

50 Commands of Christ ~ Lesson 2 ~ (Commands #7-12)

7. Be reconciled—*Matthew 5:23-25. 1 John 4:20.*

Why is it preferable for Christians to quietly resolve conflicts rather than battle over them publicly? Why is an “out-of-court” settlement better than a judge’s decision?

8. Do not commit adultery—*Matthew 5:27-30.* How did Jesus expand the definition of adultery in God’s eyes?

What’s wrong with the statement, “it’s okay to look as long as you don’t touch?”

Did Jesus mean what he said literally in 5:29-30? Why did he make this radical statement?

9. Keep your word—*Matthew 5:33-37.* How did Jesus update the ancient saying about oaths? Why is it inappropriate to swear by heaven? By earth? By your head?

In what situations do people often swear? How do we take the name of God lightly or frivolously?

10. Go the second mile—*Matthew 5:38-42.* Where do we draw the line between our rights and the responsibility to be forgiving and patient?

Can love really overcome evil? How can doing good change a bad situation?

11. Love your enemies—*Matthew 5:44.* Is this a new command? (Exodus 23:4-5, Deut 22:1-4, Proverbs 25:21)

God loves and treats evil and good people the same way. Why is it so difficult for us to do the same?

Is praying for an enemy a good first step to loving him?

12. Be perfect—*Matthew 5:48, 1 John 3:2-3.* Who set the example for us? Is it possible for us to carry out this command? Does that mean we shouldn’t try?

What aspects of perfection are we to strive for?

50 Commands of Christ ~ Lesson 2 ~ (Commands #7-12) ~ Leader's Guide

7. Be reconciled

Matthew 5:23-25 – “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to him; then come and offer your gift.

“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.

Note that Jesus speaks of offering a “gift” at the altar, not a sacrifice as the Jews would normally have done; this anticipates Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice of himself to replace animal and grain sacrifices at the altar.

The message in Verses 23-24 is that you must seek peace (or reconciliation) with your neighbors before reconciliation with God is possible. We are hypocrites if we claim to love God while we are angry and feel hateful toward others. The real test of our love for God is how we treat the people right in front of us.

1 John 4:20 – If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [ESV]

Why is it preferable for Christians to quietly resolve conflicts rather than battle over them publicly? Why is an “out-of-court” settlement better than a judge’s decision? Matthew 5:25 was practical advice in Jesus’ time and still is today. Trials are messy, time-consuming, and expensive, but the bigger issue is the increasing anger on both sides. Even small disagreements that may not take you to court mend more easily if you try to make peace right away.

In the broader sense, these three verses advise us to get things right with other people, especially with other believers, before we have to stand before God.

8. Do not commit adultery

Matthew 5:27-30 – 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 stumble, 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 stumble, 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.

How did Jesus expand the definition of adultery in God’s eyes? The 7th commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” said it was wrong for a person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse. But Jesus said that a willful,

calculated look leading to the *desire* to have sex is a form of adultery, even if it is only in one's heart. Jesus emphasized that if the act is wrong, so is the intention. Jesus is not condemning natural interest in the opposite sex or even healthy sexual desire, but the deliberate and repeated filling of one's mind with fantasies that would be evil if acted out.

What's wrong with the statement, "it's okay to look as long as you don't touch?" Left unchecked, wrong desires will lead to wrong actions and turn people away from God.

Did Jesus mean what he said literally in 5:29-30? Why did he make this radical statement? In Biblical times, Jews linked the loss of limbs to martyrdom, which was not what Jesus had in mind at all. He was speaking figuratively for, in fact, even a man with one eye can lust. What he is saying is that we should deal as drastically as necessary with sin (which he repeated again in Matthew 18:8-9). The bizarre images held one to remember the danger of these sins but also emphasize that one cannot disclaim responsibility by blaming the body.

9. Keep your word

Matthew 5:33-37 – 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.’ ³⁴But 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.

How did Jesus update the ancient saying about oaths? In a sense, the ancient saying was actually the third commandment, “Do not misuse the name of the Lord, your God.” (Exodus 20:7, Deut 5:11) Or perhaps more likely, the law set down by the Lord through Moses in Leviticus 19:12 – Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. Again, in Numbers 30:2, we read, “When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.”

Jesus now essentially totally threw out the idea of swearing by God or anything related to God. In fact, Jesus did away with all oaths and vows, in favor of always simply speaking the truth.

Why is it inappropriate to swear by heaven? By earth? By your head? In the Mishnah (a Jewish method of teaching) such oaths are viewed as not binding. But Jesus essentially says here (5:34-36) that all oaths are covered by his prohibition

In what situations do people often swear? How do we take the name of God lightly or frivolously?

Truthfulness and honesty today are often not the norm, so many people feel they must preface statements with “in all honesty” or end them with some sort of promise or oath on the name of God.

10. Go the second mile.

Matthew 5:38-42 – ³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

The “eye for eye” and “tooth for tooth” expression in 5:38 was originally set down in Exodus 21:23-25, Leviticus 24:19, and Deuteronomy 19:21. It was given to judges and said, in effect, “let the punishment fit the crime.” The guide was given to *limit* vengeance and help the court administer punishment that was neither too strict or too lenient. It was not a guide for personal revenge or a vendetta against others.

When we are wronged, our first reaction is generally to get even. Instead, Jesus said we should do good to those who wrong us. Our desire should not be to keep score, but to love and forgive. This is not natural—it is supernatural. Only God can give us the strength to love as he does. So instead of planning vengeance, pray for those who hurt you.

Where do we draw the line between our rights and the responsibility to be forgiving and patient?

Can love really overcome evil? How can doing good change a bad situation? When you turn the other cheek, so to speak, don’t expect to see an immediate change in the person who wronged you. It’s like planting a seed or watering a seed that was planted previously—the plant is not going to all of a sudden spring into beautiful bloom—but maybe it will move a little further in that direction. Or maybe not! There is some evil that will never be eliminated by punishment or love. Eventually, it will be judged by God, but in the meantime God commands us to love all: family, friends, neighbors, and, yes, our enemies as well.

11. Love your enemies.

Matthew 5:44 – But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Although presented as a new command in a new section, essentially this is a continuation of the previous command to not seek retaliation and not resist evil people. But here, Jesus goes one step further and commands us to love our enemies and pray for them. In the Old Testament, the Jews had been told they were not to mistreat their enemies in verses such as Proverbs 24:17 – Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice. And in the next chapter, Solomon even says to be kind to your enemy in Proverbs 25:21-22 – ²¹ If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to

drink.²² In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

In other OT verses (Exodus 23:4-5, Deut 22:1-4), the Jews were told to help your enemy if their animals got in trouble. But there were other places (Psalm 139:19-22, 140:9-11) that the Jews interpreted as meaning they should hate their enemies. But with Jesus' command and his teaching, there is no ambiguity: we are always to love all including our enemies. If you love your enemies and treat them well, you will truly show that Jesus is Lord of your life. This is possible only if you give your life fully to God because only he can deliver you from your natural selfishness. We must trust the Holy Spirit in each of us to *show* love to those for whom we may not *feel* love.

God loves and treats evil and good people the same way. Why is it so difficult for us to do the same?

Is praying for an enemy a good first step to loving him?

12. Be perfect.

Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Who set the example for us? Is it possible for us to carry out this command? Does that mean we shouldn't try? Christ set up the ultimate ideal of perfect love, which, of course, is not something we can attain in this earthly life. Nevertheless, it is God's high standard for us and he expects us to strive in that direction.

Throughout the last few verses, Jesus has essentially asked for perfection. What more can be done about adultery if lust has been driven from your hearts (5:29)? And who else is left to love after one has loved his enemy (5:44)?

What aspects of perfection are we to strive for? There are several: first, in *character*. Meaning our temperament, honor, integrity, moral fiber, fortitude, reliability, discipline, perseverance, generosity, humility, loyalty, and patience. Secondly, in *holiness*. We are to separate ourselves from worldly values; we are to be devoted to God's values rather than our own. Third, in *maturity*. We can't achieve Christlike character and holiness all at once, but we must grow in maturity and wholeness. Just as we expect different behavior and thinking from a baby, a child, a teenager, and an adult, so God expects different behavior from us, depending upon our stage of spiritual development. Fourth, in *love*. We should seek to love others as completely as God loves us.

Interestingly, the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* opines that "be perfect" applies only to maturity or wisdom, or could possibly indicate "completeness" with God, though not necessarily in a moral sense. Likewise, the *Oxford Bible Commentary* says that "be perfect" is not a call to sinlessness, but is actually a call to "completeness." In other words, they let you off the hook a little bit.

On the other hand, the *Life Application Study Bible* says that we can be perfect if our behavior is appropriate for our maturity level—perfect, yet with much room to grow. Our tendency to sin must never deter us from striving to be more like

Christ. Christ calls all his disciples to excel, to rise above mediocrity, and to mature in every area, becoming more like him. Those who strive to become perfect will one day be perfect, even as Christ is perfect.

1 John 3:2-3 – Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, a we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

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