



The Sermon on the Mount: Righteousness that Exceeds



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INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

AUTHORSHIP

Matthew, one of the twelve disciples and an apostle of the Lord, is considered the author of the Gospel of Matthew. Early church fathers in the first few centuries attest to his authorship. Matthew is mentioned several times in Scripture: called to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9), identified as a publican/tax-collector (Matthew 9:9; 10:3), listed as one of the “Twelve” (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), and called Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27).

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

The Gospel of Matthew was likely written in AD 57 (at least in the late fifties or early sixties). The early church had grown under Paul’s ministry through his three missionary journeys. Scripture and history are silent about Matthew’s residence when he wrote his Gospel. Some have suggested Antioch of Syria, since Christians from Antioch preferred this Gospel. The Sermon on the Mount occurred early in Christ’s ministry during His Great Galilean Ministry (AD 28-29).

TYPE OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Matthew, along with Mark, Luke and John, fall under a unique genre (*zhahn-ruh*) or type of literature called *Gospel* (“good news”). All four Gospels tell us the good news about the person of Jesus Christ - his birth, ministry, and passion (death, burial, and resurrection). The ministry of Jesus can be further broken down into His teachings, narratives, and miracles. Matthew’s Gospel contains five major teachings with the Sermon on the Mount being the first. The other major teachings contained in Matthew include special instructions to the Twelve (10:5-42), a series of parables (13:1-52), life under kingdom authority (18:1-35), and the Olivet Discourse (24:1-25:46).

PURPOSE OF MATTHEW

It appears that Matthew wrote his Gospel originally to Jewish Christians possibly living in Syria. There is a strong emphasis on Jesus as Messiah and King and on the Kingdom of God. Matthew offers many quotations from the Old Testament in his appeal to the Jews.

PURPOSE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount falls in line with the major theme of Matthew’s Gospel - The Kingdom of God. Through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught what living under the authority of His kingdom should look like, and He alone fulfilled such righteous requirements. Throughout the lessons that follow, you will notice a distinct reference to “kingdom-dwellers.”

UNIT AIM

An appropriate aim for this series of lessons entitled, *The Sermon on the Mount: Righteousness that Exceeds* is -- The Learners will acknowledge Christ as the Righteous King and understand that those living in God’s kingdom wisely build their lives upon the foundation of Christ’s teachings and possess a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.



BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 4:23-5:2; 7:24-29:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?
3. Are there any comparisons noted in this passage?
4. What contrast is noted in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?
3. How does the cultural/historical background help to understand the text?
4. How does the immediate context help to understand the text?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe?
2. Is there an error to avoid?

Interactive Outline for Lesson One

Begin with the End in Mind | Matthew 4:23-5:2; 7:24-29

Aim: Learners will understand the wisdom of committing themselves both to hearing and doing Christ's teachings.

Introduction (Matthew 3:1-4:22)

What did Jesus do in each of the following verses?

Matthew 3:13 -

Matthew 4:1-11 -

Matthew 4:12 -

Matthew 4:23 -

Matthew 4:17 -

Part One: Beginning His Public Ministry (Matthew 4:23-5:2)

A. Preaching and Healing (4:23-25)

The *key word* _____ means to proclaim a message with the intent of persuading.

B. Teaching Begins (5:1-2)

The *key word* _____ means to impart knowledge or disseminate information.

The focus of these lessons will be on what Jesus taught them during this setting on the mount. **Are you ready to listen to what He taught?**

Part Two: Beginning with the End in Mind (Matthew 7:24-29)

In the case of Matthew 7:24, use of the word "therefore," likely refers to Christ's entire sermon that began in Matthew 5:2 when "He opened His mouth and taught them saying." What is the *cause and effect*? _____ and _____ the words spoken by Christ in Matthew 5:3-7:23 are the causes.

A. Building like a _____ man (7:24-25)

Jesus referred to "whosoever" hears and does His words (7:24). This *key word* "_____" indicates that any of us could hear and do His words. In the original language of the New Testament, the *key words* "_____" and "_____" mean continual action. The *key phrase* "_____" means someone who is intelligent, thoughtful, and prudent (sensible, careful).

B. Building like a _____ man (7:26-27)

In contrast, the opposite results when a person keeps hearing Jesus's words but keeps on not doing them. The *key word* "_____" comes from the Greek word "moron" which means foolish, dull, or stupid.

The only sure and solid foundation is God's Word. God is the Creator and Author of life itself! His wisdom is essential for figuring out how to live. Keep hearing and keep doing what He teaches in His Word! Notice in this passage that both the wise and foolish hear and continue to hear what Jesus said; however, they *contrast* or differ when the wise continue to do and the foolish continue not to do or act upon the words of Jesus.

Will you choose the wisdom of hearing and doing as Christ taught?

Lesson One: Begin with the End in Mind Matthew 4:23-5:2; 7:24-29

Aim: Learners will understand the wisdom of committing themselves both to hearing and doing Christ's teachings.

Introduction (Matthew 3:1-4:22)

In the *immediate context* of this lesson's text, Jesus made His first appearance in the Bible as an adult. Previously, Jesus appeared in the Bible at His birth and later at the age of twelve. John the Baptist is the prominent figure in the first part of Matthew 3. Isaiah 40:3 foretold a "voice crying in the wilderness" preparing the way of the Lord. Matthew recognized John as the one prophesied to be that "voice" (Matthew 3:3).

John preached repentance and many people confessed their sins and received baptism (Matthew 3:5-6). He also confronted members of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jewish religious sects, that came to the Jordan River to see him in action. John recognized they lacked fruit that demonstrated repentance and compared them to trees about to be cut down and burned because they had produced no "good" fruit (3:7-10). Primarily, John recognized the eventual end of his preparation ministry by emphasizing the coming of One "mightier" than himself. This One would baptize overwhelmingly with the Holy Spirit and fire (3:11-12).

In Matthew 3:13, Jesus arrived from Galilee to be baptized by John. This baptism occurred at the Jordan River in the southern part of Israel. Galilee is in the north. Immediately following His baptism, God the Father thunderously announced "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). That was a high-point in Jesus's life, as it would be for anyone! Following the baptism, Jesus entered the wilderness and was tempted/tested by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). In a way, this was a low-point for Jesus. Again, it was so "in a way." The 40 days of not eating and being pressured by the devil were very difficult. That was the "low" part. However, Jesus passed the tests by refusing to do what the devil suggested. As a result, this became perhaps even a higher-point of victory in the life of Jesus!

After Jesus heard of John the Baptist's arrest (Matthew 4:12), He returned to Galilee and began His ministries of preaching, teaching, and healing (Matthew 4:23). Although Nazareth was His hometown, Jesus moved to Capernaum (kuh-PER-nay-uhm) basically to set up His ministry headquarters (4:12-13). This fulfilled what had been spoken by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (4:14-16). From that time, Jesus began to preach a simple message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" or "at hand" (4:17). Jesus also called His first disciples. They fished for a living on the Sea of Galilee. One day Jesus saw two brothers (Peter and Andrew) to whom He said "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (4:18-19). Immediately, they left their nets and followed Him. Almost the same thing happened to the brothers James and John (4:20-22). These two commands spoken by Jesus seem to summarize the two main points of His preaching: "Repent" and "Follow Me."

Part One: Beginning His Public Ministry (Matthew 4:23-5:2)

A. Preaching and Healing (4:23-25)

Jesus taught, preached, and healed. Matthew 4:17 and 19 describe the content of His preaching: (1) “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” and (2) “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The *key word* preaching means to proclaim a message with the intent of persuading. Obviously, Jesus wanted to persuade people to repent and to follow Him. These later verses in chapter 4 describe His healing ministry. According to the original wording in 4:23, Jesus healed incurable diseases and disabling or weakening sicknesses. In other words, some of these diseases had no cure while others simply made people feel very bad and made them very weak. Although several different terms are used to describe the sickness and disease Jesus healed (4:24), we can separate them into two main categories: physical/mental and spiritual. It is not hard to believe that news of such healings would spread and cause large crowds to gather and follow Him. These large crowds consisted of people who followed Him from all over Israel and beyond (4:25). This means Jesus ministered to both Jews and non-Jews.

Although we know from Matthew the two basic points of Jesus’s preaching (repent and follow Me) and the extent of His healing, we do not know the points of His teaching. Matthew 4:23 does state that Jesus taught in synagogues, which were houses of Jewish worship, prayer, and teaching of Scripture. This likely indicates that Jesus’s initial teaching ministry focused on His fellow Jews.

B. Teaching Begins (5:1-2)

Matthew 5:1 tells us that Jesus saw the crowds, went up on a mountain, sat down, and His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and taught them (5:2). The *key word* teach means to impart knowledge or disseminate information. Teaching instructs and informs others. Knowing the *cultural background* of that time, when a teacher “sat down” it may have been a signal to those following that He was ready to teach them. The focus of these lessons will be on what Jesus taught them during this setting on the mount. Are you ready to listen to what He taught? His teaching begins in Matthew 5:3 and ends in Matthew 7:27.

Part Two: Beginning with the End in Mind (Matthew 7:24-29)

Matthew 7:24-29 closes the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. Whenever a passage begins with the word “therefore” or phrases such as “For this reason” or “For this cause” it typically means a *cause and effect* relationship is present. It is reasonable to ask “What is ‘therefore’ there for?” The reader almost always needs to look back to the words immediately preceding the passage. In the case of Matthew 7:24, use of the word “therefore,” likely refers to Christ’s entire sermon that began in Matthew 5:2 when “He opened His mouth and taught them saying.” What is the *cause and effect*? Hearing and doing the words spoken by Christ in Matthew 5:3-7:23 are the causes. Jesus illustrates this by *comparing* whoever is hearing and doing His words to a man building a house upon a firm foundation. The *effect* is the ability for one’s house (i.e., life) to stand during hardships as described in Matthew 7:24-25. The opposite occurs when a person hears Jesus’s words but purposely chooses not to do them (causing) his or her life to be like a house built upon the sand (a foundation that is not solid) and

unable to stand during the hardships of life (effects) as described in Matthew 7:26-27.

A. Building like a wise man (7:24-25)

Jesus referred to “whosoever” hears and does His words (7:24). This *key word* “whoever” indicates that any of us could hear and do His words. In the original language of the New Testament, the *key words* “hear” and “do” mean continual action. In other words, we can understand what Jesus said to mean “whoever keeps on hearing and keeps on doing.” Jesus compared the one who keeps hearing and keeps doing His words to a wise man who built his house upon a rock. The *key phrase* “wise man” means someone who is intelligent, thoughtful, and prudent (sensible, careful). The rock referenced means a massive rock or boulder. We should all hope to be wise in our decisions about life. Such wisdom includes deciding to build our lives upon firm foundations (i.e., His words). According to James 1:5-8, a *related passage*, wisdom is available to anyone who asks for it in faith and without doubting.

B. Building like a foolish man (7:26-27)

In *contrast*, the opposite results when a person keeps hearing Jesus’s words but keeps on not doing them. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship. Hearing but not doing His words (cause) will result in his or her life being like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand (a foundation that is not solid) and is unable to stand due to the hardships of life (effects) as described in Matthew 7:26-27. The *key word* “foolish” comes from the Greek word “moron” which means foolish, dull, or stupid. In Jesus’s mind, building a house on sand showed stupidity. We should all hope to avoid stupidity in our decisions about life.

According to the *related passage*, James 1:22-25, we should be “doers” of the Word and not “hearers” only. James indicated that hearing without doing is deceitful and misleading. Hearing without doing is like looking in a mirror and seeing dirt on one’s face but immediately forgetting to wash it off (James 1:23-24). Simply looking in a mirror does not remove dirt from one’s face. Obviously, face cleaning does not work that way. Similarly, the Law of God is like a mirror. It helps us see flaws in our lives that need cleaning; however, the law itself does not clean. We need Jesus and His fulfillment of the Law to cleanse us from the sins we have committed by breaking God’s Law (Matthew 26:28; 1 John 1:7).

Sand shifts and can be blown away. Much like a sandcastle on the beach, a rising tide of water washes it away. *Avoid the error* of building your life on a foundation that is temporary and not solid. Building your reputation, staking your future, etc. upon things that cannot last will bring frustration and regret later in life. The only sure and solid foundation is God’s Word. God is the Creator and Author of life itself! His wisdom is essential for figuring out how to live. Keep hearing and keep doing what He teaches in His Word!

Notice in this passage that both the wise and foolish hear and continue to hear what Jesus said; however, they contrast or differ when the wise continue to do and the foolish continue not to do or act upon the words of Jesus.

Conclusion

As you study this series of lessons, pray for God to give you wisdom and the courage to keep hearing and keep doing what He says. What exactly did He teach in the Sermon on the Mount? These lessons will focus upon the sermon in hopes of discovering how the teaching applies to today's followers of Christ. Remember that at the sermon's end, Jesus will invite you to keep hearing and keep doing what He said. How about committing now to be a wise man who listens, learns, and does, building your life on a firm foundation (His Words) able to stand through the storms of life and to glorify Him for eternity?

Apply It

- *Believe the truth* that hearing and doing the teachings of Christ resembles the actions of a wise man.
- *Believe the truth* that hearing and doing the teachings of Christ strengthens one against the storms of life.
- *Avoid the error* of only hearing Christ's words and not doing them.
- *Avoid the error* of building your life on a temporary foundation.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Following a Daily Bible Reading guide is a good method of Bible intake. A Daily Bible Study guide is even better!

Find your own daily Bible readings by reading the context of the passage being studied and locating related passages. This page is intended for reuse with each lesson. So, making copies or finding your own method to journal answers may work well for you.

Day of the Week	What to Read	Fill in Bible Reference
Day 1 (Monday)	Immediate Context: Read the verses or chapter which precedes the passage being studied. (If no verses or chapter precedes the passage being studied, read the passage itself.)	
Day 2 (Tuesday)	Immediate Context: Read the verses or chapter that follows the passage being studied.	
Day 3 (Wednesday)	Read a related passage. (Study Bibles usually provide cross references in their margins.)	
Day 4 (Thursday)	Read a related passage. (Find where a key word or phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible. Words can be found in a concordance.)	
Day 5 (Friday)	Read a related passage. (Read a related passage referenced in the lesson comments.)	
Day 6 (Saturday)	Read the passage in context. (Read the preceding verses, the passage, and the following verses.)	



BLESSED ARE THEY

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 5:3-10:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. Who is speaking and being addressed in the passage?

2. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)

3. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?

2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Two

Blessed Are They | Matthew 5:3-10

Aim: Learners will recognize the attributes of those “blessed” and to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

Introduction

Matthew 5:3-7:27 provides the Bible’s most extensive, single record of Christ’s teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount. The obvious and important question at the end of Christ’s sermon: **Will you be like the wise man who hears and does Christ’s words or will you be like the fool who only hears without doing?**

Define the words below based on the Bible and the lesson commentary.

Blessed Are “They” (5:3-10)

“blessed” -

A. The Poor in Spirit and They who Mourn (5:3-4)

“poor in spirit” -

“mourn” -

B. The Meek and They who Hunger and Thirst (5:5-6)

“meek” -

“righteousness” -

C. The Merciful and the Pure in Heart (5:7-8)

“merciful” -

“pure” -

D. The Peacemakers and the Persecuted (5:9-10)

“peacemakers” -

“persecuted” -

Will you choose the wisdom of hearing and doing as Christ taught?

Lesson Two: Blessed Are They Matthew 5:3-10

Aim: Learners will recognize the attributes of those “blessed” and to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

Introduction

Remember that Jesus’s ministry focused on preaching, healing, and teaching (Matthew 4:23). Matthew provided details regarding the content of His preaching: “Repent” and “Follow Me” (Matthew 4:17, 19). His healing included physical/mental and spiritual diseases and sicknesses (Matthew 4:23-24). Large crowds followed Jesus at the start of His ministry. The crowds included locals from Galilee and a relatively large region beyond Galilee. Matthew 5:3-7:27 provides the Bible’s most extensive, single record of Christ’s teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount.

Interestingly, Jesus did not include direct teaching regarding salvation in this Sermon on the Mount. His preaching did address salvation with its emphasis upon repentance. Matthew 7:21-23 provides the closest message to salvation in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus makes it clear to those who called Him “Lord” and did many good things “in His name” that they were evildoers because “I never knew you.” The point is clear: Jesus must know you.

At the close of His sermon, Jesus also made it clear that consistent hearing and doing of what He said in the sermon likened an individual to a wise man who built his house upon a very large rock. Such a foundation kept the man’s house standing during hard times. In contrast, those consistently hearing but not doing what Jesus said in the sermon are like fools who build their houses upon the sand (i.e., temporary and unstable things). When storms come to the fool’s house, it has a massive fall. The obvious and important question at the end of Christ’s sermon: **Will you be like the wise man who hears and does Christ’s words or will you be like the fool who only hears without doing?**

Blessed Are “They” (5:3-10)

Matthew 5:1 tells us that Jesus saw the crowds, went up on a mountain, sat down, and His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and taught them (5:2). Jesus began His teaching by affirming that some people are “blessed.” The *key word* blessed emphasizes that someone is supremely happy or fortunate. *Repeated* use of the term “blessed” helps identify it as a *key word*. The idea seems to be that congratulations are in order for those who please God by behaving in these “blessed” ways. Although the sermon begins on such an encouraging note, it should become obvious that only Jesus Christ attained these attributes 100% of the time.

This section of the sermon is commonly known as the “Beatitudes,” a term that refers to a declaration of blessedness. Each verse begins with the term “blessed.” In other words, Jesus speaks of genuine happiness that comes to those who “are” the things described. This section of the sermon seems to begin and end with the phrase “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3 and 5:10). Each beatitude speaks a *truth* or *promise* of blessing rather than the issue of commands to obey. Notice also the

apparent *contrasts* within the verses. For example, most people consider words like “poor” and “mourn” to reflect unhappiness, but Jesus went beyond the typical human understanding of such words and recognized the blessing and fortunate nature of such attributes. Such understanding should also help us realize that life as a follower of Christ is not all about becoming healthy and wealthy as some teach. Jesus taught that supreme happiness occurs in part through difficulty. Consider the content of what Jesus taught His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount. Consider further how you can wisely hear and do His teaching in your own life.

A. The Poor in Spirit and They who Mourn (5:3-4)

Blessed are the “poor in spirit” basically means supremely happy are the humble (5:3a). The *key word* “poor” is plural and in a negative sense refers to those reduced to begging or lacking wealth, influence, honor, or position. In a good sense, being “poor in spirit” refers to those with humility and devotion. What is so incredibly blessed about being poor *in spirit*? Jesus taught that the “kingdom of heaven” belongs to those with such devotion and humility (5:3b). No one has ever been so poor in spirit as Jesus. In a *related passage*, Philippians 2:8-11 says that Jesus humbled Himself even to the point of death on the cross. In response, God the Father exalted the name of Jesus to be above every name. **Does “poor in spirit” describe you?**

Blessed are those who “mourn” basically means happy are those who grieve (5:4a). The *key word* “mourn” often refers to those grieving over someone’s death. However, scholars believe that Jesus also used the term in 5:4a to describe those who grieve over both sin and the world’s present condition. Grammatically, the word used here for “mourn” implies continued mourning. What is so incredibly blessed about continual mourning over sin? Jesus taught that those now mourning would be comforted in the future. The word “comfort” implies hope and comfort for those needing it on earth while anticipating permanent comfort throughout eternity (5:4b). No one has ever mourned so much as Jesus. He seemed to grieve over the fact that many times He wanted to comfort Jerusalem but the people were unwilling to come (Matthew 23:37).

B. The Meek and They who Hunger and Thirst (5:5-6)

Blessed are the “meek” or gentle (5:5). Although many people think the *key word* “meek” means “weak,” the term refers to a combination of strength and calm. Some rightly consider meekness as “strength under control.” When those with great strength treat others with gentleness, they exemplify meekness. What is so incredibly blessed about being meek? Jesus taught that in the future, the meek will definitely inherit or obtain the earth. The Apostle Peter wrote of a promised and coming “new earth” in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). Think about the meekness that Jesus showed on the cross. Although Jesus could have prayed and received immediate help from angels sent by His Heavenly Father (Matthew 26:53), He meekly endured the shame and agony of the cross.

Blessed are those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (5:6a). The words “hunger and thirst” refer to ongoing cravings for righteousness. The *key word* righteousness means good behavior, attitudes, and actions motivated by the approval of God. What is so blessed about an ongoing and craving hunger and thirst

for righteousness? Jesus promised future satisfaction when such individuals “shall be filled” (5:6b). Jesus hungered for His Father’s will and the finishing of His father’s work. (John 4:34).

C. The Merciful and the Pure in Heart (5:7-8)

Blessed are the “merciful” (5:7a). The *key word* merciful means to be compassionate or full of pity. However, this mercy does not enable someone to sin. What is so incredibly blessed about being merciful? Those who act mercifully will in the future receive such compassion, pity, or mercy (5:7b). We need God’s mercy! The Apostle Paul stated it clearly in his letter to Titus (3:5) that salvation comes not by works of righteousness that we do but by His mercy! Jesus demonstrated mercy more than any other person. Even while He hung on the cross and people mocked Him, He prayed for their forgiveness since they did not know what they were doing (Luke 23:34). Similarly, Jesus also *commanded* to be merciful just as your Heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

Blessed are the “pure in heart” (5:8a). The *key word* “pure” means clean and without stain. Pure things are not mixed with something else but 100% “pure.” When discussing the “heart,” Jesus meant the center of one’s being and that for which someone has affection. In other words, the “pure in heart” have complete affection and longing for things clean and unstained. What is so incredibly blessed about being pure in heart? Jesus promised a future in which those pure in heart would “see God” (5:8b). Hearts clean and pure for eternity have been made so only through the work of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11). 2 Corinthians 5:21 teaches that sinless Jesus became sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. 1 Peter 2:22 says that Jesus did not even speak bad words. King David, after being confronted by God’s prophet Nathan regarding the king’s sin of adultery, wrote about God’s cleansing of his sinful heart (Psalm 51:2, 10). The *key word* “see” means a clear recognition and discerning of God, the only true Creator, Owner, and Sustainer of all things.

D. The Peacemakers and the Persecuted (5:9-10)

Blessed are the “peacemakers” refers to those who love peace and bravely declare God’s requirements for restoring what needs repair (5:9a). In other words, peacemakers seek to reconcile people at odds. What is so incredibly blessed about being a peacemaker? Jesus promised that such individuals would be “called children of God” (5:9b). Has anyone ever mentioned how you might look or act like one of your parents? Acting as a peacemaker makes us look like children of our Heavenly Father. When someone reflects God’s love for peace, he is doing what God does. We see God’s love for peace demonstrated when He sent angels to announce Christ’s birth to shepherds and specifically proclaimed “peace on earth” and “good will” to men (Luke 2:14). Likewise, the Bible teaches that God has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry or service of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Blessed are those “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (5:10). In Jesus’s mind, these people have been and still are being persecuted. The *key word* persecuted means to make someone run away and to cause trouble for him or her. It is important to recognize that people can be rightly punished when they do wrong. Jesus did

not use His sermon to teach blessing for those being punished for wrongdoing. In fact, the Apostle Peter noticed the difference between punishment for wrongs and persecution for doing right (1 Peter 4:15-16). No one suffered as much persecution as Jesus, including the bearing of our sins so that we might live unto righteousness (1 Peter 2:21-25).

Jesus saw blessedness for those persecuted for righteousness (Matthew 5:10a). Righteousness refers to what God has approved. Those persecuted because they have gained God's approval will be blessed. The Bible teaches that anyone desiring to live a godly life will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). What is so blessed about being persecuted for righteousness? Jesus taught that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:10b). As mentioned earlier, "theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" also appears in the first usage of "blessed" (5:3). This *repeated phrase* indicates Jesus's concern for the kingdom of heaven.

Conclusion

The Bible's most extensive single record of Christ's teaching begins with Matthew 5:3-10. This "blessed" list emphasizes the attributes of those to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. The list appears in an almost chronological order of spiritual growth that occurs in the life of Christ's followers. That process begins with humility and mourning that grows into meekness, craving for righteousness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and eventual persecution. While some of the time these attributes might describe you or me, they describe how Jesus lived all His time on the earth. Clearly, the kingdom of heaven rightly and deservedly belongs to Jesus! Those who belong to Christ, hear and do as He taught, can likewise have the kingdom. Will you choose the wisdom of hearing and doing as Christ taught?

Apply It

- *Believe the truth* that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit and the persecuted.
- *Believe the truth* that the mourners, meek, cravers of righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers are supremely blessed.



PERSECUTION, SALT, LIGHT

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 5:11-16:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?
3. Are there any comparisons noted in this passage?
4. What contrast is noted in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?
3. How does the immediate context help to understand the text?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there a truth to believe?
3. Is there a promise to claim?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Three

Persecution, Salt, Light | Matthew 5:11-16

Aim: Learners will embrace their responsibilities for influencing the world for Christ while rejoicing in personal suffering for Christ.

Introduction

Jesus transitions from “Blessed are they” to “Blessed are _____” in 5:11. This transition, along with the *repeated phrase* “kingdom of heaven” in 5:3 and 5:10, lends credence to the idea that this is a new section in the Lord’s sermon. Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes the expectation that following Christ results in a changed life for His followers.

Part One: Blessed Are You (5:11-12)

A. *Blessed when Persecuted* (5:11)

Notice the types of behavior that would result in a supreme blessing for Christ’s followers. First, the *key word* “_____” or “_____” means to defame or disgrace a person by making complaints.

Second, the *key word* “_____” means to chase someone away or to drive people out.

Third, the *key phrase* “_____” means to tell lies.

The *key word* “_____” refers to rebellion against moral laws with disregard for the harm it will do.

The *key phrase* “_____” or “_____” clarifies that Jesus did not refer to casual or common mistreatments that people may endure. **To what extent might today’s committed followers of Christ be insulted, persecuted, or falsely accused?**

B. *Rejoice when Persecuted* (5:12)

The *key word* “_____” means to experience God’s grace. The *key word* “_____” means to be extremely joyful.

Part Two: You are Salt and Light (5:13-16)

Jesus continues the sermon by making two emphatic *comparisons* of what His followers _____.

A. “_____ *the salt of the earth*” (5:13)

Although scholars debate the possibility of salt losing its flavor, the *key phrase* “_____” or “lost its saltiness” can be understood as meaning “deficient” or “defiled.” Christ expected His followers to influence the earth like salt that adds flavor, creates a thirst for righteousness, and preserves His teaching.

B. “_____ *the light of the world*” (5:14-16)

People use light for different purposes. Primarily, light helps things to grow and prevents people from stumbling over things in the dark. “Let your light so shine before men” is a *command* from the Lord (5:16a). The *key phrase* “_____” refers to the city on a hill and the candle on a lampstand.

Will you choose to act wisely and continue hearing and then doing Christ’s teaching?

Lesson Three Outline: Persecution, Salt, Light Matthew 5:11-16

Aim: Learners will embrace their responsibilities for influencing the world for Christ while rejoicing in personal suffering for Christ.

Introduction

At first glance, one might think that Matthew 5:11 fits well in the section with 5:3-10. That is reasonable; however, notice the slight change in language. Jesus transitions from “Blessed are they” to “Blessed are you” in 5:11. This transition, along with the *repeated phrase* “kingdom of heaven” in 5:3 and 5:10, lends credence to the idea that this is a new section in the Lord’s sermon. Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes the expectation that following Christ results in a changed life for His followers. In 5:11-16, Jesus transitions from the general attributes addressed in 5:3-10, the preceding *immediate context*, to specific matters for His disciples: the realities of coming persecution and their expected influence in the world. **Before studying this lesson, will you choose to act wisely and continue hearing and then doing Christ’s teaching?**

Part One: Blessed Are You (5:11-12)

A. *Blessed when persecuted* (5:11)

Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me (5:11). Remember that the *key word* “blessed” refers to one’s being supremely blessed, happy, or fortunate. In 5:11, Jesus finished His list of “blessed” statements while transitioning to a new level of intensity for His disciples. The *key word* “you” is plural and likely emphasizes the unity Christ expects amongst His followers as they endure persecution. Notice the types of behavior that would result in a supreme blessing for Christ’s followers.

First, the *key word* “revile” or “insult” means to defame or disgrace a person by making complaints. In the original language of the New Testament, Jesus indicates that people will actively insult His followers. Likewise, the chief priests reviled and insulted Jesus while He hung on the cross (Mark 15:31-32).

Second, the *key word* “persecution” means to chase someone away or to drive people out. Jesus endured such persecution (John 5:16) and further warned His disciples that if the world persecuted Him, then it would also persecute them, His followers (John 15:18).

Third, the *key phrase* “falsely say” means to tell lies. In the original language of the New Testament, Jesus specified the continual and intentional deception of these lies. The precise nature of these lies would focus upon “all manner of evil against you.” The *key word* “evil” refers to rebellion against moral laws with disregard for the harm it will do. The liars Jesus spoke of in 5:11 would continually and intentionally attempt to deceive individuals into believing that His followers behaved in immoral and harmful ways. In a *related passage*, many false witnesses spoke falsehoods against Jesus during His pre-crucifixion trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:55-59).

Although no one likely desires insults, persecutions, and intentional lies made against him or her, notice the *cause and effect* relationship in 5:11. Because of Jesus, the insults, persecutions, and lies come (effects). The *key phrase* “for My sake” or “because

of Me” clarifies that Jesus did not refer to casual or common mistreatments that people may endure. Again, no one likely wants to endure such, but these forms of mistreatment come because of one’s commitment and relationship to Jesus Christ. In a *related passage*, the Apostle Peter encouraged his readers to rejoice when they suffered for Christ. However, he commanded them not to suffer because of wrongdoing (1 Peter 4:12-16). **To what extent might today’s committed followers of Christ be insulted, persecuted, or falsely accused?**

B. Rejoice when persecuted (5:12)

In response to the insults, persecution, and lies mentioned in 5:11, Jesus *commanded* His listeners to “rejoice” and “be glad” (5:12). The *key word* “rejoice” means to experience God’s grace. The *key word* “glad” means to be extremely joyful. It means to have the kind of joy that makes someone jump up-and-down with excitement! Incredibly, such rejoicing can and should occur even under difficult circumstances. The original language of the New Testament helps us understand that Jesus intended for such rejoicing and gladness to become ongoing commitments.

What makes insults, persecution, and lies something to celebrate as a supreme blessing? Jesus gave two reasons (i.e., *cause and effects*). First, is a *promise* that great is the reward in heaven for “you” when insulted, persecuted, and falsely accused (5:12a). In a *related passage*, Hebrews 12:2, the writer tells that Jesus endured the cross and its shame because of the “joy” He knew awaited Him. Second, the Old Testament era prophets (who lived before Christ’s listeners) were persecuted in the same way (5:12b). In Jesus’s mind, suffering like the prophets suffered is an honor. Peter and John realized this when they rejoiced that God considered them worthy of beatings and suffering shame for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). Peter later wrote that believers should not consider it strange or unusual when fiery trials come their way (1 Peter 4:12).

In a *related passage*, Hebrews 11:1-31, the author identified numerous Old Testament men and women as prominent in the exercising of their faith. In Hebrews 11:32-39, the author concludes by asking “What more can I say?” of the numerous judges, kings, and prophets who accomplished incredible feats through acts of faith (Hebrews 11:32-33). Some faced fire and sword while others experienced mocking, scourges, bonds, and imprisonment. Some were stoned or sawed in two. Others lived in harsh conditions and yet “the world was not worthy of them” (Hebrews 11:34-38). Those, including prophets, who endured so much did not receive the promise given them because God had something better “for us” along with them (Hebrews 11:40). In Matthew 5:12, Jesus saw a connection between the prophets, Himself, and His disciples. Those who join with the prophets and Christ have indeed joined those of great faith! Such is a tremendous reason for continual rejoicing and gladness!

Part Two: You are Salt and Light (5:13-16)

Jesus continued the sermon by making two emphatic *comparisons* of what His followers are. First, “you are the salt of the earth” (5:13). Second, “you are the light of the world” (5:14-15). With these comparisons, Jesus changed from the previous “blessed” statements to truths about the influence His people should have in the world. A sick earth and a dark world need the influences of salt and light.

A. ***“You are the salt of the earth”*** (5:13)

People use salt for different purposes. For example, salt adds flavor to food, creates thirst, preserves food, and may help heal cuts or wounds. But, if salt loses its saltiness (flavor, ability to preserve, ability to heal) then it is useless. Although scholars debate the possibility of salt losing its flavor, the *key phrase* “lost its savor” or “lost its saltiness” can be understood as meaning “deficient” or “defiled.” “Lost its saltiness” comes from the same Greek word that references a “fool” in Matthew 5:22 and 7:26. Both uses of the word reflects something deficient (either with a person’s intelligence or saltiness). Christ’s listeners likely understood that Jesus was stressing the lack of influence a “deficient” disciple would have upon the earth. Christ expected His followers to influence the earth like salt that adds flavor, creates a thirst for righteousness, and preserves His teaching.

If dirt ends up in a container of salt, has it not basically ruined all the salt? While each grain of salt may retain its flavor, separating the dirt and salt would be nearly impossible. What else could be done with the salt but to throw it out? When Jesus asked his listeners how salt that loses its saltiness can be made salty again, He expected a negative answer (i.e., “It cannot be made salty again”). Notice the *cause and effect* relationship in 5:13b. Salt without saltiness (cause) is good for nothing but to be cast out and stepped on by the feet of men (effects). Obviously, salt should do what salt is supposed to do.

The implication of Christ’s *comparison* is clear. Jesus expected His listeners to *be* and *do* what He taught them to *be* and *do*. Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount describes what He expects from the “salt of the earth.” Hearing and doing all that Jesus requires in His preaching and teaching will keep His listeners “salty” and useful for service in the Lord’s kingdom. Hearing without doing what Jesus teaches will result in foolish listeners, useless and good for nothing but to be trampled underfoot by men. In the *immediate context* of Matthew 4:23-24, Jesus, like salt, healed all kinds of sicknesses and created a “thirst” for large crowds to follow Him. Christ’s authoritative teaching in this sermon amazed the listening crowd (Matthew 7:28-29). At the beginning of His ministry, Christ, like salt, “flavored” the religious landscape, and people wanted to hear more.

B. ***“You are the light of the world”*** (5:14-16)

People use light for different purposes. Primarily, light helps things to grow and prevents people from stumbling over obstacles in the dark. In *related passages*, the Apostle John identified Jesus as “light.” Jesus is the true light coming into the world (John 1:9). Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” and His followers would no longer walk in darkness (John 8:12). Jesus also recognized that so long as He remained in the world, “I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). In the *immediate context* of Matthew 4:16, Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy to be a light for those in darkness and the shadowland of death. In Christ’s mind, His followers “are the light of the world” as well and should help prevent stumbling in a dark world and encourage spiritual growth.

Jesus acknowledged the obvious fact that a city built on a hill cannot be hidden, due to the light it produces (5:14). Likewise, genuine followers of Jesus must shine as unhidden lights in the world. There should be a *contrast* between the light of Christ’s followers and the world’s darkness. Neither do people light candles and put them under baskets (5:15a). In *contrast*, lit candles are put on candlesticks so that they can give light

to all in a house (5:15b).

“Let your light so shine before men” is a command from the Lord (5:16a). The *key phrase* “so shine” refers to the city on a hill and the candle on a lampstand. Notice the *comparison*. Just as a city cannot be hidden and a lit candle gives light to those in the house, Jesus expected His followers to shine as unhidden lights to those in darkness. Notice the resulting *cause and effects* relationships (5:16b). The command to “let your lights so shine before men,” as a city and a candle (cause), would allow His followers’ good works to be seen by men (first effect) and glorify their Father in heaven (second effect).

Conclusion

Jesus continued His sermon by transitioning from an emphasis upon the general attributes of those to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (5:3-10) to specific matters for His disciples (5:11-16). First, He addressed the realities of coming persecution and commanded His disciples to rejoice and be glad because of the great reward awaiting them in heaven. Such rejoicing should also occur because the prophets experienced similar insults, persecution, and false accusations. Second, Jesus expected His followers to embrace their responsibilities for influencing the world as salt and light. Like salt, they should create a thirst for righteousness and preserve His teachings. As light, they should influence the world, help the world grow, and prevent stumbling in spiritual darkness. **Will you choose the wisdom of hearing and doing as Christ taught?**

Apply It

- *Believe the promise* that great is the reward in heaven for you when insulted, persecuted, and falsely accused.
- *Believe the truth* that Christ’s followers are to influence the world as salt and light.
- *Obey the command* of Christ to rejoice and be glad when mistreated.
- *Obey the command* of Christ to shine your light so that people see your good works to glorify your Heavenly Father.



UNLESS

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 5:17-20:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?
3. What contrast is noted in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?
3. How does the immediate context help to understand the text?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there a truth to believe?
3. Is there an error to avoid?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Four: Unless | Matthew 5:17-20

Aim: Learners will realize that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament's requirements for righteousness and unless they have the righteousness of Christ, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Part One: Christ's Relation to the _____ and _____ (Matthew 5:17-18)

A. Christ came to fulfill (5:17)

The *key word* "_____" refers to the writings of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. The *key word* "_____" refers to all the Old Testament prophetic books. In reality, speaking of the "Law and Prophets" is similar to speaking about the Old and New Testaments. In other words, Jesus referred to the entire Old Testament. The *key word* "_____" or "abolish" means to overthrow, crush, or loosen thoroughly.

B. Until all is Fulfilled (5:18)

The *key word* "_____" means truly or most assuredly. The *key phrase* "_____" refers to the end or disappearance of the world as we know it. The *key phrase* "_____" affirms that disappearance of any part of the Law certainly *will not happen* until the accomplishment of the Law and Prophets *does happen*.

Part Two: Kingdom of Heaven (5:19-20)

A. Least in the Kingdom (5:19a)

Jesus taught in 5:19a that whoever "breaks" one of the least commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called "least" in the kingdom of heaven (effect). The *key word* "_____" is the same basic word used in 5:17 for "destroy."

B. Great in the Kingdom (5:19b)

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship in 5:19b. Whoever (singular) does or keeps and teaches the commandments (causes) will be called "great" in the kingdom of heaven (effect).

C. Entrance into the Kingdom (5:20)

The *key word* "_____" or "_____" likely needs no explanation yet it is essential to the entire Sermon on the Mount. The *key word* "_____" means good behavior, attitudes, and actions motivated by the approval of God. "Your righteousness" refers to the entire group of listeners. The *key word* "_____" or means to be over and above.

Scribes and Pharisees were two groups of Jewish religious leaders during the time of Jesus. Scribes prepared hand-written copies of the Law of Moses and interpreted it when needed. The Pharisees considered themselves separated from sin and sinners. They kept both the entire written and oral law.

No one is made righteous on his own efforts to keep the Law. Rather, righteousness comes from God by faith, particularly through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9).

What will a wise person do with this teaching?

Lesson Four: Unless Matthew 5:17-20

Aim: Learners will realize that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament's requirements for righteousness and unless they have the righteousness of Christ, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Introduction

According to the *immediate context*, John the Baptist fulfilled Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy as a "voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord'" (Matthew 3:3). His clear message of preparation was, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Following John's arrest, Jesus withdrew to Galilee and began preaching the same message of "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Both John and Jesus recognized the closeness of the kingdom's arrival.

Early in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus focused upon the characteristics of kingdom-dwellers (Matthew 5:3-12). He indicated that "the kingdom of heaven" belongs to the "poor in spirit" and to those "persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:3, 10). Christ's other "blessed" statements further detailed the supreme blessings for those living in ways that characterize citizens of the "kingdom of heaven."

Christ then emphasized what kingdom-dwellers "are" (Matthew 5:13-16). "You are the salt of the earth . . . You *are* the light of the world." In the original language of the New Testament, Christ's use of the word "you" here is plural. Christ expects His followers to *be* and *do* what salt and light are expected to *be* and *do*. Salt and light characterize how the Lord expects His followers to influence a spiritually corrupt and dark world.

An important quality of salt is its ability to preserve food. In His sermon, Jesus has yet to mention the Old Testament Law as essential for kingdom-dwelling. However, as the message continued, He focused upon just that, a proper interpretation of the Law (Matthew 5:21-48). Like salt, this interpretation preserved the Law's true intent and still guides Christ's followers in understanding their relationship to the Law and the requirement for their very entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Part One: Christ's Relation to the Law and Prophets (5:17-18)

A. *Christ came to fulfill* (5:17)

Just in case listeners might be tempted to view God's Law as obsolete or unimportant to Him, Jesus made a clear *command* to "Think not that I am come to destroy the law" (5:17a). In the original language of the New Testament, the *key phrase* "think not" indicates that Jesus meant for His listeners never to begin thinking, assuming, or supposing that He came to destroy/abolish the Law or the Prophets. The *key word* "law" refers to the writings of Moses, the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). The *key word* "prophets" refers to all the Old Testament prophetic books such as, but certainly not limited to, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Speaking of the "Law and Prophets" is like speaking about the Old and New Testaments. In other words, Law and Prophets meant the entire Old Testament.

In part, John the Baptist “prepared the way of the Lord” by acknowledging a mightier One “coming after me” (Matthew 3:11). Jesus made it clear that His coming did not have the purpose of destroying the Law or Prophets (i.e., the Scriptures). The *key word* destroy or “abolish” means to overthrow, crush, or loosen thoroughly. Jesus did not come to overthrow or loosen the Scriptures. Rather, He came to fulfill the Scriptures (5:17b). With this truth, Christ prepared listeners for His teaching about the Law, particularly the attitudes that should accompany it.

In *contrast* to destruction, Christ came to fulfill the Law. The *key word* “fulfill” means to be crammed full. In other words, Jesus came to fulfill the Law completely and bring it to the desired end. It is important to note that the Old Testament Law concerns three specific areas: civil, ceremonial, and moral laws. Civil laws applied exclusively to the biblical nation of Israel. Ceremonial laws applied to the required religious acts such as sacrifices and festivals. Moral laws applied and still apply to issues of morality such as those in the Ten Commandments regarding murder, adultery, theft, dishonest testimony, and covetousness (Deuteronomy 5:17-21). Again, civil laws applied only to ancient Israel. Christ fulfilled the ceremonial laws. Romans 10:4-5, a *related passage*, speaks of how Christ ended the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. That is why animal sacrifices are no longer necessary. The moral laws of the Old Testament remain applicable today. For example, murder violates moral law. People have long understood murder to be wrong, even before God established the Ten Commandments. The moral laws continue to be part of God’s righteous standard for all people. The Old Testament Prophets affirmed these laws (Romans 3:21-22).

B. Until all is Fulfilled (5:18)

“For verily I say unto you” (5:18a). The *key word* “verily” means truly or most assuredly. In other words, Jesus stressed the utmost reliability of the statements about to be shared. He emphasized the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. The *key phrase* “Till heaven and earth pass” refers to the end or disappearance of the world as we know it. Jesus affirmed that not one “jot or tittle” would pass away until after the world’s end. The *key word* “jot” refers to the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet. The *key word* “tittle” refers to the smallest stroke made in writing. It might be compared to the dot over an “i” or an apostrophe in English writing. Notice the *repeated words* “till” or “until” and “pass” or “pass away.” Until heaven and earth pass away, not even the smallest letter or grammatical stroke of the Law will in no wise “pass away” from the Law “until” all the Law is fulfilled or accomplished (5:18b). The *key phrase* “in no wise” affirms that disappearance of any part of the Law certainly *will not happen* until the accomplishment of the Law and Prophets *does happen*.

Part Two: Kingdom of Heaven (5:19-20)

“Therefore” or “Whoever then” indicates a *cause and effect* relationship between 5:18 and 5:19-20. The Law’s ensured fulfillment (cause) means that how one handles the Law affects his or her eternity as described in 5:19-20. In 5:19, Jesus used language that appears to categorize some biblical commandments as more important than others. Of course, each of God’s commandments is important but even Jesus distinguished between commandments. In a *related passage*, Matthew 22:35-40, Jesus identified the

two “greatest” commandments. The first command is to love the “Lord your God” with all heart, soul, and mind. The second command is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” According to Jesus, all the Law and Prophets hang on these two commands.

A. Least in the Kingdom (5:19a)

How does this influence eternity? Again, remember the *cause and effect* relationship. Because every bit of the Law and Prophets will be accomplished, Jesus taught in 5:19a that whoever “breaks” one of the least commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called “least” in the kingdom of heaven (effect). The *key word* “break” is the same basic word used in 5:17 for “destroy.” Remember that the word can mean to overthrow, crush, or loosen. Here, the term implies the loosening or annulling of even the smallest commandment’s seriousness. The *key word* “teach” means to instruct or transfer information. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship. Anyone who attempts to weaken or eliminate even the least or very smallest commandment and teaches others to do so (cause), will be called “least” in the kingdom of heaven (effect). Again, remember that even Jesus distinguished between the commandments. *Avoid the error* of lessening the importance of any biblical commandment and teaching others to do the same. *Believe the truth* that a lesser position in heaven’s kingdom awaits those who commit such error. *Avoid the error* of following anyone who lessens the importance of biblical commands.

B. Great in the Kingdom (5:19b)

In *contrast* to being called least, some will be called “great” in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus recognized the *contrast* between the ones annulling the least of God’s commandments and the ones keeping the commandments. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship in 5:19b. Whoever (singular) does or keeps and teaches the commandments (causes) will be called “great” in the kingdom of heaven (effect). Every bit of the Law will be accomplished. Those who do and teach the commands have the promise of greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

C. Entrance into the Kingdom (5:20)

Jesus *commanded* His listeners not to assume that He came to destroy the Law (5:17). Similarly, Jesus makes it clear that no assumptions should be made about anyone’s entrance into the kingdom of heaven (5:20). Although “least” and “great” do exist in the kingdom, Christ taught the sobering *truth* that unless the righteousness of His followers exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, they would not enter the kingdom of heaven! The *key word* “except” or “unless” likely needs no explanation yet it is essential to the entire Sermon on the Mount. The *key word* “righteousness” means good behavior, attitudes, and actions motivated by the approval of God. “Your righteousness” refers to the entire group of listeners. The *key word* “exceed” or “surpasses” means to be over and above. The word is used to describe a flooded river that has overflown its banks. Jesus taught that for people to enter the kingdom of heaven, their behavior, attitudes, and actions of which God approved (i.e., their righteousness) had to be over and above that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Scribes and Pharisees were two groups of Jewish religious leaders during

the time of Jesus. Scribes prepared hand-written copies of the Law of Moses and interpreted it when needed. The Pharisees considered themselves separated from sin and sinners. They kept both the entire written and oral law. In a *related passage*, Matthew 23:3, Jesus said to obey the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees but to *avoid the error* of following their examples because they “don’t practice what they teach.” Jesus would spend the next several points of His sermon dealing with how these religious leaders fell short of God’s intent for the commandments they faithfully taught.

Think of the implication of Christ’s teaching here. If the entrance to heaven’s kingdom requires a righteousness that surpasses that of the religious leaders, then even the religious leaders themselves did not have enough righteousness. Only Jesus Christ has surpassed all people and religious groups with actions and attitudes of which God completely approved. Thankfully, His tremendous righteousness is available to all who believe. In the *related passage*, Romans 10:5, Paul rightly identified the Law of Moses as a law of righteousness, basically meaning that keeping the Law brought life. However, the truth is that no one is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10), and no one is justified by works of the Law but only by faith in Christ (Galatians 2:16). No one is made righteous by his own efforts to keep the Law. Rather, righteousness comes from God by faith, particularly through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9).

Conclusion

Jesus came to bring the teachings and truths of the Law and Prophets to completion. That He came to overthrow those teachings should never be thought. Believe that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament’s requirements for righteousness and “unless” you have received the gift of His righteousness, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Once the gift of heaven’s kingdom is received, then live like a great one by doing and teaching biblical truths (5:19). **What will a wise person do with this teaching?**

Apply It

- *Obey the command* not to think Christ came to abolish the Law or Prophets.
- *Avoid the error* of lessening the importance of any biblical commandment and teaching others to do the same.
- *Avoid the error* of following anyone who lessens the importance of biblical commands.
- *Believe the truth* that a lesser position in heaven’s kingdom awaits those who lessen biblical commands.
- *Believe the truth* that a great position in heaven’s kingdom awaits those who do and teach the biblical commands.



“YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID” ABOUT MURDER

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author’s comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author’s review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 5:21-26.

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?
3. What comparisons are noted in this passage?
4. What contrast is noted in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?
3. How does the cultural/historical background help to understand the text?
4. How does the immediate context help to understand the text?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there an attitude to change?
3. Is there an error to avoid?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Five: “You Have Heard it Said” about Murder | Matthew 5:21-26

Aim: Learners will understand that consequences exist for a person’s actions, thoughts, and words.

Part One: “You Heard . . . But I Say” (5:21-22)

Cultural and historical background tells us that in Christ’s day, Jewish religious leaders held to many written and oral traditions that went beyond the actual content of Scripture. Some scholars believe that rabbis used the wording “it was said” as a way of introducing something that appeared in their writings.

In the outline below, fill in what “you have heard” and what Jesus “said unto you.”

A. “You Have Heard it Said” (5:21)

“You Have Heard it Said” -

B. “But I Say unto You” (5:22)

“But I say unto you” -

1. “Angry” with his brother (5:22a) -

2. “Raca” to his brother (5:22b) -

3. “You Fool” (5:22c) -

Part Two: Brother and Adversary (5:23-25)

Jesus realized the dangers and liabilities of anger and name-calling. He presented two practical areas in which His listeners might find themselves not guilty of murder, *but* guilty of anger towards a brother or name-calling.

A. Remembering your Brother (5:23-24) -

B. “Agree with your Adversary Quickly” (5:25-26) -

What will a wise man keep doing with this teaching?

Lesson Five: “You Have Heard it Said” about Murder Matthew 5:21-26

Aim: Learners will understand that consequences exist for a person’s actions, thoughts, and words.

Introduction

The preceding *immediate context* of Matthew 5:21-26 includes the first part of the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. In 5:3-10, Jesus described the characteristics of and supreme blessings for those to whom the “kingdom of heaven” belongs. In 5:11-16, Jesus described the realities and supreme blessing of coming persecution for His followers. He also identified the expected influence His followers should have upon a corrupt and dark world as salt and light. In 5:17-20, He stressed that no assumption should be made that He came to abolish the Law. In *contrast*, He came to fulfill even the smallest bit of the Law and Prophets. He declared that “except your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees,” entrance into the kingdom of heaven would not occur (5:20).

So, what does righteousness that surpasses that of scribes and Pharisees mean or look like? The rest of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount answers those questions. In 5:21-48, Jesus addressed six sayings His listeners had “heard” but *contrasted* them with His own teaching (“But I say to you”). Each saying concerns our proper relations with others. Notice that Jesus did not contradict the teaching of Scripture. Jesus typically referred to Scripture by identifying it as something “written” or as the “words of Moses” or the “words of Isaiah.” In 5:21-48, He used a different formula: “you have heard.” This leaves room for error and misunderstanding in what some people “said” and in what others “heard.”

Part One: “You Have Heard . . . But I Say” (5:21-22)

Cultural and historical background tells us that in Christ’s day, Jewish religious leaders held to many written and oral traditions that went beyond the actual content of Scripture. Some scholars believe that rabbis used the wording “it was said” as a way of introducing something that appeared in their writings. Jesus likely referred to such extra traditions with the *key phrase*, “Ye have heard it said by them of old time” (5:21a). Some Bible versions translate the statement as “to them of old time.” Regardless, Jesus clearly recognized that “what” His listeners knew about the old-time teachings and sayings lacked a proper interpretation. Based on the *immediate context* of 5:17-20, Jesus seemed to credit these religious leaders with spreading the teaching His listeners had heard.

A. “You Have Heard it Said” (5:21)

Jesus mentioned two things heard by the people. First, “Thou shalt not kill” (5:21b). Second, “and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment” (5:21c). “Thou shalt not kill” is one of the Ten Commandments, originally found in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, *related passages*. The *key word* “kill” means to murder by intentional and unjustifiable taking of human life. Although taking of any life is serious, this command does not forbid “justifiable” killing during times of war, in self-

defense, or for capital punishment.

Deuteronomy 4:2 stresses that nothing be added to or subtracted from the commandments. By making adjustments, the people of Israel ran the risk of not obeying the actual commands. Yet, Jesus quoted something His listeners had “heard,” an addition to the commandment about not killing, “and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment” (5:21c). The *key phrase* “in danger of” means liable, guilty, or subject to the law. The *key word* “judgment” typically refers to a negative verdict. Certainly, most people recognize the seriousness of murder and the likely result of severe judgment. No doubt the scribes and Pharisees also agreed with this statement; however, Jesus interpreted the original commandment differently than they did. Jesus pointed to additional “dangers” or liabilities. His interpretation of “Thou shalt not kill” called for righteousness that surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

B. “But I Say unto You” (5:22)

Jesus *contrasted* what His listeners had “heard” with His own words, “But I say unto you” (5:22a). By using this *key phrase*, Jesus declared His authority to give an interpretation. Notice He did not contradict the validity of the original commandment or its added statement about the danger of judgment. However, He did explain that simply not committing murder does not surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, something required for entry into the kingdom of heaven. James 1:20, a *related passage*, shared the truth that man’s anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires. Jesus addressed this further as He spoke about one’s anger toward a brother.

1. “Angry” with his brother (5:22a)

Jesus declared that “danger of judgment” applied not only to murderers but to anyone angry with his brother (5:22a). The *key word* “angry” means to be enraged, exasperated with escalating anger and insult. Such anger focuses upon punishing a person unnecessarily with disregard for right or wrong. This refers to ongoing anger rather than occasional anger. The *key word* “brother” most often refers to a sibling or fellow member of a religious group. So, Jesus likely referred to one’s anger against a fellow believer. The phrase “without a cause” does not appear in all Bible translations; however, it fits well with the context and the understanding that such anger seeks to punish unnecessarily.

This *truth* presented by Jesus did not add to the Law. Instead, Jesus simply related another part of the Law to the issue of murder. Leviticus 19:17-18, a *related passage*, already commanded God’s people not to hate their brothers in their hearts. In contrast to taking revenge against a fellow member of the community, God commanded in the Law, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Each element of Leviticus 19:17-18 appeared in Christ’s interpretation of 5:22a. *Avoid the error* of ongoing anger toward others.

2. “Raca” to his brother (5:22b)

Cultural background tells us that the *key word* “Raca” is of Aramaic origin and was basically a slang word used in Christ’s day for expressing great contempt. The word means “empty-headed” (i.e., intellectually empty, fool, or good for nothing).

Name-calling such as this expresses a perceived measure of superiority over the one being called “Raca.” Although anger makes one liable to judgment, it can be hidden inside the angry person. Here, name-calling is the outward expression of inner anger. Although no murder occurs, Jesus made it clear that such name-calling created a second danger for individuals, “in danger of the council” (5:22b). The *key word* “council” referred to the Sanhedrin or the supreme court of Israel. This council tried the more important cases of the land. Christ’s reference to the council revealed the seriousness in God’s eyes of insulting someone with such words. *Avoid the error* of name-calling that insults someone’s intelligence. *Change your attitude* if calling others by such names describes your common behavior.

3. “You Fool” (5:22c)

According to Jesus, the most intense danger came when calling someone a “fool” (5:22c). The *key word* “fool” means someone is dull, sluggish, and morally worthless. To call someone “Raca” attacked the person’s intelligence. To call someone a “fool” attacked his or her heart and character. Jesus taught that such name-calling put one in danger of hell itself! In the *immediate context*, Jesus presented the truth that unless one’s righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, “ye will in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). While some believed that only murder put one at risk of judgment, Jesus recognized even greater risk coming from supposedly lesser acts such as calling someone “Raca” or “Fool.” What a *contrast* between the difficulty required for entry into the kingdom but the simplicity of entering hell. *Avoid the error* of calling someone a fool (or similar insults) in reference to his or her moral worth.

Part Two: Brother and Adversary (5:23-25)

Jesus realized the dangers and liabilities of anger and name-calling. He presented two practical areas in which His listeners might find themselves not guilty of murder, *but* guilty of anger towards a brother or name-calling. First, while visiting the temple to offer a gift at the altar, one remembers unresolved conflict with a brother. Second, is while dealing with an adversary. Although Jesus offered practical and reasonable advice on how to deal with such conflict, ultimately the problem dealt with a person’s spiritual condition.

A. Remembering your Brother (5:23-24)

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship Jesus used to continue the sermon. The truths of 5:21-22 (causes) resulted in His commands for dealing with brothers before worship and adversaries while on the way (effects). The *key word* “therefore” helps students of the Bible to recognize cause and effect relationships (5:23). Jesus addressed two things happening at the same time. The first deals with when a person brings a gift to the altar. The second deals with when that same person at the altar remembers his brother has something against him. The *key phrase*, “bring a gift to the altar” likely referred to an animal sacrifice on the altar at Jerusalem’s temple. By this, Jesus spoke of an individual’s coming to worship.

Jesus presented the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee, northern “Israel.” The temple was in Jerusalem, in southern “Israel.” A trip to the temple required intentional

effort by His listeners. Remembering conflict with a brother “back home” could be quite inconvenient; however, Jesus *commanded* such a person to do three things: leave his gift at the altar, go be reconciled to the brother, and then return to offer the gift (5:24a). The *key word* go means to go away quietly and without getting attention (5:24b). The *key phrase* “first be reconciled” means that at the beginning of one’s “going away,” he or she is to make reconciliation a priority. Reconcile means to alter the situation and make peace by doing all that is possible to stop the brother’s anger. From God’s viewpoint, efforts to worship and reconcile with Him are unacceptable while conflict with others remains. Once reconciled, the person is to return and offer the gift left at the altar (5:24c). *Obey the command* to deal with personal conflicts before attempting to worship the Lord.

B. “Agree with your Adversary Quickly” (5:25-26)

Jesus changed from discussing a worship scenario to a legal one. He *commanded* listeners to “agree with your adversary” (5:25a). The *key word* agree means to be wholly committed to meeting the adversary half-way in order to reach an agreement. The *key word* quickly means without delay. The *key word* adversary refers to an opponent in a legal matter. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship as Jesus encouraged quick agreement (cause) to avoid the adversary’s possible decision to turn His listeners over to the judge (effect). Such a decision would result in further effects. The judge would then turn listeners over to an officer who would then “cast” or “throw” them into prison. The *key word* cast means to do so with little concern over what happens to the one thrown into prison (5:25b).

Jesus again used the word “verily” or “truly” to emphasize the truth of His statement. By the time one was thrown into prison, the opportunity for reconciliation was over. Everything owed would be paid (5:26).

Conclusion

Jesus addressed two matters in Matthew 5:21-26. First, Jesus properly interpreted the Old Testament command “Thou shalt not kill” by addressing the inner actions, thoughts, and words that lead to murder and their consequent guilt and the punishment deserved. Second, Jesus gave commands concerning how to deal with conflicts between brothers and adversaries. Although practical, Christ’s teaching is not free legal advice. Jesus regarded the spiritual implications. Kingdom-dwelling worshippers should deal with conflict immediately. Jesus would certainly agree with the Apostle Paul’s command to stop letting the sun go down on their wrath (i.e., deal quickly) because it gives the Devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Apply It

- *Obey the command* not to commit murder.
- *Avoid the error* of ongoing anger toward others.
- *Avoid the error* of name-calling that insults someone’s intelligence.
- *Avoid the error* of calling someone a fool or insulting a person’s moral worth.
- *Obey the command* to deal with personal conflicts quickly before attempting to worship the Lord.



“YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID” ABOUT ADULTERY, DIVORCE, AND OATHS

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author’s comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author’s review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 5:27-37:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?
3. What contrast is noted in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?
3. How does the cultural/historical background help to understand the text?
4. How does the immediate context help to understand the text?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there a truth to believe?
3. Is there a sin to confess?
4. Is there an error to avoid?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Six: Matthew 5:27-37

“You Have Heard it Said” about Adultery, Divorce, and Oaths

Aim: Learners will understand Christ’s views of adultery, divorce, and making oaths and apply them to their relationships.

Introduction

Jesus *repeatedly* referred to the kingdom of heaven during His Sermon on the Mount. What a great theme! Jesus made it clear that kingdom-dwellers should *avoid the errors* of sinful actions, thoughts, and words. **Will you choose now to be wise by keeping and doing His words about adultery, divorce, and being honest?**

In the outline below, fill in what “you have heard” and what Jesus “said unto you.”

Part One: “Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery” (5:27-30)

A. *Adultery in the Heart* (5:27-28)

“You have heard that it was said” -

Jesus replied “But I say unto you” -

B. *Serious Steps to Avoid Adultery of the Heart* (5:29-30)

Jesus clearly uses a figure of speech not meant to be taken literally.

Men, what do you need to “cut off” and “throw away” in order to purify your thoughts toward other men’s wives?

Women, what could you do to help men around you maintain pure thoughts toward you?

Part Two: “Whosoever Shall Put Away His Wife” (5:31-32)

A. *“It has been said” about Divorce* (5:31) -

B. *“But I say” about Divorce* (5:32) -

Part Three: Oaths (5:33-37)

A. *“Ye have heard” about Oaths* (5:33) -

B. *“But I say unto you”* (5:34-37) -

What will a wise man keep doing with this teaching?

Lesson Six: “You Have Heard it Said” about Adultery, Divorce, and Oaths | Matthew 5:27-37

Aim: Learners will understand Christ’s views of adultery, divorce, and making oaths and apply them to their relationships.

Introduction

Jesus *repeatedly* referred to the kingdom of heaven during His Sermon on the Mount. What a great theme! Matthew 5:3-26, the preceding *immediate context* of Matthew 5:27-37, describes those who dwell in that kingdom and gives particular attention to issues of the heart. For example, Jesus properly interpreted the Old Testament command “Thou shalt not kill” by addressing the inner actions, thoughts, and words that lead to murder and make anyone guilty and deserving of punishment (5:21-22). Through His interpretation, Jesus made it clear that kingdom-dwellers should *avoid the errors* of sinful actions, thoughts, and words.

In 5:17-20, Jesus stressed His coming to fulfill the Old Testament Law and Prophets and the truth that unless “your righteousness” surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, entrance into heaven will not occur (5:20). Although not committing murder is good, a person’s words and inner thoughts must also be righteous. Likewise, Jesus demanded more than simply not committing adultery or getting a divorce to obtain the righteousness required for entry into heaven’s kingdom. At the end of His sermon, Jesus would declare the *truth* that those who keep hearing and keep doing His words will be as wise men building the houses of their lives upon a firm foundation. **Will you choose now to be wise by keeping and doing His words about adultery, divorce, and being honest?**

Part One: “Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery” (5:27-30)

A. Adultery in the Heart (5:27-28)

Jesus began this section with the cultural formula used by Jewish teachers, “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery,” one of the Ten Commandments (5:27). The *key word* adultery is *repeated* and basically means to have full and intimate physical relations with another man’s wife. To the scribes and Pharisees, simply *not* committing adultery was apparently “good enough” to meet God’s requirements for righteousness; however, in Jesus’s view, this type of thinking may equal but does not surpass their righteousness.

Jesus replied with a *contrasting* and proper interpretation, “But I say unto you” that anyone looking on a woman to lust after her is already guilty of adultery with her in his heart (5:28). The Pharisees’ teaching did not address the inner lusts that led to adultery. The *key phrase* “looking on a woman to lust after her” means a continual and longing look of desire. This clearly refers to the intent of a man’s heart. Jesus likely referred here to Exodus 20:17, a *related passage*, that records the tenth commandment’s charge not to covet a man’s wife. Unquestionably, men should *avoid the error* of looking upon women in such a way. Lustful looks can occur by actual looking at a person or by use of visual stimulants such as pornography. Some scholars believe the phrase can be translated properly to involve one man’s attempt to entice another man’s wife to leave her husband because she lusts for the other man. Such action appears to combine the views of adultery as both theft and impurity.

This should answer a common question, “Is it a sin to look?” Scholars tend to agree that when one person recognizes another person’s beauty, it is not a sin initially. However, all should *believe the truth* that continued allowance of intentional, ongoing, and longing looks results in creating an adulterous heart. That is a sin.

B. Serious Steps to Avoid Adultery of the Heart (5:29-30)

Jesus *compared* the actions necessary for a man to stop ongoing lustful looks by referring to one’s removal of his right eye and/or right hand (5:29-30). Jesus clearly uses a figure of speech not meant to be taken literally. The *key word* right refers to a place of honor or authority. The *key word* offend means to cause or entice to sin. It refers to a stumbling block intended to trip someone and make him fall. Again, using figures of speech, Jesus commanded that “if your right eye” causes you to sin, then it should be plucked, cut, or gouged out and thrown away (5:29a). Similarly, Jesus referred to one’s “right hand” with the same instruction. If it causes you to sin, then cut it off and throw it away (5:30a).

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship with both comparisons in 5:29b and 5:30b. Removing the part that entices you to sin is profitable or better because one perishing part is better than having the entire body go into hell (effect). Jesus does not want you to mutilate your body; however, He does expect you to separate yourself from people, places, and things that hinder your obedience to the Bible’s commands against adultery, coveting, and lust. **Men, what do you need to “cut off” and “throw away” in order to purify your thoughts toward other men’s wives? Women, what could you do to help men maintain pure thoughts toward you?**

Part Two: “Whoever Shall Put Away His Wife” (5:31-32)

A. “It has been said” about Divorce (5:31)

Cultural background tells us that some Jewish religious leaders had very loose guidelines regarding divorce. For example, Hillel believed a man could legitimately divorce his wife for any “good cause,” including her being a bad cook! One can easily see the connection Jesus made between adultery, coveting, and lust that leads to divorce. Jesus noted, “It has been said, ‘Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement’” (5:31). The *key phrase*, “put away” means to dismiss or destroy. The *key phrase* “whoever shall” refers to any man simply thinking about divorce. Again, as with adultery of the heart, Jesus refers to the man’s thoughts and actions in a relationship.

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship. A man’s thinking about divorce (cause) required him to give his wife a bill of divorcement (effect). The *key phrase* “let him give her” is written as a command in the original language of the New Testament (Greek) and likely refers to the Old Testament teaching of Deuteronomy 24:1, a related passage. Religious leaders in Christ’s day basically taught that any man just thinking about divorcing his wife was commanded to file the divorce papers! For example, the Pharisees later asked Jesus “Why did Moses then command” a man to divorce his wife and send her away? (Matthew 19:6-7).

B. “But I say” about Divorce (5:32)

“But I say unto you” (5:32) establishes Jesus’s *contrast* to what “has been said” to His listeners. Notice the *cause and effect* relationships. Jesus said that divorce without marital unfaithfulness causes a man’s wife to commit adultery (effect) and whoever

marries her to commit adultery (another effect). *Cultural and historical background* teaches that a woman in that day could hardly survive without a husband. A divorced woman was likely to remarry for such a reason. She would *not* have been put in such a position (to remarry and commit adultery) if her first husband had remained true to his pledge of marriage. Neither would the second husband be able to remarry and commit adultery if the first husband had kept his marital vows.

The Lord's statement presents one legitimate reason for divorce, a wife's sexual immorality (i.e., adultery). 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, a *related passage*, presented another legitimate reason for divorce, the leaving of an unbelieving spouse; however, this lesson focuses upon the teaching of Matthew 5.

It should not be thought that Jesus is limiting reasons for divorce to a wife's immorality. Jesus's sermon had already addressed the fact that a man's lust equaled adultery in his heart. In a *related passage*, Matthew 19:6, the original language of the New Testament indicates that Jesus commanded men to stop walking out on their marriages with the *key phrase* "let man not put asunder/separate" what God has joined together. If necessary, *confess the sin* of such divorce and/or adultery if applicable to you. *Avoid the error* of divorce for any reason but marital unfaithfulness or desertion and *avoid the error* of causing your spouse to commit adultery.

Deuteronomy 24:1 records what God actually "said" through Moses. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship in Deuteronomy 24:1. When a man found "uncleanness" or indecency in his wife (cause) and she no longer pleased her husband (effect), then "let him write her a bill of divorcement" (another effect). The *key word* uncleanness in Deuteronomy 24:1 applies to all kinds of sexual immorality (adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, and more). In the original language of the Old Testament (Hebrew), the *key phrase* "let him write her a bill of divorcement" is **not** a command. Both Moses and Jesus agreed that only sexual immorality provides a legitimate reason for a man to send away his wife, but the Bible does not command it. Divorce does not surpass the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees.

Part Three: Oaths (5:33-37)

A. "Ye have heard" about Oaths (5:33)

Jesus knew His listeners had heard that those of old taught "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths" (5:33). The *key phrase* "not forswear thyself" means to break an oath or commit perjury. The *key word* oaths basically meant a promise. Such swearing did not refer to profanity but the making of formal vows, promises, and oaths.

The *key phrase* "perform unto the Lord thine oaths" means to keep the promises made to the Lord. *Cultural and historical background* tells us that the religious leaders of Christ's day used an elaborate system of oaths that attempted to bypass making an oath to the Lord. Jesus addressed that system in 5:34-36.

B. "But I say unto you" (5:34-37)

"But I say unto you" again establishes Jesus's *contrast* to what "has been said" to His listeners (5:34). Jesus told them not to swear at all. Jesus likely referred to a *related passage*, Numbers 30:2, that says making vows to the Lord must be kept and to Leviticus

19:12, another *related passage*, that forbids lying and swearing falsely by the Lord's name. To avoid getting the Lord's name involved in their oaths, the religious leaders of His day thought that swearing by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or even one's own head protected them or gave them a way out. However, Jesus revealed the truth that those things are still connected to God. Notice the *cause and effect* relationships. No swearing at all is allowed (effect) because heaven is God's throne (5:34b), the earth is God's footstool (5:35a), Jerusalem is the city of the great King (5:35b), and people have no control over even the color of their own hair (5:36).

In *contrast* to swearing, Jesus *commanded* simple honesty reflected in "yes" meaning "yes" and "no" meaning "no." Jesus saw anything added to honest words, such as "I swear to God" to convince someone of your honesty as coming from evil. The *key phrase* "cometh of evil" likely means originating from the evil one (5:37).

Conclusion

Like a mirror, Christ's Sermon on the Mount helps us see the reality of our spiritual lives. The Lord's interpretation of Scriptures related to adultery, divorce, and dishonesty surpassed the views of the scribes and Pharisees. Christ called for righteousness without lust of the heart, without easy divorce, and without loopholes for dishonesty. Apply His interpretations to your relationships. **What will a wise man keep doing with this teaching?**

Apply It

- *Avoid the error* of looking upon women to lust after them.
- *Believe the truth* that lusting causes adultery in the heart.
- *Obey the command* not to covet another man's wife.
- *Avoid the error* of divorce or causing your spouse to commit adultery.
- *Obey the command* to be honest.
- *Confess the sins* of lust, adultery, and/or dishonesty.



“YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID” ABOUT RETALIATION, NEIGHBORS, AND ENEMIES

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author’s comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author’s review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 5:38-48:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause and effect relationships exist within this passage?
3. What contrast is noted in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
2. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?
3. How does the cultural/historical background help to understand the text?
4. How does the immediate context help to understand the text?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there an example to follow?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Seven: Matthew 5:38-48 “You Have Heard it Said” about Retaliation, Neighbors, and Enemies

Aim: Learners will understand that believers can respond to mistreatment with spiritual maturity rather than natural human impulses to retaliate.

Phrases such as “Turn the other cheek” and “Go the extra mile” are well-known but may not be recognized as the words of Jesus.

In the outline below, fill in what “you have heard” and what Jesus “said unto you.”

Part One: Instead of Retaliation: Turn the Other Cheek (5:38-42)

A. “*Ye Have Heard it Said, ‘An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth’*” (5:38)
(List Bible references)-

B. “*But I say unto You” Turn the Other Cheek, Go the Extra Mile* (5:39-42)
(List cultural background)-

Part Two: Instead of Hatred: Love your Enemies (5:43-48)

A. “*You Have Heard it Said*” (5:43)
(List Bible references)-

B. “*But I Say*” (5:44-48)
(What did Jesus say?) –

1. “*Love your Enemies*” (5:44)
(List Jesus’s commands necessary for obeying Leviticus 19:18)-

2. “*Children of your Father*” (5:45)

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship that provides a transition between 5:44 and 5:45. Jesus *commanded* His listeners to love, bless, do good, and pray for enemies (causes) so that they “may be children” of their “Father which is in heaven” (effect; 5:45a).

3. “*Loving those Who Love You*” (5:46-47)

Jesus intended children of God to *contrast* or act differently than children of the world. In His mind, Jesus considered there to be no reward for only loving those who love you. To Jesus, loving those who love you does not even surpass the “righteousness” of tax collectors!

4. “*Be Perfect Like Your Heavenly Father*” (5:48)
(How can you be perfect?)-

What will a wise person do with this portion of teaching from the Sermon on the Mount?

Lesson Seven: “You Have Heard it Said” about Retaliation, Neighbors, and Enemies | Matthew 5:38-48

Aim: Learners will understand that believers can respond to mistreatment with spiritual maturity rather than natural human impulses to retaliate.

Introduction

Phrases such as “Turn the other cheek” and “Go the extra mile” are well-known but may not be recognized as the words of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew concludes chapter five with the Lord’s final discussion about what His listeners had “heard” from their religious leaders regarding the biblical law. As seen in Matthew 5:21-37, the *immediate context*, Jesus *contrasts* what “Ye have heard it said” with “but I say unto you.” His interpretation of things “said” presented a standard of righteousness that surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Any person who *keeps hearing* and *keeps doing* Christ’s words will be like a wise man who builds his or her house upon a firm foundation. At the end of His sermon, Christ will challenge His listeners to be wise. Consider how hearing and doing the contents of 5:38-48 will help you build upon the solid rock of His words.

Part One: Instead of Retaliation: Turn the Other Cheek (5:38-42)

A. “Ye Have Heard it Said, ‘An Eye for an Eye and a Tooth for a Tooth’” (5:38)

Jesus continued using the traditional formula for Jewish religious leaders to introduce a topic followed by their own opinions. Jesus referred to Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21, *related passages*, when he spoke of what His listeners had “heard” about retaliation. It is true that the Old Testament passages said “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” when referring to judgment upon those responsible for a person’s injuries. The Exodus passage also says the same about life, hand, foot, burning, wound, and stripes (Exodus 21:23-25).

These instructions may sound violent and uncivilized to many readers; however, scholars believe that the Old Testament standard brought more civilized behavior to God’s people. It did so by ensuring the extent of punishment equaled any wrongdoing. For example, an eye equals an eye. A hand, foot, and eye exceed the punishment allowed for just an eye. It seems that what Jesus’s listeners “heard” was misunderstood to mean “eye for an eye” and “tooth for a tooth” had to be enforced. So, the Pharisees may have taught that one *must* retaliate by returning violence with equal violence. This could open the door wide for vigilante justice. Jesus expected His listeners to *avoid the error* of retaliation.

B. “But I say unto You” Turn the Other Cheek, Go the Extra Mile (5:39-42)

Remember what Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God” (5:9). Jesus’s use of “But I say” *contrasts* with the Pharisees’ teaching of retaliation. This passage focuses on limiting acts of retaliation. Likewise, *biblical background* also indicates that the *related passages* in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy focus upon retaliation. For example, they do not consider matters of

self-defense. Such an understanding of context is essential for a proper view of the Lord's interpretation.

Jesus *contrasted* what His listeners had "heard" from religious leaders about "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" retaliation by saying, "But I say unto you . . . resist not evil" (5:39a). The *key phrase* "resist not" often refers to legalities in a court-of-law. The *key word* evil refers to an evil person and the misery he brings. Christ expected His followers to avoid retaliation against evil people in court (i.e., regarding matters of law). Christ approves of legal justice but not retaliation that goes beyond "an eye for an eye."

While some may take the phrase "resist not evil" to imply that persons cannot defend themselves or protect their families against a violent attacker, remember that the *context* concerns retaliation rather than self-defense. In the next verses, Christ gave examples of non-retaliation in non-life-threatening situations. *Cultural background* implies that these examples mostly illustrated the powerless being pressured by the powerful.

In *contrast* to "an eye for an eye," Jesus *commanded* His listeners to "resist not evil" but to respond with turning the other cheek, giving up a cloak, going the extra mile, and lending to those who ask. First, Jesus *commanded* His listeners to "turn the other cheek" to whoever would smite him or her on the "right cheek" (5:39b). Striking on the right cheek implies a backhanded slap. *Cultural background* indicates that such a slap intended great insult. It seems reasonable to believe that the natural response to such an insult would be a desire to retaliate immediately with similar and/or additional insult! In *contrast*, Jesus taught His followers not to retaliate but *commanded* them to allow the evil one a slap at the other cheek.

Second, Jesus *contrasted* "eye for an eye" retaliation as it pertained to lawsuits. If anyone wants to sue for your coat, Jesus *commanded* His listeners to "let him" also have their cloaks (5:40). Third, Jesus *contrasted* retaliation as it related to governmental powers that forced citizens to comply with its rules (5:41). Scholars believe that *cultural background* related to the Roman government's control over Israel helps the proper understanding of this passage. Apparently, Roman soldiers could force citizens to carry loads for them up to one mile's distance. Going an extra mile would not be one's natural reaction but would show the opposite of retaliation. Fourth, Jesus *contrasted* retaliation as it pertained to lending. He *commanded* listeners to give to one who asks or hopes to borrow (5:42). Jesus likely assumed the borrower's legitimate need for help and did not require everything requested to be given every time someone asked.

Part Two: Instead of Hatred: Love your Enemies (5:43-48)

A. "You Have Heard it Said" (5:43)

Jesus's listeners had heard the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy" (5:43). Although Leviticus 19:18b, a *related passage*, *commands* God's people to "love thy neighbor as thyself," it begins with a specific command not to avenge or bear any grudges against others (Leviticus 19:18a). Not only did religious leaders in Christ's day add to God's command, they completely contradicted it! They also removed the instruction to love one's neighbor "as thyself." The *key word* enemies refers to adversaries.

B. “But I Say” (5:44-48)

Jesus *contrasted* what His listeners knew and heard about loving neighbors and hating enemies by properly interpreting the intent of Leviticus: to love one’s enemies (5:44). Again, the natural inclination is to hate one’s enemies, but only loving neighbors and hating enemies does not surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

1. “Love your Enemies” (5:44)

Jesus gave four *commands* necessary for obeying Leviticus 19:18. First, love your enemies (5:44a). The *key word* love refers to a concern to do what is best for the one being loved. In this case, Jesus *commanded* doing out of concern what is best for one’s adversaries. Second, Jesus *commanded*, “bless them that curse you” (5:44b). The *key word* bless means to speak well of someone. The *key word* curse refers to an ongoing wish of harm upon someone. Although a desire to retaliate with equal or greater curses is natural, Jesus expects His followers to speak well of those who speak such ill against them. Blessing under such circumstances surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees.

Third, Jesus *commanded*, “do good to them that hate you” (5:44c). In this context, the *key phrase* “do good” means to be active in doing what is honorable and right for those hating you. Fourth, Jesus *commanded*, “pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (5:44d). The *key phrase* “despitefully use” means to pursue and drive out. The *key word* persecute means to insult. Remember that Jesus said supreme blessing awaited those treated this way (Matthew 5:10-12). While on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who mistreated Him (Luke 23:34). The Apostle Paul encouraged his readers to “overcome evil with good” by living peaceably and caring for enemies (Romans 12:18-21).

2. “Children of your Father” (5:45)

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship that provides a transition between 5:44 and 5:45. Jesus *commanded* His listeners to love, bless, do good, and pray for enemies (causes) so that they “may be children” of their “Father which is in heaven” (effect; 5:45a). Remember that peacemakers “shall be called children of God” (5:9). Loving, blessing, doing good, and praying for enemies resemble the Father’s actions. Notice how the Father treats all people. First, He makes the sun to rise on both evil and the good people. Second, He sends rain on the just and the unjust people (5:45b). In other words, both evil and good people benefit from the sun and rain. The *key word* just is the word “righteousness” that is *repeated* throughout Christ’s sermon. Righteousness refers to actions and attitudes approved by God. The *key word* unjust is the opposite of righteousness. Incredibly, even people of whom the Father disapproves, His enemies, benefit from His love for them. If you are a child of God, *follow His example* in how you treat your adversaries.

3. “Loving those Who Love You” (5:46-47)

Jesus intended children of God to *contrast* or act differently than children of the world. Using a rhetorical question, Jesus challenged His listeners to consider the reward of loving those who “love you” (5:46a). The *key word* reward refers to earned pay or reward. In His mind, Jesus considered there to be no reward for only loving

those who love you. Why not? Jesus used another rhetorical question to answer this by noting that even “publicans” love those who love them (5:46b). The *key word* publicans refers to tax collectors, Jews known for cheating fellow Jews while collecting taxes for Rome. To Jesus, loving those who love you does not even surpass the “righteousness” of tax collectors!

In 5:47, Jesus repeats the use of rhetorical questions to help His listeners see His points for themselves. The *key word* salute means to greet, welcome, or pay respects to someone. Jesus asks, “If a person only greets his brothers, what more does he than others?” Jesus expects children of God to do more than children of the world. The *key phrase* “what do ye more” refers to the superior and extraordinary. Again, do not even the despised tax collectors greet their brothers? Greeting only your brothers does not even surpass the “righteousness” of tax collectors.

4. “Be Perfect Like Your Heavenly Father” (5:48)

“Therefore” causes the listener and reader to recall the previous words. Notice the *cause and effect* relationships. Considering the truths found in 5:45-47 (causes), Jesus *commanded* His listeners to “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which in heaven is perfect” (effect; 5:48). Although the Father is both complete and sinless, biblically, the *key word* perfect typically implies completeness and maturity, not sinless perfection. Many will say, “No one’s perfect!” Indeed, and that is the point Jesus makes. No one has sinless perfection except Jesus. *Related passages* speak of Christ’s sinless perfection (Hebrews 4:15) and each human’s imperfection (Romans 3:10, 23). However, we become holy and blameless through faith in Jesus (Colossians 1:22-23) and “perfect” (i.e., complete, spiritually mature) through preaching, admonishing, and teaching of fellow believers (Colossians 1:28).

Conclusion

The natural reaction of humans is to retaliate when pressured or insulted, to love those who love them, and to hate their adversaries. Jesus *contrasted* natural human inclinations with *commands* to avoid retaliation, to bless those mistreating you, and to love both your neighbors and enemies by being “perfect” as the Heavenly Father. Believers with a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees obey Christ’s commands. With the help of Christ, believers can respond with spiritual maturity rather than natural human impulses to retaliate. **What will a wise person do with this portion of teaching from the Sermon on the Mount?**

Apply It

- *Obey the commands* in 5:39-42 and *avoid the error* of retaliation.
- *Obey the commands* to love, bless, do good, and pray for your enemies.
- *Obey the commands* to love your neighbors and enemies.
- *Follow the example* of the Father who blesses all people.
- *Obey the command* to be “perfect” as your Heavenly Father.



THE PROPER PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study Method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause/effect relationships appear in the passage?
3. What comparisons do you see in this passage?
4. What contrasts do you see in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What is the immediate context of the passage?
2. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
3. Are there any related passages that need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a command to obey?
2. Is there a promise to claim in this passage?
3. Is there something to praise God for in this passage?
4. Is there an error to avoid in this passage?
5. Is there an attitude to change?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Eight: The Proper Practice of Righteousness | Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

Aim: The learner is to guard against practicing righteousness to be seen by men; rather, the learner should do so in a way that will please the Heavenly Father.

In Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18, Jesus presented somewhat of a “how-to” guide regarding three key spiritual disciplines: giving, praying, and fasting.

Part One: A Warning About the Proper Practice of Righteousness (6:1)

Jesus begins this section with a word of warning. He says to “_____” not to practice your alms or righteousness before men.

Part Two: The Proper Practice of Giving (6:2-4)

A. How not to give (6:2)

Giving alms is the first act of righteousness Jesus taught in this section. The *key word* _____ refers to one’s sympathy, compassion, or charitable giving to the poor. Jesus teaches not to “sound a trumpet” when one gives, which is equivalent to making a big announcement about one’s giving.

B. How to give (6:3-4)

Jesus now speaks of the proper way to give. He does so by employing an unusual phrase, “let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (6:3).

How would the wise man respond to this teaching on giving?

Part Three: The Proper Practice of Praying (6:5-8)

A. How not to pray (6:5, 7-8)

The hypocrites love to stand and pray in the synagogue and busy street corner (cause) to be seen by men (effect). The *key word* _____ means to make one’s self visible.

Another way Jesus says not to pray is through vain or meaningless repetitions. The *key phrase* _____ means to babble, use many meaningless words, or use the same words again and again. Jesus *compared* their prayers to those of heathens or Gentiles.

B. How to pray (6:6)

The *key word* _____ refers to a storeroom, inner room of a house, or a private room. The purpose of shutting the door is for privacy or secrecy. **Where is the secret or private place you like to enter when you pray to the Father?**

Part Four: The Proper Practice of Fasting (6:16-18)

A. How not to fast (6:16)

The *key word* _____ means to deprive one’s self of food for a time for spiritual focus. Jesus describes first how not to fast. The *key word* _____ refers to neglecting one’s appearance. Jesus said that the hypocrites who fast to be seen by men have their reward.

B. How to fast (6:17-18)

The purpose of fasting is so that the believer can focus on seeking God and His will. Fasting is a private matter that should be only known by the Father who is in secret, and sees what is done in secret.

Lesson Eight: The Proper Practice of Righteousness

Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18

Aim: The learner is to guard against practicing righteousness to be seen by men; rather, the learner should do so in a way that will please the Heavenly Father.

Introduction

“How-to” guides or manuals can be extremely helpful. We live in the “Do-it-yourself” (DIY) age. If a person desires helpful hints on how to fix, build, or create something, he or she is often just one click away from a plethora of resources. One can go to Pinterest, YouTube, or other social media platforms and become an “expert” in no time at all. The information age in the 21st Century places an endless amount of information at one’s fingertips.

When Matthew wrote his Gospel account about the life and ministry of Jesus, there was no internet to disseminate information quickly. There was not even a printing press. No such device would be invented until the fifteenth century. While communication was slow, there was still communication. On a mountain in Galilee, Jesus communicated His great Sermon on the Mount to His disciples and a larger group present on that day. Matthew eventually recorded Jesus’s sermon in his Gospel.

In Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18, Jesus presented somewhat of a “how-to” guide regarding three key spiritual disciplines: giving, praying, and fasting. This passage follows the *immediate context* of Matthew 5:21-48. In Matthew 5, Jesus provided fuller explanations about various commandments in the law of Moses. He attempted to help people understand how their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). Now He offers practical ways of practicing righteousness before God and others, specifically in the areas of giving, praying, and fasting.

Part One: A Warning About the Proper Practice of Righteousness (6:1)

Jesus began this section with a word of warning. He says to “take heed” not to practice your alms or righteousness before men. The *key phrase* “take heed” means to beware, watch out for, or be on guard. The grammar indicates continual taking heed or watching. Jesus is specifically warning about practicing one’s righteousness before men with the expressed purpose of being seen by them. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship in 6:1. If a person practices righteousness for the purpose of being seen by men (cause), that person will have no reward with the Father in heaven (effect). It is far better to have God’s approval than any person’s when it comes to practicing these spiritual disciplines. This verse marks an introduction to what follows as Jesus instructs how properly to practice giving, praying, and fasting. In the sections that follow, we will observe what Jesus said about how *not* to practice these disciplines, followed by how a believer *should* practice them.

Part Two: The Proper Practice of Giving (6:2-4)

A. *How not to give* (6:2)

Giving alms is the first act of righteousness Jesus taught in this section. The *key word* alms refers to one’s sympathy, compassion, or charitable giving to the poor. In a *related passage*, Jesus reminded people that the poor would always be in their midst (John 12:8).

Notice carefully that Jesus said “when” you give alms, not “if.” Helping the poor is definitely something that should be done. Jesus began His discussion of giving by stating what not to do. Jesus taught not to “sound a trumpet” when one gives, which is equivalent to making a big announcement about one’s giving. This type of giving is clearly an *error to avoid*.

Jesus *compared* this type of giving to the hypocrites who give in a resounding way in the synagogues and in the streets. The *key word* hypocrite refers to one who pretends or plays a part. This word was used in ancient literature to speak of an actor on a stage. The hypocrite pretends to be something that he is not. Just like an actor pretends to play a part, so the hypocrite in his giving pretends to care for the poor. In reality, he is more concerned with his own reputation as a mighty giver.

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship at the end of 6:2. Jesus said the hypocrites love to practice their giving in busy places such as the synagogues and the streets (cause) for the sole purpose of receiving the “glory of men” (effect). The *key word* glory means to make great or magnify. Hypocrites desire to appear great before men. Jesus said that those with this desire have their reward. Giving for one’s own reputation or glory marks an *attitude to change*.

B. How to give (6:3-4)

Jesus then spoke of the proper way to give. He did so by employing an unusual phrase, “let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (6:3). **How is such a thing even possible?** This phrase was not meant to be taken literally, but was used by Jesus for emphasis. We should give in such a secret fashion *as if* our left hand does not know what our right hand is doing. Giving should be practiced unto the Lord, and not for personal glory. Even Jesus gave up His life for the glory of the Heavenly Father. Philippians 2:11, a *related passage*, states that one day every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the *glory* of the Father.

In *contrast* to the hypocrite’s giving (6:2-3), alms should be done in secret (6:4). The *key word* secret means hidden or concealed. A better *cause and effect* relationship occurs in 6:4 and is *contrasted* with the one noted in 6:2. Our Father who sees in secret (cause) will reward us openly (effect). The giving we practice before the Lord in private, should not be announced in public.

At the end of Jesus’s great Sermon on the Mount, He reminds us of the wise man who built his house upon a solid foundation (Matthew 7:24-25). **How would the wise man respond to this teaching on giving?**

Part Three: The Proper Practice of Praying (6:5-8)

A. How not to pray (6:5, 7-8)

Jesus transitioned from giving to praying. Notice again, Jesus said “when” you pray, not “if” (6:5). Jesus assumes Christians in His kingdom will be praying and giving. So, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. Notice a similar *cause and effect* first observed in 6:2. The hypocrites love to stand and pray in the synagogue and busy street corner (cause) to be seen by men (effect). The *key word* seen means to make one’s self visible. The word for street in 6:5 is different from the word used in 6:2. In 6:5, the word refers to a broad street; in 6:2, it refers to a narrow street or alley. Desiring to pray in a broad and busy street highlights the emphasis of wanting to be seen.

Another way Jesus said not to pray is through vain or meaningless repetitions. The *key phrase* “vain repetitions” means to babble, use many meaningless words, or use the same words again and again. Jesus *compared* such prayers to those of heathens or Gentiles. The *key word* heathen refers to non-Jews or pagans. Some pagan rituals involved chanting repetitive words or phrases. Notice the reverse *cause and effect* in 6:7. The heathen think they will be heard (effect) for their much speaking (cause). In 1 Kings 18:25-29, a related passage, the prophets of Baal acted similarly on Mt. Carmel by calling upon their gods nearly all day with no answer. Jesus said not to be like the heathen, for the true God knows what we have need of before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). The ways of the heathen in praying is another *error to avoid*.

B. How to pray (6:6)

How the believer should pray, in *contrast* to the hypocrite and heathen, is to follow the sequence presented by Jesus: enter your closet or inner room, shut the door, and pray to your Father. The *key word* closet refers to a storeroom, inner room of a house, or a private room. The purpose of shutting the door is for privacy or secrecy. Once you are in your secret place, it is time to get busy praying to the Father who is with you in the secret place. Jesus exemplified secret praying to the Father in Matthew 14:23, a *related passage*, when He went alone on a mountain to pray; and in Matthew 26:39, 42, 44, another *related passage*, when He went deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray by Himself. Notice the repeated *cause and effect* from 6:4. The Father who sees in secret (cause) will reward you (effect).

Where is the secret or private place you like to enter when you pray to the Father?

Part Four: The Proper Practice of Fasting (6:16-18)

A. How not to fast (6:16)

Fasting is the third discipline Jesus discussed. Notice for the third time the *repeated word* “when.” Jesus said, “when” you fast, emphasizing the assumption that God’s people will fast, just as He assumed, they will give and pray. The *key word* fast means to deprive one’s self of food for a time for spiritual focus. Jesus describes first how not to fast. The hypocrites presented themselves before men with a sad or gloomy countenance and disfigured their faces while fasting. The *key word* disfigure refers to neglecting one’s appearance. The word appear is a *repeated word* from 6:5, focused on shining before men. Jesus said that the hypocrites who fast to be seen by men have their reward.

B. How to fast (6:17-18)

The Day of Atonement was the Old Testament’s only required fast for the people of Israel (Leviticus 16:31). All other times of fasting were voluntary. We have examples of those who fasted both in the Old and New Testaments. David fasted when he pleaded for the life of his infant son (2 Samuel 12:16). The people of Nineveh fasted when they heard Jonah’s preaching for them to repent (Jonah 3:5, 7). Jesus Himself fasted before beginning His earthly ministry (Matthew 4:2). When Barnabas and Saul were set apart for ministry, the believers prayed and fasted (Acts 13:2-3). The purpose of fasting is so that the believer can focus on seeking God and His will. While believers do not practice fasting as much as giving and praying, they should still recognize the value of fasting when serious seeking of the Lord is desired, especially in an otherwise healthy person.

Being seen is what the hypocrite desires, but in *contrast*, this is not what the believer should desire. Jesus *commanded* the believer to anoint the head and wash the face (6:17). The purpose of this is so that other people will not notice when the believer is fasting. Fasting is a private matter that should be only known by the Father who is in secret, and sees what is done in secret. As with the other two disciplines, there is the *promise* of reward for the believer.

Conclusion

Righteousness must be practiced properly, just as Jesus Himself gave us examples as noted in this lesson. Jesus also offers us the “how-to” guide on how we should practice the important disciplines of giving, praying, and fasting. The goal is not to receive the applause of men, but the applause of the Heavenly Father. As Jesus prescribed in Matthew 5:20, our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if we hope to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Apply It

- *Praise God* for the *promise* of the Heavenly Father’s reward for the proper practicing of righteousness.
- *Avoid the error* of the hypocrites and heathen in giving, praying, and fasting to be seen by men.
- *Obey the commands* of Jesus in the proper practice of giving, praying, and fasting to be seen by the Father.
- An *attitude to change* for some might be to start seeking the Father’s recognition in these disciplines instead of your own.



THE LORD'S PRAYER: BELIEVERS SPEAKING TO THEIR FATHER

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 6:9-15:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause/effect relationships appear in the passage?
3. What comparison do you see in this passage?
4. What contrasts do you see in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What is the immediate context of the passage?
2. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
3. Are there any related passages which need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe in this passage?
2. Are there commands to obey in this passage?
3. Is there an error to avoid noted in this passage?
4. Is there an attitude to change in this passage?
5. Is there something to praise God for in this passage?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Nine: Matthew 6:9-15

The Lord's Prayer: Believers Speaking to their Father

Aim: The learner will understand the dynamics of prayer relating to a proper view of the Father and proper requests from the believer.

Jesus gave a “how-to” guide on three spiritual disciplines: giving, praying, and fasting. In Matthew 6:9-15, He offers a model prayer or more commonly called, The Lord's Prayer. In this prayer, we learn the dynamics of praying as it pertains to the Father and the believer.

Part One: Prayer and the Father (6:9-10)

The *key phrase*, “_____” lets us know that there is a distinct way in which believers are to pray to the Father. In 6:9b-10, Jesus first informs us about prayer as it relates to the Father.

A. The direction of our prayers (6:9b)

The first aspect of praying as it relates to the Father concerns the direction of our praying. Our prayers need to be directed to the right person who is in the right place. Notice specifically that Jesus says, “_____.” Believers are the only ones who can truly say “our Father.” That believers can call God, “Father,” speaks to the closeness of their relationship to Him.

B. The reverence of our prayers (6:9c)

The second aspect of praying as it relates to the Father concerns the reverence of His name. The *key word* _____ means holy. God's name is to be revered as holy. **How should the holiness of God's name impact our approach to prayer?**

C. The purpose of our prayers (6:10)

The third aspect of praying as it relates to the Father concerns a focus on His will. The purpose of prayer is not to twist God's arm to get what I want, but to understand what God wants.

Part Two: Prayer and the Believer (6:11-15)

Beginning in 6:11, the focus in the prayer shifts from the Father to the believer, that is what the Father can do for “_____.” Jesus lets the believer know the proper requests to ask of the Father.

Describe the content of each of the following requests.

A. Give us (6:11)

B. Forgive us (6:12, 14-15)

C. Lead us not (6:13a)

D. Deliver us (6:13b)

Lesson Nine: The Lord's Prayer: Believers Speaking to their Father | Matthew 6:9-15

Aim: The learner will understand the dynamics of prayer relating to a proper view of the Father and proper requests from the believer.

Introduction

The truth that the Creator of the Universe affords believers the opportunity to pray to Him is an awesome thought. The most Supreme Being wants us to converse with Him! While no one ever intentionally taught me how to pray, growing up in a BMA Baptist Church and a Christian home provided the means to observe the way people pray in public and private settings. Some very good habits of how to pray can be learned by just observing, as well as some very bad habits.

Jesus's own disciples developed an interest in prayer after observing Him pray. They requested of Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Who better to learn prayer from than the Lord Jesus? In Luke 11:2-4, a *related passage*, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in a similar fashion as He does in Matthew 6:9-15. In the *immediate context*, Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18, Jesus gave a "how-to" guide on three spiritual disciplines: giving, praying, and fasting. In Matthew 6:9-15, He offers a model prayer or more commonly called, The Lord's Prayer. In this prayer, we learn the dynamics of praying as it pertains to the Father and the believer.

Part One: Prayer and the Father (6:9-10)

Jesus gives a *command* at the outset of His model prayer. He simply commanded His listeners to pray. The believer is expected to pray, just as Jesus said in the *immediate context* in 6:5, 6, "When you pray." The *key word* "pray" is the common word for prayer in the New Testament. According to the grammatical understanding of this word in 6:9a, Jesus specifically commanded the believer to pray continually. The *key phrase*, "after this manner," lets us know that there is a distinct way in which believers are to pray to the Father. In 6:9b-10, Jesus first informed about prayer as it relates to the Father.

A. The direction of our prayers (6:9b)

The first aspect of praying as it relates to the Father concerns the direction of our praying. Our prayers need to be directed to the right person who is in the right place. Down through history and in present day, many other religions focus on praying; however, adherents to those religions do not pray to the one true God. Jesus stated in 6:9b, that believers are to pray to their Father, the right person. Notice specifically that Jesus said, "Our Father." Believers are the only ones who can truly say "our Father." That believers can call God, "Father," speaks to the closeness of their relationship to Him. Believers pray to a personal God Who longs for such closeness with His people. This Father is the first person of the Trinity. The Trinity refers to the Godhead we know as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

As believers, our prayers are directed specifically to our Father who is in

heaven. This is the place where God dwells. In 1 Peter 3:22, a *related passage*, the apostle Peter speaks of Jesus at the right hand of God in heaven. We typically think of heaven as “up.” In Matthew 14:19, the Bible says Jesus looked “up” when He blessed the five loaves and two fishes.

B. The reverence of our prayers (6:9c)

The second aspect of praying as it relates to the Father concerns the reverence of His name. The *key word* hallowed means holy. God’s name is to be revered as holy. You may have heard some people refer to God in an irreverent way such as “The Big Guy,” or “The Man Upstairs.” These are not proper references for God. The very name of God is holy. The *key phrase*, “Hallowed be Thy name” is actually a *command* that could be literally translated, “Let your name be holy,” or “Your name must be holy.” Not only are we commanded to pray, but in our praying, we are commanded to treat as holy the name of God. Part of our reverence to God concerns not only reverencing His name, but also praising God for His many wonderful attributes which describe His holiness. We pray to the greatest being, and we must remember that He is a holy God with a holy name. The third commandment reminds us that we are not to take God’s name in vain (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11). **How should the holiness of God’s name impact our approach to prayer?**

C. The purpose of our prayers (6:10)

The third aspect of praying as it relates to the Father concerns a focus on His will. The purpose of prayer is not to twist God’s arm to get what we want, but to understand what God wants. The day we got saved is when our *attitude* should have *changed* from self to a focus on God and His will. Jesus said our prayers should be focused on God’s kingdom and God’s will. There is a heavy focus on the first part of the Sermon on the Mount with regards to God’s kingdom (5:3, 10, 19 [2x], 20). The whole sermon Jesus preached focused on what a kingdom-dweller looks and acts like. Jesus, like John the Baptist, preached, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). God is building a kingdom of redeemed people.

Not only should we pray for God’s kingdom to come, but for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In our English translations, the word “earth” is always mentioned first. In the original language of the New Testament (Greek), however, the word “heaven” is mentioned first, and likely for emphasis. God’s will originates in heaven first, and is ultimately fulfilled upon the earth. Even Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, remained focused upon the will of the Father, as should we.

Part Two: Prayer and the Believer (6:11-15)

Beginning in 6:11, the focus in the prayer shifts from the Father to the believer, that is what the Father can do for “us.” Jesus lets the believer know the proper requests to ask of the Father.

A. Give us (6:11)

The first proper request refers to our daily provisions: “Give us this day our

daily bread” (6:11). The *key word* daily refers to what is sufficient for the day. Just like God provided manna daily for the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings (Exodus 16:4), so God will meet our daily needs. Jesus states this in the form of a *command* - “You give us.” Although unusual, the command calls for God to do something that He has already willed to do. In 6:8, the *immediate context*, Jesus reminded us that God already knows what we need even before we ask Him. Further, in 6:33, Jesus gave the promise that if we seek God first, He will meet our needs. God has already agreed to give us these things; therefore, we can ask boldly for them. *Praise God* for His daily provision.

B. Forgive us (6:12, 14-15)

The second proper request refers to God’s forgiveness: “Forgive us our debts” (6:12). The *key word* forgive means to send away, cancel, or pardon. Again, this is written in the form of a *command*. We can ask boldly for God’s forgiveness, because He promises to forgive us according to 1 John 1:9, a *related passage*. We should desire God to forgive our debts. The *key word* debt refers to something that is owed. We are indebted to God because of our sins, and we need Him to forgive us of those sins. *Praise God* that He forgives our sins.

Notice that this *command*, however, is conditional. God *compares* His forgiveness to our forgiveness of others, the condition we must meet (6:14-15). It is assumed that we will have already offered forgiveness to others before God forgives us. Jesus discusses forgiveness further in 6:14 in the form of a *cause and effect* relationship. If we forgive others their trespasses (cause), then the Heavenly Father will forgive us (effect). We must *avoid the error* of failing to forgive others. In *contrast*, however, we see the opposite *cause and effect* in 6:15. If we do not forgive others (cause), then the Heavenly Father will not forgive us of our trespasses (effect). The *key word* “trespasses” means to step falsely or to violate a known standard for living. God will forgive us if we extend forgiveness to others. Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Likewise, Stephen prayed for those who were stoning him (Acts 7:60). **Is there someone in your life to whom you need to extend forgiveness? If so, what steps will you take to begin that process?**

C. Lead us not (6:13a)

The third proper request refers to God’s leading: “Lead us not into temptation” (6:13a). This world is full of temptation to sin. Jesus says that we can pray boldly unto God not to lead us into temptation, again in the form of a *command*. This command could literally be translated, “Don’t ever lead us into temptation,” based upon the grammatical construction. Leading people into temptation is not within God’s character as clearly stated in James 1:13, a *related passage*. God calls His people to a life of holiness and would never tempt us to sin, an important *truth to believe*.

D. Deliver us (6:13b)

The fourth proper request refers to God’s deliverance - “deliver us from evil” (6:13b). Notice the *contrast*. Instead of leading us into temptation, *praise God* that He will deliver us from evil. The *key word* evil, according to the grammar, could literally

refer to the “evil one,” who is Satan. The devil is the one who tempts people to sin; God is the one who delivers us from such temptation, a *truth to believe*. God is much stronger than the devil; therefore, He is able to deliver us just as the Lord’s prayer says in closing, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen.”

Conclusion

At its most basic level, prayer is a conversation between two persons - The Father and the believer. The fact that the believer can pray to God is attributed to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection. Jesus opened the way for us to commune with the Father, the right person. The ripping of the veil in two that separated the holy place from the most holy place in the temple at Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified, symbolizes this open way to the Father. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we have full access to the Father all the time, Who is in heaven, the right place. May we reverence God properly in our prayers as we seek His provision, forgiveness, and deliverance from the evil one.

Apply it

- *Obey the commands* to:
 - pray to God
 - reverence God’s name as holy
 - pray for God’s will to be done
- *Believe the truth* that God does not tempt us to sin, but delivers us from it.
- *Change your attitude* if you are selfish in your prayers instead of focused on God’s will.
- *Avoid the error* of failing to forgive others.
- *Praise God* for His daily provision, forgiveness of sin, and deliverance from sin.

Recite the Lord’s Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.



LASTING TREASURES

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 6:19-24:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause/effect relationships appear in the passage?
3. What contrasts do you see in this passage?
4. What comparison do you see in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What is the cultural/historical background of this passage?
2. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
3. Are there any related passages which need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe or promise to claim in this passage?
2. Are there commands to obey in this passage?
3. Is there an error to avoid noted in this passage?
4. Is there an attitude to change noted in this passage?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Ten: Lasting Treasures | Matthew 6:19-24

Aim: The learner will value the importance of accumulating heavenly treasures of eternal worth above earthly treasures of temporal worth.

What occupies your focus - heavenly things or earthly things?

Part One: Earthly vs. Heavenly (6:19-21)

A. Earthly treasures are temporary (6:19)

The *key phrase* “_____” means to store up or set aside for oneself. The *key word* _____ (built on the same root word of the verb translated, “lay up”) can refer either to a place where treasures are kept, or the valuables themselves.

B. Heavenly treasures are eternal (6:20-21)

Since we cannot get to heaven in our present earthly bodies, how do we go about laying up treasures in heaven?

Part Two: Light vs. Darkness (6:22-23)

A. Light represents clarity (6:22)

The *key word* _____ means that which is clear or healthy. A healthy eye sees things clearly. A healthy “spiritual” eye will perceive rightly between earthly and heavenly things.

B. Darkness represents evil (6:23)

Jesus says if your eye is evil (cause), then your whole body will be full of darkness (effect). Just like light is contrasted with darkness, so single or clear is *contrasted* with evil. The *key word* _____ speaks of what is bad or harmful. Where a healthy eye sees things clearly, an unhealthy eye does not.

Part Three: Love vs. Hate (6:24)

A. Devoted to what we love (6:24)

How does your life demonstrate sole devotion to God?

B. Despising what we hate (6:24)

Jesus concludes 6:24 with another negative emphatic statement, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon,” a *truth to believe*. The *key word* _____ refers to wealth, property, or any earthly goods.

Where do you stand in your love and devotion to God and heavenly things?

Lesson Ten: Lasting Treasures Matthew 6:19-24

Aim: The learner will value the importance of accumulating heavenly treasures of eternal worth above earthly treasures of temporal worth.

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is about having a kingdom mentality. Throughout these lessons, we have focused upon what a kingdom-dweller looks like. The kingdom of God involves having a proper focus on what matters. Everything related to this earth is temporary; everything related to heaven or the kingdom of God is eternal. The big question for every believer is **What occupies your focus - heavenly things or earthly things?** Jesus uses some stark contrasts in Matthew 6:19-24 to emphasize heavenly things above earthly things. This lesson seeks to unveil these contrasts to aid the believer in making wise choices, much like the wise man who built his house upon the rock (Matthew 7:24).

Part One: Earthly vs. Heavenly (6:19-21)

A. *Earthly treasures are temporary (6:19)*

Jesus unveils His first *contrast* by pitting earthly treasures against heavenly treasures. This contrast is built upon two *commands*: one negative and the other positive. In the negative command, Jesus says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.” According to the grammatical construction, this command can be literally translated, “Stop laying up for yourselves treasures upon the earth.” The *key phrase* “lay up” means to store up or set aside for one’s self. The *key word* treasures (built on the same root word of the verb translated, “lay up”) can refer either to a place where treasures are kept, or the valuables themselves.

Jesus states clearly that earthly treasures are temporary due to their propensity for destruction or loss, a *truth to believe*. Insects and the elements can destroy earthly things. The *key word* corrupt or destroy means to cause to disappear or ruin. A moth can destroy clothing. According to the *cultural background* of the first century, clothing was a precious commodity, as the average person could not afford a full wardrobe. Another destructive force is rust. The *key word* rust means to eat through something such as by a corroding process. James 5:2, a *related passage* also talks about riches rotting and garments being moth-eaten. If insects and the destructive elements of nature do not destroy earthly things, thieves can steal what we have upon this earth. Nothing on earth is totally secure, so it is best not to put our focus upon such things. Storing up earthly treasures is an *error to avoid*. Proverbs 23:5, a *related passage*, talks about how one’s wealth can sprout wings and go away very quickly. Earthly things are fleeting.

B. *Heavenly treasures are eternal (6:20-21)*

Jesus completes the first contrast with a positive *command* - “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (6:20). Many *repeated words* are used in this verse such as *lay up, treasures, moth, rust, corrupt, thieves, and steal*. The believer should be

continually or habitually laying up treasures in heaven. Notice that one different word in 6:20 is “heaven,” instead of earth. **Since we cannot get to heaven in our present earthly bodies, how do we go about laying up treasures in heaven?** Ways we can lay up treasures in heaven include sharing our faith (which can lead others to obtain eternal salvation), praying for and helping missionaries, and serving God faithfully by helping others. Treasures laid up in heaven can never be destroyed. What a great *promise to claim!* Whatever spiritual service we render unto the Lord will have eternal results.

Jesus reminds us as well in 6:21 that wherever our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. In other words, whatever becomes our focus or desire is where our hearts will reside. If our focus is on earthly things, then our hearts will dwell on accumulating storehouses of goods that will one day perish. But, if our focus or desire is on heavenly things (i.e., the things of God), then we will accumulate what will last for eternity. **Where is your heart today?** If your focus is on earthly things right now, then this is an *attitude to change*.

Part Two: Light vs. Darkness (6:22-23)

A. Light represents clarity (6:22)

The second *contrast* Jesus unveils is with regards to light and darkness. This time Jesus begins with the positive part of the contrast. He starts by *comparing* the eye to the lamp of the body. This is somewhat of an unusual phrase, but when you understand the concept it makes perfect sense. The eye is the organ of the body that takes in images or light that is then processed by the brain. The eye aids in one’s perception. Notice how 6:22 relates contextually to the previous verses regarding earthly or heavenly treasures. How one perceives treasure (whether earthly or heavenly), will impact the whole body or self.

Therefore, in the form of *cause and effect*, Jesus states that if your eye is single (cause), then your whole body will be full of light (effect; 6:22). The *key word* single means that which is clear or healthy. A healthy eye sees things clearly. A healthy “spiritual” eye will perceive rightly between earthly and heavenly things. As believers or kingdom-dwellers, we need to have a singleness of eye that focuses on the things of God. If you have ever undergone cataract surgery, you understand the concept of deceptive sight. Before the cataract is removed, you likely thought you saw things clearly. But, once the cataract was removed, you realized you did not have “singleness” of eye after all. Just like a cataract can cloud our vision, so earthly treasures can keep us from focusing on heavenly things.

B. Darkness represents evil (6:23)

Jesus concludes this part of the contrast with the negative aspect of an unhealthy eye. Notice again a similar *cause and effect* relationship to 6:22. Jesus says if your eye is evil (cause), then your whole body will be full of darkness (effect). Just like light is *contrasted* with darkness, so single or clear is *contrasted* with evil. The *key word* evil speaks of what is bad or harmful. Where a healthy eye sees things clearly, an unhealthy eye does not. Jesus furthermore says that if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness. Darkness is often described as the absence of light. If our perception of earthly and heavenly things is not clear, then this too will

affect the entire body or course of our lives. It is imperative that we keep earthly and heavenly things in perspective. If that perspective is tainted in any way, then our focus will not be on the things of God.

Part Three: Love vs. Hate (6:24)

A. Devoted to what we love (6:24)

As we come to the last verse of this passage, we see Jesus developing a contrast regarding the kind of master to which we adhere. The primary *contrast* is between love and hate or devotion and despising. Jesus began 6:24 with a negative emphatic statement, “No man can serve two masters.” Jesus pulled from the imagery of the master/slave relationship which was prevalent in the first century. A good percentage of people living under Roman domination in the first century were slaves, so this was a common concept familiar to the original hearers of this sermon. The *key word* serve refers to the service of an indentured slave, that is, one who is owned by another and under contractual obligation to serve.

The *key word* hold means to be devoted to something or cling to something. Truly we hold to or are devoted to what we love. The Bible tells us that we are to love God foremost, according to Deuteronomy 10:12 and Luke 10:27, *related passages*. In these passages, we are reminded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. We need more Christians who are solely devoted to God and focused on storing up heavenly treasures. **How does your life demonstrate sole devotion to God?**

B. Despising what we hate (6:24)

Hate is a very strong emotion. We often teach children not to use such a strong word. Jesus reminded us in this passage that a person cannot be equally devoted to more than one master. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. The *key word* despise means to look down on another with contempt. As believers, we should be so devoted to God and heavenly things that our perception of earthly things looks like hatred in *comparison*. Jesus even told His disciples in Luke 14:26, a *related passage*, “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” The point of this statement by Jesus is not that we literally hate our family members, but that our love and devotion to God surpasses our love and devotion for all other persons and things.

Jesus concludes 6:24 with another negative emphatic statement, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon,” a *truth to believe*. The *key word* mammon refers to wealth, property, or any earthly goods. This word is used in a derogatory sense where one perceives wealth and earthly riches as a god. Jesus is clearly stating that kingdom-dwellers cannot serve God and the world at the same time. Money and wealth can easily become idols if we are not careful. These by themselves are not evil, but when they become the focus of our love and devotion, we are guilty of idolatry. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy that the love of money is the root of all evil in 1 Timothy 6:10, a *related passage*. The apostle John rightly asserts in 1 John 2:17, another *related passage*, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will

of God abideth for ever.” Our love and devotion for God should be so supreme, that it should look like we are despising the world in comparison.

Conclusion

Where do you stand in your love and devotion to God and heavenly things? Using several contrasts, Jesus reminds us that our love and devotion need to be focused on God and heavenly things above earthly things. Nothing on this earth will last forever. Our most valued earthly possessions will tarnish, grow old, and decay, but the things of God are eternal and will never tarnish. May we keep our eyes single and focus on what is most important. May we serve God and be solely devoted to Him. A wise person will remain devoted to God enabling him to stand strong against the storms of life because his own life is built upon a strong foundation.

Apply it

- *Believe the truth* that earthly treasures are temporary.
- *Believe the truth* that no one can serve both God and money.
- *Claim the promise* that heavenly treasures will never be destroyed.
- *Obey the command* not to store up earthly treasures (Storing up earthly treasures above heavenly treasures is also an *error to avoid*).
- *Obey the command* to store up heavenly treasures.
- Having a strong focus on earthly things and not enough on heavenly things, this is an *attitude to change*.



HOW TO COMBAT WORRY

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 6:25-34:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause/effect relationships appear in the passage?
3. What contrasts do you see in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What is the cultural/historical background of this passage?
2. What is the immediate context of the passage?
3. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
4. Are there any related passages which need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe or promise to claim in this passage?
2. Are there commands to obey in this passage?
3. Is there an example to follow in this passage?
4. Is there an error to avoid in this passage?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Eleven: How to Combat Worry | Matthew 6:25-34

Aim: The learner will understand how to combat worry in this life by obeying the commands of Jesus and practicing strong faith in the Father.

Why worry when we have a loving Father who both knows about and cares for our needs?

Part One: Combat Worry by Obeying God's Command (6:25)

Jesus commands, "_____ " or "do not be worried." The *key word* _____ literally refers to one's soul. In the context of 6:25, however, it refers to one's earthly existence. Jesus asks a very appropriate question - "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment" or clothing? (6:25).

Part Two: Combat Worry by Observing God's Creation (6:26-30)

In 6:26-30, Jesus uses two illustrations or object lessons from nature which build upon an argument from lesser to greater.

A. Observe how God feeds the birds (6:26-27)

Jesus then asked a rhetorical question (a question that has an obvious answer). He asked, "Are ye not much better than they?" (6:26). The obvious answer is "_____!" By making this observation about the birds, it should be clear that God will take care of humans who bear His image.

B. Observe how God clothes the lilies of the field (6:28-30)

_____ means to learn something thoroughly or make a close examination. Just as God feeds the birds of the air, so He also clothes the lilies of the field. If God will clothe and make wild flowers beautiful, will He not clothe His image bearers? The *key word* _____ speaks of our trust in God. Jesus questions the little faith of one who will worry about being properly clothed.

Part Three: Combating Worry by Seeking the Right Things (6:31-34)

A. Seek God's Kingdom (6:31-33a)

The *key word* _____ means to strive for something to the point of making it your heart's desire.

What should God's kingdom-dweller seek?

B. Seek God's Righteousness (6:33b-34)

Jesus *commands* us to seek God's righteousness (6:33). **Where does one acquire such righteousness?**

Lesson Eleven: How to Combat Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

Aim: The learner will understand how to combat worry in this life by obeying the commands of Jesus and practicing strong faith in the Father.

Introduction

A fine line exists between concern and worry. There is certainly nothing wrong with being concerned about someone we love who is going through difficult circumstances. It is natural to be concerned. We often must fight, however, against moving into the realm of worry. When we cross this line, we begin to lose sight of our faith in God.

Matthew 6:25a points the reader back to the *immediate context* - “Therefore.” Anytime you see a “therefore” in Scripture, you want to see what it is *there for*. This type of word should cause the reader to consider what was previously said. Jesus discussed in 6:19-24 about keeping one’s focus on heavenly things. When one is focused on heaven above, the problems and issues on earth below do not seem as big. Jesus reminds us in 6:8 that our Heavenly Father already knows what we have need of even before we ask Him. **Why worry when we have a loving Father who both knows about and cares for our needs?** Our Heavenly Father’s knowledge and care should impact our thought processes regarding worry as we will learn in this lesson. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus instructs His disciples and the crowd on how a kingdom-dweller can combat worry.

Part One: Combat Worry by Obeying God’s Command (6:25)

One way to combat worry is simply to *obey the command* of God. Jesus commands, “Take no thought” or “do not be worried.” This *key phrase* can be understood both positively and negatively. Positively, it can mean to care for others or be concerned about them. Negatively, which is the case in 6:25, it can mean to be anxious or overly concerned. Specifically, Jesus *commands* not to be worried about your life. The *key word* life literally refers to one’s soul. In the context of 6:25, however, it refers to one’s earthly existence. Jesus mentions three areas pertaining to one’s life: what we eat, drink, and the clothing we wear. These three items mark some of the primary necessities of life. According to the *cultural background*, many in the crowd who heard the Sermon on the Mount were poor, as was the case for most people living in the first century. When a person does not have much money, he likely thinks often about how he is going to obtain food and clothing.

When someone is constantly thinking about the necessities of life, he or she begins to focus more on the earthly than the heavenly. So, Jesus asked a very appropriate question - “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment” or clothing? (6:25). Certainly, the necessities of life are important, but are they important enough to lose focus on the things of God? Jesus commanded the believer not to worry, and this *command* should be *obeyed*. Such an attitude of worry is certainly an *error to avoid*. Jesus’s command should be enough for the kingdom-dweller to stop worrying. In Philippians 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:7, *related passages*, the apostles Paul and Peter also commanded us not to worry but rather to cast our cares upon God. Even though obeying the command should be enough, Jesus knew the listener needed more instruction.

Part Two: Combat Worry by Observing God’s Creation (6:26-30)

In 6:26-30, Jesus used two illustrations or object lessons from nature which built upon an argument from lesser to greater. If God will do the “lesser” by feeding birds and beautifying the lilies of the field, certainly He will do the “greater” by feeding and clothing His people.

A. Observe how God feeds the birds (6:26-27)

Jesus then gave us another way to combat worry using a second *command* - “Behold the fowls of the air” (6:26). The *key word* behold means to look intently at, give careful attention to, or think deeply about something. With this command, Jesus told His hearers to put their “thinking caps on.” We should *follow the example* of the birds who do not worry, but rather enjoy the provisions God offers them.

Jesus then asked a rhetorical question (a question that has an obvious answer). He asked, “Are ye not much better than they?” (6:26). The obvious answer is “Yes!” The *key phrase* “much better” speaks of one’s worth or superiority over something else. While God called all things “good” which He created, He gave man dominion over the creatures of the earth and created man after His own image (Genesis 1:26-28). These historical facts from creation remind us of our worth in God’s sight. What a great *truth to believe!*

By making this observation about the birds, it should be clear that God will take care of humans who bear His image. Jesus asked another rhetorical question in 6:27, this time anticipating a “no” answer. No one through worry can add “one cubit unto his stature.” A cubit was a measure of length equal to about eighteen inches. The *key word* stature refers to a person’s span of life upon this earth. We most certainly cannot add to our lives through excessive worry. If anything, the stress that often accompanies worry could shorten a person’s life.

B. Observe how God clothes the lilies of the field (6:28-30)

Do not take your thinking cap off just yet! Jesus then *commanded* us to think about another aspect of creation - “Consider the lilies of the field” (6:28). The *key word* consider in 6:28 is similar to the word “behold” in 6:26. Consider means to learn something thoroughly or make a close examination. Just as God feeds the birds of the air, so He also clothes the lilies of the field. The *key word* lilies refers to wild flowers that grow in a field. Jesus says of the lilies that they do not toil or labor, neither do they spin. If God will clothe and make wild flowers beautiful, will He not clothe His image bearers?

Jesus *contrasted* Solomon with the lilies of the field (6:29). Solomon was the son of David, the third king of Israel, and God gave him great wealth when he asked for wisdom above all other things in order to lead God’s people. 1 Kings 10:23-25 mentions that Solomon was greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. Part of his riches included garments. Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of the wild flowers of the field. The *key word* arrayed literally means to throw clothing around your body or to dress yourself.

Jesus mentions further the short lifespan of the lilies of the field (6:30). These wild flowers are here today and gone tomorrow. They may eventually be cut down and thrown into an oven or furnace as fuel for the fire. If God will array (clothe) or beautify

something that will eventually be thrown into a fire, how much more will God clothe His kingdom-dwellers? Jesus rhetorically asked, “shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” The *key word* faith speaks of our trust in God. Jesus questions the little faith of one who will worry about being properly clothed.

Part Three: Combating Worry by Seeking the Right Things (6:31-34)

A. Seek God’s Kingdom (6:31-33a)

Jesus *repeated* the *command* concerning worry He originally gave in 6:25. We should not worry about the necessities of life such as what we will eat, drink, or wear (6:31). Jesus mentioned how the Gentiles seek after these things (6:32). The *key word* seek means to strive for something to the point of making it your heart’s desire. The mention of *Gentiles* is to highlight the *contrast* with a kingdom-dweller. Jesus reminded us that our Heavenly Father knows that we need these necessities of life, a comforting *truth to believe*, as *repeated* from 6:8.

What should God’s kingdom-dweller seek? First, Jesus *commanded* us to seek the kingdom of God. The kingdom refers to what is heavenly and lasting as opposed to earthly things as mentioned in 6:19-24, the *immediate context*. This is the kingdom Jesus came to establish on this earth and in our hearts. God’s kingdom is a theme that runs throughout the Sermon on the Mount (5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 13, 33; 7:21).

B. Seek God’s Righteousness (6:33b-34)

Second, Jesus *commanded* us to seek God’s righteousness (6:33). In the opening part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus focused upon thirsting for righteousness (5:6) and making sure that our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).

Where does one acquire such righteousness? Such righteousness can only come from God. Left to our sinful selves, we do not possess this righteousness. Romans 3:10, a *related passage*, clearly states there is no one who is righteous. Only God is purely righteous, and we must receive of His righteousness to be a true kingdom-dweller. It is God’s righteousness which exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship which follows in 6:33b. If you will seek God’s kingdom and righteousness “first” (cause), then all these things will be added to you (effect). The *key word* added is a *repeated* word from 6:27 which means to give or provide. While we cannot add to our lives, God can. What God adds speaks to the *promise* of God’s provision. Seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness “first” speaks of what our priority should be.

Jesus *repeated* the main *command* of this passage for a third time - “Take no thought” or “Do not worry.” Jesus concluded this lesson on worry by saying, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (6:34). Jesus clarified this statement further by saying, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” What this means is that each day has enough trouble on its own. So, do not worry about what might or might not happen tomorrow, for there is enough to tend to in the present.

Conclusion

This is one of those lessons that sounds good on paper, but is difficult to put into practice. Everyone has trouble with worry to some extent or another. The good news is that there is hope for our worrying souls. To combat worry in our lives, let us heed the commands of Jesus to stop this attitude of worry, consider how God takes care of birds, flowers, and grass, and seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. By consistently doing these three things, we can get on with worry-free living. To accomplish this, we must stop being people of little faith, but rather express great faith and trust in God. A wise person would stop worrying and start trusting in the Father.

Apply it

- *Obey the commands* of Jesus:
 - Do not worry about the necessities of life.
 - Observe God's care over creation to combat worry.
 - Seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first.
- *Believe the truth* that mankind has greater worth than all other things in Creation.
- *Believe the truth* that the Heavenly Father knows our needs.
- *Claim the promise* that all our needs will be added to us if we will seek God first.
- *Follow the example* of the birds that do not worry.
- *Avoid the error* of worrying about the necessities of life.



WHAT NOTS AND DO WHATS

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 7:1-12:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause/effect relationships appear in the passage?
3. What contrasts do you see in this passage?
4. What comparisons do you see in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What is the immediate context of the passage?
2. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
3. Are there any related passages which need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe in this passage?
2. Are there commands to obey in this passage?
3. Is there something to praise God for in this passage?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Twelve: What Nots and Do Whats | Matthew 7:1-12

Aim: The learner will commit to obeying Jesus about judgment, discernment, praying, and the right treatment of others.

Part One: Judge Not (7:1-5)

The first part of this lesson covers the first thing that we are not to do. The verses that follow are often misunderstood and misinterpreted, thus the main point of the passage is missed. Let us learn what it means to judge not and why we are not to do it.

A. What it means to judge not (7:1)

What does it mean to judge not?

B. Why we are to judge not (7:2-5)

Why are we to judge not?

Part Two: Give Not (7:6)

Why are we to give not?

Part Three: Do Ask, Seek, and Knock (7:7-11)

A. The intensity of prayer (7:7)

What three commands of Jesus mark the intensity of our prayers?

B. The result of prayer (7:7-11)

What are the results of prayer?

Part Four: Do Good to Others (7:12)

What is the “Golden Rule?”

Lesson Twelve: What Nots and Do Whats Matthew 7:1-12

Aim: The learner will commit to obeying Jesus about judgment, discernment, praying, and the right treatment of others.

Introduction

The above title to this lesson probably leaves you scratching your head a little bit. Let me explain. Reading through the Bible we realize that it tells us both what we are not to do - “What Nots,” and what we are to do - “Do Whats.” Does it make more sense now? In Matthew 7:1-12, Jesus commanded two things kingdom-dwellers are not to do, and two things they are to do.

Part One: Judge Not (7:1-5)

The first part of this lesson covers the first thing that we are not to do. The verses that follow are often misunderstood and misinterpreted, thus the main point of the passage is missed. Let us learn what it means to judge not and why we are not to do it.

A. *What it means to judge not (7:1)*

It is important at the outset of this passage to determine what Jesus meant by the *command* to judge not (7:1a). The *key word* judge means to criticize by making one’s self superior to others. I have heard many people interpret this command of Jesus to mean that you should “never” call anyone out for his or her sin. This is not the intent of Jesus here, as there are times when people need to be confronted about their sins. In the context of this passage, we are talking about having a critical spirit toward others without first considering our own faults. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship in 7:1b. The reason Jesus gave for not judging one another in this manner (cause) is so that we ourselves will not be judged (effect). A person is sorely mistaken if he judges another person thinking he himself is perfect.

B. *Why we are to judge not (7:2-5)*

In the form of a *cause and effect*, Jesus said that with whatever judgment or criticism you judge (cause), a *repeated word* from 7:1, you will be judged (effect); or with whatever measure you measure someone (cause), it will be measured to you again (effect; 7:2). Paul reminded us of this same *truth to believe* in Romans 2:1, a *related passage*. The *key word* measure refers to setting a standard. The English word “meter” is derived from the original Greek word translated as “measure.” In many places around the world, a meter is a standard of measurement. People determine the length, width, or height of an object based upon the standard of a meter. One cannot simply come up with his own idea of how long a meter will be; a meter is a meter. In the same way, we cannot come up with our own standard of judging others.

Jesus illustrated this principle by use of a *contrast*. He began this contrast by questioning, “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye?” (7:3a). The *key word* beholdest or look means to take a careful look at something or someone

else. In the illustration, one is looking at the mote in his brother's eye. The *key word* mote refers to a speck or a small piece of straw or wood. Jesus asked, "Why are you so focused on the small speck in someone else's eye 'but' you do not see the beam that is in your own eye?" (7:3b). The *key word* beam refers to an actual log. It is somewhat comical to imagine someone walking around with a log sticking out of his eye. Jesus used this image for emphasis. We cannot say to our brother, "Hey, let me get that speck out of your eye," when there is a log sticking out of ours (7:4).

A minor moral failure is *compared* to a speck. A major moral failure is *compared* to a log. Jesus called such a person a hypocrite who is focused on the speck in someone else's eye but does not see the log in his own eye (7:5). The *key word* hypocrite is a *repeated* word from 6:2, 16, and refers to one who pretends or plays a part. Jesus said we must first take the log out of our eye and then we will see clearly to take the speck out of another's eye. The *key phrase* "see clearly" is an intensified form of the word "beholdest" in 7:3, and means to have one's eyes wide open. It is only when we are living according to a correct standard (the Word of God) that we can then see clearly enough to help people with their moral failures.

Part Two: Give Not (7:6)

Jesus then moved into the next "what not." Another thing we are not to do is to give what is holy to the dogs or to cast our pearls before swine (7:6a). Just like with the speck and beam, Jesus did not refer to literal dogs and swine. The use of dogs and swine is likely a reference to the lost or wicked person. While the Bible does not typically refer to people as swine, there are some *related passages* where lost men are referred to as dogs. Paul warned the Philippian believers to beware of the dogs (Philippians 3:2, referring to Jewish opponents to the gospel). The apostle John referred to the dogs or lost people who are outside God's kingdom in eternity (Revelation 22:15). In Psalm 22:16, David referred to the wicked who surrounded him as dogs. It would seem then, along with these other biblical usages, that Jesus is comparing the resistant lost people to dogs and swine.

The gospel is a priceless eternal truth, yet, some people do not care about it or other holy things. People considered pearls to be of great value. Certainly, a literal dog does not care about what is holy and a pig could not care less for pearls. Thus, unholy and wicked men do not care for the priceless things of God. They would rather trample on those things and even attack the one that brings holy things to their attention (7:6b). Obviously, this creates a dilemma. To whom should the things of God be given? If a person treats the things of God given to them with disdain, the kingdom-dweller must use discernment when deciding to move on and give them to someone else.

Part Three: Do Ask, Seek, and Knock (7:7-11)

A. The intensity of prayer (7:7)

Once Jesus commanded us what not to do, He then switched gears to *command* us what we should do. The first thing we should do is ask, seek, and knock (7:7). These images refer to our prayer lives before the Father. Jesus already told us how to pray in 6:5-15. His *commands* to ask, seek, and knock mark the intensity of our prayers. According to the grammatical construction of these commands, they

are to be continual actions on our part - keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. The *key word* ask means to make a request. The *key word* seek is a *repeated word* from 6:33, the *immediate context*, and means to make a diligent search for something. Each word in this sequence seems to build off the other. We begin by asking. Then we diligently seek after that which has been asked. Finally, we knock until the door is opened.

B. The result of prayer (7:7-11)

When we intensely pray to the Father, we can expect results. Jesus mentioned the results of asking, seeking, and knocking in 7:7-8 in the form of *cause and effect* relationships. The one who keeps asking (cause), receives (effect). The one who keeps seeking (cause), finds (effect). To the one who keeps knocking (cause), the door is opened to him (effect).

Jesus then illustrated the concept of asking and receiving through familiar earthly scenarios by using rhetorical questions. Remember, as mentioned in the previous lesson, a rhetorical question is one that has an obvious answer. Scenario #1 - If a man has a son who asks for a loaf of bread will he give him a stone? (7:9). The obvious answer is “No!” Scenario #2 - If that same son asks for a fish, will his father give him a snake? (7:10). Again, the obvious answer is “No!” No earthly father who truly loves his son would trick him in these ways.

We now come to a “then” or therefore in Scripture. What is the point of these illustrations? Jesus concluded this portion of His teaching with a lesser-to-greater argument, similar to what He did in 6:26-30, the *immediate context*, when he discussed the birds and lilies of the field: the lesser - “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children (7:11a); the greater - “how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (7:11b). In *contrast* to our Father in heaven, we are viewed as evil. Jesus is not saying that kingdom-dwellers are wicked people, but compared to their Heavenly Father, they simply fall short of His goodness. *Praise the Father* for being a good giver. James 1:17, a *related passage*, also reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from above.

Part Four: Do Good to Others (7:12)

We come now to one of the more familiar verses in the Sermon on the Mount. The principle found in this verse is often labeled the “Golden Rule” along with Luke 6:31, a *related passage*. Another “therefore” begins 7:12 that likely relates to everything Jesus has taught from 5:21-7:11. The basic principle is that we should treat others the way we want others to treat us.

Notice the *cause and effect* relationship. If we follow the golden rule (cause), then we are fulfilling the Law and the Prophets (effect). The *key phrase* “law and the prophets” is a *repeated phrase* from 5:17 that serves as a “bookend” (when a passage begins and ends with the same similar phrase) for the bulk of the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In this larger section of Jesus’s sermon, He taught us how we should treat each other: don’t be angry with your brother (5:21-26); don’t commit adultery (5:27-30); don’t divorce your wife (5:31-32); be a person of your word (5:33-37); don’t retaliate (5:38-42); love all people (5:43-48); be good examples for

others in giving, praying, and fasting (6:1-18); don't judge one another (7:1-5). In all things we should treat people the way we would like to be treated. If you do these things, you will fulfill the Law and the Prophets, and you will demonstrate that your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Conclusion

Matthew 7:1-12 teaches some things that are great *not to do*, and some great things *to do*. Do not be overly critical and hypocritically judge others, but do practice good discernment when giving the holy things of God to others. Avoid giving such holy things to those wicked people who only wish to trample over it and attack you. Continually pray with great intensity to the Father anticipating great results from Him. And above all, treat people with the respect with which you wish to be treated. This is challenging work for the kingdom-dweller, but with God's help and righteousness, you can be a successful member of God's kingdom. Remember, the wise person is one who will heed these commands of Jesus.

Apply it

- Obey the *commands* of Jesus:
 - Do not judge hypocritically.
 - Do not give what is holy to wicked people who will not appreciate it.
 - Pray with the intensity of asking, seeking, and knocking.
 - Treat others as you would want to be treated.
- *Believe the truth* that the standard by which you judge others will be measured back to you.
- *Praise God* that He is a good giver.



CHOOSE WISELY

Guided Bible Study

This lesson provides questions designed to guide learners in discovering what the biblical passage says, means, and how it applies. The guided method is technically referred to as the Inductive Bible Study method. Begin by studying each passage before reading the author's comments on the passage. Then compare your answers to the author's review. Prayerfully read the passage and ask the Lord to help you see answers to the following questions that will guide you through Matthew 7:13-29:

Observation: Discover the facts or accurate information God presents in the passage of Scripture.

1. What key words or phrases are in the text? (Are any repeated?)
2. What cause/effect relationships appear in the passage?
3. What contrasts do you see in this passage?
4. What comparison do you note in this passage?

Interpretation: Determine what the passage of Scripture means.

1. What is the historical/cultural background of this passage?
2. What is the immediate context of the passage?
3. What key words or phrases need to be researched?
4. Are there any related passages which need to be studied?

Application: Apply the passage to our lives as God intends.

1. Is there a truth to believe in this passage?
2. Are there commands to obey in this passage?
3. Is there an example to follow in this passage?
4. Is there an error to avoid in this passage?
5. Is there something to praise God for in this passage?

Interactive Outline for Lesson Thirteen: Choose Wisely | Matthew 7:13-29

Aim: The learner will commit to making the right choice to build upon the foundation of Christ's teaching.

Part One: Two Gates (7:13-14)

A. *The wide gate* (7:13)

The *key word* _____ is a *repeated word* from 6:5 in the original language, referring to hypocrites who love to pray in the broad streets to be seen by men. The wide gate or broad way ultimately leads to destruction. The *key word* _____ refers to utter ruin or loss. Here, the utter ruin speaks of eternal destruction.

B. *The narrow gate* (7:14)

Many will follow the path to destruction, but few follow the path to eternal life.

Which path are you traveling? Which path would Jesus say you are traveling?

Part Two: Two Trees (7:15-20)

The *key word*, _____, *repeated* from 6:1, means to watch out for or be on guard against something.

A. *The good tree* (7:17a, 18a)

Jesus states positively first that a good tree can only produce good fruit (7:17a); and then negatively, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit (7:18a).

B. *The bad tree* (7:17b, 18b-20)

Jesus now *contrasts* the good tree with the corrupt or bad tree. The *key word* _____ literally refers to that which is evil. **What type of tree are you cultivating? What type of tree would Jesus say you are cultivating?**

Part Three: Two Types of People (7:21-23)

A. *The person who does God's will* (7:21)

B. *The person who does not do God's will* (7:22-23)

What will Jesus say to you on that day? What do you plan to say to Jesus on that day?

Part Four: Two Foundations (7:24-27)

A. *The foundation of the wise man* (7:24-25)

B. *The foundation of the foolish man* (7:26-27)

Are you building upon the solid foundation of Christ's words?

Lesson Thirteen: Choose Wisely Matthew 7:13-29

Aim: The learner will commit to making the right choice to build upon the foundation of Christ's teaching.

Introduction

Every good sermon needs a strong conclusion. Matthew 7:13-27 marks the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. The bulk of this sermon relates to Christ's discussion concerning the Law and the Prophets (bookends from 5:17 and 7:12), and how one's righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. The conclusion to the sermon comes in a series of "twos": two gates, two trees, two types of people, and two foundations. Every good sermon also warrants a wise decision. The sermon hearer must now act upon what he has heard. What gate will the wise person enter? What kind of tree will the wise person cultivate? What kind of person will the wise person be in relation to the Father? Upon what type of foundation will the wise person build? The original hearers of this sermon needed to choose, and so do we. This lesson will explore the answers to the above questions.

Part One: Two Gates (7:13-14)

A. *The wide gate* (7:13)

Those living in the first century were familiar with city gates. According to *cultural/historical background*, many cities were built with a surrounding wall and at least one gate for entering and exiting the city. Gates could come in all shapes and sizes, and so the original hearers likely understood the concept. Jesus *commanded* His hearers to enter through the strait or narrow gate (7:13a). In a reverse *cause and effect*, Jesus gave the reason for this command - "for (or because) wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction" (7:13b). The effect of this knowledge should lead one to choose the correct gate. The *key word* broad is a *repeated word* from 6:5 in the original language, referring to hypocrites who love to pray in the broad streets to be seen by men. The wide gate or broad way ultimately leads to destruction. The *key word* destruction refers to utter ruin or loss. Here, the utter ruin speaks of eternal destruction. Jesus reminded the hearer that there are many who enter in through the wide gate (7:13c). This demonstrates that it is not always good to follow the crowd.

B. *The narrow gate* (7:14)

Besides the *command* to enter the narrow gate, Jesus then briefly described it. In *contrast* to the wide gate, the correct gate to enter and the right path to follow is straight and narrow, referring to the strict standards of God (7:14). The wide path refers to the loose standards of the world. Another *contrast* with the wide gate, that leads to destruction, is that the narrow gate leads to life, especially eternal life. *Believe the truth and praise God* there is a path which leads to eternal life. The number of people who follow each path are *contrasted* as well. *Many* will follow the path to destruction, but *few* follow the path to eternal life. Did you catch what Jesus just said? Many will be destroyed

while only a few will find life; nevertheless, we should be encouraged to witness to as many people as we can. According to 6:33 and 7:7-8, the *immediate context*, the one thing we should be seeking and finding is God's kingdom and righteousness. The thought of many people perishing for all of eternity should greatly concern us. **Which path are you traveling? Which path would Jesus say you are traveling?**

Part Two: Two Trees (7:15-20)

Before discussing the second set of "twos," Jesus offered a word of warning. He *commanded* the hearer to "beware of false prophets" (7:15a). The *key word*, beware, *repeated* from 6:1, means to watch out for or be on guard against something. The grammar indicates to watch out for false prophets *continually*. The false prophets appear harmless outwardly as Jesus describes them coming in sheep's clothing (7:15b). Inwardly, by *contrast*, they are "ravening wolves" (7:15c). This *key phrase* refers to the vicious and destructive nature of a wild animal.

Jesus said that you will know them by their fruits (7:16). The *key word* know means to know exactly, fully, or completely. You cannot always tell the false prophets by their outward appearance, but the true fruit of their lives will eventually appear. Rhetorically, Jesus asked whether grapes are gathered from thorns, or figs gathered from thistles. The obvious answer to those questions is an emphatic "No!"

A. The good tree (7:17a, 18a)

This brings us now to the image of the tree and the answer to the question of what type of tree we want to cultivate. Jesus stated positively first that a good tree can only produce good fruit (7:17a); and then negatively, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit (7:18a). Jesus told His disciples in John 15:4, a *related passage*, that apart from Him they could never bear fruit. Good fruit-bearing in our lives demands that we possess a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Such righteousness only comes when we are connected to Jesus, the True Vine (John 15:1,5).

B. The bad tree (7:17b, 18b-20)

Jesus then *contrasted* the good tree with the corrupt or bad tree. The *key word* corrupt literally refers to that which is evil. One desires the good and healthy tree because of the benefit of its "good" fruit. But, a corrupt or unhealthy tree, which cannot produce good fruit (7:17b, 18b), is only good to be cut down and thrown into the fire (7:19). The image of fire speaks of hell. Those who make poor choices in life by not following the straight and narrow path and not bearing good fruit, can only expect the destruction of hell. Jesus told His disciples something similar in John 15:2, 6, a *related passage*. Jesus basically *repeated the phrase* from 7:16, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (7:20). Again, many people might fool you by their outward appearance, but their inward character will eventually reveal itself. **What type of tree are you cultivating? What type of tree would Jesus say you are cultivating?**

Part Three: Two Types of People (7:21-23)

A. The person who does God's will (7:21)

Jesus reminds us that not everyone who says "Lord, Lord," will enter into the

kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father (7:21). The Father's will is the focal point of the model prayer Jesus taught in 6:10. A true kingdom-dweller is a person who desires to accomplish God's will. Jesus Himself demonstrated His overwhelming desire to do His Father's will in John 4:34, a *related passage*.

B. The person who does not do God's will (7:22-23)

In *contrast* to the person in 7:21 who does God's will, notice how Jesus spent more time in this section talking about the person who does *not* do the will of the Father. This is likely for emphasis to warn people about the dangers of not doing the Father's will. Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day" (7:22a). The *key phrase* "that day" refers to the final day of judgment. In that day many will plead their case before Jesus, the righteous Judge, concerning the kind of life they lived. Notice their good works: prophesying in "Thy" or "Your name," casting out demons in "Your name," and performing many miracles in "Your name" (7:22b). Invoking the name of the Lord does not mean a person knows the Lord in a saving relationship.

Eternal life does not come because we have done good works, but rather because we trusted in Jesus as Lord and accomplished the will of the Father as a true kingdom-dweller. Jesus will declare to many on that day of judgment, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The *key word* iniquity refers to lawlessness. What irony! Those who claimed to be keepers of the law, such as the scribes and Pharisees, will be told one day how lawless they really were! **What will Jesus say to you on that day? What do you plan to say to Jesus on that day?**

Part Four: Two Foundations (7:24-27)

A. The foundation of the wise man (7:24-25)

The sermon comes down to the final set of "twos" - the two foundations. Lesson one entitled, "Begin with the End in Mind," previously discussed these verses, but we will review the main principles. This section begins with a "therefore," likely pointing back to the entire sermon. The two foundations provide a concluding image. The wise man who built his house upon the rock represents the first foundation. Jesus *compared* everyone who keeps "hearing" and "doing" His sayings to this wise man (7:24). James 1:22-25, a *related passage*, reminds us that it is not only important to *hear* the Word of God, but to *act* upon it. Notice the *cause and effect* relationship. When you have a solid foundation from "hearing" and "doing" (cause), the storms of life cannot knock your house down when it is built upon the rock (effect; 7:25). Praise God for the foundation of His words. The wise man is a *great example to follow*. **Are you building upon the solid foundation of Christ's words?**

B. The foundation of the foolish man (7:26-27)

In *contrast* to the wise man who "hears" and "does," the foolish man hears but does not build upon the words of Christ (7:26). The opposite *cause and effect* occurs in this verse. The foolish man's house fell when the same type of storm blew upon it (effect), because he built his house upon the sand, the second foundation (7:27). Not only did it fall, but the Bible says it was a "great" fall. So it is with anyone not building his or her life upon the solid foundation of Christ's sayings. Where the foolish man built his house is an *error to avoid*.

Epilogue (7:28-29)

Notice the *causes and effect* when Jesus finished His sermon. The crowds were astonished (effect) at His teaching (first cause; 7:28) and His person because He taught them as one having authority (second cause) in *contrast* to the scribes with whom they were familiar (7:29). The *key word* astonished means to be amazed or overwhelmed. This was a common effect when Jesus taught the masses.

Conclusion

No wiser choice can be made than building one's life upon Christ's teaching. Jesus is the One who can give us His righteousness with which we can exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, which is the point of the entire sermon. They were the foolish men. They made poor choices when they refused to follow Jesus as the Messiah. When we make the choice to follow Jesus, we enter the narrow gate, bear good fruit, follow the will of the Father, and build upon a foundation that will stand through the storms of life. The Sermon on the Mount paints a beautiful picture of the actions and attitudes of the kingdom-dweller. May our lives reflect this great masterpiece, all for the glory of God!

Apply It

- *Believe the truth* that the straight and narrow road leads to life.
- *Believe the truth* that the only one who does the Father's will can enter heaven.
- *Obey the command* to enter the narrow gate.
- *Obey the command* to beware of false teachers.
- *Follow the example* of the wise man and build your life upon the rock of Christ's teaching.
- *Avoid the error* of the foolish man who built his house upon the sand.
- *Praise God* that there is a path that leads to eternal life.
- *Praise God* for a strong foundation of Christ's teaching.