

Matthew 5:21-37. Feb 16th, 2020. #Blessed – with relationship wisdom/healthy relationships

21 “You have heard that it was said to people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be subject to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ will have to answer to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of hell fire. 23 “So if you are about to offer your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift. 25 “If someone accuses you, reach an agreement with him quickly, while you are with him on the way. Otherwise your accuser may bring you to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Amen I tell you: You will never get out until you have paid the last penny. 27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ 28 but I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to fall into sin, pluck it out and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand causes you to fall into sin, cut it off and throw it away from you. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 31 “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to be regarded as an adulteress. And whoever marries the divorced woman is regarded as an adulterer. 33 “Again you have heard that it was said to people long ago, ‘Do not break your oaths, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear at all: not by heaven, because it is God’s throne; 35 and not by earth, because it is his footstool; and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not swear by your own head, since you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Instead, let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes,’ or ‘No, no.’ Whatever goes beyond these is from the Evil One.

Are relationships on your mind? **(pause)** After all, Valentine’s Day just passed.

Jesus talked about relationships all over these verses of Matthew ch.5. He gives straightforward guidance for how love really expresses itself. Love between husbands & wives, in families, among friends and neighbors, between Builders and coworkers. Let’s pray for a blessed outcome as we hear His Word:

(Prayer) Holy Spirit, our Savior’s words take us into such an important part of our lives, covering so much ground about our relationships. Use this to strengthen, teach, rebuke, correct, train and equip us. Let it be so, for your glory and our good. Amen.

How do you spell love? Everyone answers? T-I-M-E. How do you give support, how do you show love, how do you develop and foster healthy connections? A 2018 news release cites: American Families Spend on average Just 37 Minutes Of Quality Time Together Per Day (www.studyfinds.org/american-families-spend-37-minutes-quality-time/).

Now that particular statistics might not reflect your reality. But if it’s not the time aspect, then there will be others. I’m sure all of us have had “cringe” moments as we look at our individual track-record on relationships: whether it is failures as a parent to our child, or children to your parent, or husband-&-wife, or between friends, or with others. Ok, we’ve traveled into an area where you and I may carry some substantial regrets.

Honestly? These words from Jesus certainly drive us to despair of coming to God thinking: “I’m pretty good – what’s not to like about me as a friend, husband, dad, neighbor.” God’s Word shows me how I’ve fallen short.

God exposes my sin and all its ugliness. Any inklings of being judged “good” by Him based on my record are shattered.

But listen! God’s Word, Jesus’ own voice, directs us right back to himself. Check out this verse from last Sunday. It’s in the paragraph before our section today. Jesus said, “I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets” (5:17). He alone was the perfect son, brother, friend. Shockingly He willingly took the blame for our selfishness, our failures, our guilt and our shame for the way we’ve treated other people. Look to him. He saves you from your failures and the eternal consequences. Those who look to him in faith have his perfect life on their record – and eternal life! There is no greater love.

Now He calls us – blood-bought, raised-to-life children of God – to love as He loved.

This section has so much to offer us in a practical, concrete way: how to show love to people we interact with, along with the encouragement to fight our selfish desires which hurt others. All the while we keep in view His love, in which He picks us up & cleans us up when we fall, He gives us strength to move forward with purpose. Let’s do just that!

Look at v.21-22. Jesus says, “You have heard... but I tell you” means: there was an assumption being made amongst God’s people about God’s law. It was being twisted, twisted into something that was pretty easy to keep. You see, people by nature don’t want to see how far we’ve fallen from God’s expectations. And so we’re tempted to place distinctions between sins. For instance, the common thought was: only murder was breaking the 5th commandment. The **World’s View** is like this: “I have the right to be angry! And: What’s the big deal if I call someone a fool? They deserve it!”

GOD’s View, Jesus shows us: Anger and even name-calling, bad-mouthing actually belong in the same company as murder. In God’s eyes, they’re all sin. Period.

Our Lord cares about more than just people’s physical well-being. The old rhyme “*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me*” – He knew it wasn’t true. People hurt from mental and emotional wounds inflicted by words and anger!

Who hasn’t been guilty of anger? Even the littlest among us have thrown tantrums, or pushed or hit others.
| Remember who rescues us: Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Look on. Jesus takes us to an example in in the area of the 6th commandment in Vs.27-30. The **World’s View?** “What’s the big deal if I look at a woman - or a man – with lust? It’s only a little ‘eye-candy’!” So goes the mindset of the world. Modern technology presents us with added dimensions to the world’s distorted view: “What’s wrong with acting out my fantasies in a virtual ‘game’ or by looking at bodies on a screen?”

Again, there were assumptions made in the past, as there are now. The accepted idea was that you’re only sinning if you participate in sex before marriage or with someone else’s spouse. **GOD’s View** is, as Jesus explains... You’ve already broken God’s law by each lustful look – the sin, in those cases, already committed in the heart.

Our Lord cares about the person’s whole being: physical, emotional and spiritual. And that applies to you, to the people walking by you, or the individuals pulled up on the screen of your electronic device. God wants you to think how such sinful looks and lusts hurt people: people are used and exploited, in some cases even trafficked and enslaved. Real people, hurt. | And our God in His goodness wants to keep you and me free of warped, faulty views of his gift of sex. He wants it to be enjoyed in the place He has designed for it, within

the beautiful unity of a marriage. That's where it belongs in His book. He talks about it a good deal, because it is a good thing then.

Following this topic through further, Jesus gives us an answer to a common excuse. Someone says: "But I can't help it – these eyes cause me to lust!" Jesus shows how foolish it is to blame the eyes. The heart is the true source of the problem, the sinful heart. And so Jesus isn't advocating that we mutilate our bodies. Jesus' point is: See the danger! See the catastrophic potential! Sin, left unaddressed (where the sinful flesh's desires aren't checked), threatens to enslave a heart. So don't make excuses for sin.

Fight it. Think of the practical ways to help fight such temptation. If you have a hard time with temptations toward sexual sin, put software in place to cut you off from places you shouldn't be searching or looking.

And parents among us, God has entrusted you with your child's wellbeing. Software & filters are essential for protecting your child. Statistics show the average age for exposure to porn is 8-11 years old.

Conquers through Christ was at Martin Luther College this past week. If you check out the archived livestreams of the chapels, you'll hear a positive model of talking about the temptations and sin that attacks us. You'll see, if you look at the *Conquers through Christ* website, materials for encouraging and helping, correcting when needed. There is something of benefit for all ages. And always, you'll find a consistent message of looking to Jesus, for forgiveness for past sins.

As we face the kind of temptations that inundate our world, we are striving to be a church, a body of believers, who are here to help one another. If you struggle and want guidance, talk with me. There's also added council that can be offered, like through *Christian Family Solutions*. All because... eternal life with our gracious God is much too precious to lose for short term pleasures, which won't satisfy in the end.

In Vs.31-32 Jesus once again presents us with where the **World's View** has gone wrong. The world says: "What's the big deal if two people get a divorce, it happens all the time?" Even thousands of years ago, a very casual approach to divorce had developed among some – we hear reference here to marriage being ended easily.

Jesus counters this with **God's truth**. God cares about the stability, security and wellbeing of individuals, family units and society as whole. Think through how many people are affected by an "it's not a big deal" view of divorce (where divorce without a real reason, the one's He gives of unfaithfulness or desertion).

There's a secular study that was done by an Oxford social anthropologist, JD Unwin. He researched a total of 86 societies and civilizations. Central to his conclusions was the finding: the *highest flourishing of a culture* took place when two factors were found together. Are you curious? The two factors are: "premarital chastity" (waiting for sex until in marriage), paired with "absolute monogamy" (a lifelong commitment with marriage vows). And where these moral standards were abandoned, with people simply living to chase after whatever they sexually desired, there was a very swift collapse in the societies (in only three generations time). JD Unwin labeled this a "dead level." The cultures were usually taken over or conquered at that point.

We don't need that kind of a study to defend God's truth. But it points us back to the wisdom of God. Jesus teaches us ... If a spouse decides to divorce with no scriptural reason, he (or she) is putting their spouse (and children, if there are any) through unnecessary trauma (heartache, and upheaval of their lives)! Psychologists have noted, in some ways, people experience greater grief at this than that at a spouse's death. You think that through: they have loss, but along with it feel rejection, betrayal and sometimes shame.

Part of that painful impact may come from what Jesus explains: If people don't know the facts, the wronged spouse may be viewed unfairly as guilty by others. The translation in front of you accurately reflects this - at the end of vs.32; many translations miss this. The one seeking a divorce, when the other spouse is innocent, leads the innocent spouse to be *looked upon as an adulterer*. That's an unfair assumption *by outsiders*. But one that is made sometimes. And in a similar way: doubt or misplaced guilt is cast by onlookers on the one who marries the divorced person, as if maybe they were involved in something sinful. |

Think about all Jesus is taking us through. We're spending time, Jesus spent a lot of time, talking about practical ways God's commands intersect with human lives. And in all this we see: Our Lord cares about us. His commands are always for our good.

Real briefly, vs.33-37, so we don't leave it out... Just because cursing and unnecessary swearing is happening all around you doesn't mean you have to do it. Paul Wolfram, a former Marine (do you say "former" with Marine?) who now serves on the WELS Military Services Committee, gave the advice to not tiptoe around this topic, especially with members who are soldiers. He added: it's not just about avoiding the sin yourself. Not joining in also gives a witness, no matter how it's received, to those around you.

Now the part we didn't cover, vs.23-24, I saved for last. Here's why: #Blessed with relationship wisdom does not mean we'll have perfect homes, or a perfect RV camp. Jesus shows us how to move forward when we have sinned against others. He depicts a scene, and he puts his audience into it. Picture yourself. You are moving to express your relationship with God. You are worshipping the Lord when you have a moment of clarity: you realize you have wronged someone, you have hurt them.

Look what priority level our Lord places on the hurt party: "Go to him; be reconciled." Jesus shows how much God cares about the people our sins have hurt. As soon as we recognize what we've done wrong, he directs us to deal with it. Too often we rationalize and make excuses. Jesus' instruction teaches us how important it is to recognize the impact of our sins against others.

Remember what it was that the individual, in Jesus' description, was doing when he first recognized his sin? Worship. At worship we encounter our God – we hear his truth – we are confronted with our wrongs – we hear again the news of His undeserved love. This is the "recipe" – if you'll allow that description – for bringing us to admit our sin, and take steps for the healing of others whom we have sinned against: saying we're sorry to them, and making correction for the wrongs we can.

In light of all our Savior has taught us today, we know the hurt we have caused in the lives of those around us. I said toward the beginning: the topic of relationships can bring up a lot of regret. Let's close with an assurance of the healing and peace we have in Jesus, with Jesus:

- 1 John 3:1-3 – How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God – and that is what we are.
- 1 John 2:1-2 – Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- 1 John 1:7-10 – If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- Psalm 103 – As far as the East is from the West so far has the Lord removed our transgressions from us.
- Psalm 25:3 – No one who hopes in you [Lord] will ever be put to shame.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 – You are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely our holiness, righteousness and redemption. Amen.