

## **Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 8, Matthew 5-6 The Sermon on the Mount**

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This is Dr. Craig Keener teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 8 on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6.

We've been talking about Jesus' so-called antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount where he says, you shall not murder, well, you shall not want to murder.

You shall not commit adultery, well, you shall not covet your neighbor's spouse sexually. And some of these things I struggled with for years, not coveting my neighbor's spouse, but especially when I was single and I thought that even noticing someone's beauty was committing lust. That was, it was very difficult.

And Jesus' demands got my attention, certainly. I remember one time I was in a church service and I was thanking God in my heart. I hadn't lusted after anybody in such a long time and suddenly I noticed that I was staring at the hands, the beautiful hands of the woman in front of me lifted up in praise.

I said, oh God, I really have problems. But anyway, the Lord can deliver us from our problems and help us to be pure, holy, pure before him. But we shouldn't be coveting somebody else's sexuality.

That is being unfaithful to our spouse or our future spouse. And in the same way, Jesus says, don't betray your spouse by divorce. Because here we are also acting unfaithfully if we betray a spouse.

These things were for our good. It's not God that's making these rules to be hard on us. But God knows the pain of betrayal.

He knows that we were not meant for that. And so he set it up so that we wouldn't betray each other so that we would be faithful. Jesus warns that whoever remarries commits adultery.

We talked about this earlier. If this is literal, all remarriages are adulterous and therefore we should break up second, and third marriages and so forth. Well, before we jump to that conclusion that there's no hyperbole involved, we need to look at Jesus' teachings on divorce altogether in context.

Mark 10 and verse 11, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. Notice against her. This is not just a rule, just to have a rule.

This is to make sure that somebody is not betrayed. Divorce is not a victimless crime. It hurts someone.

It's wrong because it wrongs an innocent party. Sometimes both parties are guilty, but in any case, often it's an innocent party. In that culture, a wife could be divorced for almost any reason and had little economic recourse once she was divorced.

Now that's not to say that people thought divorce was a good thing. They recognized it wasn't. Some later rabbis said even the very altar of God weeps tears when a divorce takes place.

But on the other hand, most teachers believed that it was permissible. So, for example, you have this story of a woman who came and begged the rabbis, please don't let my husband divorce me. I love him.

I need him. Please don't let him divorce me. And they said, you know, we're sorry, but that's his right under the law.

We can't stop him. And that was a very sad thing. Now, also you have another rabbinic story.

I don't know if this one is true, but it's a nice story about this. Where, according to rabbinic teaching, because you're supposed to be fruitful and multiply if a wife couldn't have children after 10 years, the husband and the wife would have to divorce and they'd have to find other spouses and see if they could bear children that way. And so there was this, and it wasn't just the rabbis, you find it in Pseudo-Philo and elsewhere, but this one couple, they said, well, you know, the husband says, I love you, but I can't help it.

We have to obey the teaching. We have to be fruitful and multiply. We haven't had children for 10 years, so I have to divorce you.

But whatever you love most in this house, I'll let you take it with you when you go back to your father's house. And so, she said, okay, well, let me throw you a banquet, like Esther. So, she throws him a banquet.

She got him good and drunk. And while he was stone drunk, her brothers came in, picked him up, and carried him to her father's house. Because after all, he'd said, whatever you love most in this house, you can have.

And when he woke up, he said, oh, I can't divorce you. He went to the rabbis and they prayed and they had a baby. So that's the story.

But in any case, divorce was recognized as a sad thing. But they had no real rules that you couldn't do it. So, what does it mean, literally, if somebody commits adultery? It says he's committing adultery against her if he divorces her.

It can only mean that they remain married in God's sight. So, if he's marrying somebody else, he can't be doing that because he's married to her in God's sight. Mark 10, verse 11, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.

If Dedrick is married to Shemeika and he sleeps with Shonda, he likes women whose names begin with SH, that's literal adultery. But if Dedrick divorces Shemeika and marries Shonda, Jesus says that's also adultery. Because Dedrick still remains married to Shonda in God's sight.

And even more troubling, as you have in Luke 16, 18, that even the innocent party remains bound to the marriage. So if anyone divorces his wife, marries another woman, commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery, even though it doesn't say why she was divorced. Well, is this literal or is it hyperbole? Well, here are some considerations we have to take into account as we ask this question.

And I'm going to spend some time on this question because this is actually an issue of controversy in many churches today. So, I think you already know that there are different views on this. I'm going to try to give you what I think is most accurate.

But again, you already know that there's a range of views. You're not obligated to agree with me. But Jesus often used hyperbole.

The context of the divorce saying in Matthew 5:32 is hyperbole. Jesus' other teachings assume the dissolubility of marriage. When I say dissolubility, not that you're allowed to, but that the marriage actually is ended, and therefore you're not still married to the person afterward.

You can see that in the case of the woman at the well. You can see that with the exception clause in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. You can see it with Paul's freedom to recognize an exception in 1 Corinthians 7:15. You can see it in the very context of Mark 10 and verse 9. I'm going to do these in more detail. Jesus often used hyperbole.

Well, can a camel really fit through a needle's eye? I suppose if you squeeze it into camel juice, that's where we get camel meal tea, right? You can squeeze it into camel juice, but technically, no, a camel doesn't fit through a needle's eye. And that was an expression for something that was virtually impossible. Did Pharisees really gulp down camels whole? Talk about indigestion.

How often did Jesus' followers move literal mountains? Not to say God can't do that. The Bible talks about God doing that during earthquakes and so on. But these things were hyperbole.

They were graphic ways of putting something. Well, the context of the divorce saying in Matthew 5.32 is hyperbole. Remember the solution.

If a person lusts, well, if you lust, pluck out your eye. Most people don't take that literally. Most people don't pluck out their eyes.

They just recognize, whatever we have to do to stop lusting, we better do it. So if somebody is looking at pornography on their computer, if you have to disconnect from the computer, then you better do it. Whatever you need to do to get away from that, do it.

But people generally don't take that literally and pluck out their eye. There's a story that Origen, an early Christian leader, actually took this literally in his youth and castrated himself. And that did not go over well in the early church.

They did not like that. And then I don't know if it's a true story or not, but if it's true, it would certainly explain why he spent the rest of his life allegorizing the Bible instead of taking it literally. But in any case, we don't take that literally.

We recognize it's hyperbole. It's a graphic way of getting our attention. That's the context of this passage as well.

Jesus' other teachings assume the dissolvability of marriage. Jesus does not say to the woman, well, you were married once and you lived with five guys since then. Rather, he says, you were married five times but are just living with somebody now.

So you can say, well, he didn't mean it literally there. You can say that. But what you can't do is say both passages are literal.

One of the two passages can't be literal. Either Jesus would say, after the first marriage, the rest were adultery, or these were marriages. And when he's speaking of adultery, he's being hyperbolic in terms of remarriage.

Likewise, the exception clause in Matthew 5.32 and 19.9. Whoever divorces his wife, Jesus says, except in the grounds of unfaithfulness. Well, unfaithfulness was a legal charge often brought up in matters of divorce. And some people have tried to narrow the meaning there of porneia, unfaithfulness.

But actually, if you don't have anything in context that suggests the narrowing of the meaning, then you have no reason to narrow the meaning. The meaning means sexual immorality. It's actually wider than moikeia.

It's actually wider than adultery, rather than narrower. The school of Shammai, when they were talking about being unfaithful to your marriage, if a wife went out in public with nude hair, she wasn't wearing her head covering, they considered that to be unfaithfulness. So, Jesus says, whoever divorces his wife, except on the grounds of unfaithfulness, is committing adultery.

Well, divorce by ancient definition meant freedom to remarry. That's actually what the word meant. And that's how it was used in divorce contracts.

The question was the validity of the divorce. If the divorce was valid, then a remarriage was valid. If the divorce was not valid, well, then in the wife's case, the remarriage was not valid.

In the husband's case, Jewish men allowed polygamy, but it wasn't practiced very often. In the Gentile world and Jewish people living in the diaspora, that wasn't even a possibility. So, for either one, they couldn't really remarry unless the divorce was valid.

But if the innocent party here is validly divorced because of their spouse's unfaithfulness, if the innocent party is not married to the guilty party, how, pray tell, can the guilty party still be married to the innocent party? This would suggest that if Jesus makes an exception, probably there's an element of hyperbole in the original statement. Also, Paul recognizes another exception. Jesus says the believer is not free to divorce or abandon a faithful spouse.

In Corinth, in the Greco-Roman world in general, to walk out of the marriage automatically entailed divorce. If either party wanted out of the marriage, the marriage was dissolved. It was held together by mutual consent.

That was the Greek and Roman way of doing things. It was also the Jewish way of doing things in the diaspora. So, Paul, he'll address this both ways, the husband and the wife.

Mark 10 does that as well. Jesus says the believer is not free to divorce or abandon a faithful spouse. But Paul qualifies this as a special situation.

Well, what happens if the spouse leaves? He's talking about believers and unbelievers here. He's assuming the believer won't leave, or at least very certainly shouldn't leave because of what Jesus taught. But what happens if the other person

leaves? Well, if the spouse leaves, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7.15, the believer is not under bondage in such cases.

That's the exact language in ancient Jewish divorce contracts for freedom to remarry. And we know that because we have ancient Jewish divorce contracts that have been found in the Judean desert. And also, because we have a whole collection of material about ancient Jewish divorce in the tractate Gittin.

Mishnah Gittin 9 specifically talks about this, the formula for divorce. Saying the person is now free or not bound. Sometimes it was spelled out more fully, is now free to any man, free to marry any man the wife is.

So, Paul takes what Jesus said as a general statement of principle, the way we might take a proverb, that has to be qualified in some circumstances. The hand of the diligent makes rich. Well, Paul's not being diligent working and getting rich in jail.

Does that mean there's something wrong with him? This is a general principle. So, Paul takes it as a general statement of principle that may be qualified. Four out of the six texts about divorce in the New Testament explicitly make exceptions.

Do we explain away the exceptions or do we recognize that these exceptions are explicating the idea that was already present in the more general principle? But keep in mind here that this is not something that covers every kind of situation. What Matthew's and Paul's exceptions have in common is the believer is not the one breaking the marriage. The other person is the one breaking the marriage by being unfaithful to it sexually, not saying you have to divorce in that situation right away.

But if the person is continually being unfaithful and back in that day, according to law, you were supposed to, although it wasn't always enforced. But if your spouse is being unfaithful to you, if your spouse leaves the marriage, there's nothing you can do to make them stay. So when Paul says the believer is not under bondage in such cases, yes, the believer is free.

The believer didn't break up the marriage. Now, sometimes some believers will make somebody go away, in which case you help break up the marriage. But the believer must do everything possible to save our marriage, to make our marriage work.

And the point of the exceptions is for the person who's not breaking up the marriage, the person who's staying faithful to the marriage. Now, Paul made an exception based on analogy, based on understanding what Jesus really meant. Analogously, if we follow Paul's model, we might have to make an exception for something today like abuse.

If the husband is beating his wife, if the wife is putting arsenic or other kinds of poison in her husband's coffee or tea, those kinds of things may be a reason to separate them. And those are also the kind of things that break the marriage covenant. But we don't want to make this like anything.

Well, she tickled me and I don't like to be tickled or something like that. People will call all sorts of things like, well, they've mistreated me. We should do everything possible to make our marriage work and to make our marriage flourish.

The exceptions are supposed to be exceptions and not to reduce the point of hyperbole about being faithful to our marriage. Mark 10 and verse 11 speaks as if marriage is indissoluble. If you marry somebody else, you're committing adultery.

But Mark 10 and verse 9 recognizes that it is in fact dissolvable. Not that it's okay to dissolve it, but that the marriage once broken actually is broken. He says, therefore, what God has joined together, let no one put asunder.

He doesn't say it can't be put asunder. He says, don't put it asunder. So I think the overall teaching of Jesus on divorce qualifies this and shows us that it's possible to put hyperbole, the idea that it can't be put asunder.

The point in both cases is not that it can't be dissolved, but that it should not be dissolved. It must not be dissolved, at least from the believer's side, the obedient believer's side. The rhetorical function of the language is demand.

Preserve marriage. It's not a cosmic law that even when the marriage is broken, it's really still intact and we have to break up new marriages. Now, I know that's more relevant an issue in some cultures than in others, but you do have cultures today where you often have spouses who turn out to be unfaithful.

Sometimes they walk away from the faith. Sometimes they walk away from the spouse. And we need to keep that in mind.

And also, I'll mention this more later when we get to Matthew 19, but there were two people who were very, two schools of thought among the rabbis. One school of thought was the school of Shammai, which said that if your wife is unfaithful, you can divorce her. The school of Hillel said you can divorce your wife if she burns the toast.

On this particular issue, the burning of the toast people seem to have prevailed because Josephus and Philo also speak of, you know, divorce for any reason. Jesus doesn't believe in divorce for any reason. Jesus wants us to be faithful to our marriages.

So, the indissoluble and the dissoluble, you put them together. And in light of Jewish teaching techniques, a number of scholars who are familiar with the Jewish teaching techniques say, well, Jesus probably intended this to be more haggadic than halakic. It's not intended as a law.

It's intended as a principle that we need to always take into account. Jesus also warns that oaths are a poor substitute for integrity. The Torah warns against false oaths, and warns against taking God's name in vain.

When you swear an oath, you are invoking a deity. You are saying, well, God is my witness that this is true. Or if you were a Gentile, you'd invoke the name of a particular deity and say, you know, that deity is my witness.

In English today, sometimes we still speak of cross my heart and hope to die. Basically, what you're saying when you say God is my witness, if I'm not telling the truth and I'm invoking God's name, then God knows I have just dishonored his name and God will punish me for dishonoring his name. So, people were usually scared to invoke a God that way if they believed in a God.

So, which most people did. There were various Jewish views on oath-taking. Josephus and Philo praised the Essenes, which was a very strict group because they had so much integrity, that they needed no oaths.

And they seemed to be portraying the Essenes as very similar to a Greek philosophic sect called the Pythagoreans. The Pythagoreans didn't swear oaths. They just told the truth.

Jesus says, let your yes function as yes, let your no function as no. Just be so true to your word that people can trust you no matter what. One of my very close friends from northern Nigeria tells me that a generation ago, when he was young, if a Christian said something in court as a witness, that just settled it because Christians were always known for telling the truth.

Christians were a minority. But the first time a Christian lied under oath, it shook things up. And he said, today, a lot of the Christians are not behaving right.

But when Christians behave as Christians should, as we follow Jesus' teachings, we walk with integrity, people will learn that we are trustworthy. Now, with these oaths, people sometimes used k'nuyim, surrogate objects by which to swear. And the further from God's name, the better.

Hey, you don't want to swear by God just in case you accidentally couldn't keep the vow or you accidentally broke the oath. Better not to swear by God's name, better to swear by something else. Swear by heaven.



Or better yet, swear by the hair on your head. Because if you violate the law, the hair on your head won't bother you. And some of us actually have lost enough hair on our heads that swearing by it might be almost ineffectual.

But in any case, Jesus says, you can't do that. Because whatever you swear by belongs to God. Whatever you swear by is something that God created.

And so ultimately, it's referring back to God. Nothing is purely secular for the worldview of a believer. Because we believe that God is the rightful Lord of everything.

Now, non-believers won't believe that. We don't force that on them. But that's what we believe as followers of Jesus.

We have illustrations of this within Matthew. Herod Antipas swears oaths and ends up having to kill John the Baptist to fulfill his oath. Peter swears oaths, denying that he knows Jesus.

And that's also portrayed very negatively. So, we have illustrations of the principle even within Matthew's Gospel. Avoiding retribution and resistance, 5:38 to 42.

Well, avoiding revenge. And of course, Leviticus 19 tells us we're supposed to avoid revenge. But this eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, what's come to be called from Latin, *lex talionis*, that was standard practice in ancient Near Eastern, or today we might say ancient Middle Eastern law.

You have it in the code or the legal collection of Hammurabi from the 1900s BC, something like that. You have it in a number of ancient legal collections. And the idea was, if somebody pokes out your eye, then you take them to the judge, assuming you're in any condition to do so, and the judge will poke out their eye.

Although they could pay a monetary fine and get around it. But the difference is, in the Old Testament where you have an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, it's just stated for everybody, or everybody is free. They did have that distinction.

But in ancient Near Eastern law, elsewhere, it was based on class. So, if you poke out the eye of somebody of the same social class, then your eye gets poked out, and so on. If you poke out the eye of somebody of a lower social class, the penalty is less, and so on, based on the social class.

So, what we have in Exodus is actually an improvement, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, an improvement over surrounding laws. And those laws were also meant to

be an improvement because it meant that the punishment was to be commensurate with the offense. It wasn't allowed to be greater than the offense.

So, these things were improvements. And that's what civil law does. Civil law limits sin.

But Jesus goes beyond that. He says, don't even take revenge. Don't even take the thing to court.

Somebody pokes out your eye. Well, he talks about the text eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. Then he gives an example of something else turning the other cheek.

But Jesus is not revoking the Old Testament. Instead, he's saying, don't make use of this law. He's not saying it's not true, it's not just.

He's saying, don't make use of it. And there were also philosophers and Jewish sages who talked about avoiding vengeance. You have it in Exodus 23 and Leviticus 19 in the same context as loving your neighbor.

Avoid vengeance. But the example Jesus gives is the example of turning the other cheek. And when you were turning the other cheek, the context of that, actually, is often connected with the lex talionis, the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth, and other ancient Near Eastern legal collections.

And so, it was sometimes associated with that. But it was a matter of honor and shame. And this one was normally punished by a monetary fine.

But when somebody strikes you on the cheek, it's not meant to knock your teeth out. In this culture, it's like there are some old movies and some cultures where somebody might take a glove and slap you on the cheek. It's like I challenge you to a duel.

It was a challenge to your honor. It was an insult to your honor. It was a backhanded slap on the cheek.

When it says turn the other cheek to them also, you're saying, I'm not going to defend my honor. In a sense, it can be seen as a form of resistance because you're saying, I don't value your opinion that much that I'm really insulted because I only care about God's opinion of me. But it's also a form of loving your enemy.

The prophets suffered this. Isaiah 50 and verse 6 speaks of being struck on the cheek. Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 is struck on the cheek.

Jesus is challenging us not to defend our honor but to leave our honor in God's hands. How much of this is hyperbole? Well, the point of hyperbole is to grip our attention and make us considerate. So, I'll let you consider because I'm not sure all of us would know exactly where to draw the line in the same place.

But some of these are going to get more challenging as we go on. He says, if somebody wants to take you to court and take your cloak or if somebody wants to steal your cloak, relinquish it, verse 40. And many peasants, at least in Egypt, had only one cloak.

It may have been common to have more than that in Judea and Galilee. But many peasants had only one cloak. The one possession that Jewish law specifically exempted from seizure in Deuteronomy 24 was the outer cloak because that's what you would use to sleep in at night.

It was your blanket. It's how you kept warm at night. Well, if the person takes your outer cloak, go ahead and give them your inner garment too.

What happens if you give them both? You will be naked and they will probably be sorry. But in any case, Jesus is saying, just cooperate with them. They want these things, let them have these things.

These are not the things that matter. What matters is your relationship with God. He's going to talk in chapter six about, you know, the birds of the air, they don't worry about what they'll eat or what they'll wear.

Your heavenly father provides for them. So, we don't need to struggle and strive with people over possessions because we depend on God. And if these people take these things, well, and again, how far do you push this? If somebody does something, would you take them to court? One of my students came to me one time when we were studying this and there had been an auto accident.

Somebody had run into her and she wasn't sure that she should let her insurance company go after their insurance company to pay for the damages. And I said, no, in our culture, that's what the insurance is for. I think it's all right to do that.

But the point is, don't seek revenge and love your enemy and even cooperate insofar as is wise, which doesn't solve the issue. But then Jesus saying doesn't resolve completely the issue either because we've got a lot of different situations. He can't cover every situation.

So, he gives us the principles, sometimes stated hyperbolically. Love your oppressors, verse 41. There would be some people in Judea and Galilee who would not really like what Jesus was saying about this.

And you can understand why. Jesus goes beyond not resisting to actively cooperating. Soldiers from the occupying power, the Roman army, most of them locally were Syrian auxiliary recruits.

But soldiers could requisition things. They could say, OK, well, I need you to carry this for me or I need you to lend me your donkey so I can carry this or I need to quarter in your home during the winter, something like that. Soldiers were known to abuse this legal right that they were given by the government.

So how far should we cooperate in practice? Jesus says somebody wants you to carry something a mile, carry it two miles, just go all out in showing them that you're cooperating and you're not upset with them, but you're just loving them. Let your light shine. How far do we push this? Well, if we look at Jesus in practice or we look at Paul in practice, I mean, when somebody strikes Jesus on the cheek in John 18, it's not in Matthew's gospel, but somebody strikes Jesus on the cheek, Jesus does respond.

He says, what have I done? And challenges the legality of the way they're behaving. When the high priest orders Paul to be struck on the cheek in Acts 23, Paul responds, God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. So, there is an element of hyperbole here.

I mean, even earlier where Jesus has called nobody a fool in Matthew chapter 23, guess what? Jesus is talking to the Pharisees. He says, you blind fools. So, there is an element of hyperbole, but again, it's meant to grip our attention, and make us consider our ways to make us kind people, even to people who aren't kind to us.

Now, another question that this raises is whether this talking about personal oppressors or national oppressors. Christians have differed on this. And if it's national, would it mean that the nation shouldn't be involved or that we as Christians shouldn't be involved? These are questions that Christians have debated through the ages.

And I am not going to resolve questions that Christians have debated through the ages. But I can tell you a case where this really deeply challenged me. You know, I was an atheist before my conversion.

And after I wrote my book on miracles, there were some atheists on the internet. Not all atheists, but some of the radical atheists called the New Atheists who just misrepresented the book. They said bad things about me.

And I just loved them. I couldn't help but love them. I used to be an atheist.

I could sympathize with where they were coming from, even though I knew better because I knew the Lord. But I did have a different kind of problem. My wife and I were supposed to go speak on ethnic reconciliation to, I believe it was 1700 pastors in Cote d'Ivoire, right after a civil war had taken place there.

And this war was not on religious grounds. It was an ethnic war. But I had a problem.

I really didn't feel this part where I was talking about loving your enemies. I didn't feel it at all. I was used to talking about ethnic reconciliation among Christians, but I didn't feel it.

Halfway over the Atlantic, I realized the Lord convicted me that the reason I didn't feel good about talking about loving enemies was because I didn't love my enemies. And the enemies I had in mind, some of my friends in the middle belt of Nigeria had been victims of the attacks of jihadists. A couple of my friends had been stranded in the church for three days with no water and a corpse as jihadists outside were attacking the church.

I didn't dislike Muslims, but the jihadists, the kind that had tried to kill my friends and had killed many Christians, unprovoked initially, I mean, eventually some of the younger Christians started striking back and not turning the other cheek. And unfortunately, they were killing other people besides jihadists, which is not justifiable on anybody's terms. But initially, the people who were doing this were just unprovoked slaughtering Christians and slaughtering moderate Muslims too.

I did not love these people. And I justified my hatred of these people, and the Lord convicted me. And I said, Lord, this isn't practical.

I mean, you have to be able to strike back. But the issue wasn't practicality. And the issue wasn't saying necessarily what somebody's position should be on, like a police action to stop people from committing this violence.

The issue was, was I allowed to hate them in my heart? Or did I have to love them in my heart? And the issue wasn't, what's the most practical thing to do? I mean, nonviolent resistance, worked with Martin Luther King Jr. It worked with Gandhi. There are some other places in history that I won't mention. Out of respect for some other places where it didn't work.

And the issue wasn't here whether it worked or not in terms of changing the enemy. The issue was, if I'm a disciple of Jesus, what did Jesus do? Jesus loved his enemies when he went to the cross and died for us. Because while we were his enemies, he laid down his life for us.

And for some, it worked, brought us to himself. Some remained his enemies, but he laid down his life for us. And so, I could not harbor hatred in my heart.

And after I repented, then I was able to go and speak with integrity the message the Lord gave me. Now, social conditions may differ from one place to another. I'm not going to advise you on how things should be done in your culture.

But we do need to love our oppressors. The details might be hyperbole, but the principle of love has to prevail. Love does no harm to a neighbor, and love even shields the neighbor from harm when we can do that.

We have many stories of jihadists and others who actually have come to faith as they realize the truth and are now our brothers and sisters in Christ. Surrendering possessions, verse 42. Beggars and charity were common in Judaism, but they also had a high work ethic.

So people valued work. People didn't normally beg if they didn't have to. So, when we talk about people begging in that culture, it wasn't like, in my culture, I have to pray about where to give.

Because once you give to one place, they often sell your address to a bunch of other places, and everybody's asking you for things, and not all of them are using them in the right way. But in any case, beggars and charity were common in Judaism, but there was a high work ethic. But do you give up all your possessions, verse 42, and then become a street person yourself, like the cynics who begged in the streets in Greek cities? Judaism normally limited charity to 20% beyond tithes to make sure you didn't become a beggar.

When you look at Jesus' lifestyle, Jesus, there were limits. I mean, he had to get away from the crowds, take his disciples away from the crowds, because there are limits to what can humanly be done. But Jesus gave and gave and gave.

He sacrificed for the sake of others. So, there are limits, but ultimately we need to be people who are giving and people who value other people more than we value possessions. I think that's the point here.

Verses 43 to 48, love your enemies. Well, Jesus addresses, I believe, all kinds of enemies, personal as well as national. And he shows love to a centurion.

Now in Luke's gospel, you find out more about why the centurion was lovable, but Matthew doesn't tell us that. And Matthew is writing for Jewish believers. If he's writing for Jewish believers after 70, as I believe, or if he's writing for Jewish believers before 70, as tensions are building towards 70, Jewish people had reason,

Judeans and Galileans in particular, had reason not to like Romans or members of the Roman army.

And after what happened to Jerusalem, Jewish people around the empire had reasons to not feel too comfortable about the Roman army. Qumran, the Dead Sea Scrolls, talked about hating your enemies, but Jesus talks about loving your enemies. And that's whether it's somebody individually who doesn't like you or somebody where they belong to a group that you don't like or they don't like your group, you need to love them anyway.

And I've been in situations like that. And sometimes it's been for the gospel's sake. One time I was with another professor and we were, and he was teaching the students against the Bible, I was teaching the students for the Bible, and it became like a tug of war for the students.

And I wanted to withdraw from the tug of war, but there's a proverb that says, the righteous who gives way before the wicked is like a polluted well. So, for the sake of the students, I hung in there. But I also prayed that in this case, the proverb would also be fulfilled that God makes even one's enemies to be at peace with him.

And God did that. And this man and I became friends. And eventually, God also arranged it so that the students came over to the side of the Bible and this man was like, well, how did that happen? Because he actually was, he had more teaching experience than I did.

But in any case, we became friends. So that's not guaranteed that will always happen that way. But we're called to love our enemies, whatever the grounds for our enemies.

If you're from a culture where people practice curses and people have cursed you, I found out something very interesting about that because my wife is from a culture where some people practice that and they were practicing that towards us. I found out that if we follow Jesus' teaching about blessing those who curse you, it really releases you from being held by that. That blessing those who curse you, you know, Proverbs says that a curse that's not deserved will not land on you.

And again, Balaam was trying to curse Israel and couldn't do it until it was deserved because he couldn't curse him God had blessed him. And so, in the same way, we can trust that God has our back. We don't return curses for curses.

We don't return mocking for mocking. We answer in love. We may have to answer firmly.

Jesus certainly did that with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. But that doesn't mean we stop loving people or caring for them or praying that they will see God's love as well. We have both positive and negative examples here that Jesus gives in terms of loving enemies.

The positive example is God. God was often the subject for imitation in ancient ethics. And Jesus gives that here.

He says, well, God sends his rains upon the just and on the unjust. He sends sunshine on the just and the unjust alike. And he gives a negative example.

The Gentiles are viewed negatively in Leviticus and elsewhere. He says, you know, we realize the Gentiles don't always behave according to biblical law, right? Even Gentiles, even pagans love those who love them. So, if you love people who love you, how are you acting any better than they are? No, you love even the people who don't love you, love them.

And I've been in some settings where I've been there long enough where I was able to win over every person. The longest it took me was a year by showing them love. Now, again, that's not always guaranteed either.

But often, love can change people's hearts. But even when it doesn't, we still love people. Verse 44, pray for your persecutors.

You know, in 2 Chronicles 24, Zechariah prays for judgment on his persecutors. Same with Psalm 137. Oh God, just how blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes their little ones against the rocks like they did to our children.

Jeremiah 15, praise for judgment. Revelation 6 in the New Testament, praise for judgment. And there may be a place for that.

I had a student from a Latin American country where in a right-wing dictatorship, during that, he came home, he found his parents had been killed by a neighbor. And he prayed for the God of vengeance. And you can understand that.

I mean, I couldn't tell him that was a wrong thing for him to do. He didn't take it into his own hands, he prayed. But there's a higher ethic here, a higher demand here.

And this is a challenge to us. I was praying with Sundia Gan, another one of my students from Northern Nigeria. Well, actually from the middle belt of Nigeria.

And in a particular state, some people were demanding Sharia law. And so, some Christians had gone to the capital to, they made up a lot of the state and they said, no, we don't want Sharia law. And some jihadists started gunning them down.



They'd come prepared with automatic weapons and so on. And Sunday, as far as he knew, his cousin had been killed. He thought maybe his brothers were there.

He thought maybe his brothers had been killed. He thought his wife had gone to this and that his wife had been killed. He didn't know whether they were alive or dead.

He had no way to contact them. And as we were praying together, I prayed, oh God of vengeance, arise, mighty warrior, avenge your people. I thought I'd prayed really well.

And after I finished praying, Sunday prayed. He said, oh God, forgive them. If we die, we have hope, but they don't have the hope of eternal life that you give.

And I was ashamed because on Sunday prayed as a man of God, a deeper man of God than I had prayed. Years ago, I mentioned earlier in the course, I was falsely accused. I was put into a very bad situation that I thought was going to destroy my ministry.

Eventually, I was vindicated after a few years. But the person who was primarily the instigator of the situation, knew exactly what he was doing. There was no question about that.

Admitted what he was doing. You know, I had loved him right from the start. For the first couple of months, I loved him.

But after a while, the Bible says to pray for your persecutors. I found myself praying for him, that God would kill him. And the Holy Spirit reproved me.

I said, God, that's not fair. Everything, I mean, what you called me to do, I can't even do because of this accusation. But God reminded me that I could do what he called me to do.

Because he was with me. And I had to love this person. It didn't come easily.

It didn't come quickly. But eventually, it came to the place where I could, if I had seen him, I would have run up and hugged him. I loved him.

And I love him now. Be perfect like God is. Verse 48.

Now in Luke 6:36, it says, be merciful like your heavenly father. There's probably an Aramaic word that can be translated whole. It can mean perfect.

It can be merciful. It can encompass some of these different things. Scholars have pointed to the Aramaic word being behind both of these.

So, it comes out translated in a couple of different ways. But in the Old Testament, it says, in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 18.13, it says, be perfect or blameless with the Lord your God. So also, Leviticus 11, Leviticus 19, Leviticus 20.

Be holy like God is holy. So, God provides an example for us. If God's the standard, none of us can boast.

So, by the time we get to the end of Matthew 5, Jesus' demands have been pretty radical. Because these are demands not just on what we do outwardly. These are demands on our hearts, that our hearts be right.

And that's something that happens as we are born again. Let God transform us, and give us a new life in Christ. And as we let God continue to soften our hearts and conform us to the image of Christ, as we go through these tests and learn to respond in the right ways.

If you're not learning to respond in the right ways, you will probably have to have more tests to get there. But in any case, as we get these tests, we grow. And Matthew 6 carries this theme on further.

Don't do your righteousness to be glorified by others. Matthew 6, verse 1. You can do it before others to be seen by them to glorify God, but don't do it before others so that you'll be glorified. It's the same Greek word in both cases.

And he gives three examples of this. Don't do your charity so others will see it and honor you. Don't do your prayer before others so they'll see you and honor you.

Don't do your fasting before others so they'll see you and honor you. And with the fasting, ancients normally didn't shave or wash or anoint their head when they fasted. The anointing, your scalp could get dry so you could anoint there.

But also, Greeks had this practice of anointing themselves with exercise, and then they would take something called a strigil and scrape it off. That was one of the ways they cleaned themselves. Well, so normally if you're fasting and you haven't shaved, you haven't washed, you haven't anointed yourself, Jewish people would look around and say, okay, that person must be fasting.

But you don't let people know that you're fasting. That would mean, for example, today in my culture, I brush my teeth so they can't smell that I'm fasting. Now, this is a general principle.

I remember there were a few times when I was with my parents and I was fasting and my mother fixed a meal and I wouldn't eat, but I didn't want to tell her that I was fasting. That got really, that created a very bad situation. Maybe I should have just told her.

But in any case, we don't do it to be honored by others. We don't do it so that others will think well of us. These are fairly random examples, but they're fairly representative examples of the kinds of things that people counted as righteousness.

The Book of Tobit, a book in the Apocrypha, is a widely known story. Others talked about, well, the Book of Tobit has these examples in 12.8. Others talked about the basic examples of righteousness in terms of Torah, the temple service, and charity. Some later rabbis talked about prayer, charity, and repentance, which could be expressed in fasting.

In any case, Jesus gives these examples of not doing your righteousness to be seen by others and speaks of the eternal reward that goes with them. If you do them just for God to see, then you'll be rewarded by God. But if you already get your reward by doing it for others to see, some people, look pious on the outside, but in effect, they're practical atheists.

Because they're not really thinking about how God will reward them. They want to get everything they can from people now. They're not really thinking about God.

Jesus says those who do it for others to see, they've already received the reward in full, which was a term used on ancient business documents, meaning paid in full. Nothing more is owed to this person. One of the examples, the first example, is doing your charity secretly.

Chapter 6, verses 2 through 4. And he uses hyperbole here. When you do your charity secretly, don't sound a trumpet before you. Well, nobody really sounded trumpets before them as they were doing charity.

Nobody did that literally. Maybe it could be trumpets calling people to prayer. Maybe it's the trumpet-shaped charity boxes in the temple that it's alluding to.

Probably it's just hyperbole. Probably it's just a graphic way of making the point. You know, these people, they want everybody to see them giving their charity.

So, before they put their money in, they sound a trumpet. And pardon my music. But anyway, he said, don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

Obviously, I wasn't there since an ancient orator talked about that when somebody committed a solacism with his hands, talked about heaven and earth. Well, I mixed

them up. Well, I should have said, don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

In any case, that kind of hyperbole was also known elsewhere. Marcus Aurelius in the second century is a Stoic philosopher. Says, don't let your own ear hear you.

It was just a graphic way of saying, just let it be secret. Receiving treasure in heaven for charity. Jewish people already believed that.

You have that in the book of Tobit and elsewhere. And it's a standard expectation of care for the poor in Judaism. Many throughout history have seen this.

Of course, St. Anthony, St. Francis, Wesley. As far as Wesley was concerned, stewardship was caring for the poor. And we should have all of our resources poured into caring for people's needs.

People should learn to work hard. He emphasized that too. But we should care for the poor.

We should make ways for them to be able to achieve more. And Wesley said, you know, if when I die there's more than just a handful of coins to my name, then let everybody call me a thief and a liar. Because he wanted to devote his resources to helping others.

Matthew chapter 6 verses 5 through 15. Jesus teaches about prayer. And the way he sets it up is with a very careful structure about the way you shouldn't pray and the way you should pray.

First of all, don't pray like this, like the hypocrites, 6.5. Do pray like this, secretly, verse 6. Don't pray like the pagans, verses 7 and 8. Do pray like this. And then he gives the example of what we call the Lord's Prayer in verses 9 to 13. And then goes on to develop the petition about forgiveness further in verses 14 and 15.

Well, the praying in secret. He uses some hyperbole here as well. Go into your closet or your storeroom.

Not every home actually had one of those. But we know that it's hyperbole because Jesus himself didn't go into the storeroom. He went up into the hills.

But it still meets the same point. He went elsewhere to pray to be alone with God. So it wouldn't just be other people seeing him.

That doesn't mean he never prayed in public. He did pray in public too. But especially he prayed in private.

Sometimes we have people who want to pray in public and want prayer to go on in public. We don't even spend time praying in private. Hyperbole.

Homes were crowded. They were tightly packed together. Villages were often close together.

That's where Jesus has to go up in the hills sometimes. Like in Mark chapter 1. He talks about somebody who arranges to be in the street at prayer times. Wants everybody to see them when they pray.

Jesus says to pray in secret. Pray so that only your father sees you. He says don't pray like the pagans.

They used a lot of verbiage. Pagans tried to pray to manipulate their deities. They would pile up different names of their deities.

There was this one document that people often cite where the person gives all the possible names of this goddess that he's invoking. And finally says, or by whatever other name you wish to be called. Just in case I missed one.

They would pray in ways to manipulate their deities. Partly by piling up names to appeal to the deities. They would also appeal to different sacrifices, offerings, and favors that they showed to the deity.

Well, I gave you this offering. Surely you could give me some rain on my field and so on. In Roman custom, a single ritual syllable is messed up.

Ruined the prayer. If the priest's hat fell off, they had to redo the prayer. So, people were very much into formulas, into manipulation in pagan prayer.

But the issue is not so much the form. It's the motivation. Jesus offers a concise prayer.

My father-in-law in Congo often would pray for people. Just a very simple prayer. And often God would answer immediately.

It wasn't a lengthy, elaborate prayer. Some people do pray lengthy, elaborate prayers and God hears them too. But Jesus here gives a very concise prayer.

It's not by piling up words. Why do we know that he hears us? Well, he says in verse 7, because your heavenly Father knows what you ask, knows what you need before you ask him. So that being the case, the basis for the answering of our prayer is not that we pile up verbiage.

It's not that we get the ritual just right or the formula just right. Sometimes in the past, I prayed with formulas that weren't biblical and I didn't know it and God answered my prayers because I didn't know any better. But it's because we pray on this basis.

Our Father. And that's why Jesus starts the prayer that way. Our Father.

Do you ever pray the Lord's Prayer? It has a lot of parallels with some other Jewish prayers. And we'll talk about that more in the next session.

This is Dr. Craig Keener teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 8 on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6.