

Reconcile, Then Worship

Matthew 5:21-26

Jesus Christ had a special relationship with God's law, God's will, and God's purpose. As Immanuel ("**God with us**" - [Matthew 1:23](#)), Jesus Christ was the author of the Old Law and taught it with all authority ([Matthew 7:28, 29](#)). As the Savior, Jesus did not come to destroy the Old Law but to fulfill it ([Matthew 5:17](#)).

He fulfilled all righteousness. It is in Christ that we can see what righteousness truly is. It is in Him that we can see what true humanity looks like without the deforming effects of sin. The righteousness of Christ exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees because His righteousness was not all about what He did but also about Who He was.

That is why He is the fulfillment, or the completion of, the Old Law. That is why we see in Jesus Christ a perfect communion with His Heavenly Father. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the only kind of righteousness worth having because it is the true relationship between God the Creator and Man the Created. As we can see in the Beatitudes, we must receive what God the Father has for us and not have the false idea that we can give ourselves eternal life.

In [Matthew 5:21-26](#), our Lord challenges the current ideas of some in His day concerning righteousness. Righteousness is not merely a legal reality. It is not about only following or not following certain rules. It is not even about only keeping merits and demerits. (That kind of thinking was that of the Pharisees.) Our Lord teaches that righteousness goes deeper than certain behaviors. That kind of thinking tempts us to think of our lives only in terms of the minimum we need to do to be pleasing to God. It also tempts us to see what we can get away with and still not be in violation so that God is obliged to keep His part.

JESUS DEALS WITH THE COMMANDMENT "DO NOT KILL"

"Do not kill" was one of the Ten Commandments given to Moses and Israel. Jesus reminds His listeners that **"...whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment."** The Jews were familiar with the Old Law and they already knew that this was the case. This is the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. But our Lord then reveals more of His special relationship to the Old Law as He Who wrote and would fulfill it when He says, **"But I say unto you."** Our Lord is telling the Jews the deeper meaning of God's law. God's intention was not just that they do not actually murder. One has not necessarily fulfilled God's command just because he has not physically killed another.

We must understand the next three statements of Christ as being parallel statements. Our Lord is saying to be angry with another person without cause and to demean another by lies and insults is liable to the same judgment as if you murdered someone. Under that standard of right and wrong that He will establish, being angry with a brother *without a cause* will endanger one before the same judgment seat as murder did under the Old Law. Even more strict, to give way to one's temper and anger to the point of calling a brother *Raca* (a term of reproach meaning empty headed or senseless) would endanger him before the greater court; the *council* which was the Sanhedrin. Stricter yet, to accuse of brother of being a *fool* (meaning a wicked rebel before the Lord) will put one in danger of hell (Gehenna) fire.

What is the meaning for us today? Our Lord is showing us the shallowness of our thinking and telling us it must be corrected. We are tempted to think that righteousness is defined by the absence of

actual murder. He is telling us to consider that the seeds of murder began earlier than the final act. Murder began way back in the first angry word or the first thoughtless insult. He is saying there is a real death that occurs whenever we speak unkindly or out of rash anger to others. There is discord, there is dissolution, and there is pain brought into reality by our thoughtless and selfish words. The words can be “worked around” as some put their spin on it and they can be apologized for but they cannot be unsaid. Damage to the relationship has been done!

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS IS FAR MORE THAN LEGAL AND EXTERNAL OBEDIENCE

Righteousness is not about getting your way, or getting your part done and making it look right. It is not looking to see just how much you have to confess and repent of to be considered righteous. Righteousness is right relationships, relationships that spring out of pure heart, out of pure mind, and out of a pure soul that always brings about blessings and peace.

In the Beatitudes, our Lord spoke of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This is part of being poor in spirit. The blessed realize their complete inability to make themselves right on their own but they long for being right with God in their own lives and also in the lives of others. True righteousness goes beyond just doing what is right all the way to being right. True righteousness includes both Truth and Spirit ([John 4:24](#)). That is why it is blessed to be poor in spirit. We must recognize our need for one another to make us right in order to recognize the Truth about our condition. Our Lord wants us to know what righteousness is and then long for it and not be satisfied by punching some kind of “spiritual time-clock.”

AFTER HIS THREE STATEMENTS, JESUS GIVES TWO COMMANDS

Our Lord commands us to make all-out efforts to reconcile and heal broken relationships as quickly as possible in two different settings.

In the first instance, Jesus is speaking of when you are offering a gift at the altar. The context is worship. If you are in an assembly to offer Jehovah God your worship and you remember or you know that someone else here has **“aught against thee,”** what is your obligation? You may want to offer God your worship but there is a relationship (or relationships) in your life that is not right. Notice that here (and in the following situation) that you are in a position of having wronged someone else, not being wronged. (I wonder if our Lord chose to emphasize these situations because they can often be the more difficult, because of arrogance and pride, for us to seek reconciliation and healing.) It can be very uncomfortable to have to admit a dereliction of duty, that is, not having checked out a situation thoroughly, or to have to admit to a falsifying of facts to make yourself look right, or to let your pride get in the way of doing what is best for all concerned. But that is part of true righteousness.

Our Lord commands us that we are not to proceed to offer Jehovah God our worship until reconciliation has been sought and healing begins. There is an important connection between the worshiping of our God and the state of our relationship with our brethren. God’s will is for reconciliation and so to honor and glorify Him we must be reconciled to our brethren. If you know your brethren have aught against you then why do you attempt to fellowship them? It cannot be to worship God. So what is your purpose? Brethren, our worship to Jehovah God is vanity when we attempt to do it without His approval. And His approval will only be granted when all of our relationships are right.

The second command is set in a legal context. Our Lord compares us to someone being taken to court by an accuser. His command here is to **“Agree with adversary quickly”** so that perhaps we do not have to go to court. The point is that we should seek right relationships with others without legal help. Sometimes, pride or stubbornness may get in the way and, although a thing may “be

settled” according to the outlook of some, there are still inwardly feelings of mistrust and the relationship is still not right.

Our Lord paints a picture here of paying a very high and legal price for refusing to work toward reconciliation and healing. You will never get out of the prison of hurt and mistrust **“till thou hast paid the utmost farthing.”** It would seem that our Lord is using irony here. *“If you wish to go the legal direction, go ahead. You will pay the full legal price, but then what do you have, right relationship? No!”* If one does not pursue reconciliation and healing with the righteousness of Christ, things continually go from bad to worse.

God intends for all persons and relationships to be healed and actually to be reconciled. His aim is for all things to be made fully right, perfect. But only He can make us complete. We must long for and receive a far greater righteousness that transforms us and heals our relationships. It is better for us, and more joyful for us, to let ourselves go and participate in God’s work together as one.

Jesus Christ brings about true righteousness. That is something far deeper and more wonderful than merely trying to make others think you are right. Our God knows.

Do you long to be made right? Do you see your poverty of spirit? Do you mourn over the pain and hurt in the church and in the world, including that which you have caused? We do not need our own righteousness, but we need Christ in us.

Do you need to reconcile so you can truly worship Jehovah God?