

March 15, 2026 (Lesson 2)

THE CHRISTIAN'S MORALITY

1. **Avoid Anger and Lust** (Matthew 5:21-30)
2. **Faithful in Marriage; Truthful in Speech** (Matthew 5:31-37)
3. **Love Your Enemies** (Matthew 5:38-48)

Central Truth: Christlike morality is required of all who are citizens of Heaven.

Focus: Explore Christlike morality and resolve to lead holy lives.

Evangelism Emphasis: The exercise of Christlike morality can attract the lost to Christ.

Golden Text: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27).

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is directed to all His disciples—past, present, and future. This sermon redefines Christian believers’ views on happiness, righteousness, and way of life. To belong to God’s kingdom, we must be poor, meek, hungry, thirsty, and willing to face danger—even death. Our righteousness must extend beyond external displays of righteousness to a transformation of our thoughts, attitudes, and actions from the inside out. True disciples of Jesus do not merely pretend to be righteous; they are marked by purity of heart, humility, compassion, and integrity. This internal righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and scribes (Matt. 5:20).

To illustrate an inside-out righteousness, Jesus contrasted traditional interpretations of God’s law with His fresh and deeper understanding of these laws. He used a series of six statements that follow this pattern: “You have heard . . . but I say to you.” This approach is designed to challenge a public display of righteousness and emphasize a commitment to doing what is right even in those moments when no one else is watching.

As we study these contrasting statements, we must keep in mind that Jesus was not opposing the teachings of the Old Testament. Remember, Jesus had just said He did not come to abolish “the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfill” them (Matt. 5:17 NKJV). In these statements, Jesus corrected the religious leaders’ misunderstandings and misapplications of the Law. He showed its original

purpose was not simply strict external obedience, but first a focus on the intentions and motivations of the heart.

God-Pleasing Righteousness

The story of the Good Samaritan is a powerful example of the kind of righteousness that Jesus calls His followers to have. While a priest and a Levite, both respected religious figures, ignored a fellow Israelite in need, a Samaritan—who was despised by the Jews—showed compassion. He cared for the injured man’s wounds and paid for his care. He demonstrated the kind of love and mercy that go beyond ethnic and social boundaries. This parable illustrates that true righteousness is about showing love and compassion to everyone, even our enemies.

1. AVOID ANGER AND LUST

A. Murder and Anger (Matthew 5:21-26)

²¹ Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: ²² But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. ²³ Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; ²⁴ Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

The first contrasting statement addresses the sixth commandment: “Thou shalt not kill” (v. 21; Ex. 20:13). Since there are several other Hebrew words for “kill,” the word *murder* is a more accurate translation of the Hebrew word found in Exodus, as it points to the deliberate premeditations involved in the act. Yet, Jesus explains that murder is not limited to the conscious decision with a clear intent to cause death; it also includes harboring anger and using words that express deep hatred, such as “raca” (empty-head) and “fool” (vv. 22-23). Nursing anger and name-calling indicate intense feelings of resentment toward someone. This can harm the person by devaluing and

diminishing the individual at whom the anger and hostility are directed. Therefore, murder, angry thoughts, and hateful words are all deserving of punishment—even “hell fire.” The phrase “hell fire,” which is sometimes translated as “Gehenna,” refers to the Valley of Hinnom outside the city of Jerusalem, where human sacrifice to the god Molech was once carried out. By Jesus’ day, it had become a site where refuse was continuously burned. This ongoing burning became an appropriate symbol for final judgment of the wicked.

The only remedy for such a contemptuous attitude is reconciliation. Jesus gives two examples to illustrate how reconciliation should be carried out. In the first setting, Jesus places a person’s right attitude and reconciliation within the context of worship. If a worshiper is at the “altar” with an offering, they must leave their offering at the temple and go make things right with the other person (vv. 23-24). Given that travel in Jesus’ day was mainly done on foot and could take days, this was no small task. However, Jesus emphasizes that true worship requires both the right attitude and right relationships.

The second example involves a person bringing legal action against a Christian, possibly over a financial dispute. Jesus advises the believer to take the initiative and resolve the issue promptly. If the decision is instead left up to the accuser, the Christian may end up in court, and possibly even in prison. The Greek word translated as “agree” generally means to show goodwill, kindness, or a positive attitude toward others. For this reason, some English translations render this verse as “Make friends quickly with your opponent at law” (v. 25 NASB, 1995). In the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus teaches that God’s disciples are called to a radical form of love and reconciliation, which extends even to those who oppose or harm them. It reflects a commitment to living out God’s values in a way that challenges conventional norms and fosters reconciliation and peace. By using the phrase “Verily I say unto thee” (v. 26), Jesus underscores the certainty of the consequences for

those who refuse to reconcile. The imprisonment of the person thrown in jail serves as a metaphor for eternal punishment.

§ *Why are hateful words taken so seriously by God?*

B. Adultery and Lust (Matthew 5:27-30)

²⁷ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: ²⁸ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. ²⁹ And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

The second contrasting statement provides a fresh perspective on the seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27). It highlights that adultery begins with lusting after someone else. The Greek word *lust* suggests a deep, passionate desire or craving that originates in the heart. This term goes beyond mere physical attraction; it is not a fleeting thought but a deep-seated desire that drives a person’s thoughts and intentions. In the context of the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” this interpretation reveals the commandment is concerned with more than the physical act of infidelity. Jesus teaches the unity of marriage is not just about physical actions but involves the whole person—heart, mind, and actions. Therefore, looking at a woman with lustful intent is equivalent to committing adultery in one’s heart.

Jesus uses exaggerated illustrations to emphasize the serious nature of lust. The metaphor of plucking out one’s eye or cutting off one’s limbs should not be taken literally (v. 29). The graphic imagery serves to depict the drastic action needed to remove the sources of temptation and sin from the Christian’s life. It highlights the importance of taking decisive steps to avoid falling into sin, particularly sins of the heart like lust. Sin hinders a person from fulfilling God’s will and attaining eternal salvation. It leads to “hell.” Therefore, it is preferable to remove parts of the body than to have the “whole body” be thrown into “hell” (v. 30), which speaks of complete spiritual ruin or

separation from God. If left unchecked, sin can lead to devastating spiritual consequences.

Therefore, it is preferable to take drastic action—such as metaphorically removing a part of the body that leads to sin—than to risk eternal separation from God.

Marital Unfaithfulness

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union.—C. S. Lewis

2. FAITHFUL IN MARRIAGE; TRUTHFUL IN SPEECH

A. Faithful in Marriage (Matthew 5:31-32)

³¹ It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: ³² But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

The third contrasting statement on divorce flows naturally from Jesus' preceding discussion on adultery and addresses the law on divorce found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Since that Old Testament law, two predominant teachings on divorce had emerged within the Jewish community. The conservative group taught that divorce was permissible only in cases of marital unfaithfulness. In contrast, the liberal group believed a husband could divorce his wife for any reason that displeased him, such as ruining a meal or finding someone else. Note that Jewish law did not grant women any grounds for divorcing their husbands; only men were allowed to initiate divorce, and they did not require a legal hearing to do so (Matt. 5:31). By Jesus' time, it appears the liberal group's views on divorce had been widely accepted in Jewish culture.

In response to this trivial view of marriage, Jesus emphasized its sanctity. A man cannot divorce his wife for frivolous reasons; only marital unfaithfulness is a legitimate cause. Moreover, a man who marries a woman divorced for trivial reasons also commits adultery, as the first marriage continues

to be binding in God's eyes (v. 32). Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce not only upholds the sanctity of marriage but also protects women from being unjustly divorced for shallow reasons and from being wrongfully labeled as adulteresses.

Marital Faithfulness

Staying married . . . is not mainly about staying in love. It is about keeping covenant. "Till death do us part" or "As long as we both shall live" is a sacred covenant promise—the same kind Jesus made with His bride when He died for her.—John Piper

B. Truthful in Speech (Matthew 5:33-37)

³³ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. ³⁴ But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne.

³⁷ But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Jesus' fourth contrasting statement forbids oaths, alluding to passages that allow them, such as Leviticus 19:12 and Numbers 30:2. To be clear, swearing an oath was not inherently wrong. God himself assured the fulfillment of His promises by making an oath (Gen. 22:16), and people were permitted to swear an oath in God's name to signify their commitment to uphold their promises. However, over time, the seriousness of keeping an oath diminished. The Jewish people came to believe only oaths made in God's name were binding. If a person had no intentions of fulfilling an oath, they might swear by things like "heaven" (Matt. 5:34) or "earth" (v. 35). In response to this devaluation of promises and the intent to deceive, Jesus told His disciples not to "swear at all" (v. 34 NKJV). In this context, swearing does not refer to cursing. Rather, Jesus says our word should be truthful and trustworthy, reflecting our integrity. A simple "yes" or "no" should be sufficient (v. 37a NKJV).

§ *According to Jesus, what comes "from the evil one" (v. 37b NKJV)?*

3. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

A. Righteous Retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42)

³⁸Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: ³⁹But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

⁴²Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Jesus' fifth contrasting statement reinterprets the Old Testament concept of retributive justice: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:23-25 NKJV; also Lev. 24:20). This Old Testament law was never intended to justify personal retaliation but to ensure that the punishment was proportional to the crime. In fact, God told the Israelites, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:18). However, as with the preceding contrasting statements, the Jewish people had found ways to diminish or abuse the Old Testament teaching. Jesus' stance on retaliation was revolutionary and would have been surprising to a Jewish audience living under Roman oppression. He went beyond merely instructing not to retaliate, to commanding "not to resist an evil person" at all (Matt. 5:39 NKJV).

Jesus provided four examples from daily life to highlight His radical teaching, instructing His disciples not to defend themselves, to accept being taken advantage of, and to go out of their way for their enemies. Jesus aimed to establish a righteousness that surpassed that of the Pharisees and scribes. In Jewish culture, a slap on the cheek was a severe insult. Yet, Jesus instructed His disciples to choose non-retaliation and respond with grace, even offering to turn the other cheek when struck (v. 39). However, Jesus' statement should not be used to justify staying in abusive or dangerous relationships. Jesus' message is about breaking the cycle of violence, rejecting all actions motivated by revenge, and responding to wrongdoing with a higher standard of love and forgiveness. This teaching does not imply individuals should tolerate abuse or put themselves at risk.

As Jesus' disciples, we are called to a higher standard, where seeking revenge or prioritizing our own protection when wronged is not the focus. Self-centeredness has no place in God's kingdom. Our primary responsibility is to serve others, extending kindness and help to everyone, regardless of whether they seem deserving or not. This is why Jesus instructs us to not seek retaliation, willingly give up more than what is demanded when sued, go the extra mile, and give generously to those who ask (vv. 39-42).

§ *In verse 40, what does Jesus say about "your shirt" and "your coat" (NIV), and why?*

B. Godly Love (Matthew 5:43-48)

⁴³ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; ⁴⁵ That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁸ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Jesus' radical teaching on retaliation prepared the way for His sixth and final contrasting statement, which calls for loving our enemies. Although the Old Testament taught Israel to love their neighbor (Lev. 19:18), who were part of the Israelite community, Jesus said His disciples must extend love to their enemies (Matt. 5:44). Normally, enemies are people we do not like or care about, so commanding us to love them seems astonishing. Loving those who are hostile to us reflects the character of God's love for all humanity. Jesus' disciples are called to see others through God's eyes, loving them deeply enough to offer the message of reconciliation. This includes even praying for those who persecute us, showing the life-changing love Jesus demonstrated. Prayer is a realistic way of showing kindness and goodwill to those who are against us. Furthermore, love for our enemies does not make us children of God, but it reveals the relationship between God and Christian

believers (v. 45). As Jesus' disciples, we are called to demonstrate our relationship with God, our Father, by living out His love through acts of compassion and forgiveness.

If we do not love our enemies, we are no better than those who do not follow God's ways. How we treat those we might not like or those who mistreat us is a test of our Christianity. Those who love and greet their enemies, and pray for those who hurt them, are becoming more like their heavenly Father and will "be called the children of God" (v. 9). Jesus provided two examples of God's common grace to illustrate why His disciples should love both their neighbors and their enemies without distinction. First, God's sun rises and rain falls on both the good and the evil. This shows that all people—both the good and the bad—receive God's care and provision in this life. Second, the love Jesus is talking about goes beyond ordinary human relationships. People naturally care for and love those who love them back, so loving just those close to us is not extraordinary (v. 46). Likewise, Gentiles (or "pagans") also greet and bless their own friends and family (v. 47), so blessing fellow believers is unremarkable.

Jesus' disciples see everyone as deserving of love, not just those they know or who return their love. This sixth teaching shows how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and demonstrated how the righteousness of His followers would "exceed" that of "the scribes and Pharisees" (cf. v. 20).

The command found in verse 48 provides a fitting conclusion to the entire chapter, particularly the six contrasting statements: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This verse brings to mind God's command to Israel, "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). When Jesus used the word *perfect* instead of *holy*, He was referring to spiritual maturity. He was not setting an impossible standard but encouraging His followers to grow in obedience to God's will and become more like Him. This idea of perfection sums up the righteousness expected from all who belong to His kingdom.

God-Pleasing Righteousness

Every decision that you make, every choice that you have in front of you to pursue sin or to pursue righteousness, is a chance to bring happiness to God himself.—Luke Humphrey

CHRISTLIKE MORALITY

Christlike morality goes deeper than following rules; it is about the intentions and motivations that drive our actions. Jesus emphasized righteousness is not just about outward behavior but about our heart's condition. For example, it is not enough to avoid committing acts of violence; we must also root out anger and hatred in our hearts. Similarly, it is not just about avoiding adultery, but also guarding against lustful thoughts. Christlike morality calls for a transformation from within, where love, humility, and compassion shape our actions, reflecting the character of God in every aspect of life. This inward focus ensures our external actions are genuinely aligned with God's will, not just a performance of religious duties.

Daily Devotions

- M. Sinful Anger Has Consequences (Numbers 20:7-13)
- T. Consequences of King David's Lust (2 Samuel 12:7-14)
- W. Faithfulness to Your Wife (Proverbs 5:15-23)
- T. Faithfulness to Your Spouse (Matthew 19:1-9)
- F. Exhortations to Christlike Conduct (Romans 12:9-21)
- S. Be Doers of the Word (James 1:19-22)