

Pursuing Right Relationships With Brethren

(Matthew 5:20-26)

I. One of our recent points of emphasis has been discussions around our relationships;

A. Most of the time the world has a general code of conduct for how we should treat someone else; many times this even based or rooted in a scriptural principle (*such as the Golden Rule*)

B. However, if we were to pull back some layers and look underneath the surface, what we would find would be ugly and unattractive;

i. Sentiments like:

a) As long as I don't do anything truly harmful to my neighbor it isn't really all that bad for me to treat them just a little poorly from time to time

b) I can say whatever I want to whoever I want; It isn't as though I'm hurting them physically or stealing from

c) I can think any way I choose about others; I can harbor ill will, I can wish them evil, I can hate them-- as long as I am not acting on those thoughts

2. And to extend this thought even further; when someone actually does mistreat someone else; that code of conduct disappears completely;

a) Maybe I said or did something; but I couldn't help myself; or they deserved it;

(i) It *certainly* isn't my responsibility to go and fix it-- to make it right; give them enough time and they will forget about it anyway;

C. This is not a problem that is limited to those in the world; unfortunately these same attitudes are lurking just beneath the surface in many of God's people;

i. This isn't a new development either; **Turning to Matthew 5** we can see that this was a problem that Jesus had to deal with in his ministry as well:

II. Read Matthew 5:20-26

A. There is a general misunderstanding that is often applied to the sermon on the mount: That is, the idea that Jesus is contrasting the New Law with the Old Law;

i. In other words; This is the standard that you've been held to up until now; but if you want to be a Kingdom Citizen; you'll have to be even more righteous:

2. Or for some; It is pointing to the Pharisees and saying; look at how the religious elite live; you have to be even more righteous than they are!

a) While this is maybe a little closer to the truth, it still doesn't address the issue in the way that Jesus did;

B. First, Jesus was not seeking to impose a more rigorous standard than the Law of Moses or suggest that its teachings didn't have high enough moral standards; in the previous verses He has just gone to great lengths to express the importance of following each and every one of God's commands;

1. **Second, the Pharisees** are not being pointed at as an example of "good", so that they could to "better". Their righteousness had to exceed that of the Pharisees because to follow their example was to have no righteousness at all;

a) Jesus is having to argue against layers of misunderstanding and distortions of the law that had been built up over time by the scribes and other religious leaders;

b) They had taken the law, cut it down to the portions that best suited their needs, and then **reduced those** to nothing but rituals-- their idea of righteousness was completely separated from any idea of love:

c) They had forgotten that the very foundation of the law (*Matthew 22:36-40*) was to first Love God with all your heart, and then turn that love to your neighbors.

d) turning our attention back to the text:

III. Verses 21-22

A. From the best that I can tell In verse 21 Jesus is first quoting the Law of Moses, and then citing the tradition of the Elders:

1. In other words it might be like saying: This is a universally recognized truth; Both the Laws of God, and the traditions of man acknowledge that murder is wrong;

2. But the verses that follow seem to indicate there was a core problem in the hearts of some of the people; it was one that we referenced as we began: **This is the line where serious wrongdoing starts**-- everything up to that must be ok;

a) They had bought the illusion that you could hate your brother so long as you didn't murder him; that you could carry lust in your heart as long as it didn't

lead you to commit adultery! **and they were selling this to the people as well:**

B. Jesus calls out this idea that if you can't be brought up on charges in the court, it must not be all that bad;

1. The words that you use to express the contempt in your heart are just as wicked as murder;

a) What a powerful lesson about the way that we speak to each other:

(1) Don't misunderstand; Jesus is not saying that the line is murder-- and speaking this way is getting too close to crossing that line;

(2) When we speak this way we are crossing the line of not loving our brethren;

b) You may not be liable in the court of man for cutting down with speech; but Jesus says you will be accountable in God's court:

2. In the same way that Jesus argues about our speech; we should see the implication about our hearts; **our thoughts toward brethren must be pure;**

a) How can we expect to have one without the other; Again; Jesus is not warning about "getting too close to a line". He is stating that the way we follow God's will in our relationships with others is by showing love in Action, in Words, and in thought:

b) To do otherwise not only cuts us off from that person; but separates us from God as well.

(i) So what are we to do about it?

IV. Verses 23-24

A. Let us first point out that there is a concept at work here.

1. When we engage in worship; we are in the presence of God. Certainly to get rid of our sins we must draw near to him; but when we come into His presence our desire should be to do so with nothing separating us from Him. ***(this is something we demonstrate often in our prayers during assembly)***

2. First and foremost; the application is that we should remove the barrier of having not repaired our relationships;

a) I would suggest that this is especially true in this context; While there was certainly an “individual element” in the worship under the Old Law; there was still very much a congregational element; which is what we do today;

(1) Can you easily accomplish a secular task when you have severed the relationship with your partner?

b) How much more should this apply to the great task of worship? How can I expect to join in unison with a brother to praise God if I’ve sinned against them and refuse to repair the damage?

c) Not only is this not possible; when I have this attitude I am blinded to the consequences:

V. Verses 25-26

A. At first this seems like a strange piece of advice from the Lord; But He is simply using a scenario they could relate to to illustrate His point.

1. Anyone can see the wisdom of settling out of court when you are the guilty party; Here you have been guilty of wrongdoing against someone else: You have the opportunity to make it right before hand and “escape the consequence”.

2. However, if you refuse to do so; you will be found guilty; you will be punished; and the consequence is *not* reversible:

B. Notice the urgency that is a part of the illustration:

1. You don’t have much time; You are on your way to the courts: **Do it Quickly (v 25)**

a) This is wisdom we must take to heart; Repair the damage with urgency! Don’t put it off; don’t let it fester; Don’t wait around until you change your mind and decide that you *are not* in the wrong; If you do the damage will be irreversible:

(1) *(We might could point out that in addition to damaging yourself, the damage you do to the brother may unavoidable as well)*

VI. Applications:

A. In context there are a couple of main points:

1. In the broad sense of the sermon as a whole; obedience from the Heart is being emphasized; It must come first; A heart that is right with God will produce actions that are in accordance with His will: As Jesus states later: those who Love Him will do His commandments;
2. But don't lose site of what that larger point is being specifically applied to here:
 - a) The immense importance of our love for our brethren; Specifically how that is demonstrated in our relationships with them; Not only must our actions be right; but our words and the thoughts of our hearts;
 - b) We need to take stock on whether or not we are being separated from brethren;
 - (1) Actions?
 - (2) Words?
 - (3) Thoughts?
 - (a) Any of these **demand** that I do whatever it takes to restore that relationship.