

Matthew 5 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 5:1-12 THE KING PROMULGATES THE LAWS OF HIS KINGDOM

This is the natural order of royal action. The King is anointed, comes among the people to show his power, and afterwards acts as a Legislator, and sets forth his statutes.

Matthew 5:1. AND seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.

For retirement, fresh air, and wide space, the King seeks the hill-side. It was suitable that such elevated ethics should be taught from a mountain. A natural hill suited his truthful teaching better than a pulpit of marble would have done. Those who desired to follow him as disciples gathered closely about the seated Rabbi, who occupied the throne of instruction in their midst; and then in outer circles "the multitudes" stood to listen.

Matthew 5:2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying

Even when his mouth was closed he was teaching by his life; yet he did not withhold the testimony of his lips. Earnest men, when they address their fellows, neither mumble, nor stumble, but speak distinctly, opening their mouths. When Jesus opens his mouth let us open our ears and hearts.

Matthew 5:3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The King's first statutes are Benedictions. He begins his teaching with a largess of blessings. The Old Testament ended with "a curse": the New Testament opens with "Blessed." This word is by some rendered "happy"; but we like blessed best. Our Lord brings to men true Beatitudes by his teaching, and by his kingdom.

Spiritual poverty is both commanded and commended. It is the basis of Christian experience. No one begins aright who has not felt poverty of spirit. Yet even to this first sign of grace is the kingdom given in present possession: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The question in heaven's kingdom is not, "Are you a peer?" but, "Are you poor in spirit?" Those who are of no account in their own eyes are of the blood royal of the universe. These alone have the principles and the qualifications for heavenly kingdom. May I be such!

Matthew 5:4. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

These seem worse off than the merely poor in spirit, for "they mourn." They are a stage higher, though they seem to be a stage lower. The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves. These men are grieved by sin, and tried by the evils of the times but for them a future of rest and rejoicing is provided. Those who laugh shall lament, but those who sorrow shall sing. How great a blessing is sorrow, since it gives room for the Lord to administer comfort! Our griefs are blessed, for they are our points of contact with the divine Comforter. The beatitude reads like a paradox, but it is true, as some of us know full well. Our mourning hours have brought us more comfort than our days of mirth.

Matthew 5:5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

They are lowly-minded, and are ready to give up their portion in the earth; therefore it shall come back to them. They neither boast, nor contend, nor exult over others, yet are they heirs of all the good which God has created on the face of the earth. In

their meekness they are like their King, and they shall reign with him. The promised land is for the tribes of the meek: before them the Canaanites shall be driven out. He has the best of this world who thinks least of it, and least of himself.

Matthew 5:6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

They are not full of their own righteousness, but long for more and more of that which comes from above. They pine to be right themselves both with God and man, and they long to see righteousness have the upper hand all the world over. Such is their longing for goodness, that it would seem as if both the appetites of "hunger and thirst" were concentrated in their one passion for righteousness. Where God works such an insatiable desire, we may be quite sure that he will satisfy it; yea, fill it to the brim. In contemplating the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Christ, and the victory of righteousness in the latter days, we are more than filled. In the world to come the satisfaction of the "man of desires" will be complete. Nothing here below can fill an immortal soul; and since it is written, "They shall be filled," we look forward with joyful confidence to a heaven of holiness with which we shall be satisfied eternally.

Matthew 5:7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

They forgive, and they are forgiven. They judge charitably, and they shall not be condemned. They help the needy, and they shall be helped in their need. What we are to others, God will be to us. Some have to labor hard with their niggardliness in order to be kind; but the blessing lies not only in doing a merciful act, but in being merciful in disposition. Followers of Jesus must be men of mercy; for they have found mercy, and mercy has found them. As we look for "mercy, of the Lord in that day", we must show mercy in this day.

Matthew 5:8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Foul hearts make dim eyes Godward. To clear the eye we must cleanse the heart. Only purity has any idea of God, or any true vision of him. It is a great reward to be able to see God; and, on the other hand, it is of great help towards being pure in heart to have a true sight of the thrice-holy One. There are no pure hearts on earth unless the Lord has made them so, and none shall see God in heaven who have not been purified by grace while here below. Lord, create in me a clean heart, that I may behold thee, both now and for ever!

Matthew 5:9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

They are not only passively peaceful, like the meek, who keep the peace; but actively peaceful by endeavoring to end wars and contentions, and so make peace. These not only are the children of the peace-loving God, but they come to be called so; for men are struck by their likeness to their Father. Hereby is our sonship known to ourselves and others. Men of peace are the children of the God of peace, and their Father's blessing rests on them.

This seventh beatitude is a very high and glorious one; let us all endeavor to obtain it. Never let us be peacebreakers; evermore let us be peacemakers. Yet must we not cry "peace, peace, where there is no peace."

The verse before, this speaks of purity, and this of peace. First pure, then peaceable: this is God's order, and it should be ours.

Matthew 5:10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is the peculiar blessing of the elect of God, and it stands high up in the list of honor. The only homage which wickedness can pay to righteousness is to persecute it. Those who in the first blessing were poor in spirit, are here despised as well as poverty stricken: and in this they get a new royal charter, which for the second time ensures to them "the kingdom of heaven." Yea, they have the kingdom now: it is theirs in present possession. Not because of any personal fault, but simply on account of their

godly character, the Lord's Daniels are hated: but they are blessed by that which looks like a curse. Ishmael mocks Isaac; but nevertheless Isaac has the inheritance, and Ishmael is cast out. It is a gift from God to be allowed to suffer for his name. So may we be helped to rejoice in Christ's cross when we are honored by being reviled for his name's sake.

Matthew 5:11, 12. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Persecution of the tongue is more common, but not less cruel than that of the hand. Slander is unscrupulous, and indulges in accusations of every kind: "all manner of evil" is a comprehensive phrase. No crime is too base to be laid at the door of the innocent; nor will the persecutor have any hesitation as to the vileness of the charge. The rule seems to be, "Throw plenty of mud, and some of it will stick." Under this very grievous trial, good men are to be more than ordinarily happy, for thus are they elevated to the rank of the prophets, upon whom the storm of falsehood beat with tremendous fury. "So persecuted they the prophets." This is the heritage of the Lord's messengers: they killed one, and stoned another. The honor of suffering with the prophets, for the Lord's sake, is so great, that it may well reconcile us to all that it involves. There is an inquisitorial succession of persecutors; "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"; and there is a prophetic succession of saints, ordained to glorify the Lord in the fires. To this succession it is our high privilege to belong; and we are happy that it is so. Our joy and gladness are to exceed all ordinary bounds when we are honored with the decoration of the iron cross, and the collar of S.S., or savage slander.

Matthew 5:13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted a it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Thus he speaks to those whom he enrolls in his kingdom. In their character there is a preserving force to keep the rest of society from utter corruption.

If they were not scattered among men, the race would putrefy. But if they are Christians only in name, and the real power is gone, nothing can save them, and they are of no use whatever to those among whom they mingle.

There is a secret something, which is the secret of the believer's power: that something is savor: it is not easy to define it, but yet it is absolutely essential to usefulness. A worldling may be of some use even if he fails in certain respects; but a Christian who is not a Christian is bad all round, he is "good for nothing", and utterly useless to anybody and everybody. Utter rejection awaits him: He will "be cast out, and trodden under foot of men." His religion makes a footpath for fashion, or for scorn, as the world may happen to take it: in either case it is no preservative, for it does not even preserve itself from contempt.

How this teaches the necessity of final perseverance! for if the savor of divine grace could be altogether gone from a man it could never be restored: the text is very clear and positive upon that point. What unscriptural nonsense to talk of a man's being born again, and yet losing the divine life, and then getting it again. Regeneration cannot fail: if it did, the man must be for ever hopeless. He could not be born again, and again, and again: his case would be beyond the reach of mercy. :But who is hopeless? Are there any whom it is impossible to restore? If so, some may have altogether fallen from grace, but not else. Those who speak of all men as within the reach of grace may not scripturally or logically believe in total apostasy, since "it is impossible to restore them unto repentance", if any have really apostatized.

The great lesson is, that if grace itself fails to save a man, nothing else can be done for him. "If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" You can salt meat, but you cannot salt salt: if grace fails everything fails. Gracious Master, do not permit me to try any experiments as to how far I may lose my savor; but ever keep me full of grace and truth.

Matthew 5:14, 15. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

We are to remove the darkness of ignorance, sin, and sorrow. Christ has lighted us that we may enlighten the world. It is not ours to lie in concealment as to our religion. God intends his grace to be as conspicuous as a city built on the mountain's brow. To

attempt to conceal his Spirit is as foolish as to put a lamp “under a bushel ”: the lamp should be seen by “all that are in the house, ” and so should the Christian’s graces.

Household piety is the best of piety. If our light is not seen in the house, depend upon it we have none. Candles are meant for parlors and bedrooms. Let us not cover up the light of grace: indeed, we “cannot be hid” if once the Lord has built us on the hill of his love, neither can we dwell in darkness if God has lighted us, and set us “on a candlestick. ” Lord, let me be zealous to spread abroad the light I have received from thee Even throughout the world! At least let me shine in my own home.

Matthew 5:16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

The light is ours, but the glorification is for our Father in heaven. We shine because we have light, and we are seen because we shine. By good works we best shine before men. True shining is silent, but yet it is so useful, that men, who are too often very bad judges, are yet forced to bless God for the good which they receive through the light which he has kindled. Angels glorify God whom they see; and men are forced to glorify God whom they do not see, when they mark the “good works ” of his saints. We need not object to be seen, although we are not to wish to be seen. Since men will be sure to see our excellences, if we possess any, be it ours to see that all the glory is given to our Lord, to whom it is entirely due. Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name, O Lord, be praise!

MATTHEW 5:17-20 OUR KING HONORS HIS FATHER’S LAW

He took care to revise and reform the laws of men; but the law of God he established and confirmed.

Matthew 5:17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

The Old Testament stands in all its parts, both as to “the law and the prophets. ” The Lord Jesus knew nothing of “destructive criticism.” He establishes in its deepest sense all that is written in Holy Scripture, and puts a new fullness into it. This he says before he proceeds to make remarks upon the sayings of men of old time. He is himself the fulfillment and substance of the types, and prophecies, and commands of the law.

Matthew 5:18. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Not a syllable is to become effete. Even to the smallest letters, the dot of every “i”, and the crossing of every “t”, the law will outlast the creation.

The Old Testament is as sacredly guarded as the New. “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever.” Modern critics have set themselves an impossible task in their endeavor to get rid of the inspiration of the whole sacred volume, or of this book, or that chapter, or that verse; for the whole shall come forth of their furnace as silver purified seven times.

Matthew 5:19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Our King has not come to abrogate the law, but to confirm and reassert it.

His commands are eternal; and if any of the teachers of it should through error break his law, and teach that its least command is nullified, they will lose rank, and subside into the lowest place. The peerage of his kingdom is ordered according to obedience. Not birth, knowledge, or success will make a man great; but humble and precise obedience, both in word and in deed. “Whosoever

shall do and teach, ” he is the man who “shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ” Hence the Lord Jesus does not set up a milder law, nor will he allow any one of his servants to presume to do so.

Our King fulfills the ancient law, and his Spirit works in us to will and to do of God’s good pleasure as set forth in the immutable statutes of righteousness.

Lord, make me of this thy kingdom a right loyal subject, and may I both “do and teach ” according to thy Word! Whether I am little or great on earth, make me great in obedience to thee.

Matthew 5:20. For I any unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

We cannot even “enter the kingdom ” and begin to be the Lord’s, without going beyond the foremost of the world’s religionists. Believers are not to be worse in conduct, but far better than the most precise legalists. In heart, and even in act, we are to be superior to the law-writers, and the law-boasters. The kingdom is not for rebels, but for the exactly obedient. It not only requires of us holiness, reverence, integrity, and purity, but it works all these in our hearts and lives. The gospel does not give us outward liberty to sin because of the superior excellence of a supposed inner sanctity; but the rather it produces outward sanctity through working in our inmost soul a glorious freedom in the law of the Lord.

What a king we have in Jesus! What manner of persons ought we to be who avow ourselves to be in his holy kingdom! How conservative ought we to be of our Father’s revealed will! How determined to allow no trifling with the law and the prophets!

MATTHEW 5:21-37 THE KING CORRECTS TRADITIONAL LAW

It was needful for the Lord Jesus to clear away human traditions to make room for his own spiritual teaching.

Matthew 5:21. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.

Antiquity is often pleaded as an authority; but our King makes short work of “them of old time. ” He begins with one of their alterations of his Father’s law. They added to the sacred oracles. The first part of the saying which our Lord quoted was divine; but it was dragged down to a low level by the addition about the human court, and the murderer’s liability to appear there. It thus became rather a proverb among men than an inspired utterance from the mouth of God. Its meaning, as God spake it, kind a far wider range than when the offense was restrained to actual killing, such as could be brought before a human judgment-seat. To narrow a command is measurably to annul it. We may not do this even with antiquity for our warrant. Better the whole truth newly stated than an old falsehood in ancient language.

Matthew 5:22. 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.

Murder lies within anger; for we wish harm to the object of our wrath, or even wish that he did not exist, and this is to kid him in desire. Anger “without a cause ” is forbidden by the command which says “Thou shalt not kill”; for unjust anger is killing in intent. Such anger without cause brings us under higher judgment than that of Jewish police-courts. God takes cognizance of the emotions from which acts of hate may spring, and calls us to account as much for the angry feeling as for the murderous deed.

Words also come under the same condemnation: a man shall be judged for what he “shall say to his brother. ” To call a man Raca, or a worthless fellow, is to kill him in his reputation; and to say to him, “Thou fool ”, is to kill him as to the noblest characteristics of a man. Hence all this comes under such censure as men distribute in their councils; yea, under what is far worse, the punishment awarded by the highest court of the universe, which dooms men to “hell fire .” Thus our Lord and King restores the law of God to its true force, and warns us that it denounces not only the overt act of killing, but every thought, feeling, and word

which would tend to injure a brother, or annihilate him by contempt.

What a sweeping law is this! My conscience might have been easy as to the command "Thou shalt not kill;" but if anger without just cause be murder, how shall I answer for it? "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation!"

Matthew 5:23, 24. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 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 Pharisee would urge as a cover for his malice that he brought a sacrifice to make atonement; but our Lord will have forgiveness rendered to our brother first, and then the offering presented. We ought to worship God thoughtfully; and if in the course of that thought we remember that our brother hath ought against us, we must stop. If we have wronged another, we are to pause, cease from the worship, and hasten to seek reconciliation. We easily remember if we have ought against our brother, but now the memory is to be turned the other way. Only when we have remembered our wrong -doing, and made reconciliation, can we hope for acceptance with the Lord. The rule is — first peace with man, and then acceptance with God. The holy must be traversed to reach the Holiest of all. Peace being made with our brother, then let us conclude our service towards our Father, and we shall do so with lighter heart and truer zeal.

I would anxiously desire to be at peace with all men before I attempt to worship God, lest I present to God the sacrifice of fools.

Matthew 5:25, 26. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

In all disagreements be eager for peace. Leave off strife before you begin.

In law-suits, seek speedy and peaceful settlements. Often, in our Lord's days, this was the most gainful way, and usually it is so now. Better lose your rights than get into the hands of those who will only fleece you in the name of justice, and hold you fast so long as a semblance of a demand can stand against you, or another penny can be extracted from you. In a country where "justice" meant robbery, it was wisdom to be robbed, and to make no complaint. Even in our own country, a lean settlement is better than a fat law-suit. Many go into the court to get wool, but come out closely shorn. Carry on no angry suits in courts, but make peace with the utmost promptitude.

Matthew 5:27, 28. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

In this case our King again sets aside the glosses of men upon the commands of God, and makes the law to be seen in its vast spiritual breadth. Whereas tradition had confined the prohibition to an overt act of unchastity, the King shows that it forbade the unclean desires of the heart.

Here the divine law is shown to refer, not only to the act of criminal conversation, but even to the desire, imagination, or passion which would suggest such an infamy. What a King is ours, who stretches his scepter over the realm of our inward lusts! How sovereignly he puts it: "But I say unto you"! Who but a divine being has authority to speak in this fashion?

His word is law. So it ought to be, seeing he touches vice at the fountain-head, and forbids uncleanness in the heart. If sin were not allowed in the mind, it would never be made manifest in the body: this, therefore, is a very effectual way of dealing with the em. But how searching, how condemning! Irregular looks, unchaste desires, and strong passions are of the very essence of adultery; and who can claim a lifelong freedom from them? Yet these are the things which defile a man. Lord, purge them out of my nature, and make me pure within.

Matthew 5:29. 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.

That which is the cause of sin is to be given up as well as the sin itself. It is not sinful to have an eye, or to cultivate keen perception; but if the eye of speculative knowledge leads us to offend by intellectual sin, it becomes the cause of evil, and must be mortified. Anything, however harmless, which leads me to do, or think, or feel wrongly? I am to get rid of as much as if it were in itself an evil. Though to have done with it would involve deprivation, yet must it be dispensed with, since even a serious loss in one direction is far better than the losing of the whole man. Better a blind saint than a quick-sighted sinner. If abstaining from alcohol caused weakness of body, it would be better to be weak, than to be strong and fall into drunkenness. Since vain speculations and reasonings land men in unbelief, we will have none of them. To "be cast into hell" is too great a risk to run, merely to indulge the evil eye of lust or curiosity.

Matthew 5:30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, 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 cause of offense may be rather active as the hand than intellectual as the eye; but we had better be hindered in our work than drawn aside into temptation. The most dexterous hand must not be spared if it encourages us in doing evil. It is not because a certain thing may make us clever and successful, that therefore we are to allow it: if it should prove to be the frequent cause of our falling into sin, we must have done with it, and place ourselves at a disadvantage for our life-work, rather than ruin our whole being by sin. Holiness is to be our first object: everything else must take a very secondary place. Right eyes and right hands are no longer right if they lead us wrong. Even hands and eyes must go, that we may not offend our God by them. Yet, let no man read this literally, and therefore mutilate his body, as some foolish fanatics have done. The real meaning is clear enough.

Lord, I love thee better than my, eyes and hands: let me never demur for a moment to the giving up of all for thee!

Matthew 5:31, 32. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 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.

This time our King quotes and condemns a permissive enactment of the Jewish State. Men were wont to bid their wives "begone", and a hasty word was thought sufficient as an act of divorce. Moses insisted upon "a writing of divorcement", that angry passions might have time to cool, and that the separation, if it must come, might be performed with deliberation and legal formality. The requirement of a writing was to a certain degree a check upon an evil habit, which was so engrained in the people that to refuse it altogether would have been useless, and would only have created another crime. The law of Moses went as far as it could practically be enforced; it was because of the hardness of their hearts that divorce was tolerated: it was never approved.

But our Lord is more heroic in his legislation. He forbids divorce except for the one crime of infidelity to the marriage-vow. She who commits adultery does by that act and deed in effect sunder the marriage-bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the State as being sundered; but for nothing else should a man be divorced from his wife. Marriage is for life, and cannot be loosed, except by the one great crime which severs its bond, whichever of the two is guilty of it. Our Lord would never have tolerated the wicked laws of certain of the American States, which allow married men and women to separate on the merest pretext. A woman divorced for any cause but adultery, and marrying again, is committing adultery before God, whatever the laws of man may call it. This is very plain and positive; and thus a sanctity is given to marriage which human legislation ought not to violate. Let us not be among those who take up novel ideas of wedlock, and seek to deform the marriage laws under the presence of reforming them. Our Lord knows better than our modern social reformers. We had better let the laws of God alone, for we shall never discover any better. 33-37. 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: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

False swearing was forbidden of old; but every kind of swearing is forbidden now by the word of our Lord Jesus. He mentions several forms of oath, and forbids them all, and then prescribes simple forms of affirmation or denial, as all that his followers should employ.

Notwithstanding much that may be advanced to the contrary, there is no evading the plain sense of this passage, that every sort of oath, however solemn or true, is forbidden to a follower of Jesus. Whether in court of law, or out of it, the rule is, "Swear not at

all. " Yet, in this Christian country we have swearing everywhere, and especially among law-makers.

Our legislators begin their official existence by swearing. By those who obey the law of the Savior's kingdom, all swearing is set aside, that the simple word of affirmation or denial, calmly repeated, may remain as a sufficient bond of truth. A bad man cannot be believed on his oath, and a good man speaks the truth without an oath: to what purpose is the superfluous custom of legal swearing preserved? Christians should not yield to an evil custom, however great the pressure put upon them; but they should abide by the plain and unmistakable command of their Lord and King.

Matthew 5:38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

The law of an eye for an eye, as administered in the proper courts of law, was founded in justice, and worked far more equitably than the more modern system of fines; for that method allows rich men to offend with comparative impunity. But when the lex talionis came to be the rule of daily life, it fostered revenge, and our Savior would not tolerate it as a principle carried out by individuals. Good law in court may be very bad custom in common society. He spoke against whet had become a proverb, and was heard and said among the people: "Ye have heard that it hath been said. " Our loving King would have private dealings ruled by the spirit of love, and not by the rule of law.

Matthew 5:39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Non-resistance and forbearance are to be the rule among Christians. They are to endure personal ill-usage without coming, to blows. They are to be as the anvil when bad men are the hammers, and thus they are to overcome by patient forgiveness. The rule of the judgment-seat is not for common life; but the rule of the cross and the all-enduring Sufferer is for us all. Yet how many regard all this as fanatical, utopian, and even cowardly. The Lord, our King, would have us bear and forbear, and conquer by mighty patience. Can we do it? How are we the servants of Christ if we have not his spirit?

Matthew 5:40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also

Let him have all he asks, and more. Better lose a suit of cloth than be drawn into a suit in law. The courts Of our Lord's day were vicious; and his disciples were advised to suffer wrong sooner than appeal to them. Our own courts often furnish the surest method of solving a difficulty by authority, and we have known them resorted to with the view of preventing strife. Yet even in a country where justice can be had, we are not to resort to law for every personal wrong. We should rather endure to be put upon than be for ever crying out, "I'll bring an action."

At times this very rule of self-sacrifice may require us to take steps in the way of legal appeal, to stop injuries which would fall heavily upon others; but we ought often to forego our own advantage, yea, always when the main motive would be a proud desire for self-vindication.

Lord, give me a patient spirit, so that I may not seek to avenge myself, oven when I might righteously do so!

Matthew 5:41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain,

Governments in those days demanded forced service through their petty officers. Christians were to be of a yielding temper, and bear a double exaction rather than provoke ill words and anger. We ought not to evade taxation, but stand ready to render to Caesar his due. "Yield" is our watchword. To stand up against force is not exactly our part; we may leave that to others. How few believe the long-suffering, non-resistant doctrines of our King!

Matthew 5:42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Be generous. A miser is no follower of Jesus. Discretion is to be used in our giving, lest we encourage idleness and beggary; but the general rule is, "Give to him that asketh thee." Sometimes a loan may be more useful than a gift; do not refuse it to those who will make right use of it. These precepts are not meant for fools; they are set before us as our general rule; but each rule is balanced by other Scriptural commands, and there is the teaching of a philanthropic common sense to guide us. Our spirit is to be one of readiness to help the needy by gift or loan, and we are not exceedingly likely to err by excess in this direction: hence the baldness of the command.

5:43 Matthew 5:43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shall love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.

In this case a command of Scripture had a human antithesis fitted on to it by depraved mince; and this human addition was mischievous. This is a common method — to append to the teaching of Scripture a something which seems to grow out of it, or to be a natural inference from it: which something may be false and wicked. This is a sad crime against the Word of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will only father his own words. He owns the precept, "Thou shall love thy neighbor", but he hates the parasitical growth of "hate thine enemy." This last sentence is destructive of that out of which it appears legitimately to grow; since those who are here styled enemies are, in fact, neighbors. Love is now the universal law; and our King, who has commanded it, is himself the Pattern of it. He will not see it narrowed down, and placed in a setting of hate. May grace prevent any of us from falling into this error!

Matthew 5:44, 45. 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; 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.

Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. "Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to; do good to them, and pray for them." We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate, and then abide in a cold neutrality; but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse, and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus. The theory may be ridiculed, but the practice is revered, and is counted so surprising, that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and own that they are the children of the Father who is in heaven. Indeed, he is a child of God, who can bless the unthankful and the evil: for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on great scale, and none but his children will imitate him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilizing shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere, our hearts will grow contracted, and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

Matthew 5:46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?

Any common sort of man will love those who love him; even tax. gatherer and the scum of the earth can rise to this poor, starveling virtue. Saints cannot be content with such a groveling style of things. "Love for love is manlike"; but "love for hate" is Christlike. Shall we not desire to act up to our high calling?

Matthew 5:47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so.'

On a journey, or in the streets, or in the house, we are not to confine our friendly greetings to those who are near and dear to us. Courtesy should be wide, and none the less sincere because general. We should speak kindly to all, and treat every man as a brother. Anyone will shake hands with an old friend; but we are to be cordially courteous towards every being in the form of man. If not, we shall reach no higher level than mere outcasts.

Even a dog will salute a dog.

Matthew 5:48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Or, "Ye shall be perfect. " We should reach after completeness in love — fullness of love to all around us. Love is the bond of perfectness; and, if we have perfect love, it will form in us a perfect character. Here is that which we aim at perfection like that of God; here is the manner of obtaining it— namely, by abounding in love; and this suggests the question of how far we have proceeded in this heavenly direction, and also the reason why we should persevere in it even to the end, because as children we ought to resemble our Father. Scriptural perfection is attainable: it lies rather in proportion than in degree. A man's character may be perfect, and entire, wanting nothing; and yet such a man will be the very first to admit that the grace which is in him is at best in its infancy, and though perfect as a child in all its parts, it has not yet attained to the perfection of full-grown manhood.

What a mark is set before us by our Perfect King, who, speaking from his mountain-throne, saith, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"! Lord, give what thou cost command; then both the grace and the glory will be thine alone.