

God and His Image  
“God and His Image”

Matthew 5:20-26

February 20, 2005 by C.W. Powell

20 For I say 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.

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:

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.

25 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.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

The passage that I just read is a part of the famous Sermon on the Mount, which was a kind of manifesto of the kingdom of God. In this famous sermon, the Lord Jesus is setting forth the true principles of the kingdom of God and what constitutes the true worship of God. It starts with blessings, for Jesus did not come to curse the world, for it was already cursed in Adam, but to forgive sins and bring a blessing to His people. True worship always begins with a blessing, for those whose hearts are filled with anger and strife cannot worship correctly.

So I want to do several things here today.

1. Set this passage in its context in the Sermon on the Mount.
2. Explain the several propositions that Christ presents in this passage
3. Make application to you and me.

I. I would set the passage in its context in the Sermon on the Mount. This involves understanding several things”

A. Christ begins with His blessings upon His true worshippers and describes their character:

1. They are poor in spirit—they bring nothing, as we saw last week in the examination of the publican and the Pharisee. They bring nothing to God as payment for their sins and offer nothing of their own righteousness. At some future time, we will examine more closely the blessings in connection with worship, if the Lord wills.
2. Not only is their blessings and character described, but their role in the world is explained. They are to be salt and light
3. Then He begins a long exposition of the Law of God, for He did not come to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them, and this means an understanding of the true nature of the law and the prophets.

B. It is in this explanation of the true nature of the law of God that we find the passage that I read, verse 21-26 of the 5th chapter of Matthew. He sets forth the principle that their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. These were the experts and scholars of the law in the days of Christ, and it was not small order for Christ to say that an acceptable righteousness before God must be of a greater order than theirs, for they were meticulous in their observance of the law. They were sincere about it, they worked hard at it, but as Paul would say

later, they did not seek righteousness by faith. They had great zeal, but their zeal was worth nothing before God, for they sought their righteousness within themselves and despised others.

- C. He examines several of the commandments, bringing out their true character and showing what the true claims of the law are.
  1. They are directed to the souls of men, and not just to their bodies.
  2. They are therefore spiritual, coming from God who is a spirit, Who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.
  3. Although stated in negative terms, the ten commandments always carry a positive principle which we must perform if we are to truly keep the law. The positive principle is that we are to love God with all our hearts, souls, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as our self.

II. This brings us to the passage itself. It involves the Sixth Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Kill.

A. It must be stated that our love for God cannot be disconnected from our love for men. How can we say that we love God when we have hatred toward our neighbor.

B. There are several manifestations of our rebellious, sinful nature, with respect to this commandment.

1. Causeless anger. This does not mean that we do not think we have reason for our anger against our neighbor, for the heart has many reasons. We are wise in our own conceits and very easily justify ourselves and justify our anger toward our neighbor. It is easy to find reasons. Men are sinners; our neighbors are sinners, and have faults. But are their faults the reason for our anger? Then why aren't we angry with everybody all the time? Some people are, of course, and ruin themselves and everyone around them. They are constantly vexed and filled with strife. The true cause of their anger is not the faults of others, but something in their own hearts.

2. Thinking of him as inferior or useless. Despising your neighbor. This is what "Raca" means an empty or useless fellow. The Pharisee despised others, and considered themselves a notch above, in a special class of people who knew the law and zealously obeyed it. The problem is that those who boast in the law always reduce it to outward forms and ceremonies, as if God is pleased with outward forms and ceremonies. Jesus is saying that if you boast in the law then you must boast in perfect and pure love for God and your neighbor, for this is what the law requires. Therefore, you not only must refrain from the hidden anger that springs up, but from setting aside your brother as an empty person. If you truly believe in the sovereignty of God, then you must realize that there are no accidents in the world, and every man has a purpose in this world and is not to be despised. Even the punishments of the law recognized this. A man could only be beaten a limited number of lashes for offenses under the law, for he was not to be despised. Even if he deserved punishment, he was not to be treated as a dog or foul vermin.

3. Breaking out in rants and defamations: "Thou Fool." This is to deny even the image of Christ in him, for Christ is the wisdom of God and those without wisdom are not in the image of God. This is to objectify man and make him no better than the beasts of the field. This is a frightful sin and worthy of extreme punishment, for it lashes out at God Himself.

C. Do not think you can approach the holy throne of God in worship if you defend these sins and do not repent of them. Do you think that God will accept your offerings if you offer them with the blood of your brother on them? The evidence that a man trusts in his own righteousness is the despising of others, a setting aside of others.

1. This is an emphatic reminder of the true nature of worship, that it does not involve ceremonies, but must spring from the heart of the believer, in meekness and poverty of spirit.
2. “Leave your gift...” --your praise, your thanksgiving, your spiritual offerings, and go make it right with your brother.
3. Oh that the church had the same zeal for peace among its members, and reconciliation and love, as it does so many times for ceremonies and outward things!
4. Peace with your brother takes precedence over the offering of your gift—in the law this gift was a sacrifice made on the altar. All the people had access to the altar and could have the priests offer their sacrifice on the altar. Today, we do not offer sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem; our sacrifices are of praise and thanksgiving and joy.

### III.

#### Application.

##### A.

God is a Spirit and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Let us keep our heart with all diligence, for out it are the issues of life. In the presence of God we must like Isaiah realize that we are unclean in the midst of an unclean people. No one keeps the Sixth Commandment, not even those who have never shed the blood of a human being. The sin is in the heart and involves the image of God in our brother. “How can we say we love God whom we have not seen, when we hate our brother whom we have seen.” This is the way of the world, the sinful, wicked world in which we live. The earth runs red with the blood of those who are hated and despised and counted as rubbish by those who think themselves to be superior. Those same people attend their houses of worship and think to please God by offerings and sacrifices. Let it not be so with us, but let us be “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Eph 4:32

##### B.

It ought to grieve us if someone has something against us, for we have been commanded to be harmless and without blame. It doesn’t say whose fault the quarrel is—and that is not the issue, for quarrels often continue forever because each insists upon blaming the other. The rule is, if you can fix it, go and fix it. Don’t come to the worship of God without resolving issues with your brother. Everything cannot be fixed, but we are to fix what we can.

##### C.

How precious are our offerings if they are offered to God from a humble, poor, and meek disposition. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

##### D.

But there is a frustration here. How can I do this? Most of all, it is to the Lord God that we must make our peace. If our sins against men make us unfit for worship, how much more do our sins against God make us unfit. What, then, are we to do? Can we fix every thought, every slip of the tongue, every unkind and thoughtless word, before we are fit for worship. Who then, can worship? We truly see, here, that we are all unfit for worship if God had not made provision for us. It is in the cross of Christ, the true offering for sin, that our great poverty toward God is clearly set forth.

##### E.

This is the true poverty of mind that Jesus speaks of, for it is in the cross of Christ that reveals our poverty. “Though 2Co 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” My sins are freely forgiven in Christ, so I can make it right with my brother, and worship God in sincerity and in truth. As I have been forgiven, the anger, the pride, the arrogance seeps away in view of His love for me, and I am able to be reconciled to my neighbor. I can forgive others because He has forgiven me. I can seek peace with my brother because Christ has made peace with me. Thus the law is fulfilled, for I am at peace with God and with men.

If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them. Amen and Amen.

May God bless you.