went to work. They found that a bolt on the aileron cylinder was installed upside down.

“Eventually, the culprit was found in a North American Aviation plant. He was an older man on the assembly line who ignored instructions about how to insert that bolt, because, by golly, he knew that bolts were supposed to be placed head up, not head down. In a sad commentary, Yeager says that nobody ever told the man how many pilots he had killed.”¹

In the same way, when we think we know better than God and disregard His Law in our life, we not only put ourselves, but many of those around us, in danger of death. The purpose of the Law is to keep us safe, and to expose the error of our ways so that we might repent and come back into alignment with God's ways. God has given us His laws for us to follow so that we might prosper.

And we heard that in the reading of the Old Testament lesson of Deuteronomy 30. Moses gathered all the people together as they were preparing to move into the Promised Land, and he let them know that there were only two paths before them that would determine their future. If they would follow God's commands, if they would love God and obey His laws and keep them, they would have

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 218)

life and would prosper and become a great nation. The Lord God would bless them and give them long life in this new land (Deut. 30:15-16).

However, if they would reject God's commands, if they would disobey and refuse to listen to God's laws and if they were to wander away and worship other gods, that path would lead them to death and destruction. Their lives would be cut short in the new land west of the Jordan River if they rejected God and chose not to follow Him. (Deut. 30:17-18).

So Moses calls the people together to make a choice as to which way they will go. He says, "*I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessings and God's curses, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life! Love the Lord your God, obey Him and be faithful to Him...*" (Deut. 30:19-20).

Now right off the bat some might question and ask, "Does God curse us? I thought He was a holy God. How can He send curses on His people?" Well, that's Moses' way of saying if we follow God's ways we will be led by God into prosperity and security, but if we reject God's ways, we will go our own way and that will certainly lead us into troubles, hardships, and certain death. True, God does not do anything evil, so by God's curses, it means that we receive the natural consequences of our actions, and God will distance Himself from us, letting us go our own way. So we have the choice of either having God's presence with us, or turn and walk away and have God's absences with us. Those were the only two choices they had, and that goes to us even today.

So the Law was established for us to help keep us in line with God's ways so that we might find His presence with us and be blessed by Him. And the choices we make will influence the lives of others around us and will either bring life or death to them because of the choices we make.

The problem is, given enough time, we can take even God's Laws and turn them into something that is restrictive, confining, and totally opposite of what the intention of that law is. We can twist and turn and manipulate the Laws of God so that instead of helping others find their way back to Him, we actually turn them away from Him. And that's where we find the situation today in our New Testament

lesson of Matthew 5:21-48. Here in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus confronts some of the laws before the people to go deeper so that we might understand them better. So let's look at them.

Jesus begins each of these segments by stating, "YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID...BUT I SAY TO YOU..." He first addresses what the "law" stated, and then gives the deeper truth of the law. He is not abolishing the Law, but giving the intention of the Law.

Jesus starts out addressing the issue of anger. He says, "*You have heard that people were told in the past, 'Do not commit murder; anyone who does will be brought to trial'*" (Matt. 5:21). He lists the law that had been on the books for so long, and everyone would know that it is a part of the Ten Commandments, "*Thou Shalt Not Murder*" (Exodus 20:13). Jesus doesn't say that the law is wrong, He then goes behind that law to instruct of the intention of the law. He says, "*But I now tell you: whoever is ANGRY with his brother will be brought to trial, whoever calls his brother 'You good-for-nothing!' will be brought before the Council, and whoever calls his brother a worthless fool will be in danger of going to the fire of hell*" (Matt. 5:22).

You see, behind the law of not murdering is the issue of anger. You don't commit murder if you are not angry, so Jesus opens up this law by addressing the issue behind the law, Don't Be Angry enough to let that anger drive you to do what is against the Law. If we control our anger, the tendency to want to hurt someone else decreases.

But I have to ask you, How many people have you KILLED with your thoughts? How many times have you thought, or said, "I wish they were dead!" You see, at that moment, your anger has driven you to the point of no return. You're right there at the precipice. And sadly, some in our world today do not control that anger within them and allow that anger to actually guide them to commit the murder. It's the anger behind the thoughts that often drives us to do things that hurt others.

Jesus wants us to make peace with each other so that we can not only avoid law suits and arrests, but to be reconciled with each other AND with God. So get control of your anger and live at peace with one another, and then watch the murder rate drop.

Jesus then addresses the issue of adultery. He says “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Matt. 5:27-28). Again, Jesus goes behind the Law to confront the issue that leads to adultery. He says, “Do Not LOOK LUSTFULLY at one another. That is for men as much as it is for women. And in our world today filled with pornography in all of the different forms of media, this is a tough one for us. Almost everywhere you turn, there’s a scantily clad woman or man boasting their body before the world, and those images get our minds turning and before we know it we might be saying something like, “Wow! I wish I had that!” And that thought can lead us into searching for THAT rather than treating one another with respect and dignity. The lustful looks lead us into the action of adultery, going outside of our marriage vows to feed our lusts.

So Jesus is telling us “Be CAREFUL little eyes what you see.” If your eyes are leading you to do what is wrong, it’s better to be blind than to let our eyes guide us away from God right into hell. And if our hands lead us into sin, again, it would be better for us to have no hands than to let them lead us right into hell. But it all starts with how we look at people and how we treat people, and that determines where our minds take us.

Then Jesus teaches about divorce. He says, “*It was also said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.’ But now I tell you; if a man divorces his wife for any cause other than her UNFAITHFULNESS, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again; and the man who marries her commits adultery also*” (Matt. 5:32).

Just as in Jesus’ day, it has become so easy for married couples to give up on their marriages and get rid of their spouse so they can look for someone else to entertain them and satisfy their pleasures. In Jesus’ day, all it took was for a husband to write a certificate of divorce to send the woman away. It could have been that she was a rotten cook, or was a terrible housekeeper, or any miniscule reason, not unlike today’s reasons for many divorces. The law made it so easy to end what was supposed to be a life-time commitment to each other that there was no longer any effort put into keeping that marriage.

But Jesus does give a guideline for reasonable divorce – Unfaithfulness to the marriage vows. Any behavior that breaks the vows to “love, honor and cherish” is the only reason for divorce in Jesus’ mind. It’s not that you just don’t get along with each other anymore. It’s not “she doesn’t cook,” or “he doesn’t help out with the housework.” No, it is unfaithfulness to the vows we make to each other on that day we stand before God and commit our lives to one another, “for as long as we both shall live.” Yeah, it can be tough, but Jesus is telling us that marriages are worth fighting for and keeping strong.

What Jesus is saying is that we need to build **HEDGES** of protection around our marriages that build UP the marriage rather than tear DOWN the marriage. Protect yourselves from looking at any other man or woman and wishing your husband or wife could be like them. Focus on building up your spouse so that they can be the very best they can be. And if both do that, they marriage will thrive.

So this means we need to TALK with each other rather than talking AT each other. Share your feelings, your worries, your concerns, your hopes and your dreams. Take the time to keep growing together and building into your mate so that they can be the best they can be, and that doesn’t mean trying to change those things in them that you don’t like. Encourage them, support them, and invite them closer into your life so that you can maintain a close relationship.

And in the words of Gary Chapman in his book *Love Languages*, keep the “love tank” **FULL**. Find out how you and your spouse show love and then feed them love in that language so that they never wonder if you love them. Work hard to prevent any kind of unfaithful behavior by showing love to them in the way they need to see love. Then, there’s no question that they love you and you love them.

Jesus then moves on to the law that covers keeping your promises; “*You have also heard that people were told in the past, ‘Do not break your **OATH**, but do what you have vowed to the Lord to do.’ But I now tell you; do not use any oath when you make a promise...*” (Matt. 5:33-34). Jesus says, “Let your **YES**’ be yes, and your **NO**’ be no!” Keep it as simple as that. Don’t swear by anything you think is higher in authority to prove your commitment to keep your promise. Just say “yes” or “no” and let it be as simple as that. Contracts can become so big and cumbersome, so keep it simple by a yes or a no.

Jesus is going deeper behind this law in order to help us to be people of our **WORD**, even if it hurts or becomes inconvenient. It used to be that people would seal a deal with a handshake and that would be the extent of the promise. One would stand by their word. And with that handshake, the commitment to do what was agreed upon was given, and then, the greatest effort to accomplish that commitment was expended. However in our world today, there are some who want to renege upon their promises, or others want to take advantage of that agreement to get more than what was agreed upon. Jesus says Consider **WISELY** before you co-sign for someone or even before you give your commitment to do something so that you make sure that you can fulfill your promise. But there are to be no oaths made; it is to be yes or no – nothing else.

Jesus continues teaching about revenge. He says, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But now I tell you; do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you”* (Matt. 5:38). Jesus goes so far as to say, Do not **RESIST** an evil person. If a person slaps you, don’t retaliate, but turn your other cheek. If they demand you give them your shirt, give them your coat too. If someone in authority commands you to take them a mile down the road, take them two.

I know this is another hard saying of Jesus, but He is interested in our hearts not becoming bitter and seeking revenge. **REVENGE** will only eat YOU up! There is no delight in getting revenge. Most often if you do get revenge on a person who has wronged you, you end up feeling worse than you did before. Seeking revenge is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die. Revenge only eats at your soul, turning you bitter to the point that that bitterness spills over and affects every single relationship you have in your life. It’s just not worth trying to get even.

I had a friend once who often told me, “I don’t get even; I get ahead.” Now that wasn’t against me, but he was explaining what happens to those who do wrong to him. WOW! He always wanted the last word, or the last retaliation. Jesus tells us instead, be quick to **FORGIVE** the wrongs so that you become free from the anger and bitterness that will consume you. Until you forgive the other, your life will be a living hell on the inside, AND on the outside. I just heard a great statement by Rob McCorkle,

“The one who forgives and apologizes first, wins the fight.” Think about it; bringing reconciliation is the best way to correcting a wrong. Question is, will we take the time to do it?

Jesus then moves on to how we are to treat the enemy. Rather than getting revenge on them, Jesus says love them. Listen to Jesus! “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies.’ But now I tell you; love your **ENEMIES** and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:43-44). REALLY? Love the enemy? Why in the world should we do that? Because God loves them, too, and desires that you show them His love so that they might see what real love looks like!*

Think about this; how will they hear/see the Gospel if you **HATE** them? If you show hate, you’ll be acting like all the rest of the world. But if you love them, even when they are hurtful, or abusive, or evil, God can use that to transform their lives, AND YOURS. Loving the enemy may be what they need to see life differently than they have ever seen it before. That way you’re not burning up with anger, you’re not actively seeking revenge, but you are demonstrating the kind of respect and dignity that they are not expecting, and you will take them off guard so that they might see Jesus through you. Seek the Lord’s help to **TRANSFORM** their lives from being an enemy to becoming a friend. When you let the Lord guide you in this, He will use you in a marvelous way to change the life of that person and draw them close to God.

But Jesus comes along and closes this section with a very difficult command. He says, **BE PERFECT AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT**. So what does that mean? It means that we are to see the person in front of us AS GOD SEES THEM! A precious child in desperate need of His love in their life. That fits all of us, but as we begin to see that person with needs for God’s love in them, and that we are God’s choice to bring that love to them, then we will begin to see the difference we can make in their life as we begin to show love to them as God has first loved us.

But the first response from many people today is, “What! I can’t do that!” And they are absolutely right; you cannot do that on your own without the help of God. Yet we want to know how we might follow Jesus better and grow closer to God, and we then tell God, “NO! I won’t do that!” We

end up like the rich young ruler in Matthew 22:37 who upon hearing Jesus' explanation of how to receive the kingdom of heaven, walks away sorrowfully because he is unwilling to give up all he has to follow Jesus. We are commanded to strive for God's perfection in loving one another, but the choice is ours, and we make the choice of either following Jesus or rejecting Jesus, finding life or claiming death.

Another response to this command to be perfect as God is perfect is, "You want me to do what?" So let me explain what Jesus is after here. First, Jesus tells us, **LOVE** the Lord, and then Love your neighbor. He starts by quoting the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5), "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" And Then, '*Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*' (Matthew 22:37-40). Love God – love each other. Simple in concept, but often difficult to do.

Second, Jesus tells us, **FORGIVE** 70 times 7 (Matthew 6:15, 18:22). When we forgive others of the wrong they have done to us, God is then able to forgive us for the wrong we have done to others. There's no "three strikes and you're out" here. Forgiveness is to be continuous, ongoing and forever.

Third, Jesus tells us, **GIVE** to others. He says in Luke 6:38, "*Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands – all that you can hold.*" God supplies us with an abundance so that we might freely give to others as God has given to us. Don't hold on to God's blessings, but freely give so that others might be blessed, too.

Fourth, Jesus tells us through the apostle Paul, **HONOR** each other, even the enemy. Romans 12:9-10 tells us, "*Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly as Christian brothers, and be eager to show respect for one another.*" Treat others as you want to be treated and you will find a difference in the environment in which you live.

Fifth, Jesus tells us, be willing to **DIE** for another. John 15:12-13 tells us, "*My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.*" As followers of Jesus, we are encouraged to live His example for us, to even die for the salvation of another, if that's what it takes.

So it all comes down to this; as **FOLLOWERS** of Jesus, Live Like Him! Amen? Let it be so!