


# week #10


## SMALL GROUPS

## UPSIDE DOWN

## ACTIONS



Est  
AD 30



Salt and Light	Coram Deo	Study
<p>“Christians are to be like salt and have a positive impact on the culture far beyond what is expected from the powerless.”</p>	<p>Christ’s call for us to be salt and light is not an impossible one.</p>	<p>Open It Explore It Get It</p>

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (v. 16). Matthew 5:13–16

## Salt and Light

Jesus identifies Himself with Yahweh in the Sermon on the Mount when He compares His disciples to the persecuted prophets of old (Matt. 5:11–12; Jer. 37–38). The disciples who speak for Jesus are like the prophets who spoke for the Lord of the covenant; therefore, Christ implies His divine sovereignty.

The prophets carried out their ministries in full view of the people of Israel, and so we are not surprised to see that their successors, the disciples of Jesus, do not build the kingdom of God in

secret. This is the point of today’s passage. Our Savior calls His disciples the “salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13) and the “light of the world” (v. 14), two substances that permeate and transform the food, or the darkness, in which they are found. Like salt and light, the church is to have a transformative effect on the surrounding society.

Salt is often produced as tiny grains and is not expensive given its prevalence. Yet its value far outweighs its apparent insignificance. Christians are to be like salt and have a positive

impact on the culture far beyond what is expected from the powerless.

The meaning of Jesus’ metaphor is probably not limited to any single benefit we get from salt, but we will highlight its preservative quality. The church must have a preserving effect on society and by its influence prevent the world from rushing headlong toward ungodliness. Christianity has fulfilled this role historically, leading the way in the advance of human rights. But take note that we are salt only if we maintain our difference from the world around us. In the Near East, salt can be found mixed with



gypsum or sand, diluting its “saltiness” and worth. The same fate can befall us if we bend over backward to show the world how much we are like them (v. 13; 1 Peter 1:14–16).

Rural communities like the one Jesus addresses in Matthew 5 well know how blinding darkness can be. Yet the glow of a city in the distance can give those living in the pitch black of night a sense of direction and bearing. Just as walking around the camp at night is dangerous without a lighted torch, Jesus calls us to be the light of the world, to live as those transformed by the Spirit so that the world will take notice and be led to glorify the Father (vv. 14–16).

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Christ’s call for us to be salt and light is not an impossible one. In keeping with New Testament

ethics, Jesus first tells us what we are and then calls us to live up to that standard. In Him we are salt and light (Matt. 5:13–16), and so we are to live out by faith what He has made us to be. If you are discouraged by your saltlessness or darkness, remember that Jesus declares you to be salt and light and press on, knowing that by the power of the Spirit you can obey His charge.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Passages for Further Study

Isaiah 42:1–9

Mark 9:50

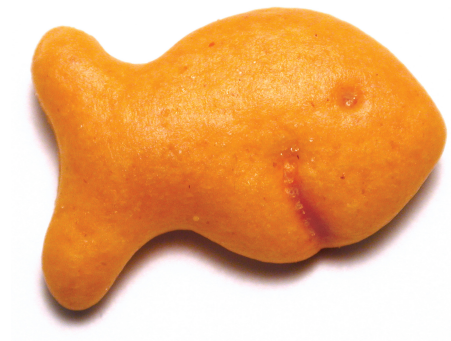
Acts 13:44–49

Romans 12:1–2



# Open It!

1. What salty snack do you enjoy eating the most?



2. While eating that salty goodness what favorite drink do you enjoy with it?

## Read It | Matthew 5:13-16

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

## Explore It

1. What two things does Jesus call us to be?

2. What is done with unsalty salt?

3. What does Jesus tell His followers to do with the light we have been given?

4. What two results come when we are “salt and light” in this world?

## Get It

1. After speaking about the eight kingdom attitudes that God demands of His followers, He speaks about our engagement with the world. What relationship do the Beatitudes and our being salt and light have with one another?
2. In our text this week Jesus uses two metaphors to illustrate the role that Christians play in the world. Why would Jesus use salt and light to describe His followers' engagement with the world?
3. In ancient Palestine salt was used to preserve meat and keep it from spoiling. What does this say about the role that the church and Christians play in society? How have you seen this preserving effect take place?
4. What are some current events and situations in our world that could use a heavy sprinkling of God's salt?
5. While saltiness is spoken about in a positive way to preserve and as a flavoring additive that makes things taste better, in what ways does salt cause trouble? Is there ever a time when a Christian can be too salty? Explain your answers.

## The unsalty salt...

At the end of verse 13 Jesus speaks about salt that has lost its taste. The idea of unsalty salt is summed up in the Greek word “moraine.” This word carries the idea of ‘playing the fool’ or ‘to become foolish.’ In a sense isn't that what Christians do when they lose their saltiness by playing the fool for the world, by ignoring Christian disciplines, by giving in to lusts or disregarding warnings about sin? In the present passage “moraine” is used more figuratively meaning to cause something to lose its taste or purpose for which it exists. For Christ followers to lose their saltiness was equivalent to becoming foolish. It would in effect be to lose their identity.



6. If losing our saltiness is the epitome of foolishness for the believer why then do so many Christians live such unsalted lives?

***You are the light of the world** - Jesus gives the Christian both a great compliment and a great responsibility when He says that we are the light of the world, because He claimed that title for Himself as He walked this earth<sup>3</sup>.*

7. What does it mean that this type of salt is only good for throwing to the ground to be trampled on by men? How is this principle applied to our Christianity?

9. Jesus turns from the metaphor of being salt in this world to being a shining light to this world. In what ways will the Christian's saltiness allow their light to shine more brightly?

*Salt must be brought into close contact with whatever it is meant to affect if it is to do any good. Christians are the salt of the earth. We must be willing to be rubbed into the decaying carcass of an unregenerate society. Most of us are content to sit on Sunday in our little saltshakers, far removed from a needy and lost humanity<sup>2</sup>.*

8. Who are those people with whom you are close enough to “salt?” What are you doing to be the salt shaker God is calling you to be?

10. Name some contemporary things that we hide our light with?

11. What temptations have a way of keeping us from shining as brightly as we could?

"YOU are the light of the world." The "you" is emphatic in the Greek text, so that we might translate it "You, and you alone are the light of the world." Jesus Christ intentionally singles out this group of peasants as so distinctly different from the world and so important for the world, that he calls them "the light of the world." We know that Jesus uses the same language of Himself in John 8:12, "I am the Light of the world." That passage speaks of light in an originaive sense. He is the origin of such light so that He can add, "He who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." Christians are light in a derivative sense in that the light we have comes as a result of relationship to Jesus Christ. We do not produce the light, but like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, we too reflect the light of His indwelling life<sup>4</sup>.

12. How is the Christian to reflect the light of Christ and not himself to the darkened world around us?

## His Lamps

God's lamps we are,  
 To shine where He shall say:  
 And lamps are not for sunny rooms,  
 Nor for the light of day;  
 But for the dark places of the earth,  
 Where shame and wrong and crime have birth,  
 Or for the murky twilight grey,  
 Where wandering sheep have gone astray,  
 Or where the Lamp of Faith grows dim,  
 And souls are groping after Him.  
 And as sometimes a flame we find,  
 Clear-shining through the night,  
 So dark we do not see the lamp  
 But only see the Light,  
 So may we shine, God's love the flame,  
 That men may glorify His Name  
 --Annie Johnson Flint





Reread this portion of the poem and complete the following questions:

And lamps are not for sunny rooms,  
Nor for the light of day;  
But for the dark places of the earth,  
Where shame and wrong and crime have birth

Or for the murky twilight grey,  
Where wandering sheep have gone astray,  
Or where the Lamp of Faith grows dim,  
And souls are groping after Him.

(Continued)

13. For many it is quite easy to shine brightly in Christian settings. Is this wrong to do, or is there a place to be light for other Christians? What purpose would this accomplish?
14. What are some practical ways that the church can allow the light of Christ to shine brighter? How can you?
15. How does our shining as bright lights cause the unbelieving world to glorify God?

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Salt and Light From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)*

<sup>2</sup> Vance Havner, "Pepper 'n' Salt."


<sup>3</sup> David Guzik, "Commentary on the Bible".

<sup>4</sup> Phil Newton, "The Power of Christians as light", South Woods Baptist Church)



# week

# #11



UPSIDE  
DOWN

ACTIONS

Est.  
AD 30

Law and Gospel	Coram Deo	Study
<p><b>"We can be justified by His law if we keep His commandments perfectly, or we can be justified by faith in the gospel on account of Jesus' perfection. Of course, since no sinner can keep God's law flawlessly, the gospel is the only means by which we can be justified."</b></p>	<p>Our Lord saves us from His wrath in order that we might serve Him according to His law, but we cannot serve Him unless we walk by the Spirit of God.</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (v. 19). Matthew 5:17-20

## Law and Gospel

Lutheranism and the Reformed tradition both come directly out of the Protestant Reformation and have much in common, at least historically. Not the least of these commonalities are the doctrines of justification by faith alone and the final authority of Scripture. Yet, there are also differences between these two traditions, one of which is how the respective communities distinguish law and gospel.

In teaching if not in practice, Lutheranism tends to draw a sharp distinction between law and gospel in the whole of the Christian life. God's law is almost always seen as a threat

even though Lutherans call believers to live by the Ten Commandments. Reformed thinkers, however, traditionally view God's law more positively. Yes, the Reformed tradition has said that we must sharply distinguish law and gospel—but only in regards to our justification. That is, God's law and God's gospel offer two alternative ways of securing a righteous status before the Lord. **We can be justified by His law if we keep His commandments perfectly, or we can be justified by faith in the gospel on account of Jesus' perfection. Of course, since no sinner can keep God's law flawlessly, the gospel is the only means by which we can be**

**justified.** John Calvin comments on Galatians 3:12 that “the contradiction between the law and faith lies [only] in the matter of justification.”

Law and gospel are not opposed elsewhere, even in our sanctification, the process by which we live out our gratitude for God's gracious salvation. Jesus Himself calls us to obey the commandments, not to earn our place in Heaven but to thank the Lord for providing us a place in Heaven through Christ Jesus our Savior (Matt. 5:19). Thanking our Creator for His redemption involves the people of God making an effort by His Spirit to live holy lives. This was true of the



“Our Lord saves us from His wrath in order that we might serve Him according to His law, but we cannot serve Him unless we walk by the Spirit of God.”

Israelites, who were given the Ten Commandments after their rescue from Egypt (Ex. 20:1–17). It remains true for us today, for in Christ we have been saved unto good works (Eph. 2:8–10).

Consequently, thanking God for our salvation does not consist merely in getting used to our justification, although we must never forget that we stand before God unafraid based on His grace alone. True gratitude consists in our efforts to live godly lives according to God’s law (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 86).

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Answer 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes that we do good works because the God who justifies us also gives us His Spirit to conform us more and more to the image of Jesus Christ. Our Lord saves us from His wrath in order that we might

serve Him according to His law, but we cannot serve Him unless we walk by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit empowers our obedience to God’s law, and we must ask Him daily for help that we might obey our Creator.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Passages for Further Study

Psalms 78:1–8

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14

Ezekiel 39:25–29

Revelation 14:12

# Open It!

1. How closely do you follow directions? Are you a free spirit that likes to do it “your own way” or do you do things “by the book?”



2. What is your favorite story from the Old Testament? What is it about that particular story that impacts you?

## Read It | Matthew 5: 17-20

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

## Explore It

1. What was Jesus being accused of when it came to the law?
2. How long will it be before the law passes away?
3. How righteous must we be to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?

## By this point in His sermon, Jesus has made it very clear what belonging to the Kingdom of God means.

What he has said is startling enough. But in some ways, what he has not said is even more startling. He has said nothing about the law and the importance of keeping it. He has said nothing about the traditional interpretations of the law, and the importance of observing them. No statement with regards to encouraging reverence for the scribes and the Pharisees. Did this mean that Jesus was overthrowing the law? He certainly was teaching that the way of salvation and entry into God's

Kingdom was not by merit gained through obedience to the law. Rather than feeling that they had achieved merit, Jesus' followers were poor in spirit, mourned for their sins, and received comfort and the Kingdom of God. To the listening scribes and Pharisees, this must have sounded for all the world like the abolition of religion and of everything they stood for. So far, Jesus had said people could enter God's Kingdom by God's grace; He had made not one single mention of the law!<sup>2</sup>

### Get It

1. If salvation is solely through God's grace and not obtained through the righteousness of following the law, what value does the law have for people?

The word "abolish" comes from the Greek word *kataluo* which means to set aside, to destroy, pull down, to break up, to disintegrate or demolish. The idea is to abrogate (to abolish by authoritative action) or set aside in the exercise of legislative authority. To the religious Jew even the thought of such a thing would be profanity.

2. What would have caused the Pharisees and scribes to believe that Jesus was trying to abolish the law?

3. Why could Christians find it convenient to abolish some or all of the law?

(Continued)

Jesus did not DESTROY the law, He fulfilled it. When He arose, He proved that He had paid the death penalty of that law. The law has not failed—but man failed under the law. The law is still as perfect as ever, still as “just” as ever, and will condemn the sinner. The only hope lies in abandoning all hope of saving one’s self, and casting one’s self on the grace of God, and God alone. We repeat, Jesus did not destroy the law. It remains and ever will remain, the perfect demand of a righteous God for all who would save themselves. Since the sinner cannot keep it, the law condemns him. But Christ fulfilled all its demands, and so while the law is not dead, the believer is dead to the law, and alive unto God.<sup>3</sup>

4. What parts of the Old Testament do you wish you could skip or overlook?

5. According to verse 18 how does Jesus give credence and credibility to the law’s authority? How did Jesus submit himself to this authority while here on earth?



The word “fulfill” comes from the Greek word *pleroo* which means to be completely filled indicating a completed state. To fill out or to expand. Jesus uses this word to speak of something made complete in every way. To complete the design. To fill up what was predicted. To accomplish what was intended in the Old Testament.

6. In what ways did Jesus fulfill the requirements of the law?

7. Read John 13:34. It has been said that because Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law the only aspect that Christians are bound to keep is the law “to love another.” Discuss as a group the different implications that can come if we were only called “to love one another” and nothing else.





Jesus anticipated a natural tendency to relax God's commandments. Because they are of such a supernatural nature, people tend to explain them away, to rationalize their meaning. But whoever breaks one part of the law, and teaches other people to do the same, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven<sup>4</sup>.

8. Since Jesus places such an emphasis on the fulfillment of the law, how then can we go about fulfilling it in our lives?
9. In what ways do we Christians relax or minimize God's commandments as believers? What causes us to do these things?
10. In what ways can each of us be more helpful in teaching God's commands to others?

## The two ways one can rightly (or wrongly) handle the Word of God are by **doing** and **teaching**.

Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven should live like that. We are called to uphold every part of God's law, both in our **living** and in our teaching no matter where we are or who is around us. Jesus tells us that our position in the Kingdom is based on this approach to the commandments of God.

John MacArthur echoes this thought commenting that greatness is not determined by gifts, success, popularity, reputation, or size of ministry-but by a

believer's view of Scripture as revealed in his life and teaching. Jesus' promise is not simply to great teachers such as Paul or Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, or Spurgeon. His promise applies to every believer who teaches others to obey God's Word by faithfully, carefully, and lovingly living by and speaking of that Word. Every believer does not have the gift of teaching the deep doctrines of Scripture, but every believer is called and is able to teach the right attitude toward it.<sup>5</sup>

11. Why would our position in God's Kingdom be impacted by following the law when we enter His Kingdom through grace? Does this truth bring comfort or concern when it comes to your own place in God's Kingdom?

Jesus uses hyperbole (exaggeration) to drive home the truth that external righteousness without internal reality will not gain entrance into the Kingdom. The only righteousness that God will accept is the perfection that He imputes to those who accept His Son as Savior (2 Cor. 5:21). Of course, where there is true faith in Christ, there will also be the practical righteousness that Jesus describes in the remainder of the Sermon.<sup>6</sup>

12. Why is the righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes not good enough to get a person to Heaven? Why do so many people still try to gain Heaven through their own effort even today?

13. In what ways can leaning too much on the law hurt our walks as Christians? On the other hand can we overemphasize the concept of grace in the Christian walk?

14. In light of the text before us how would you define what it means to be saved? Do your best to explain the roles of the law and gospel when it comes to our entering the Kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair: Sermon on the Mount: Banner of Truth

<sup>3</sup> Martin Ralph De Hann, Studies in Galatians

<sup>4</sup> MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments. Nashville: Thomas Nelson

<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, J: Matthew 1-7 MacArthur New Testament Commentary Chicago: Moody Press

<sup>6</sup> MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments. Nashville: Thomas Nelson

# week #12



SMALL GROUPS

UPSIDE DOWN

ACTIONS

Est. AD 30

The Full Meaning of Moses	Coram Deo	Study
<p>“When inner purity and outward goodness concur, one’s righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Of course, sinners can never meet this standard, and so Jesus pushes us to see that we all need His righteousness...”</p>	<p>“The unseen sins of the mind and heart are the easiest for us to justify...”</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to the hell of fire” (v. 22). Matthew 5:21–26

## The Full Meaning of Moses

Last week we saw how Jesus comes to fulfill the Mosaic law, not to set it aside (Matt. 5:17). Our Lord, being the goal of the Law and the Prophets, by no means intends to do away with them. In fact, as the end of the Law, Jesus reveals the depth of Scripture, making it clear that God’s demands are actually much stricter than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20).

The meaning of this last point is determined from the practice of the Pharisees and Jesus’ teaching regarding the Law in the life of Israel. Among our Savior’s contemporaries, no one keeps the letter of the Law better than the

Pharisees. Few Israelites can imagine outdoing their righteous practice, so exacting is their observation of the commandments. Yet as Christ will show us, outward conformity to the Law’s details, while important, is not enough. Outward observance does not necessarily arise from a righteous motive (Isa. 29:13–14). **When inner purity and outward goodness concur, one’s righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Of course, sinners can never meet this standard, and so Jesus pushes us to see that we all need His righteousness to be reckoned to us in order to be accepted by God (Gal. 2:15–16).**

Beginning with today’s passage, Jesus draws a series of antitheses between

what has been said and what He Himself is teaching. We must understand at the outset that Jesus is not contradicting the teaching of the Old Testament. What has been “said” (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) is not what is “written” in the Law (4:4, 7, 10). In these antitheses Christ is giving the full meaning of what Moses originally delivered on Sinai and correcting the sayings — the traditions — that have unpacked the text falsely or incompletely. John Calvin comments: “As the law had been corrupted by false expositions, and turned to a profane meaning, Christ vindicates it against such corruptions, and points out its true meaning.”



“The unseen sins of the mind and heart are the easiest for us to justify...”

Regarding the law against murder (Ex. 20:13), we may think we have kept the commandment if we never kill anyone. Yet hatred provokes all murder, and the anger that produces hatred is actually murder to a lesser degree. Therefore, obeying God requires us to mortify our ungodly anger (Matt. 5:21–26).

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Matthew Henry writes that the Pharisees made the fundamental error in thinking that “the divine law prohibited only the sinful act, not the sinful thought.” The unseen sins of the mind and heart are the easiest for us to justify, but God detests our inner wickedness as much as He hates the evil we do before the eyes of men. Seek to reconcile yourself to someone with whom you have been angry unjustly so that your heart and your deeds may be purified<sup>1</sup>.

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#### Passages for Further Study

Genesis 4:1–8

Proverbs 14:29; 19:11

James 1:19–21

1 John 3:15

# Open It!

1. What are some things that try your patience and cause anger to rise up within you?



2. Share about a time you had to deal with an irritating individual. How did you handle it? What did you learn from the experience?


## Read It | Matthew 5:21-26

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

## Explore It

1. According to verse 21 who is held liable for murder?
2. Who does Jesus say is liable for the judgment of murder according to verse 22?
3. Which comes first, our worship of God or reconciliation with others?



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4. What is Jesus' command to us in verse 25 when it comes to dealing with difficulties with others?

## Get It

Over the next two studies we will focus on the issue of private sins. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount we see Jesus deepen not destroy the law. In that day the tendency was an outward adherence to the law's demands all the while never dealing with the heart. Jesus seeks to reverse this tendency. This is a reminder that God is not so concerned with the outside as much as He is with the inside. The outside is only validated insofar as it is representative of what is on the inside.

This principle is the basis of the text that we shall consider. Jesus emphasizes here in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the rest of His ministry that external ceremonies and religious rites are not the important issue, because God's primary concern is with the heart.

1. What are some benefits to judging people thru externals? What are some of its shortcomings?

The OT law dealt only with outward actions, but citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven must beware of sinful inward attitudes. In fact, the attitudes Jesus calls for can only be fulfilled by those with a new heart and His Spirit, otherwise they are an impossible standard which climaxes in the highest of all impossible standards to "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Only citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, genuine believers, can obey Jesus' instructions and commands, doing so not because of outward constraints (not "under Law") but because of an inward life ("under grace") enabled by the indwelling Spirit of the Living God.

2. We devoted eight weeks to the study and application of kingdom attitudes that should characterize the believer and our actions. How would those beatitudes impact the words of Jesus in our text this week?

(Continued)

Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. In itself, anger is not a sin, because even God can be angry (Dt 9:8, 20; Ps 2:12). The Bible often speaks of anger "being kindled" (Ge 30:2; Dt 6:15), as though anger can be compared to fire. It is difficult for us to practice a truly holy anger or righteous indignation because our emotions are tainted by sin, and we do not have the same knowledge that God has in all matters. God sees everything clearly and knows everything completely, and we do not. The NT principle seems to be that the believer should be angry at sin but loving toward people. The fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God. According to Jesus, anger is the first step toward murder because anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives, and Satan is a murderer. -Warren Weirsbe

3. How does anger show itself in our actions? How does anger hurt our relationship with others? With God? Have you struggled with anger? If so, share your story.

4. Why is simply saying "*raca*" or "you fool" to another human being a sin that makes one guilty enough to even go to hell?

5. Is there ever a time that we can display our anger to others? If so how can we go about it without sinning?

Jesus is saying that in effect our "cutting words" carry out the "assassination" of the person using the weapon of the tongue and those words that proceed from a heart filled with animosity, enmity or anger. Jesus explains this by saying that calling someone a fool was deserving of a murderer's punishment.

The word "fool" in verse 22 is "*raca*" which is an Aramaic word meaning empty one, worthless fellow and was used as a term of contempt used by the Jews in the time of Christ. English synonyms with a similar idea include nitwit, blockhead, numbskull, bonehead or brainless idiot. "*Raca*" expressed contempt for an individual's intelligence and existence.



Jesus recognized that we cannot be trusted in our judgment of the seriousness of careless speech. We treat the damage we do with our lips very lightly because we do not see the corpses we leave behind. That is why Jesus invades our moral slumber by telling us how serious this is in the sight of God. He uses language we readily understand: anger incurs judgment; using terms of contempt (like *raca*) is worthy of condemnation by the highest court (Mt 5:22); calling someone a fool fits us for hell. Jesus is probably not placing these sins on a scale of seriousness in the Kingdom of God; He is simply stressing vividly that they are far more serious than most of us assume. In fact, our insensitivity to their real seriousness is indicative of the dullness of our spiritual senses.<sup>2</sup>

6. When have your words of insult hurt others around you? What caused you to say those things?

7. What were the consequences and how did you reconcile with the person you spoke against?

The word reconciled is the Greek word *diallasso* which means to be restored to normal relations or harmony with someone. This could apply to an enmity, animosity or a quarrel in which the fault may be two-sided or one-sided. Jesus is calling for the offender to take the initiative in this process. That is, even if we hold nothing against him, if he is angry with or hates us, we should do everything in our power to be reconciled to him.

(Continued)

We might have expected Jesus to focus primarily on the offended party, since they are the most likely to feel anger towards another. Instead, in these verses it is the offender who initiates the process of reconciliation. Elsewhere Jesus urges the offended party to make the first move (Mt 18:15). Both share an obligation to work for resolution when there has been a conflict. Ideally, the two would meet en route to one another and settle their differences “on the way.”

How important is it to deal with enmity, disagreements, animosity, or anger? Reconciliation is so important that it takes priority over everything else. It even takes precedence over worship. God would rather see us resolve our differences than receive our offerings!

8. Why is Jesus so concerned that our reconciliation be full and resolved quickly?

9. What types of consequences come to a relationship when reconciliation is delayed or dismissed?

10. Read 1 John 4:20-21. What happens to our relationship with God when we are fighting with others?

Picture a man in church. He is about to express his devotion to the Lord in worship and in his offering. But he has not been enjoying fellowship with his brother. There is disharmony in the relationship. Jesus says the man should leave his offering, be reconciled to his brother, and then return to worship God with a clear conscience and full heart. Is Jesus saying that the only important thing in worship is right relationships with our fellow men? Hardly! He recognizes that our relationship with God is primary, but we always appear before God as those who are related, rightly or wrongly, to our fellow men. What

we are before God involves how we are related to others (cf 1Jn 1:6, 7). And if we are at enmity with others, how can we come into the Lord's presence with clean hands and a pure heart?<sup>3</sup>

As far as I know, this is the only time God tells you to slip out of church early. Apparently, he'd rather have you give your olive branch than your tithe. If you are worshiping and remember that your mom is hacked-off at you for forgetting her birthday, then get off the pew and find a phone. Maybe she'll forgive you; maybe she won't. But at least you can return to your pew with a clean conscience.<sup>4</sup>

(Continued)

11. What are some practical and spiritual ways we are challenged by Jesus to follow the prescription found in verse 25-26?

## Read It | 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

12. What reasons does Paul give when it comes to prohibiting lawsuits with other believers?

13. What will the watching world see if Christians live in disharmony?

14. What happens when unresolved fights and quarrels become commonplace to a church?

15. In what ways have you found victory over the temptation of allowing your anger to get the best of you?

Let's get practical for a moment. **Do you know someone who is angry with you? Is there someone who has offended you? How can you take the initiative in each case to reconcile with that person?** Before attempting to reconcile, take some time to think through your strategy. For example, reconciliation may be better attempted face to face rather than over the phone. You may even want to write out what you will say in advance. Note that there is no way to guarantee how the other person will respond, but you can be certain of God's help as you "make every effort" to be at peace with all men.

16. With whom do you need to pursue reconciliation? Take some time to pray and then go quickly and make right so your worship will not be hindered.

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, The Full Meaning of Moses From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)


<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair: Sermon on the Mount : Banner of Truth

<sup>3</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair: Sermon on the Mount :Banner of Truth

<sup>4</sup> Lucado, M. When God Whispers Your Name. Page 127. Dallas: Word Pub



# week #13



**UPSIDE  
DOWN**

**SMALL  
GROUPS**

Est.  
AD 30

**ACTIONS**

Lustful Intent	Coram Deo	Study
<p>"From James 1:12–15, as well as human history and experience, we may rightly infer that lust is the first step toward sexual sin..."</p>	<p>"We must also regularly return to the Bible's teaching on sexuality so that we can resist the lies about lust and sex that our culture loves to tell us every day."</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (vv. 27–28). Matthew 5:27–30

## Lustful Intent

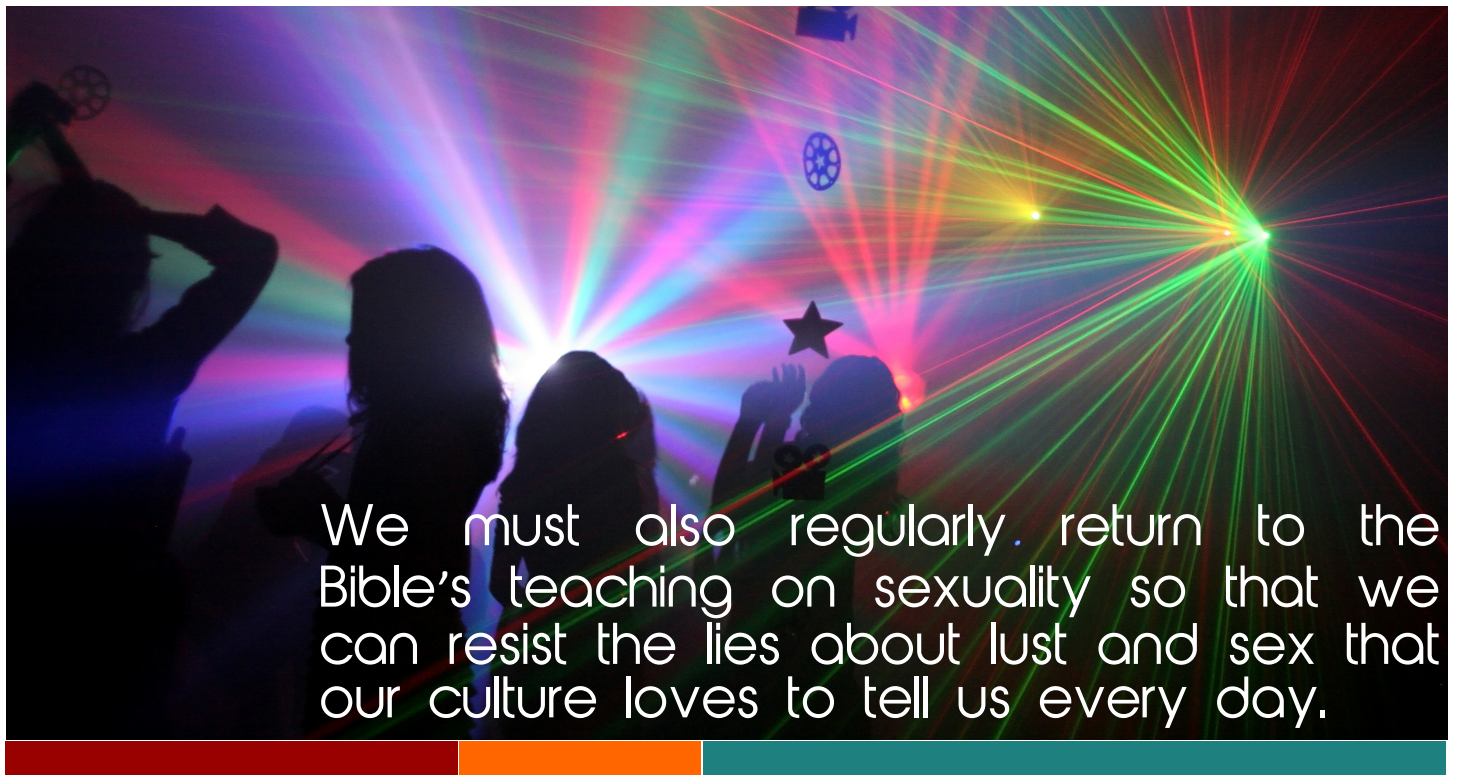
Christ's exposition of the seventh commandment in Matthew 5:27–30 indicates how the biblical teaching on adultery goes contrary to much of what our society wants to tell us about sex. Most people, at least in our culture, are unlikely to have consummated an extramarital affair. Single people are not even capable of committing adultery in the narrow sense of an affair unless they are sleeping with a married person. However, few, if any, could ever say that they have never looked at another person with lust in their

hearts. We live in a pornographic society that relishes and encourages all manner of illicit sexual activity.

In demonstrating that the seventh commandment was given also to prohibit lust, Jesus is not somehow saying that an unconsummated lustful intent is sinful to the same degree as an actual extramarital affair (though both sins merit punishment). The latter is a more blatant violation of the statute against adultery, and it has greater consequences in the form of divorce and the loss of one's reputation as a trustworthy person. Nevertheless, all extramarital affairs

start in the heart with lustful desires that are nurtured and indulged instead of fought through repentance and resistance. **From James 1:12–15, as well as human history and experience, we may rightly infer that lust is the first step toward sexual sin, and it falls under the scope of transgressions forbidden by the seventh commandment.**

Of course, we must actually know what lust is if we are to resist it. Lust is not sexual desire in and of itself, for sexual desire is part of God's good creation and the consummation of it is entirely lawful within marriage



We must also regularly return to the Bible's teaching on sexuality so that we can resist the lies about lust and sex that our culture loves to tell us every day.

(Gen. 2:23–24). Moreover, lust is not the mere recognition of physical attractiveness. The Lord made us to recognize beauty, and Scripture itself speaks, without breaking God's law, of the beauty and handsomeness of some of the people it describes (Gen. 29:17; 1 Sam. 16:12; 25:3). Instead, lust may be defined as the desire to engage in or enjoy illicit sexual activity. Given this definition, a whole host of things qualify as lust, including the viewing of pornography, adulterous fantasies, homosexual behavior, incest, sexual abuse, rape, bestiality, and other perversions. In prohibiting lust, our Creator prohibits all of these things.

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Positively, question and answer 109 of the Heidelberg Catechism note, the seventh commandment encourages the maintenance and promotion of chastity in marriage and singleness. We should be doing all that we can to prevent a

climate in the church and in our homes that may make adultery easy to commit and hide. We must also regularly return to the Bible's teaching on sexuality so that we can resist the lies about lust and sex that our culture loves to tell us every day<sup>1</sup>.

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#### Passages for Further Study

Proverbs 11:6  
 Ezekiel 23  
 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8  
 2 Peter 2:4-10a

# Open It!

1) Describe a time in your childhood when you desired a certain toy. What was the toy? Did you receive it? What was your response?

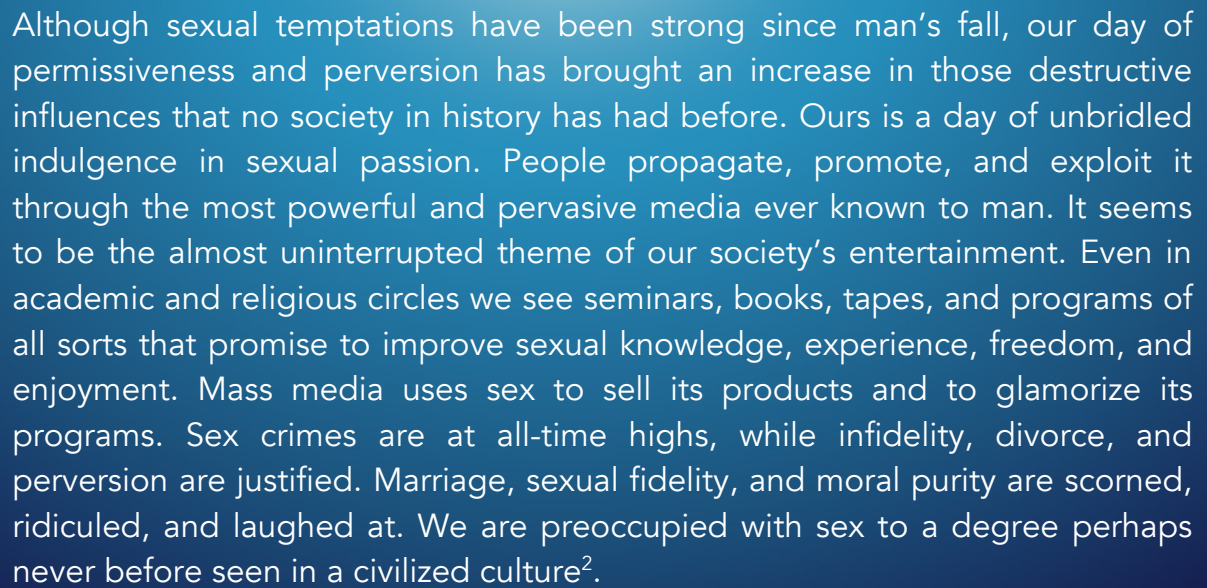


## Read It | Matthew 5:27-30

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

## Explore It

1. According to verse 27 from what activity are we to refrain?
2. How does Jesus expand the prohibition of verse 27?
3. What are we to do when a member of our body causes us to sin?
4. What happens to us when we fail to deal with sin altogether?



Although sexual temptations have been strong since man's fall, our day of permissiveness and perversion has brought an increase in those destructive influences that no society in history has had before. Ours is a day of unbridled indulgence in sexual passion. People propagate, promote, and exploit it through the most powerful and pervasive media ever known to man. It seems to be the almost uninterrupted theme of our society's entertainment. Even in academic and religious circles we see seminars, books, tapes, and programs of all sorts that promise to improve sexual knowledge, experience, freedom, and enjoyment. Mass media uses sex to sell its products and to glamorize its programs. Sex crimes are at all-time highs, while infidelity, divorce, and perversion are justified. Marriage, sexual fidelity, and moral purity are scorned, ridiculed, and laughed at. We are preoccupied with sex to a degree perhaps never before seen in a civilized culture<sup>2</sup>.

## Get It

1. What is it about sex that makes it so easy to sell anything?
2. What is it about sex that is such a powerful tool for intimacy?
3. What is the world's view of sex and its place within our lives?

Read the following passages. What do each of them say about the biblical view of sex within marriage?

- Song of Solomon 5:10-16; 7:1-10
- Proverbs 5:15-20
- 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

(Continued)



The “look” that Jesus mentioned was not a casual glance, but a constant stare with the purpose of lusting. It is possible for a man to glance at a beautiful woman and know that she is beautiful, but not lust after her. The man Jesus described looked at the woman for the purpose of feeding his inner sensual appetites as a substitute for the act<sup>3</sup>.

Calvin Miller said that “lust has been compared to a cannibal committing suicide by nibbling on himself” How have you seen lust cause hurt and pain in the lives of people?

4. Why is lust, even when kept secret, destructive to the lives of people?
5. Many temptations including lust seem to confront us through our eyes. What can we do to protect our eyes from allowing these temptations to take hold of our lives?
6. How would the Pharisees’ interpretation of this command in verse 27 have been lived out? Why would their view of purity not have gone far enough?

While Jesus addresses lust from a male perspective it is easy to see that lust is not just a male problem. While the practice of lusting is not determined by gender, the ways that we are affected or tempted by lust can be very gender specific. Divide your group according to your gender and discuss your answers to the following questions.

7. Some Christians have mistakenly taken verses 29-30 to be a literal command and have maimed themselves in order to fight against lust. Why is this a foolish thing to do? How are believers to apply this warning to one’s life?



The person whom Jesus here condemns is the one who deliberately uses the eyes to stimulate their desires; the one who finds a strange delight in things which waken the desire for the forbidden thing. To the pure all things are pure. But the one whose heart is defiled can look at any scene and find something in it to titillate and excite the wrong desire<sup>4</sup>.

8. Read Job 31:1. In what practical ways can we “covenant” so as to not look lustfully towards others?

9. While the world seems to have no trouble talking openly about sexual things, why is it so hard to speak about this subject with other Christians?

10. How does our world tempt men/women to pursue lust?

11. In what ways have you struggled with some of these temptations?

12. Have you ever been hurt by or hurt someone else because of sexual behavior?

13. How are we called to find victory over the issue of lust?

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, Lustful Intent, [www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals)


<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, J: Matthew 1-7 Chicago: Moody Press

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor

<sup>4</sup> Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series. The Westminster Press

# week

# #14



SMALL GROUPS

UPSIDE DOWN

ACTIONS

Est. AD 30

Divorce & Adultery	Coram Deo	Study
<p>"...to be poor in spirit, is to have humble thoughts of ourselves, of what we are, and have, and do".</p>	<p>"The greatest glory of heaven is not that we will be free of pain, as wonderful as that will be. Instead, [it's] the ability to enjoy direct, face-to-face communion with God."</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Read It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“Everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (v. 32). Matthew 5:31–32

## Divorce & Adultery

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, tells us that God wants not only right actions, but also a pure heart (Matt. 5:8). Refraining from murder and adultery does not exhaust those particular commandments; Exodus 20:13–14 also forbids lust and unjust anger (Matt. 5:21–30). This is in line with the Old Testament, which says the Law must be followed in heart and in deed (Deut. 6:6; Ps. 37:31).

Jesus’ corrections of the Pharisaic traditions are not an exposition of the Law that covers every single possible situation. For example, Christ says “everyone who is angry

with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matt. 5:22), but He does not mean that anger is always evil, as He Himself will get angry (21:12–13) without sinning (1 Peter 2:22). Ungodly anger is what the injunction against murder forbids. We can (rarely) be righteously angry and yet not sin (Eph. 4:26).

This point helps us understand today’s passage. Jesus does not give every possible ground for divorce when He allows it for “sexual immorality” (Matt. 5:31–32); desertion by an unbelieving spouse also makes divorce permissible (1 Cor. 7:12–16).

Moreover, the Greek word for “sexual immorality” in today’s passage (*porneia*) covers all types of sexual misconduct, implying that some sexual sins besides extramarital affairs can be legitimate grounds for divorce. Yet Jesus is not allowing divorce for any instance of lust or sexual indiscretion. Otherwise, every lewd thought is just cause for divorce. Since no sinner has been fully pure in this area, every marriage would then be dissolvable, which clearly violates our Lord’s high view of holy matrimony (Matt. 19:1–12).

As with other complicated problems





“...the bond of marriage is too sacred to be dissolved at the will...of men.”

in the Christian life, we go to our elders to see if a particular form of *porneia* is legal grounds for divorce. God gives us the church to help us work through complex issues (Acts 15:1–35). Each marriage is different, and choosing the right course of action can be hard, but wise church leaders are to apply Scripture properly and give sound direction. Divorce is often easier than working through marital problems and is appealing to our fallen nature. We must recognize this lest we adopt the world’s practice of sanctioning divorces for reasons other than those God has given.

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

John Calvin reminds us that “the bond of marriage is

too sacred to be dissolved at the will, or rather at the licentious pleasure, of men.”<sup>1</sup> Many issues can drive spouses to despair and contemplate an unbiblical divorce. That is why we must seek help for our marital troubles at the first sign of trouble. If you need counseling, contact your flock elder to seek counseling as well.

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#### Passages for Further Study

Malachi 2:10-16

Luke 16:18

# Open It!

1) Describe a time when you lost something of great value. What did you lose and how did you lose it? To what lengths did you go to find it? Were you successful? How did you feel as a result?



2) Who was your best friend growing up? What made that person so special? Are you still friends today? Why or why not?

There is no time in history when the marriage bond stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Christianity first came into this world. At that time the world was in danger of witnessing the almost total break-up of marriage and the collapse of the home... Theoretically no nation ever had a higher ideal of marriage than the Jews had. Marriage was a sacred duty which a man was bound to undertake....Ideally the Jews abhorred divorce. The voice of God had said, "I hate divorce" Malachi 2:16

William Barclay  
on the state of  
marriage at  
the time of  
Jesus

## Read It | Matthew 5:31-32

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

### Get It

In order to have a biblical understanding of marriage and divorce we must examine what the bible says on the subject. Take some time to read the passages given and answer the following questions:

1. **Read Genesis 2:18-25.** What does this passage say about God's original intention and plans for marriage?
2. **Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4.** What does this passage tell us about when, why and how a divorce is to take place?
3. **Read Malachi 2:13-16.** What words of condemnation does God give the people regarding their marriages and what are His feelings regarding divorce?
4. **Read Matthew 19:3-9.** In what way did Jesus answer the question about why God had put laws in the Old Testament that allowed divorce?
5. **Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.** What guidelines does Paul give people who find themselves in a difficult marriage?
6. After reading the previous passages what do you see as the biblical teaching on divorce? Does the Bible ever permit divorced people to be remarried? (*Do your best to stay true to what scripture actually says and not on your feelings or personal thoughts.*)

## The purpose of the law . . .

This law was supposed to deter divorce rather than encourage it since it required a “writing of divorcement” executed in public. The document granted the woman the right to remarry without civil or religious sanction.



# THE LAW OF MOSES

Divorce could not be done privately. The acceptable reason for granting divorce was “some uncleanness.” Specific types of “uncleanness” had their own penalties. Adultery carried the death penalty by stoning. Although the Law of Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife, the wife was not allowed to divorce her husband for any reason at all. Legally the wife was bound to her husband as long as they both lived or until he divorced her. If the woman was given a certificate of divorce, she was eligible to remarry any man except a priest (Lev. 21:7, 14; Ezek. 44:22). However, remarriage defiled her in respect to her first husband — i.e.: he could not marry her again, because she had in effect “committed adultery” against him (cf. Matt. 5:32). In Jesus’ day, there was much confusion about the grounds for divorce. The rabbis could not agree on what constituted the “uncleanness” of Deuteronomy 24:1. There were two opinions. Those following Rabbi Shammai felt adultery was the only grounds for divorce. Those who followed Rabbi Hillel accepted a number of reasons for divorce, including such things as poor cooking.<sup>2</sup>

7. While it seems that divorce had become commonplace in Jesus’ time, the Law established that a certificate was needed to validate a divorce. What was the purpose for such a law and how might this law have helped in stemming the tide of rampant divorce of the day?

So what is the problem with what the scribes and Pharisees had taught? The problem is that they were not good inductive Bible students and because of inadequate **observation** and reliance on the “commentaries” (what the rabbis had taught as “tradition”), they arrived at an inaccurate **interpretation** of the Law and consequently, and most importantly, they prescribed inappropriate **application** based on their willfully inept analysis of the OT Scriptures. Their misapplication of the Law had led to a liberal attitude toward divorce (just as it had with murder, adultery, vows, retaliation and love) and so once again Jesus calls His listeners, and we the readers of His sermon, to allegiance to a higher standard, a righteousness that far surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees and which shines like a beacon of supernatural light that points men to a great and mighty supernatural “force” — the Heavenly Father.

8. When Jesus spoke regarding the issue of divorce what did He focus on? What was the focus of the Pharisees?

**(Continued)**

9. Jesus' teaching in our text this week makes it clear that He stood against divorce. Why do you think He allows for an exception for sexual immorality?
10. What would be the world's response if they heard Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce today? Does Jesus' teaching make you uncomfortable? If so, why?
11. What causes divorces? List the many factors that play a part in the breaking of marriages?
12. Why is it that divorce has once again become so commonplace? What societal influences have eroded the sanctity of marriage?

### A study by the Barna Research Group in Ventura, California says...



Born-again Christians are more likely to go through a marital split than are non-Christians. Using statistics drawn from a nationwide survey of nearly 4,000 adults, the Barna data show that 11% of the adult population is currently divorced but that 25% of all adults have experienced at least one divorce during their lifetime.

Among born-again Christians, 27% are currently or have previously been divorced, compared with 24% among adults who are not born-again. Surprisingly, the Barna report said, the Christian group whose adherents have the highest likelihood of getting divorced are Baptists. It said the only groups to surpass Baptists were Christians associated with non-denominational Protestant churches.

"Of the nation's major Christian groups, Catholics and Lutherans have the lowest percentage of divorced individuals — 21%. People who attend mainline Protestant churches, overall, experience divorce at the national average of 25%."



(Continued)

13. How has divorce affected you? What have you learned from these experiences?
  
14. Why do you think Christians find themselves just as susceptible to the perils of divorce?
  
15. What can we do to help people keep their marriages fresh and vibrant? In what ways can we minister to those whose marriages are growing cold and coming apart?
  
16. In what practical ways can we offer grace and love to those who have suffered divorce in their past?
  
17. How are we to balance between upholding the importance of marriage and a heart of grace and mercy to those who find themselves amidst a divorce?
  
18. Go back to the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12. How can these kingdom attitudes help us be God-honoring — whether in our own marriage or in serving those who struggle in their marriage or have experienced the great pain of divorce?



# PRAY AS A GROUP FOR...

**1** That the marriages within our church would continue to find their strength in Christ's love and forgiveness.

**2** That the church would be a place where people struggling with broken marriages can find help in the reconciliation of spouses.

**3** That the church might be Christ's hands and feet to people who have endured divorce and might be led to forgiveness and grace in Christ and restoration to a right fellowship with Him and others.

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Divorce and Adultery From Ligonier Ministries*, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Packer, J., Tenney, M. C., & White, W. Nelson's *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson

# week

# #15



SMALL GROUPS

UPSIDE DOWN

ACTIONS

Est. AD 30

Oaths	Coram Deo	Study
<p>"People might think they can get out of their obligations because they did not swear an oath..."</p>	<p>Jesus' teaching leads us to conclude that it is better not to make a vow than to swear an oath that we have no intention of keeping.</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

"I say to you, 'Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King'" (vv. 34–35). Matthew 5:33–37

## Jesus' Teaching on Oaths

Oaths and vows are commended in Scripture, but not every oath or vow is legitimate. Certainly, a vow to commit a sin must not be kept, for we are never to break God's law. David realized this when Abigail's actions kept him from his vow to kill Nabal (1 Sam. 25). Moreover, no one should swear an oath indiscriminately or frivolously. The Westminster Confession of Faith says oaths are appropriate only in "matters of weight and moment" (22.2); this reflects a biblical pattern wherein oaths are commonly associated with covenants (Gen. 26:3; Ps. 132:11). We should make vows only in matters of great

and lasting consequence, such as marriages or court proceedings.

Understanding common first-century Jewish practices helps us see what our Savior was getting at in His teaching on oaths and vows. To keep people from breaking the law's rules regarding our promises (Num. 30:1–2), Jewish teachers and leaders invented a system by which they could determine whether a vow had to be kept. Extrabiblical literature indicates that many rabbis did not consider it a sin to break a vow if it was not made explicitly in the name of God. Oaths made in the name of

heaven or even the gold of the temple were not regarded as ultimately binding. As we might expect from sinners, this led to people making oaths by persons or objects other than God to give them an out in case they did not keep their word.

In Matthew 5:33–37, Jesus points out the foolishness of this teaching by reminding His audience of God's omnipresence. **People might think they can get out of their obligations because they did not swear an oath in the name of the Lord, but the Creator is present with those things by which people might swear**, and He



## Coram Deo

Before the face of God

Jesus' teaching leads us to conclude that it is better not to make a vow than to swear an oath that we have no intention of keeping. It also reinforces the point that oaths and vows should not be made on just any occasion, but they should be reserved only for occasions of great importance and lasting significance. In other cases, we should let our yes be yes and our no be no. But in all circumstances, we must strive to keep our word.

(Continued)

is the sovereign Creator of all. All things exist by His authority, so to swear an oath at all is to finally swear an oath in His name. A mere change of words does not give one a “get-out-of-oaths-free” card.

# Open It!

- 1) Discuss a time during your childhood that you told a lie. What was it and why did you tell it? Were you ever found out?
- 2) What are some daily commitments that people around you rely on you to keep?

"Today there is an urgent truth shortage! There was a time when western culture was distinguished from other cultures by at least a conventional outward sense of obligation to tell the truth. But now there is a pervasive indifference to truth-telling, and this has not only infected day-to-day conversation but the most solemn pledges of life. Perjury under solemn oath is epidemic. The sacred vows of marriage are broken almost as often as repeated. God's name is invoked by blatant liars who purport to be witnesses to the truth."

## Read It | Matthew 5:33-37

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

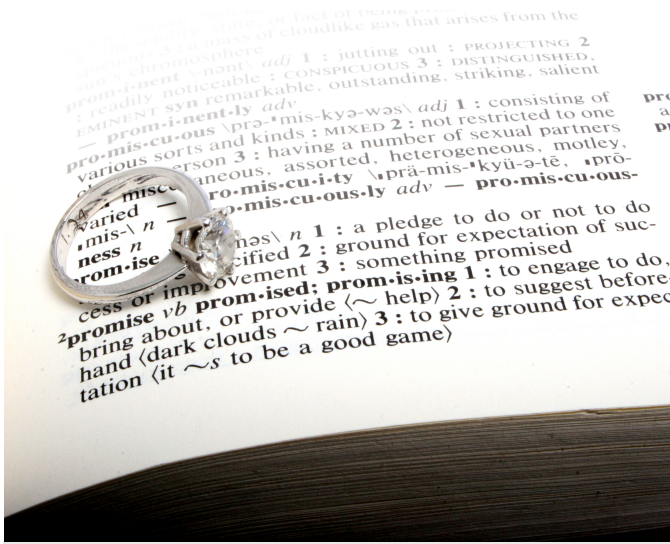
## Explore It

3. What does Jesus want of His followers in verse 33?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What three things did Jesus tell us not to swear by?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What should our answers be instead of swearing falsely?

(Quote Continued)

There is, indeed, a crisis, but we must not make the mistake of thinking it occurs only out there because it happens among us too. It is difficult to always tell the truth. The great preacher and writer George Macdonald wrote to his son on December 6, 1878, "I always try - I think I do - to be truthful. All the same I tell a great many lies." I identify with that. I am speaking to someone and suddenly realize that what I am saying is not the truth. Perhaps you have experienced the same. The difficulty comes from the combination of my own deceitful nature and the pervasive deceptiveness of the surrounding culture<sup>2</sup>.

## Get It



6. Jesus has just spoken of the importance to staying committed to our marriage commitments. How does the issue of oaths intersect with that of marriage and divorce?
7. Read Proverbs 20:25. How can rash or casual oaths and vows become a snare to the one who makes them?

## Charles Ryrie helps us understand how the scribes and Pharisees were perverting the Old Testament passages on vows noting that...

*Oaths taken in the name of the Lord were binding, and perjury was strongly condemned in the law (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Deut. 19:16, 17, 18, 19). Every oath contained an affirmation or promise and an appeal to God as the omniscient punisher of falsehoods, which made the oath binding. Thus we find phrases like "as the Lord lives" (1Sam. 14:39). The emphasis on the sanctity of oaths led to the feeling that ordinary phrasing need not be truthful or binding<sup>3</sup>.*

In other words, when the scribes and Pharisees made an oath in the name of the LORD, that oath must be kept. On the other hand if one made an oath without expressly using the LORD's name (this is the "catch", the "fine print" so to speak) this oath was considered to be of lesser significance and did not demand one to be quite so conscientious about keeping it. And so the practice of making oaths "by heaven", "by earth", "by Jerusalem", "by the Temple", etc. had come into vogue. Later in Matthew, Jesus again castigates the scribes and Pharisees for their abuse of oaths declaring,

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.... And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.'" (Mt 23:16,18)

In this example of manipulation of truth by the scribes and Pharisees, they (illogically) reasoned that swearing by the temple, did not obligate one to fulfill their vow, but swearing by the gold of the temple, obligated them to fulfill the vow. Similarly, they hypocritically reasoned that swearing by the gift on the altar was binding, but swearing by the empty altar was not. What they did was value gold above God since the temple was the house of God.



(Continued)



Making a vow was used to make an impression, as if they were “talking big” and making enormous promises. If the affirmation which one made was a lie or if the promise was never even meant to be kept, that did not disturb their conscience as long as they had not sworn the oath “to the LORD.”

6. After reading this, why may Jesus have spoken against oaths and vows?

7. What is the believer to do with Jesus’ words when it comes to vows during a wedding ceremony or an oath in judicial proceedings? What are some places where oaths and vows are necessary?

## What does the Mishna say?

The Mishna devotes one whole section called Shebuoth (“Oaths”) to an elaborate discussion of when oaths are binding and when they are not. The swearing of oaths had degenerated into a system of rules as to when you could lie and when you could not. The results were incredible. There was an ongoing epidemic of frivolous swearing, and oaths were continually mingled with everyday speech: “By your life,” “by my beard,” “may I never see the comfort of Israel if . . .” There was an inevitable trivialization of everyday language and integrity. It became common practice to convince another that you were telling the truth

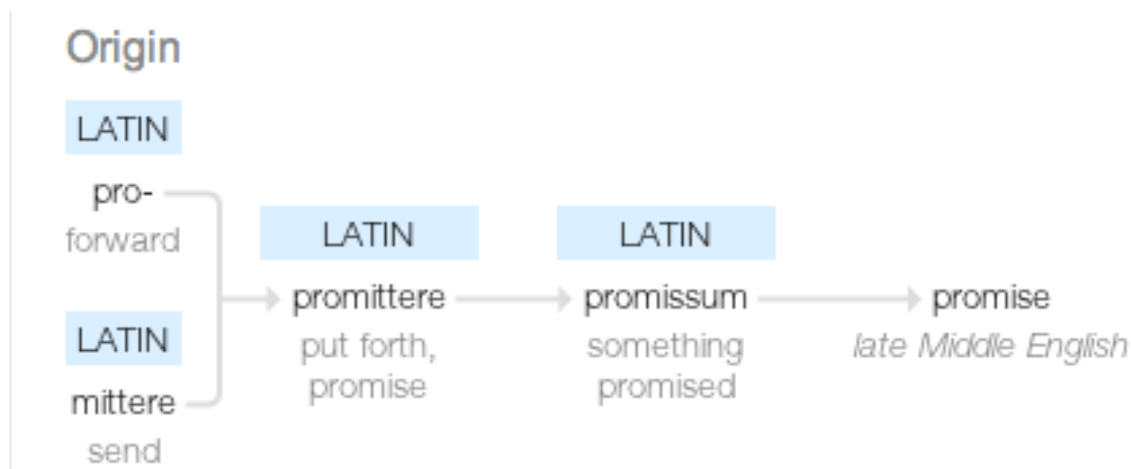
(while lying) by bringing some person or eminent object into reference. The deception was very subtle....One rabbi taught that if one swore by Jerusalem one was not bound, but if one swore toward Jerusalem, it was binding - evidently because that in some way implied the Divine Name. All of this produced in its adherents a profound spiritual schizophrenia: “I’m not telling the truth, but I’m really not lying.” Their use of oaths was like children saying, “I have my fingers crossed, so I don’t have to tell the truth.”<sup>4</sup>



(Continued)

8. In what ways are vows, oaths and commitments (whether oral or written) good and profitable to both the giver and receiver?
9. God made a series of vows and oaths throughout the Old Testament with covenants. How might our lives as Christians be different if God didn't stand by His commitments and covenants?
10. After hearing the words of Jesus in regard to oaths, what should we be concerned about when we make a commitment?
11. Have you ever been less than honest? Is there ever a time that we can be dishonest for the sake of something good? Explain your answer.
12. Whether by politicians or even our spouses, we live in a society that is filled with broken promises. Why are we so prone to breaking our word to others?
13. What types of commitments are hardest for you to keep? Why?
14. Why are we so resistant to committing to things?

(Continued)



15. Can those around you characterize you as a person of your word, no matter how difficult it is to keep?
  
16. What are we called to do when we fail to keep our word and commitments to others? What does reconciliation and restitution look like for a broken commitment?
  
17. In verse 37 we are called to let our "yes be yes and no be no" What does it look like for us when it comes to our everyday life?


<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, Jesus' Teaching on Oaths. *From Ligonier Ministries*, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, R. K. Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom. Crossway Books

<sup>3</sup> The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation: 1995. Moody Publishers

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, R. K. Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom. Crossway Books)

# week #16



SMALL GROUPS

UPSIDE DOWN

ACTIONS

Est AD 30

Retaliation and The Kingdom	Coram Deo	Study
<p>“Eye-for-an-eye justice was given to the courts in Israel to ensure that victims received adequate restitution.”</p>	<p>“We are to endure insults and offenses meekly, doing extra even for those who do not deserve it.”</p>	<p>Open It Explore It</p>

“I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (v. 39). Matthew 5:38–42

## Retaliation and The Kingdom

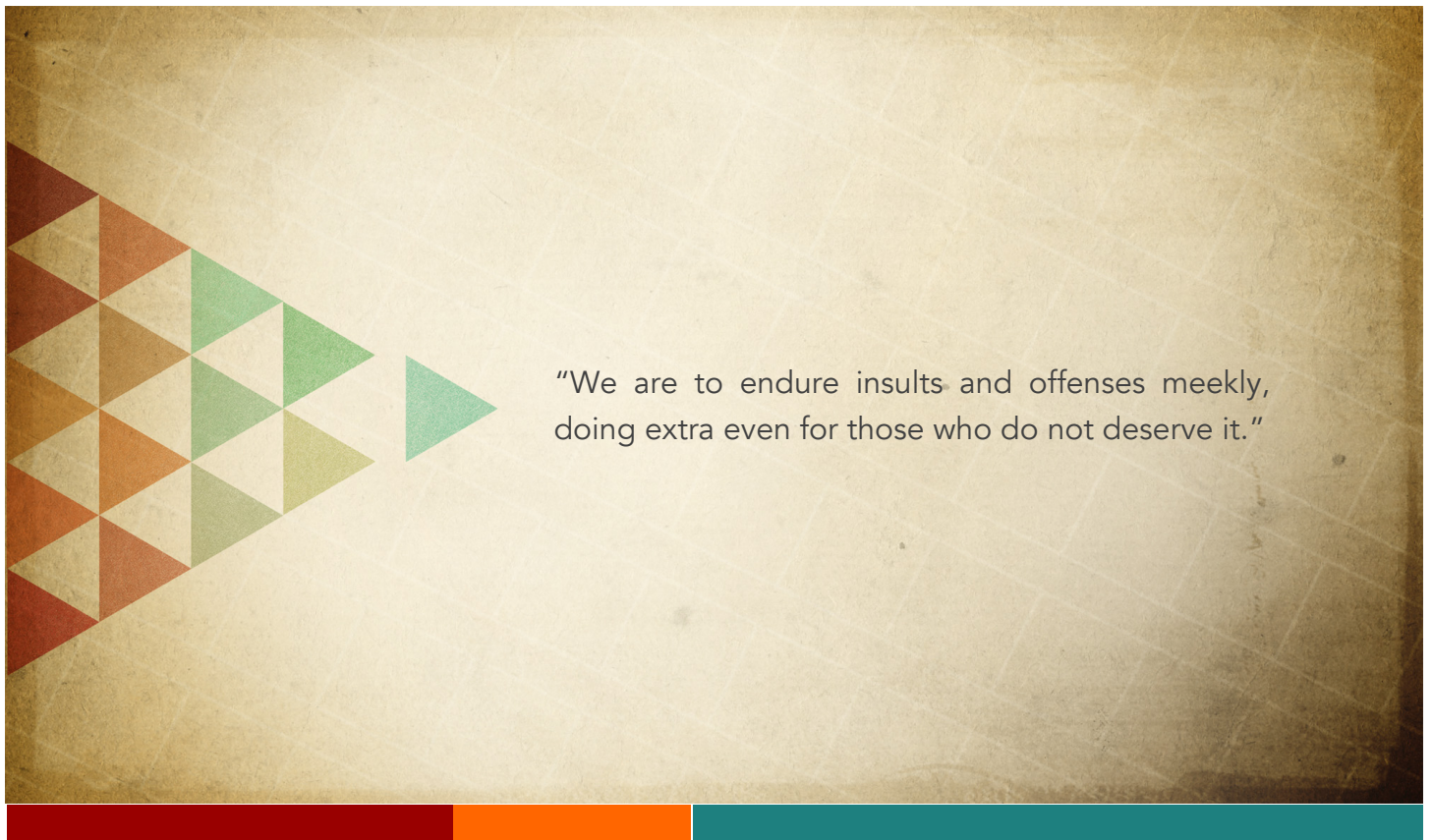
One of the best helps for interpreting the Sermon on the Mount properly is to remember that Jesus’ stipulations deal directly with interpersonal relationships within the covenant community and, secondarily, with those outside the church. It is not as if He has nothing to say to the structures of society, it is just that we err if we treat Christ’s words here as primarily dealing with law courts, warfare, and other broad societal and governmental concerns.

Consider today’s passage in which Jesus discusses the Law’s “eye-for-an-

eye” justice (Matt. 5:38–42; see Ex. 21:23–25). Many assume He is saying that the so-called *lex talionis* is wrong, but such interpretations make Christ one who denies the goodness of God’s law (Rom. 7:7), not the one who fulfills it (Matt. 5:17–20). As God Himself, Jesus knows that eye-for-an-eye justice is wise, instituted to ensure that the punishment fits the crime. Justice in ancient Israel’s tribal system could have easily become endless feuding without this law. Without the *lex talionis*, in ancient times my family might kill you to avenge your breaking of my leg, your family might then kill

my family, and so on. Today, news of young girls being raped or killed as punishment in some Islamic countries for “violating” their family’s “honor” reveals the righteousness of the *lex talionis*.

**Eye-for-an-eye justice was given to the courts in Israel to ensure that victims received adequate restitution. However, the *lex talionis* was never intended to justify retaliation for everyday, personal offenses.** This is what Jesus is talking about in today’s passage. A slap on the “right cheek,” which basically



"We are to endure insults and offenses meekly, doing extra even for those who do not deserve it."

amounts to a personal insult, must not be returned in kind (Matt. 5:39). Believers give up their law-given right to keep their outer cloak (Matt. 5:40; see Ex. 22:26–27), that is, we may not appeal to our legal rights every time we are wronged. The *lex talionis* restrains vengeance to help us cultivate a generous heart that overlooks personal offenses and forgives for the kingdom's sake. In short, Matthew Henry says, "Christians must not be litigious; small injuries must be submitted to, and no notice taken of them; and if the injury is such as requires us to seek reparation, it must be for a good end, and without thought of revenge."

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

The last point of Matthew Henry's quote is important since there are times when seeking reparation may in fact be the best way to love our

neighbor and keep him from sinning further. Such occasions, however, will be few and far between. We are to endure insults and offenses meekly, doing extra even for those who do not deserve it (Matt. 5:41). When someone asks you for a favor, volunteer to go above and beyond their request.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Passages for Further Study

Genesis 34; 49:5–7

Isaiah 34:8

Acts 25:1–12

1 Corinthians 6:1–8

# Open It!

1. What rights and privileges do you most enjoy as an American? What is it about these freedoms that you enjoy most?
2. When have you sought out revenge? What caused you to desire it? What lengths did you take to enact it? How did you feel when it was accomplished?

## Read It | Matthew 5:38-42

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

## Explore It

1. What does Jesus tell us to do when someone slaps us in verse 39?
2. What should our response be when someone takes something from us?
3. According to verse 42 what should we do for those who are in need?

## John MacArthur explains...

"...the rabbinic tradition had perverted lex talionis, an "eye for an eye", which in the Old Testament did not allow an individual to take the law into his own hands and apply it personally. Yet that is exactly what rabbinic tradition had done. Each man was permitted, in effect, to become his own judge, jury, and executioner. God's law was turned to individual license (permit to act, freedom to take a specific course of action), and civil justice was perverted to personal vengeance. Instead of properly acknowledging the law of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth as a limit on punishment, they conveniently used it as a mandate for vengeance-as it has often been wrongly viewed throughout history. What God gave as a restriction on civil courts, Jewish tradition had turned into personal license for revenge. In still another way, the self-centered and self-asserted "righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees had made a shambles of God's holy law.<sup>2</sup>



## Get It

1. In what ways had the Pharisees perverted the law regarding revenge as shared in verse 38?
2. Jesus' words come right from Deuteronomy 19:15-21. After reading this passage what more do we learn about the context of this principle?
3. In what ways did this greater context of the law keep an individual from pursuing personal revenge?
4. In verse 39 we are called not to "resist the one who is evil". The term "resist" meant to set against, oppose or refuse to yield. What does this look like for us today? Are there ever times and places where we must oppose evil people as believers? Is so, when?
5. The New Testament seems to stand in full agreement with Jesus when it comes to the issue of personal retaliation. Read Romans 12:14-21. What correlations can we make from Jesus' words and those of Paul?



# A eye for an eye...

Of the entire Sermon on the Mount, no ideas are more frequently alluded to than the ones that follow: an eye for an eye; turn the other cheek; go the extra mile. They are still colorful expressions in the English language. For some people, they are the essence of Christianity. These statements have been used to explain and justify pacifism, by Christians and by others. But what do they mean? What was the purpose of this law, and the justice that it expressed? Clearly, it was to limit and, if necessary, restrain retaliation. It seems, however, that this law was used as the justification for gaining even limited retaliation and revenge. That was to misunderstand the purpose of the law. Since it was meant to restrain personal vindictiveness and retaliation, the real fulfillment of it would be found in the man who did not seek such revenge... The passage is not really speaking to the question of whether Christians should be involved in legal or military professions. Rather, it is challenging believers to follow their Master's example in personal relationships.<sup>3</sup>

6. What aspects of these commands of Jesus do you find most difficult to accept? Why??
7. What things seem to keep us from following the ways of Jesus when it comes to retaliation?
8. How does a robust view of God's sovereignty help combat against the temptation to seek revenge?

**What does Jesus tell us to do?** *To turn the other cheek pertains more to what we are not to do than what we are to do. Why? When you turn the other cheek, you refuse to avenge the gross insult. You refuse to retaliate. If you lived by the letter of the Law, as the Pharisees taught, what should you do? They would say you should take your revenge and slap "their cheek for your cheek"! Jesus counters their false teaching and says "No, no. You dearly beloved of My Father, you turn your other cheek."*

**How can one do this naturally?** *It is not the natural response! It is a supernatural response representing the work of God's Spirit in the new heart of a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven who is controlled by a gentle, meek spirit that chooses not to respond. Remember meekness is not weakness, but rather power under control. In this example, by all cultural norms of the day (including the "blessing" of the Pharisees), the one slapped had a valid right to respond but was under such control by the Holy Spirit that he chooses not to respond. Such an individual has fully surrendered his or her personal rights to the Lord.*

*In Jesus' day a slap to one's face was considered a gross insult by the Jews, and was among the most demeaning and contemptuous acts one person could inflict on another person. Jesus is not describing a physical attack and telling us to roll over and "play dead". He is describing what was well known in the culture to be a calculated insult. A slap to one's face was not intended to cause physical harm but was intended as a terrible indignity, in which one human created in the image of God is treating another human being as even less than a human! A slave would rather receive a rod or whip across the back than a slap from their master's hand!*

9. What makes it so difficult to turn the other cheek? When we go the extra mile and turn the other cheek, what is achieved?

In order that we might pursue relationships over our rights, Jesus wants us to release our rights. His message seems to follow a pattern of...

Putting others over:

Your personal dignity (verse 39)

Your comforts (verse 40)

Your private lifestyle (verse 41)

Your exclusive ownership of things (verse 42)

10. Which of these do you find yourself tempted to pursue in spite of the impact it may have on others?
11. How are we called to live out these commands without having others take advantage of our kindness or enabling their evildoing?
12. When you are wronged do you suffer in silence or are you quick to seek revenge?
13. How can we help one another to not seek revenge when we are hurt by others?
14. How does the example of Jesus in 1 Peter 2:21-23 help us to properly deal with our desire to right the wrongs in our lives?
15. What practical steps can you take this week to pursue reconciliation rather than retaliation and revenge?


<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Revenge From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)*

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, J:Matthew 1-7 Macarthur New Testament Commentary Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>3</sup> Davi Ferguson, Sinclair: Sermon on the Mount :Banner of Truth.

# week

# #17



**UPSIDE DOWN**

**SMALL GROUPS**

Est. AD 30

**ACTIONS**

Loving Your Enemies	Coram Deo	Study
<p>"...love 'is not something primarily that happens to us. Love, rather, is a duty, a requirement..."</p>	<p>"Loving the sinner does not mean we approve of wickedness. It means we pray for our enemies and long for their conversion, not their eternal condemnation."</p>	<p>Open It</p> <p>Explore It</p> <p>Get It</p>

“Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (vv. 35-36) Luke 6:27–36

## Loving Your Enemies

Today we discuss one of our Savior's most radical demands of us in this area. Jesus' command in today's passage to love our enemies (Luke 6:27) is nearly impossible to practice. Anyone can love those who love them (v. 33), but men rarely love their foes. Such individuals must be extraordinarily patient and kind; in fact, their characters must mirror God's nature (vv. 35–36). This is only possible for those who walk in the Spirit because our flesh seeks revenge on those who do us ill.

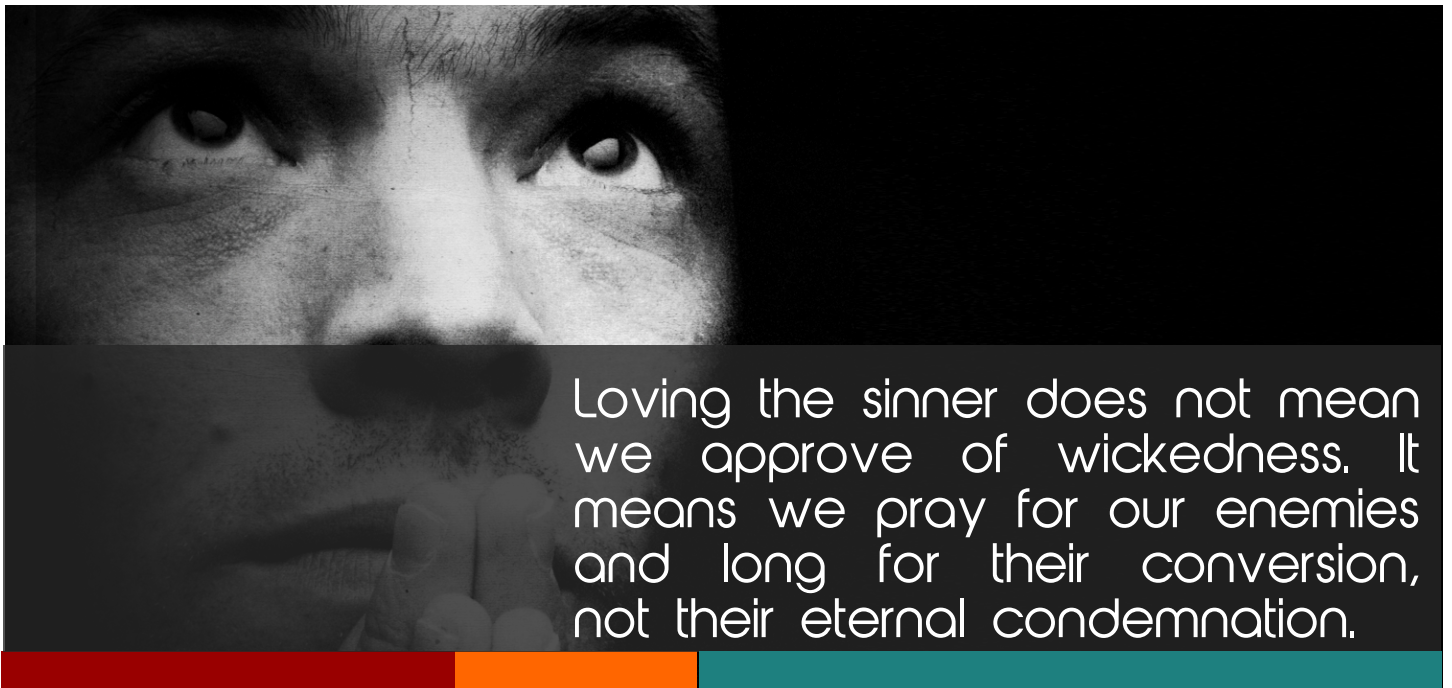
Christ's call for us to love our enemies is not naïve. We are not to read one portion of Scripture in

isolation from another. Consequently, what Jesus demands here does not contradict texts regarding punishment for criminals and self-defense (Ex. 22:1–4). Jesus exhorts us to be as “wise as serpents” when we deal with others (Matt. 10:16). Seeking retribution against those who oppress the weak and defenseless is not unloving. Sometimes, the only way we can love our enemies is to put them in a place (such as prison) where they will be hindered from doing more damage and incurring greater consequences for their sins.

Such situations are, of course, rare for us. More often, we face individuals who insult us with words (this is what

Jesus means in Luke 6:29) or take advantage of us in relatively minor ways (v. 30). We must not seek vengeance upon such people (v. 35). **Of course it is hard for us to feel love toward an enemy, but Christian love “is not something primarily that happens to us. Love, rather, is a duty, a requirement. Love has more to do with activity than it has to do with feeling”** (R.C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: Luke*, p. 115).

This involves forgiving those who do not deserve our pardon. We imitate our Father in this, but not because He forgives those who deny Christ like He commands us to do. Our imitation lies in our willingness to forgive the



(Continued)

undeserving, just as He also showed His willingness to do the same when He sent Jesus into the world to save His people (John 3:16; 6:40).

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

The old saying “love the sinner, hate the sin” is true insofar as it reflects our abilities. Our remaining sin makes it impossible for our hatred of the wicked and the violent to be pure and holy like God’s (Ps. 11:5). Thus, we are unable to execute perfect punishment on evil men. Loving the sinner does not mean we approve of wickedness. It means we pray for our enemies and long for their conversion, not their eternal condemnation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Passages for Further Study

Exodus 23:4–5

Deuteronomy 32:39–42

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Hebrews 10:30–31

## Open It!

1. When you hear the word “villain” what movie character comes to mind? What makes that character so evil or sinister?
2. Who in your past have you considered an enemy? What did they do that caused you to classify them as an enemy?

## Read It | Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

### Explore It

1. In verse 43, what did the Pharisees prescribe as a valid approach to relationships?
2. What was Jesus' prescription instead? (v. 44)
3. In verse 45, what does God do for all people — whether they love Him or not?
4. What types of activities does Luke include from Jesus' teaching that Matthew omits?

### Get It

1. What characterizes someone you would consider to be an enemy?

It's easy to be kind and good  
To those who show us love,  
But loving those who won't respond  
Takes grace from God above. --Sper

2. Take time to write down some things you give or share with people whom you love most. Are these things that you withhold from those you don't love? Why or Why not?

## This quality of love is not just a feeling...

*This quality of love is not just a feeling but ultimately can be known only by the actions it prompts in the one who displays agape love. For example, God gives the supreme example of this love in the sending of His only Son to die for undeserving sinners. Obviously then, agape love is not the love of complacency nor is it a love that is drawn out by some excellencies in its recipients (e.g. as shown in Ro 5:8). This type of love was perfectly present in and modeled by Jesus when He lived among men.*

*From these brief notes it is clear that to **love your neighbor** (whether they are "lovable" or not) requires a self-denial. In other words agape is a selfless love that thinks of others before it thinks of self. It follows that the only way one can truly love...another (with this quality of love) is by divine enablement, which Paul explains is the fruit of His Spirit in Gal 5:22.*

3. In what specific ways has God shown His love toward us "while we were still sinners" and His enemies.
4. Read Exodus 23:4-5. To whom are we to show common courtesy? How might we apply these verses in our day and age?

*Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumes that most, if not all, of us have enemies. The words of Jesus seem to speak of the mercy and love we are to show even the vilest of sinners. Yet, throughout the history of Israel, God commanded His people to enter the Promised Land and destroy their enemies.*



5. What is the difference between enemies on a battlefield and personal enemies we encounter each day? When is it okay to take up arms in order to war against our enemies?
6. How might Jesus' words impact our country's foreign policy with both friends and enemies?
7. Read Proverbs 25: 21-22. What does Solomon advise us to do for our enemies? What results from loving an enemy with acts of kindness.
8. How do we justify our hatred for others? In what ways do we passively show hatred toward others?
9. When it comes to our enemies, will following these commands from Jesus allow people to "walk all over us" and cause "spineless Christianity"? Explain your answer.

G.K. Chesteron says...

"The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people."



10. In what ways did Jesus and Stephen love their enemies? What can we learn from their example?

Jesus: Luke 23:32-34

Stephen: 7:54-60

11. Why is forgiveness so critical to our ability to love our neighbors?

12. When have you seen someone live out Jesus' word regarding our enemies? What did they do and what was the result?

13. Jesus teaches us to love our enemies with our words, actions and prayers. Which of these is most difficult for you to do? Why?

14. Since loving your enemies can be so challenging, what can you do to begin to change your perspective toward others?

15. Looking back at the Beatitudes, which kingdom attitude is missing in your life when it comes to your enemies?

16. What action steps can we take this week in order to live out these truths?



<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, Loving Your Enemy From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

# week #18



SMALL  
GROUPS

UPSIDE  
DOWN

ACTIONS

Giving with Discretion	Coram Deo	Study
<p>"The world pursues the accolades of men, but God's people are not to do the same. In fact, if we practice righteousness for the accolades of other people, Jesus tells us we have no reward from our Father in heaven."</p>	<p>"As you give your money to the poor, ask yourself if you desire the praise of men more than God's commendation."</p>	<p>Open It Explore It Get It</p>

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (v. 1). Matthew 6:1-4

## Giving with Discretion

Society is apt to take notice whenever the wealthy establish a foundation for the sake of charitable giving. Such persons are lauded for their generosity and good work in giving to those in need. More often than not, these people seek this publicity, wanting us to know how open-handed they truly are.

The world pursues the accolades of men, but God's people are not to do the same. In fact, if we practice righteousness for the accolades of other people, Jesus tells us we have no reward from

our Father in heaven (Matt. 6:1).

He applies this general principle to the three chief acts of Jewish piety — almsgiving, prayer, and fasting — beginning in today's passage with giving to the poor.

Our Savior warns us against sounding the trumpet when we give. In His own context He may be referring to the priestly blowing of the *shofar* (a ram's horn trumpet) whenever there is a great need in the community. When this happened in His day, there was often an ostentatious display of men closing up shop and running toward the temple to be the first ones seen

responding to the call. Trumpet-shaped collection boxes where money could be deposited to help the poor were present at the temple in the first century a.d., and these may also be the basis for Christ's analogy in verses 2–4. Coins thrown into these boxes might make a loud noise, announcing that a great gift has been given. In any case, our Lord's point is quite clear: Do not give in order to receive praise from men.

As Matthew Henry notes in his commentary, Jesus does not teach that it is always "unlawful to give alms when men see us." Sometimes the



only way we can help others is in front of other people. In keeping with the perfect righteousness Jesus has described in Matthew 5, John Chrysostom reminds us that Christ “is not focusing simply on the outward act done but the inward intent” (*Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 19.2). Just as under the old covenant (Deut. 15:11), Jesus assumes we will give to the poor, and this must be done in hopes for a reward from God, not from others (Matt. 6:4b). Let us do all we can to give our alms, but with the aim of caring so little for the praise of men that we are ourselves scarcely aware of our own generosity.

### Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Augustine says, “The praise of others need not even be sought by one who acts rightly” (Sermon on the

Mount, 2.2.5). Keeping track of our giving is not inconsistent with the Lord’s admonition that we do not let our right hand know what the left one is doing. Yet we are not to keep track so that we may show others just how good we are. As you give your money to the poor, ask yourself if you desire the praise of men more than God’s commendation.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Passages for Further Study

Ruth 3  
 Proverbs 14:31  
 Matthew 23:1-7  
 Acts 5:1-11

# Open It!

1. When have you had to perform, play or do something before a group of others? Do those times before others empower you or overwhelm you? Explain your answer.
2. What are ways people try to get themselves noticed? Is it always wrong to desire to be noticed for something you do or for who you are?

## Read It | Matthew 6:1-4

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

## Explore It

1. What activity was Jesus calling His followers not to do in verse one?
2. According to verse four, where should our giving take place?
3. Whose reward should a Christ follower desire for our giving?

## Get It

### Phil Newton writes...

After commanding perfection He immediately warns of the subtleties of hypocrisy that can creep into our spiritual pursuits. The problem does not rest in the pursuits but in the individual heart. Motives of love and devotion can become colored with self-centeredness. Because of sin's deceitfulness, the Christian must be on guard against hypocrisy. It can slip into the most devoted Christian's life so our Lord calls attention to the need for holy motivations in righteous pursuits... He has been addressing the matter of personal righteousness in terms of doing the will of God in the realm of morality. Now He considers doing the will of God in religious practice.<sup>2</sup>

1. What is it that drives us to have people see the good that we are doing?
2. Read Matthew 5:16. How do Jesus' words line up with His previous statement on allowing others to see the things that we do?

In the New Testament a **hypocrite** normally refers to an unregenerate person who is self-deceived. Unless prompted by the right motives, religious activities, including doing good deeds to others, are of no real spiritual value and receive no commendation from God. It does matter greatly why we do what we do. The hypocrite has a duplicitous life — often without realizing it — giving appearance of one motive when in reality there is a hidden motive. Beloved, I don't know about you, but I can state without reservation that the most difficult type of hypocrisy to discern is not that in others but self-hypocrisy! (My wife reminds me of this frequently!) How easy it is to spot improper motives in others but make excuses for similar motives in our own heart or even worse (and probably more often) never even see them (that's called self-deception)!

The **hypocrite** is the man or woman who puts on a mask and pretends to be what he or she isn't inside; in modern parlance he or she isn't "authentic". A parallel thought is what others see on the outside, which we refer to as **reputation**. God sees what's really present on the inside, which is what we call character. Clearly, God is interested in our character, not our reputation. **Who do you seek to please in your various religious activities? Are you "playing the part" like an actor/actress or are you seeking to please only your Father Who art in heaven?**




## (Continued)

3. In verse two Jesus says that hypocrites “sound trumpets in many places so people might see their acts of righteousness.” What are some ways people sound their trumpets today?
4. In what ways are we tempted to be hypocritical when it comes to our giving or service?
5. What are some worldly rewards for acts of righteousness?
6. In verse two, Jesus assumes that His followers would be active in giving. If our Savior assumes that we will be generous with Him and others why do so few Christians participate in lives of generosity?
7. What are your reasons for giving whether to church or to others? What does the giving of our resources to God and others say about the things that we have?
8. The Bible speaks much about giving to things for righteousness sake. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-9. What does Paul establish as healthy patterns for giving? In what area can your own giving be impacted by applying these verses to your life?



Jesus' point is the honor one receives from other men — be it verbal praise or laudatory looks — is the only reward one will ever receive for works that basically are designed to draw attention to self. The implication is that these individuals best savor their temporal, passing applause and take all the "curtain calls" they can because that is all they will ever receive for self-centered giving. It is possible to be the most generous member in the church, in amount and proportion of giving, and yet have no reward except the immediate praise from men. This truth should cause us all to be very sober minded regarding our giving, praying and fasting. Unless we continually abide in the Vine, we can do absolutely nothing of eternal value (Jn 15:5).

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9. What practical reasons might Jesus have had for wanting us to be discreet when we are generous with other people?
  10. What does the phrase "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" mean? Is Jesus speaking literally or figuratively? How can you tell?
  11. How easy is it for you to be generous when confronted with a specific need? Why?

Jesus begins this passage by telling His followers to "beware."

To "beware" means that one must continually be vigilant to the ever-present danger, even in believers, of practicing righteous acts out of the wrong motivation.

12. How do you stay on guard regarding the danger of doing good works to be seen by others?
13. Jesus promises that those who give according to His instruction will be rewarded. Do you feel you've been rewarded for your generosity in the past? If so, how?

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, Giving with Discretion From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.southwoodsbc.org/sermons](http://www.southwoodsbc.org/sermons).