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A Series of Sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Sofia, Holy Trinity Christian Church:

Part One: *The Beatitudes. Matthew 5:1–20.* October 19, 2024.

Part Two: *“You Are the Salt of the Earth.” Matt. 5:13–48. Christians and Public Life.* February 23, 2025

Part Three: *“Be Careful Not to Practice Your Righteousness Before Others to Be Seen by Them.” Matthew 6:1–18. Christians and Church Life.* June 29, 2025

Part Four: *“Do Not Store Up for Yourselves Treasures on Earth.” Matthew 6:19–34. Christ’s Ethical Teaching on Material Possessions.* September 6, 2026.

Part Five: *Self-Righteousness or Seeking God? Matthew 7:1–12. Christ’s Ethical Teaching on Relationships.* October 10, 2026.

Abstract: Boyan Mak Mihaylov, *“You Are the Salt of the Earth.” Matt. 5:13–48. Christians and Public Life: A Series of Sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Part Two*
. Sofia: Holy Trinity Christian Church, February 23, 2025

This sermon examines Matthew 5:13–48, focusing on Jesus’ redefinition of societal ethics in the Sermon on the Mount. It argues that Christ’s teachings transcend mere external compliance with the Law, calling believers to embody internal righteousness through transformative practices such as reconciliation, purity of heart, truthful speech, and love for enemies. The analysis highlights the role of Christians as "salt and light" in society, emphasizing that authentic discipleship requires radical obedience rooted in heart transformation rather than legalistic observance. The sermon concludes that Jesus’ ethic of perfection (τέλειος, "whole") reflects God’s character and necessitates a communal witness grounded in grace, mercy, and intentional engagement with public life.

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Enemy Love, Social Witness, Pharisaic Righteousness, Divine Perfection, Radical Discipleship, Grace and Obedience, Counter-Cultural Faith, Biblical Law, Internal Righteousness, Christian Identity, Public Theology [1]

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Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of the five discourses that Matthew recorded in his Gospel. It contains Christ’s ethical teaching about the Kingdom of God. He taught the crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan (Matt. 4:25). Christ preaches in the midst of His healing ministry. On the one hand, the sermon is for everyone, because Jesus goes up on the hill and sees the crowds (Matt. 5:1), but on the other hand, the disciples come near to Jesus (Matt. 5:1). It is difficult to imagine how we could live according to Christ’s teaching if we are not His disciples!? Upon careful reading, we will notice that it has a didactic purpose – “whoever does them (the commandments) and teaches them to others, he will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). Therefore, Jesus preached so that the disciples would pass on His teaching to everyone else, since the Gospel ends with the words “go and make disciples...”. It is at the same time an ideal and a transformative initiative [2] . An ideal, because we can always go deeper, practical training, because the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of concrete actions.

Notes:

1 Abstract and keywords generated by DeepSeek AI.

2 Стасен, Глен. Гъши, Дейвид. Етика на Царството. Следване на Христос в съвременния контекст. София: Нов човек, 2010. (Original work published in 2003 as: Stassen, Glen. Gushee, David. Kingdom Ethics. Downers Groove, IL: InterVarsity Press), стр.131 - 151

Christians and Public Life (Matthew 5:13–48)

Salt of the Earth and Light of the World (Matt. 5:13–16)

Immediately after the Beatitudes in Matthew follow two statements that Jesus makes about believers.

“You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). We are compared to salt. Just as it is important for salt to be pure, so also the church must be pure in order to give “taste” and to be useful to the Lord. 3 Salt is also a means of preservation.

“You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Jesus speaks of a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. The idea here is that the church and its message cannot be hidden – they will always shine. The world will persecute the church, but its calling is to serve the world. 4

He continues to speak about the light, but gives an example with a lamp that is intended to shine. It is not placed where its light makes no sense – under the bed. Green writes that “until He illuminates us, we will never shine with His reflected light.” 5

Application. Essential are the words: “earth” and “world,” “city” and “hill,” which shows that the two metaphors refer to the public life of Christians, and not only to the personal. Salt can lose its saltiness, and light can fail to shine. Unfortunately, today in Western Europe this is exactly what is happening.

Notes:

3 Грийн, p. 80

4 Стот, p. 50

5 Грийн, p. 81

Fulfillment of the Law (Matt. 5:17–20)

Jesus makes a clarification that the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets is not their abolition. According to Matt. 5:19–20, the disciples are expected to keep the commandments of the law and to teach others to do so. The problem with the Pharisees is diagnosed by Jesus later in Matt. 23:3:

“Therefore, whatever they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say, and do not do.”

The righteousness of the Pharisees was connected with observing the letter of the law without a desire to understand the spirit of the law and to know God Himself. Therefore, the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount goes beyond visible observance of the law to a righteousness in the human heart connected with knowing the Father Himself, through following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely the heart, according to Jesus, that is the key to following God and from there to the fulfillment of the law. (The word “heart” occurs most frequently in Acts and immediately after that almost an equal number of times in the Gospel of Matthew and Romans.)

St. John Chrysostom writes: “His statements do not annul the previous ones, but are derived from them and fill them with new meaning.” 6

Dietrich Bonhoeffer summarizes this passage as follows:

“Of course, the righteousness of the disciples will never be their personal achievement; it is always a gift that they have received when they were called to follow Jesus. In fact, their righteousness consists precisely in their following Him, and the Beatitudes, the reward of the kingdom of heaven, was promised to them for this following.” 7

Application. Christ’s message to us today is that we are expected to grasp the spirit of the law and to teach this to all other people. The Old Testament law is an essential part of God’s revelation. Departing from it is betrayal of Christ.

Notes:

6 Стот, 65

7 Бонхьофер, Дитрих. Цената на ученичеството. https://methodist.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/%D0%A6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BE%D1%82-%D0%94%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%85-%D0%91%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%85%D1%8C%D0%BE%D1%84%D0%B5%D1%80.pdf , accessed February 22, 2025, p. 47

“You have heard that it was said, but I say to you...” (Matt. 5:21–48)

From this follows Christ’s teaching on four social topics that are relevant today. In the quoted “you have heard that it was said” by Jesus, in some places there are additions that the scribes made. That is why Jesus uses “but I say to you” and corrects the teachings of the scribes.

Murder and Anger (Matt. 5:21–26)

Regarding murder, Jesus goes beyond the law, beyond condemning the culprit (an addition of the scribes) and traces the thought of murder to the “dark lairs of the human heart” (according to Michael Green), where hatred is hidden. 8 Regarding anger without cause and the use of the word “raca,” “the one who says to his brother that he is doomed to hell is himself in danger of going there” (Tasker, Stott). 9

Application. Christ’s remedy for anger and murder is reconciliation (Matt. 5:24). And in public life, reconciliation, especially between states, is also God’s will. This corresponds with “blessed are the peacemakers.” An echo of Christ’s teaching is found in the Apostle Paul: “Live in peace with all people.”

Notes:

8 Грийн, p. 83

9 Стот, p. 78

Adultery and Marriage (Matt. 5:27–32)

Unlike the tradition of the scribes, Christ reveals the real problem with adultery, which lies in the human heart. While they are ready to lay the blame on the adulterous woman, Christ clearly highlights the lust found in the man’s heart. Cutting off the hand or plucking out the eye here are hyperboles for the necessity of stopping the source that leads to sin. In our contemporary world, this could mean throwing away all pornographic materials or stopping all actions that lead to improper desire.

Application. Regarding marriage, Christ restores ethics to God’s original design – one man and one woman for life, leaving adultery as the only reason for dissolving a marriage. There is no reason this should not apply to us today.

The Meaning of Oaths (Matt. 5:33–37)

In this teaching, Christ does not forbid public oaths, as some Christian denominations interpret the verse (for example, a military oath, an oath in court).

Rather, the idea is that if a believer always speaks sincerely and accurately with “yes” and “no,” then there would hardly be any need to make any oaths. The necessity of an oath indicates that a person is not entirely sincere in his statements. The scribes and Pharisees used to swear by the gold of the temple so that they could later renege.

Application: The modern disciple of Christ must be sincere and accurate, speaking with “yes” and “no,” so that there is no need to confirm in another way what he says.

Loving the Enemy (Matt. 5:38–48)

“Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Matt. 5:38). Here Jesus gives two examples that show how one should not respond to an evil person with evil. The first is the example of giving the outer garment, and the second of walking two miles instead of one. Michael Green gives the following example of the attitude of a black Christian leader toward whites in South Africa: “When they unjustly forced me to do something, I did it, then I turned and asked my master if

I could help him with something else.” [10]

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father” (Matt. 5:44). The Father has given the sun to both the good and the evil. It is easy to love those who love you. Tax collectors and Gentiles are given as examples of such reciprocal “love.” Just as Jesus as God’s Son loves enemies, so also love for enemies is a mark of Christians that they are God’s sons and daughters.

Love for the enemy is one of the most unique characteristics of Christianity. Although this teaching is embedded in the Old Testament law, the scribes, especially the Essenes, found a way to circumvent it. [11] Two arguments are essential for our love for enemies. First, they too are created in God’s image and likeness. Second, Christ sacrificed Himself and died for their sins as well.

Application. Love for the enemy is the most essential trait of Christianity. The ability to love enemies is a divine gift. It is a holistic characteristic that is connected with the ability to forgive and to love in a divine way.

Notes:

10 Грийн, p. 86

11 Грийн, p. 87

Practical for Us

Where and how has God placed me to be salt and light?

In which area do I need change:

- anger;

- lust;

- speech – yes/no;

- retaliation of evil;

- love for enemies

How do I pass on Christ’s teaching to others?

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to draw the inference that Christ’s ethics regarding social problems elevates the Old Testament law as a pillar that must be surpassed, and that man’s sin must be sought in his heart. The fulfillment of the law comes through following Christ, who has fulfilled the law.

Christians are called to live in society, not outside it. Murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation of evil, and love for enemies are problems of our heart, not merely external social problems. When we seek their resolution, we must first examine our own heart.

Jesus concludes this passage with the words: “Therefore be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). In this context, Jesus wants us to be whole (a translation of “perfect”), just as the Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). With this, Jesus does not reduce the law to the fulfillment of commandments, but to a change of the inner essence of the Christian.

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