

1. If you asked me to take you to the chapter(s) of the bible that best describes what God expects of you as a believer in Jesus, I would take you to Chapters 5-7 of the Gospel of Matthew.
  - a) This section is all one speech given by Jesus.
    - i) Some argue it is a collection of speeches. That is not what the text says. I believe Matthew, being a Roman tax collector, understood Roman shorthand, so he could write quickly. Either that, or Jesus filled him in on the speech later.
  - b) It is commonly known as the "Sermon on the Mount".
    - i) That title does not appear in the Bible. It is a nickname for this section given as Jesus went up on the side of a hillside and spoke.
  - c) One of the great secrets to understanding the Sermon on the Mount is to understand the impossibility of accomplishing anything on this list without the help of God himself.
    - i) Chapter 5 ends with the statement "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Well now, try living that one for a while. ☺
    - ii) The secret to understanding the Sermon on the Mount is that we are only perfect because we accept Jesus perfect sacrifice as payment for our sins. That is only how we are perfect in God's eyes.
    - iii) There are two verses that come later in Matthew that apply here as well:
      - a) When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"  
Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:25-26, NIV)
      - b) When you start reading the Sermon on the Mount, you begin to understand God's requirements to get into heaven are impossible to live by. These impossible standards should drive people to Jesus.
      - c) Jesus taught these as a common misconception among the religious Jews was that it was possible to keep the law. They lightened the interpretation of the law. We'll get to that as we go through the text.
  - d) The other big-picture idea to get out of the Sermon on the Mount is that once you comprehend your need for Jesus, and turn your life over to him, there are practical aspects to this speech that apply to us once we become followers of Jesus.
    - i) One of the great secrets of the Christian life has to do with the repetitive idea of "letting go, and trusting God". The great mistake all Christians make is to trust in their own self-discipline.
    - ii) We read passages out of the Sermon on the Mount and try to live them through our own strength. Through self-discipline, we are giving the glory to ourselves and not to God.
      - a) Jesus is saying the problems of the world as well as the blessings of God begin with our internal attitude. The Sermon on the Mount teaches it is a sin to think a bad thought as well as to act upon it.
      - b) Jesus focuses on the root-problem of sin being on the inside. We can't control our behavior based on self-discipline. Therefore, we need to deal with our attitudes in order to control our behavior.
    - iii) It is only by trusting God and praying for the Spirit of God to work through you that you are capable of living any single aspect or command taught in the Bible.
    - iv) That is the secret of Christianity. Letting God work through you to glory Him.
      - a) The rest is just the details. ☺

2. Let me leave you with some final overview thoughts on the Sermon on the Mount:
  - a) One can preach wonderful sermons on every single one of these verses.
  - b) I have written two lessons on Chapter 5. These two lessons are by no means a complete, comprehensive study of this chapter.
  - c) If you see personal applications I may have missed, you may be right. I try to limit my studies to 10-12 pages, so we won't get it all. Hopefully, I cover what is most important.
3. Verse 1: Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them, saying:
  - a) In the last part of Chapter 4, Jesus went around the area near the Sea of Galilee performing miracles. He was drawing a large crowd from all over the area, as his reputation as a miracle worker was spreading far and wide. Now Jesus is using this opportunity to teach.
  - b) Notice Verse 1 says Jesus is teaching "them". Is it referring to the disciples or the crowds?
    - i) I would argue it is the disciples. Let's face it, many in the crowd will turn away from Jesus' teaching. Miracles are not enough to get people to accept Jesus, as we will see later in Matthew. Many just came to see Jesus' miracles. This speech is given to believers, which includes the disciples and those who became followers.
  - c) From Verse 3 through the end of Chapter 7, we have one speech by Jesus.
4. Verse 3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
  - a) From here to Verse 11 we have what is called the "Beatitudes".
    - i) You won't find that word in the bible as it comes from the Latin.
    - ii) The next set of verses all begin with "Blessed are."
      - a) The word describes joy from *within*. It does not refer to happiness as derived from any circumstances of your life at the moment.
      - b) You can read this as, "You will be blessed in this way if you do this".
      - c) The secret to understanding this section is to compare the actual rewards for each of the blessings with the blessings themselves.
    - iii) Let's begin with this statement in Verse 3. It says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit".
    - iv) That sounds a like a contradiction to the Christian life.
      - a) Aren't we full of the Holy Spirit as believers? (See Ephesians 5:18)
      - b) One must see this verse in context. Jesus is speaking to unbelievers.
    - v) The word for "poor" means destitute. It means you have nothing. Think of a beggar who depends upon others for daily survival.
    - vi) One must realize that apart from Christ, we have nothing spiritually.
      - a) It is that realization of how poor (destitute) we are spiritually that drives us to Jesus. Our reward is the "kingdom of heaven". That expression used by Matthew refers to eternal salvation.
    - vii) As a believer, this verse is a constant reminder that we are nothing without God.
      - a) It is a reminder to constantly "empty" ourselves of our egos, our sins and our faults and our dependency on God. Jesus says blessed are those who are poor (as in destitute) in Spirit. It is a continual action for believers.
5. Verse 4: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
  - a) This verse sounds like a catchall for anybody who is mourning over any pain.
  - b) This verse should be read in context of the surrounding verses.
    - i) The issue is our relationship to God.
    - ii) In Verse 3, Jesus talks about being "spiritually poor", which is our condition when we ignore God or we refuse to ask forgiveness of our sins.
    - iii) Our mourning is the realization of our sinful nature and our need for forgiveness.
      - a) The reward for our mourning is stated in this Verse. We will be comforted.

- iv) This is a continual action. Our mourning comes from the realization of our sinfulness and our need to bring those faults to God. The comfort comes from the fact we accept God's forgiveness upon confession and repentance.
  - c) The second beatitude (Verse 4) is a natural progression from the previous one (Verse 3).
    - i) It starts with the realization of how poor you are spiritually without God.
    - ii) That pain of being spiritually poor causes us to mourn.
    - iii) The good news is God is aware of that pain, and if we seek God in that realization, we can be assured that He will comfort us.
    - iv) A God that loves you is a God that cares about your well being. The practical application to the Christian is that one can turn to God during our times of pain and be assured that He loves us, cares for us, listens and wants to help.
6. Verse 5: Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- a) The word "meek" is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language.
    - i) People think it means "wimpy" or "weak", or being a pacifist.
    - ii) Meek refers to someone who is full of power and strength, and doesn't need to show it off to know he has it.
    - iii) Think of a martial arts expert who walks away from an insult. He or she doesn't have to beat up the one who insulted them as the martial arts expert knows he or she is more powerful than the one who insulted them.
    - iv) It may help to understand the opposite of "meek" is "vengeful". A person who is not meek is one who seeks revenge on those who do them harm.
  - b) The attitude of meekness refers to all believers in Jesus.
    - i) We as believers will inherit the earth. We will live forever and have blessings more powerful than one can imagine.
      - a) What is that in comparison to riches? What is that in comparison to power? The point of being meek is that we don't have to seek revenge on those who hurt us. We have far more power and riches than anything the world has to offer.
      - b) I should state that this is not an argument against seeking power as to be a leader. Somebody has to lead. This is not an argument against earning a living and supporting one's family. It is about taking vengeance on those who have hurt us.
    - ii) We can, and should act meek to all the things the world has to offer, because we already own them. The world will eventually be handed over to Jesus (Revelation Chapter 5) and we will be adopted sons of God (Ephesians 1:5). We get to share in that benefit.
    - iii) Once you are saved by faith in Jesus, you now get everything. We are comforted with God's love in Verse 4, and our reaction is to act in meekness.
7. Verse 6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- a) If you are really hungry or thirsty, do you care about anything else?
    - i) When I go to bed very hungry I even dream about food!
  - b) The next beatitude (Verse 6) now focuses on our new relationship with God.
    - i) Once we are saved, our life gets blessed by continually seeking God.
    - ii) God wants us to seek Him as if we are really really hungry or thirsty for Him.
  - c) The blessing of Verse 6 is that God satisfies that spiritual appetite.
    - i) If our desire is to serve God, God rewards that desire and comforts us.
    - ii) This verse requires balance. On one hand, if we seek God as if one is really hungry and thirsty, He satisfies completely that desire for worship.
    - iii) The balance is to continually and regularly seek God. God does fully satisfy that desire. It does not mean, "I just worshipped God, I'm now done for the year." Our love and gratitude to God should constantly drive us to Him.

- d) I should also add that this verse does not teach to ignore your physical needs, just to put them in perspective. There are false teachers that say we should deny our needs for food or money in order to be “more spiritual”. That is not what this verse, nor the bible teaches. It is about perspective and priority. Jesus teaches to seek *first* the kingdom of God and then God will take care of all of your other needs (Paraphrase of Matthew 6:33).
8. Verse 7: Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- a) Remember that this is a progression of thought here about salvation and action.
- i) To be “merciful” is to ask God for mercy in our sinful actions.
- ii) The promise by Jesus that we will be shown mercy. That is the word to underline.
- b) If God shows mercy to us by forgiving our sins, God expects us to show mercy to others.
- i) Think of the line from the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:10, NIV). It is a similar thought.
9. Verse 8: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- a) “Pure in heart” does not refer to any sort of self-discipline of being a good person.
- b) It refers to eternal forgiveness of our sins. Our reward is we will see God. We will live for eternity as we have a pure-heart by accepting Jesus payment of our sins.
- c) The progression is we seek God’s mercy (Verse 7) and our eternally forgiven (Verse 8).
10. Verse 9: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
- a) The term “Sons of God” as it is used here refers to adoption into God’s eternal family.
- b) “Peacemakers” as it is used here, is not referring to someone trying to break up a fight between two people, but it is a reference to seeking peace with God.
- i) Again, look at this verse in context of the surrounding verses. The context is about salvation and everlasting life.
- c) “Peacemakers” are those who are trying to make peace between themselves and God.
- i) They do that not by their own effort, but by asking God for forgiveness.
- ii) That is what is meant by the “merciful” of Verse 7”.
- d) Jesus is teaching here that if we seek peace with God (i.e., “peacemakers”) through Jesus, the guarantee is that we will be adopted into God’s family. Again, the key word is “will”.
- e) One can also see peacemakers as making an effort to bring others to Jesus.
- i) One has to know Jesus in order to have peace. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27 NIV)
- f) It can also apply to healing of our relationships. When we get into an argument with our spouse or a Christian friend, often it takes mutual prayer to heal that relationship. We have brought peace to that relationship. We have become the “peacemaker”.
11. Verse 10: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- a) OK, we’ve now finished with the good news. Here comes the bad news. ☺
- b) Does the non-believer say, “Well now, you’ve changed your life and become one of those “~~bon~~-again Christian types”. Good for you, I wish you well”? No, and here’s why: When others see you actually changing, there is a sense of guilt in their hearts placed there by God. They know that living for God is the right thing to do. Out of guilt, you will be persecuted by man if you are witness for God. That is a promise made by Jesus.
- c) Verse 10 and Verse 11-12 sound like they are talking about the same thing, but they’re not.
- i) Verse 10 says we are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness sake.
- ii) The reward of Verse 10 is the same as Verse 3. Both times we are promised eternal salvation for being “Poor in spirit” (Verse 3) and being “persecuted” (Verse 10).
- iii) I believe Verse 10 focuses more on the internal struggle. Verses 11-12 are external.

- iv) Verse 10 is about when we sin and *realize* it, and thus we struggle with ourselves, as our hearts want to do better. Those struggles to be a better person, to want to please God, is what drives us to Jesus, and thus, by grace, get eternal life.
  - d) Another reason for persecution is satanic attacks. I have stated many times in these studies that Satan's goal is to prevent or delay God's redemptive plan for mankind.
    - i) To persecute you as a believer is to prevent you from being a good witness to others. Persecution makes you want to run and hide. Therefore, you are not being a witness to other people for Jesus.
    - ii) As I stated last week, if you don't think Satan is real, try opposing him for a while.
  - e) Let's get back to Verse 10. Notice why you are persecuted. Jesus says blessed are you who are persecuted because of righteousness.
    - i) This is not a catchall for anybody who is persecuted for any reason.
    - ii) It says we will have eternal life because we are persecuted for right standing before God (i.e., "righteousness").
    - iii) That change of heart, that change of life, will automatically get evil spiritual forces to work against you, mostly through non-believers.
    - iv) You also have to remember you don't have to panic. ☺ God is more powerful than these enemies:
      - a) "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."  
(1<sup>st</sup> John 4:4, NIV)
  - f) Now that I've given you the bad news, let's go on to the good news of these verses.
    - i) Reread the verses and notice the words "blessed", rejoice and be glad".
      - a) You may think you are suffering for your belief. Around the world, as we speak, millions are suffering just to be a Christian. Many give their life.
      - b) What they don't see at the moment is that their eternal rewards will far outweigh their temporary suffering.
      - c) Jesus is saying in effect, "Jump up and down with joy right now". You may think you are suffering, but you can't imagine the eternal reward you will get in exchange for what you have to put up with in this lifetime.
      - d) Do you think there are people in heaven thinking, "You know, heaven wasn't worth all of that suffering I went through in life. I should of cared more about my personal needs and stopped focusing of God"
        - (1) I'm being flippant. God wants you to trust in the fact that
          - (a) 1) You will be persecuted if you take a stand for Jesus.
          - (b) 2) Your rewards in heaven will far outweigh any and all suffering that will occur here on earth. Have joy in that fact.
  - g) Thus ends the beatitude section. We now move on to how to be a witness for God.
  - h) If we are thankful for God, we should naturally want to live our lives in gratitude to God.
    - i) That is what leads to this persecution, as we become witnesses for God.
    - ii) This leads us to the next section.
12. Verse 13: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.
- a) In that culture, salt is first and foremost thought as a preservative.
    - i) Remember they didn't have refrigerators. Food was salted to prevent spoiling.
    - ii) If salt becomes corroded, it is no good and cannot serve its purpose.
  - b) So just exactly how are Christians suppose to be "preservatives"? Glad you asked! ☺
    - i) We are being preserved from eternal damnation by God. By abiding in the things God asks us to do (pray, study, time with other Christians), we are spiritually "preserving" ourselves from the sinful nature and temptations of the world.

- a) One of my favorite quotes about the bible is, “Sin will keep you from this book, and this book will keep you from sin”. The bible is being described as a preservative to keep you from spoiling.
    - ii) One can also see this as a bigger picture on our influence in the world. Being a public witness for Christian values and lifestyles is a preservation of our society becoming corrupt. If you study the fall of any civilization, it usually begins with moral corruption. God expects us to be a witness for him to help people to turn from the corruption of sin. God uses us as a preservative for others for eternity.
  - c) Personally, I also like the image and purpose of salt as making one thirsty.
    - i) If one eats salt, one gets thirsty. Our lives as witnesses for God should naturally make others thirsty for God. If people see your life and don’t want to emulate it, then stop and pray how I can live to be a better witness for God.
    - ii) I don’t know if that is what Jesus meant by “salt”, but I like this illustration. ☺
  - d) This verse is not teaching that if we lose our “saltiness” we lose our salvation. It is about being a good witness for Jesus. If we run and hide from persecution, we fail to be a good witness for Jesus and God can’t “use us”. The issue is witness and not salvation. This will become clearer over the next few verses.
13. Verse 14: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
- a) One can read these three verse and realize the topics of “salt and light” refer to witness and not salvation. Verse 16 makes that clear.
  - b) Jesus states in the Gospel of John that He is the light of the world. (John 8:12, 9:5)
    - i) Yet in Verse 14 here, its says “You (us!) are the light of the world.”
    - ii) Think of it as sunlight and moonlight. The moon does not give light, but reflects the sun’s light on the earth. That is what we are to be as well.
    - iii) We are to be reflection of God’s love and light. God works within us to change us. God expects us to be witnesses to the world.
  - c) These verses also argue against us living in a “Christian-only” world.
    - i) Sometimes we think, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if everybody was a Christian, or if I can work for a company where everybody was saved”?
      - a) That is contrary to what Jesus teaches. He wants us to be witnesses to the world. That means living among nonbelievers.
      - b) That does not mean there shouldn’t be a time of separation. Going to church with fellow believers is a requirement and a time to “recharge your spiritual batteries” so that we can be a more effective witness to the world.
    - ii) These verses argue that we should let “our light” shine before non-believers.
  - d) Salt and light together are a picture of God working in us and through us.
    - i) We are light, as we reflect God’s love. It is a word-picture of our exterior influence on others. Salt is mostly an interior-influence. When you “salt” food, you can’t see it. It works from the inside as a preservative. Together, you get a visual picture of God working on the inside (maturity) and outside (influence to others).
14. Verse 17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.
- a) If you want a good summary verse of the purpose of “the Laws of God”, as stated in the Old Testament, you can’t do much better than Verses 17-18.

- b) Jesus states he did not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.
    - i) All of the sacrificial laws described in Jesus are fulfilled in Jesus.
    - ii) This is why we don't bring animal sacrifices with us to church. Jesus fulfilled all of those requirements. As to whether or not we should obey the rest of the laws, we'll discuss more over the next couple of verses.
  - c) Verse 18 is a paraphrase. A more literal translation would be Jesus saying, "not one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law" (NKJV). This refers to the smallest letter and smallest punctuation marks in the Hebrew alphabet. A good paraphrase would be "not one dotting of the "i" or crossing of the "t" will disappear from the Old Testament until everything I (Jesus) will do, will be done.
    - i) That encompasses all the events of human history, past, present and future.
    - ii) It encompasses all the events of Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings.
    - iii) Remember that about 30% of our bible is predictions. Jesus is also saying that human history will exist until every last one of them is fulfilled.
  - d) Notice Jesus validates "The Law and the Prophets" exactly as it is written as being from God. That expression "The Law and the Prophets", to a Jew, encompasses all the books of the Old Testament. If you believe Jesus is Lord and His word is Truth, then you must believe that all of the Old Testament is the Word of God.
    - i) This is why Christians believe the Bible in its "original autographs" is the Word of God. The copies we have today are at least 99% accurate with the only debatable issues being a handful of numbers and a few trivial words. None of those items affect in anyway our Christian theology.
  - e) Let's get back to "fulfill". Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.
    - i) This is where "bible-typology" comes into play. Jesus states that the Old Testament is written about Him (John 5:39). The word pictures of the Bible, the stories, the commands, all point to Jesus. It doesn't mean that there are not practical applications for our lives as well. It means we first look to the Old Testament as pointing toward Jesus in its stories and text.
    - ii) It also does not mean we are ignore the Old Testament laws just because they are fulfilled by Jesus. The main purpose of the law is to drive us to Jesus. The laws of the Old Testament are a model for happiness. Out of gratitude for what Jesus did for us we are to study and apply them to our lives.
      - a) How they apply to us as believers is covered through most of Paul's letters.
      - b) There are some that apply to the Jews of that time only (the food laws) and some that still apply to us today (e.g. "10 Commandments). The American basis for society is based on the laws as stated in the Bible.
      - c) I could go on, but we have a lot of ground left to cover today. ☺
15. Verse 19: Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- a) Notice Jesus does not say, "Anyone who breaks these commands goes to hell". It says anyone who breaks one of these will be called the least in "the kingdom of heaven".
    - i) This is about our rewards and stature in heaven, not our salvation.
  - b) Notice Jesus does not say, "Since I fulfilled the law, you don't have to worry about the Old Testament laws anymore".
    - i) In fact, Jesus teaches just the opposite. He teaches that whoever breaks the least of the commandments will have the lowest stature in heaven, and whoever does all of them and teaches others (hey, why do you think I'm writing! ☺) gets great rewards in heaven.
    - ii) This verse, first of all shows, that there are different rewards in heaven.
    - iii) Heaven is not a "general-everybody is the same" kind of place.

- iv) OK, assuming you are like me, and think “Eternity is going to be a lot longer of a time span than my life here on earth. I better think about what to do to get in good stature for eternity”. Now what do I do?
  - a) Look at verse 19 again. Jesus says, “Whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven”.
  - b) In Verse 18 Jesus is talking specifically about all the commandments of the Old Testament (a.k.a., “The Law and The Prophets). Does that mean we are to obey all of these laws?
  - c) The answer is yes. The secret of “how” to obey them is what being a New Testament believer is all about.
  - d) The failure of the Israelites to obey those laws, corporately, is all about the failure to obey God without having the Holy Spirit within you. You can’t obey God based on your own self-discipline.
  - e) The only way to obey is by letting God work *through* you to obey the laws. That is what the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is all about. It is about trusting in God, sticking close to God, praying to God, reading his word, which God works through us and transforms us so that we have the *ability* to obey his laws and commands.
  - f) We as Christians fail on a regular basis because we jump back and forth between trusting in God versus trusting in our self-discipline. In those cases we prevent God work through us. We make “little gods” out of our own ability to obey the law. That is how the Israelites failed and that is how we fail.
  - g) Which leads us back to our eternal rewards in heaven. The work of a Christian can (and is) summarized by Jesus below:
    - (1) Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” (John 6:28-29, NIV)
    - (2) It is through that belief that we are able to obey the law. Jesus fulfilled the law (Verse 17). In Verse 19, Jesus calls upon us to obey that law by believing in Him.

- 16. Verse 20: For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.
  - a) You have to understand what a radical shock this verse was to the audience.
  - b) The Pharisees were the most religious people of that day.
    - i) They knew their Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) backwards and forwards.
    - ii) They studied thousands of pages of “official” commentary on how to best obey God’s laws.
    - iii) They lived their lives in the most picky of details in order to be obedient to God.
  - c) The “teachers of the law” were equally as religious.
    - i) Today we would compare them to professors of religion at major universities.
    - ii) They would be the ones we would turn to if we had a bible question
  - d) Jesus is not so much condemning their faithfulness to God, as he is saying, “these guys are missing the point. It is not about *effort* that gets you into heaven, but about *faith*”.
    - i) Notice the word “enter” into heaven.
    - ii) I spent the last page talking about our “works” for our stature in heaven.
    - iii) Jesus is now talking about entering heaven.
    - iv) Entering heaven is an impossible task based on our effort. God is perfect, and He expects us to be perfect to spend eternity with God.



- v) The last verse of this chapter says “Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect”.
    - a) That is the same idea as being taught in this verse.
    - b) It is simply about trusting Jesus as the perfect sacrifice as opposed to trusting in your religious efforts in order to enter heaven.
- 17. We have now ended “Part 1” of this Chapter. Verse 21 begins a new section of Chapter 5.
  - a) From this point, Jesus talks about specific commandments in the Old Testament. He gives illustrations and examples of what they really mean and then gives some practical application of how to apply those commandments to our lives.
  - b) You will see a reoccurring theme with an emphasis on our *internal* behavior.
    - i) Chapter 5 is over two lessons. The introduction theme to the next lesson will discuss this more in detail. Stay tuned. ☺
  - c) One phrase to catch over and over again in the next section is “You have heard”.
    - i) Remember the majority of Jews didn’t own a bible. They hear the Word of God by going to a synagogue every week.
    - ii) Jesus follows up those statements with “But I tell you”, or something similar.
    - iii) Jesus is stating He has the authority to properly interpret the law.
    - iv) A common view of the Messiah by religious Jews, even to this day is that when the Messiah comes, he will interpret the law for them. Here was Jesus stating his authority. He was not quoting famous rabbi’s of the past, but saying “I tell you” because Jesus, as God, had the authority to do so.
    - v) Remember that John’s Gospel says that all things were created by Jesus. (John 1:2) That would apply to the Laws of God as well.
      - a) If you’re not sure how to interpret the law, ask the author. ☺
- 18. Verse 21: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’”<sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.
  - a) Jesus condemns three actions 1) murder 2) calling someone “raca” (roughly “an idiot”) and 3) calling someone a fool. The punishment for these three are progressively worse.
    - i) One of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall not murder”. (Exodus 20:13).
      - a) The Jewish law calls for death for murder. When Jesus says “judgment” here, he refers to being turned over to the Jewish court or the Roman court for punishment. Murder is a capital (death) crime in a Roman court.
    - ii) The second of three illustrations talks about the danger of calling somebody “Raca”. This is an untranslated word. It roughly is like calling someone today “an idiot”. Jesus says if you do this, you had to go to the Sanhedrin, which is the religious Jewish court.
    - iii) The third illustration is about calling someone a fool. A fool, to a Jewish mind, is somebody who doesn’t care about God nor lives his or her life with any respect of the Jewish Law.
      - a) “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”” (Psalm 14:1, NIV)
  - b) The New American Standard Bible (NASB) helps to understand the progression of Jesus’ thought. The NASB translates Jesus as saying if you murder, you are liable to go before the “court”. If you call someone “raca”, you are liable before the “*Supreme Court*”. If you call someone a “fool”, you shall be guilty enough to go to hell.
    - i) It is hard to imagine, from an eternal perspective that murder is less of a crime than calling someone a fool. Jesus point is that any of these are a sin against God. The first two will bring you into judgment. It appears from the text that it refers to court-judgment as opposed to eternal judgment.

- ii) The progression sounds illogical. Why should calling someone a fool be a worse crime than murdering someone?
  - a) Jesus is not saying those who commit mass murder get less punishment than those who call someone a fool. That misses the point.
  - b) Jesus says in hell, there are different degrees of condemnation. (E.g., see Matthew 23:14)
  - c) Hell is not a place for those who commit sin. Hell is a place for those who willfully choose to reject God. Sins are *consequences* that come from living a life in disobedience to God. When we ignore God, we sin. When we ignore God completely, we sin at greater levels.
    - (1) “The gates of hell will be locked from the inside”. C.S. Lewis
  - d) Jesus main point is that people think, “Well, I’ve never killed anyone, therefore I’m not going to hell. Jesus responded to that idea by saying if you’ve ever even called someone a fool (or an equivalent thereof), you have now violated the law and are in danger of hellfire.
  - e) Dr. Walter Martin used to joke, “There are two ways to get into heaven. One is to trust Jesus. The other is to never make a mistake your entire adult life and then tell Jesus, “Move over”. ☺
    - (1) Therefore Jesus is saying if you ever get angry, even once in your life, say when someone cuts you off in traffic, you have now violated the law. Sorry, you are no longer “perfect” and heaven requires perfection as an entrance requirement.
- c) Now that we’ve covered the salvation-aspect of this verse, let’s talk about the practical day-by-day aspect of our Christian life.
  - i) Is this verse teaching we are to never be angry when we are wronged?
    - a) Let’s compare this verse to what Paul said in Ephesians:
    - b) “In your anger do not sin” (Psalm 4:4): Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” (Ephesians 4:26-27, NIV)
  - ii) There are things in life that should make us angry.
    - a) Seeing the horrors of this world make us angry.
    - b) Being frustrated because we are hurt makes us angry.
    - c) Being frustrated because we don’t get what we want makes us angry.
    - d) The point is not the anger; the point is what we do with that anger.
  - iii) Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel and Paul are both making similar points.
    - a) It is not about being angry; it is about what we are doing with that anger.
    - b) Notice in Jesus text, he never condemns anger itself; he condemns the action caused by anger. That action causes murder at the worst, or at the very least, we call people names like “an idiot or a fool”.
    - c) In the notes on the last chapter I talked about the danger of being too (H)ungry, (A)ngry, (L)only or (T)ired. That acronym of “H.A.L.T.” is a reminder that our greatest danger of committing a sin is in a time of weakness. These four conditions represent when we are weak.
  - iv) A few pages back, I titled this section “anger management”.
    - a) The whole purpose of this section is about the proper attitude about anger.
    - b) Jesus point is that anger begins in the heart, and then manifests itself in lots of ways.
    - c) Let’s cover the remaining verses of this section, which gives the solution to what God expects us to do with that anger.

19. Verse 23: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,"<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.
- a) The first word of verse 23 is translated "therefore". That means that the "therefore" connects the next set of verses with the last set of verses.
    - i) Jesus' illustrations given in Verses 23-27 are meant as illustrations and applications for when you *want* to call someone an idiot, a fool, or have hatred toward someone. It is important to read these verses in that context.
  - b) Notice the emphasis is not on an enemy causing you to anger, or for example, somebody cutting you off in traffic. It says when your brother has something against you.
    - i) It is either referring to a literal brother, or more likely, somebody as close to you as family. In the next two verses, Jesus will talk about anger and enemies (Vs. 25-26).
  - c) This whole section can be summed up with the phrase "obedience is more important than sacrifice". Notice this quote from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel (Samuel is speaking to King Saul)
    - i) But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice. (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:22, NIV *emphasis added*)
    - ii) What Jesus is teaching is that if you know someone is angry at you, especially someone who is close to you, try to reconcile that arrangement before you come to church to pray. (If that person refuses to cooperate, that's a different story. The effort must be on your part to do so.)
    - iii) Think about this from the perspective of prayer. If you are angry with someone at the moment, it consumes you. It prevents you from worshipping God because your mind is focused on that anger. It is better to try to reconcile that anger so you can have peace with God.
      - a) Jesus specifically choose the example of "brother" as if to say it is someone close to you. God wants healthy relationships in our family life. To have a peaceful relationship is more important to God than our sacrificing to Him.
    - iv) I'm going to move on to the last set of verses, and then I'll close with a discussion of how Jesus wants us to deal with our anger.
20. Verse 25: "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."<sup>26</sup> I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.
- a) Now we are moving from anger with a "brother" to anger with an "adversary".
  - b) In that day and age, when somebody wanted to sue you, they didn't get a lawyer and serve you with papers. They literally and personally dragged you to court to face their accusation. When Jesus says "adversary", in that setting, people thought it was referring to someone who had a charge against you.
    - i) Jesus responds by making two key points:
      - a) The first is we should try to settle the case on the way to court.
      - b) The second is we are guilty. Notice Jesus says we will not get out (of jail) until "we have paid the last penny". The illustration implies we are guilty.
  - c) Let's get back to the discussion of how to properly deal with our anger.
    - i) Let's say we are angry about something. Of course we think we are right. We always are. ☺ (Ever notice in marriage you remember arguing, but you never remember what the fight was about?)
      - a) In the illustration of the "brother having something against you", Jesus tells us to go and reconcile ourselves to that brother.
      - b) In the illustration of "an adversary taking you to court", Jesus tells us to settle the matter before going to court.

- c) What does either of these illustrations have to do with the judgment upon us for acting upon our anger? Remember these two illustrations began with the word “therefore” as if somehow, they connect.
- d) The important thing is to see the implications of the eternal perspective:
  - i) First of all God wants us to be a good witness for Him. As Christians, our lives are all about serving God. We are his “ambassadors” or representatives at all times.
  - ii) What do “non-Christians” expect you to do when you are frustrated?
    - a) They *expect* you to get mad, because that is what they would do.
    - b) If you can somehow rise above that, they will think “Hey, I want to have peace of mind in the times of frustration too. How do you do that?”
    - c) It leads to an opportunity to be a good witness for Jesus.
    - d) That is a reason why God wants you to try your best to reconcile that situation before coming to a time of prayer for God.
  - iii) That anger is also “blocking” your relationship with God because you are focusing on the anger and not on God.
    - a) It does not mean to avoid prayer in order to reconcile the anger. Sometimes we have to give that anger to God in order to have the Holy Spirit work through us to properly handle the situation.
    - b) The point Jesus is making is about attempting to reconcile the situation with your “brother” or your “adversary” in order for you to get on with your life in the way God intends it.
    - c) Let me give you a prayer to consider: “Heavenly Father, right now I am really angry with so-and-so. They really hurt me because of ... I’m angry and want to strike back. I take that hurt feelings and I turn it over to you because you love me and care for me. You want the best for my life. Now, help me, through your power to best reconcile that relationship. Let your power guide my thoughts and words as I work to reconcile it. Help me to be a good ambassador to Christ. In Jesus name we pray Amen.
      - (1) “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.” (Romans 12:18-19, NIV)
    - d) The whole section is about rising above the anger. Am I perfect on this? Of course not. But in those (not enough) occasions when I have the eternal focus in mind, it is amazing how God can work through me to rise above the anger of the moment.
      - (1) “It is an honor for a man to stay out of a fight. Only fools insist on quarreling.” (Proverbs 20:3, The Living Bible)
  - iv) By the way, I don’t believe Jesus is calling on total pacifism. If someone is about to attack you with a baseball bat, Jesus does not expect you to sit there and be killed. We’ll talk about that more next week. .
- e) I want to add more thing before I close this lesson. One can also read this illustration about the “adversary” as being Satan himself. .
  - i) In fact, he is called that in the bible the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10).
  - ii) Let me paraphrase Jesus illustration this way: Your “adversary” (Satan) is making accusations against you. Jesus calls on us to reconcile the situation because we are guilty (“you will pay to the last penny”). When Satan accuses you of sin, agree with him. Say you are guilty. The good news is you can now turn that sin over to Jesus for forgiveness and be assured you are starting again with a clean slate.

21. Since I already gave a paragraph long prayer a half-page back, I won’t add another here. ☺
- a) Hope you enjoy these studies and we’ll finish the chapter in the next lesson.