



1695 Woodcut Matthew 5:24. From "Biblia ectypa : Bildnussen auss Heiliger Schriftt Alt und Neuen Testaments", Christoph Weigel (author). Call Number at Pitts Theology Library: 1695Bibl.

Matthew 5: 17-37

(17 Do not think that I have come to **abolish the Law** or the **Prophets**; I have not come to **abolish** them but to **fulfill** them. 18 I tell you the **truth**, until **heaven and earth disappear**, not the **smallest letter**, not the **least stroke** of a pen, will by any means **disappear** from the Law until **everything is accomplished**. 19 **Anyone** who **breaks** 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 **practices** and **teaches** these commands will be called **great** in the **kingdom of heaven**. 20 For I tell you that unless your **righteousness surpasses** that of the **Pharisees** and the **teachers of the law**, you will certainly not enter the **kingdom of heaven**.)

21 **You have heard** that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that **anyone** who is angry with his brother will be subject to **judgment**. Again, **anyone** who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. 23 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the **altar** and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the **altar**. First go and be **reconciled** to your brother; then come and offer your gift. 25 **Settle matters** quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the **judge**, and the **judge** may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the **truth**, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. 27 **You have heard that it was said**, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that **anyone** who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, **gouge it out** and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, **cut it off** and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 It has been said, '**Anyone** who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I tell you that **anyone** who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and **anyone** who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. 33 Again, **you have heard that it was said** to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I tell you, **Do not swear at all**: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 **And do not swear** by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your '**Yes**' be '**Yes**,' and your '**No**,' '**No**'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus is diving down deep beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of the law. Am I ready for such depths?

PRAYER: Lord, you are pulling me way beyond my comfort level here in this arrangement of sayings. You are urging me to go to the center of my heart and be honest with what my true motives are. When I am feeling strong, I am attracted to this deep spiritual maturity, but when I am weak, you take me so deep that I fear getting the bends. Please be with me as I attempt to go where I never thought I could go. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

ABOLISH THE LAW / PROPHETS: Up until now, the people had only the law and the prophets for their insights into God are will and purpose. Some were convinced that this was the complete revelation.

If this were the belief of the day, how would some have received Jesus' teachings? Who would have been open to Jesus' new insights? Why?

TRUTH: Truth is that which reveals the reality of what is.

How do you determine if something is true? Have you ever thought you knew the truth, only to find that you were only just beginning to know its reality? How did this help you to enlarge your understanding, and become a more understanding person?

FULFILL / EVERYTHING IS ACCOMPLISHED: Jesus reassures those who have put their trust in the law and the prophets, that they need not be afraid. He is not doing away with the basic truth in these revelation sources, he is only asking them to dig deeper into the realities they contain.

How does scripture study help you to dig deeper into God's ongoing revelation in your life? Has this process made you a more salty person?

HEAVEN AND EARTH DISAPPEAR: Many in Jesus' day thought the end of the world was at hand. We have people today who once again feel the same.

How does this thinking affect the decisions a person makes? Who would Jesus leave behind?

SMALLEST LETTER / LEAST STROKE: It was considered a grave offense to alter the written word of God in any way. Yet people accused Jesus of doing just that with his teachings.

Can you see why they would think that way? When was the last time you struggled with someone's understanding of a truth, only to find that they simply were seeing things in a much deeper level than you were? Were you able to grow threw this experience, or did you get defensive?

BREAKS: To break something or someone is to do grave harm and often make it impossible for it or them to function.

How does your 'breaking' God's laws of love do harm to others, or disable them?

TEACHES OTHERS / PRACTICES: When we make choices, those around us observe our lives. They see what practices we have and make decisions based on what they learn from us.

How is Jesus helping the people to make their choices and decide on what practices they will put in place in their lives? Who are your models, and what have you learned from them? Are you a model for others? What are they learning from your practices?

LEAST /GREAT: What does God want and how am I to respond to God's initiative? There were many competing answers to this eternal question available in Jesus' day.

How does this text help to answer the question when it talks about the least and great of the law?

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: The kingdom of heaven is that reality where God's will is done and God's people enjoy the full presence of God.

How do you explain to yourself and others what the kingdom of heaven is like?

PHARISEES / TEACHERS OF THE LAW: These two groups of people were the religious and moral guides of their day. They attempted to live lives of strict obedience to the received wisdom of their scriptures and traditions.

Who are the examples of these groups today?

RIGHTEOUS SURPASSES: Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees were zealous about their religious practices, but that they were stuck obeying the letter of the law, which often found them disobeying the spirit of the law. In his teachings and examples, he showed that the faithfulness to the spirit of the law surpassed all else.

Can you give an example of such a situation that you might be in today? Have you ever had to decide in favor for the spirit of the law over the letter of the law? Have you ever connected that decision with this text before?

YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID: Matthew's gospel is full of references to the Hebrew Scriptures. How many times does it say "this was to fulfill"? In these teachings he was doing exactly that, fulfilling what the basic teaching taught.

When was the last time you went beyond the surface level of understanding something to the 'now I get it' moment?

ANYONE: Seven (that number signifying completion) times Jesus says anyone in this text. This would include believer and nonbeliever alike.

How would that stretch you if you were a believer? A non-believer?

JUDGE-JUDGMENT: To judge is to take into consideration all the variables of a situation and make a decision on a choice between options.

What standard do you use in judging? Is 'common sense' your default, or the 'uncommon sense' of the gospels?

RECONCILED: Something needs reconciling when an opposition exists.

What oppositions exist in your faith life these days?

SETTLE MATTERS: To settle some matter means that a choice has been made that permits forward movement.

Are there any matters that need to be settled in my faith life so that I can move forward?

GOUGE IT OUT/ CUT IT OFF: To gouge or cut something out or off implies a forceful action to remove something dangerous or unneeded.

What in my life needs gouging out or cutting off so as to follow Jesus' teachings these days?

DO NOW SWEAR:

YES/ NO: Jesus asks for clear responses. No 'on the one hand' or 'the other hand' answers work when making love decisions.

How does this help you find the right choice when a love response is called for?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 5:21 // Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17; Mt. 5: 22 // James 1: 19f; 3:6; Mt. 5:23 // Sir. 28:2; Mk. 11:25; Mt 5:25-6 // Prov. 17:14; Lk. 12:58f; Mt. 5:27 // Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18; Mt. 5:28 // Sir. 9:5; Mt. 5: 29 // Mt. 18:8f; Mk. 9:43-8; Mt 5:31 // Mt. 19:3-9; Dt. 24:1; Mal. 2:14f; Mt. 5:32 // Lk. 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10; Mt. 5:33 // Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:3; Mt. 5:34 // Ps. 11:4; Sir. 23:9; Is. 66:1; Mt. 5:35 // Ps. 48:2; Mt. 5:37 // James 5:12;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Sir. 15:15-20; Ps. 119: 1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-4; 1 Cor. 2:6-10; Mt. 21-37; Revised Common Lectionary: Dt. 30:15-20; Ps. 119:1-8; 1 Cor. 3:1-9; Mt. 5: 21-37;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Mt. 5:22-3--**Gospel According to the Hebrews**--two references by Jerome: 1-And in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which the Nazarenes are accustomed to read, one of the greatest sins is "To grieve the spirit of one's brother." 2-"As also we read in the Hebrew gospel that the Lord spoke to his disciples: "And never," he said, "be joyful except when you look on your brother with love."

To forgive another person from the heart is an act of liberation. We set that person free from the negative bonds that exist between us. We say, "I no longer hold your offense against you" But there is more. We also free ourselves from the burden of being the "offended one." As long as we do not forgive those who have wounded us, we carry them with us or, worse, pull them as a heavy load. The great temptation is to cling in anger to our enemies and then define ourselves as being offended and wounded by them. Forgiveness, therefore, liberates not only the other but also ourselves. It is the way to the freedom of the children of God. Henri Nouwen

In the **Secrets of Enoch** there is reference to swearing by heaven or earth in chapter 69: 1-3.

Forgiveness refuses to allow the offense to be the basis of the relationship. P.104.

Shea, John. [The Spirit Master](#). Chicago, Thomas More Press. 1987.

Loving one's enemy is suffering for him at his own hands. Van Beeck, Frans Jozef

There is only one ultimate imperative in life: Before we die, we need to forgive. We need to forgive those who hurt us, to forgive ourselves for not being any better than those who hurt us, to forgive life itself for some of the things that it dealt us, and, not least, to forgive God for the fact that life is unfair, so as not to die with a bitter and angry heart. Gratitude is the fruit of that struggle. [Fr. Ron Rolheiser](#)

Love means to love that which is unlovable, or it is no virtue at all; forgiving means to pardon that which is unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all. - G. K. Chesterton

God has given us two ears, but one tongue, to show that we should be swift to hear, but slow to speak. God has set a double fence before the tongue, the teeth and the lips, to teach us to be wary that we offend not with our tongue. - Thomas Watson

I suspect that one reason we have lost interest in the virtue of justice is because the word itself has been so corrupted, and also because we who can read know that it will ask something of us. It is comfortable people, not the poor, who fear the word justice. The concept of justice has been corrupted by often being a cover word for angry people, people

who want rights but not corresponding responsibilities, and most especially, people who want vengeance—instead of the healing of both sides, both perpetrator and victim. This is a Gospel perspective that few rise to, which we call “restorative justice.” Richard Rohr: *A Lever and a Place to Stand* (CD) and *Contemplation in Action* (book)

Justice and goodness mean that each part is doing its proper job, playing its proper role, under the guidance of some presiding intelligence, some presiding awareness. Jacob Needleman

The incentive to peacemaking is love, but it degenerates into appeasement whenever justice is ignored. To forgive and to ask for forgiveness are both costly exercises. All authentic Christian peacemaking exhibits the love and justice - and so the pain – of the cross. - John R. W. Stott

"It is one thing to say with the prophet Amos, 'Let justice roll down like mighty waters,' and quite another to work out the irrigation system. Clearly there is more certainty in the recognition of wrongs than there is in the prescription for their cure." - William Sloane Coffin

Justice and power must be brought together, so that what is just may be powerful and whatever is powerful may be just. Blaise Pascal

But forgiveness is not an emotion... Forgiveness is an act of will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. - Corrie Ten Boom

Always forgive your enemies, nothing annoys them so much. Oscar Wilde.

He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass. -Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648)

Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it forgoes revenge, and dares forgive an injury. Edwin Hubbel Chapin

SUGGESTED READINGS: (All these books are reviewed in the book review section www.theark1.com)
Mitchell, Stephen. *The Enlightened Heart*. Harper & Row, NY. 1989. **THE WAY:** Page 99. **TRUTH:** Page 37. **TEACHING:** Page 17.
Aurelio, John R. *Colors*. Crossroad Pub. NY. 1993. **BODY LANGUAGE:** Pages 35-6.