

## SUNDAY

October 3, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5: 21-30 & Exodus 20: 1-17

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** Compare these two passages. Note where Jesus says “You’ve heard it said...” and find where it was said (the Ten Commandments). What do you think was the reaction of the Jews who were hearing Jesus superseding Torah law with His proclamation? What is your reaction to the authority that Jesus is declaring for Himself in this passage?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Jesus, being fully God Himself, has the authority to “upgrade” the law that was given to the Jews years before.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Read Matthew 7: 28-29. This is the conclusion of the message that Jesus was speaking (Sermon on the Mount). Note the people’s reaction to all that He had just said. Consider the reaction of the religious authorities (Pharisees & Sanhedrin) to His claim to be knowing more than the revealed law that God gave to Moses. Can you see why Jesus was seen as such a revolutionary figure to them?

What authority do you allow Jesus to have in your own heart and mind? Are you like the people who put their trust in Him, or like the authorities who were skeptical and felt threatened by Him? What do you think is the basis for your perspective?

If you have allowed Jesus to have authority in your life, how does He influence your thoughts, your words, and your actions?

**PRAY:** To be a Christ-follower (Christian) is to allow Jesus to guide your life choices and actions. If you are struggling with doing this, ask God to reveal clearly who Jesus is, and why you should allow Him to have this authority. If you have already “put Jesus in the driver’s seat” of your life, ask Him to help you hear His voice more clearly and to have a heart more keenly prepared to be obedient to His direction.

## MONDAY

October 4, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5: 21-22

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** Inside the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that anyone can be admitted to the Kingdom of God. Then He tells us that we are to be salt and light. But here He warns about how we will be judged. Why do you think that He starts with the emotion of anger? Is anger in itself sinful?

**KEY CONCEPT:** The emotion of anger is not a sin, but what we do with it can quickly lead to sin.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Do you experience anger? About what kinds of things? Is it a justifiable anger? What is the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger?

What is the impact of anger on your own physical and emotional well being? Do you have any long-standing anger that you have had for many years? Have you submitted it to God?

**PRAY:** Like fire, anger can be a good thing or a dangerous thing depending on how we handle it. If you are experiencing the emotion of anger, submit this to God in prayer and ask Him to help you know how to deal with it. Beware of nurturing anger and becoming self-righteous in your heart over it, as this can be used by the enemy without your even realizing it. Allow God to help you manage this very tricky emotion. If God reveals to you that you are harboring an unrighteous anger toward someone, confess it to Him and ask forgiveness for having done so.

## TUESDAY

October 5, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5:21-22

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** Note the several degrees of difference that Jesus is talking about with anger. There is simple anger, next there is “raca”, which is an aramaic term of contempt, and then there is “you fool” which heaps malice onto contempt (“you fool” would be more like “stupid b\*\*\*\*\*d” or “f\*\*\*\*\* jerk” is in today’s language)<sup>1</sup> Can you see the difference in degree in this list, and why they merit different consequences?

**KEY CONCEPT:** How we handle our anger is of serious importance to God because of the negative impact it can have on others and upon society.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Look at the culture we live in. Have you noticed the decline of standards in language in the media (movies, television, radio) in the past few decades? How do you think this has influenced the direction in which our culture is going? Road rage and workplace violence are fairly recent developments. How do you think we have gotten to where these have become a fairly common occurrences?

How are you at handling your own anger? Do you quickly speak what’s on your mind without considering the consequences? What does it mean to be “salt and light” in view of how we handle our anger?

**PRAY:** People are more and more quickly taking offense in negative ways...with uncivil language that can be hurtful in itself and which often leads to violence. Continue this week to ask God to help you manage your anger in a way that brings glory to Himself and allows you to be salt and light in the world.

From The Divine Conspiracy by Dallas Willard, page 154. 1997.

## WEDNESDAY

October 6, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5: 21-26 (emphasis 23-26)

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** What is the essence of what Jesus is saying in vs 23-26? Why do you think that God put so much import on reconciliation? Why do you think that God prefers that we patch things up with people before we are to come before Him in worship?

**KEY CONCEPT:** God has created us to be in relationship with people and Himself. He has told us to “love one another,” and expects us to make this of highest priority in our lives. Ruptures in our relationships need to be addressed in order to honor his command to us.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 in light of what Jesus is telling us in Matthew 5: 23-26. How important is it to you to “mend your fences” with others whom you have relationship problems? How important is it to God? Submitting your will to God’s will on this issue is an act of obedience that allows the light of Christ to shine out of you.

Who do you need to go visit and begin the process of reconciliation? What are the risks of doing so? What are risks of not doing so?

**PRAY:** If God has put someone on your heart to whom He would have you go and begin mending fences, ask Him to help you know how to go about it. Don’t rush in, but allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in this process. Know that the other person may not react in the way you would want him/her to react...but you are seeking to honor God here, and He will be pleased that you are doing this.

## THURSDAY

October 9, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5: 27-30

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** What is your reaction to Jesus' teaching about adultery? Do you think He has gone too far in judging our thought life equally with our actions? Why do you think He equates the two in this way? What is the danger of a thought that is never expressed in action?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Jesus knows that our spirit is poisoned when we allow unrighteous thoughts to linger in our minds. God cannot be in the presence of unholiness, and so we need to do all we can to get rid of such thoughts.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Read James 1: 13-15. How does looking lustfully at a man or woman have consequences that are spoken about in this passage from James?

Is there a difference between appreciating beauty in another person and indulging in lustful thoughts about them? Where is the line that separates the two? What safeguards can you put in place that will help you from transgressing this line?

Do you need to address lust in your own heart? If so, don't delay in doing so.

**PRAY:** God uses His word to convict our hearts of the need to be cleansed of our sin (see Hebrews 4: 12-13). If you have an issue of lust, do not hide it from God...He already knows about it anyway. Be like David (see Psalm 51:10) and confess it to the Lord in an earnest desire for your forgiveness and cleansing. God is faithful and will forgive you (see 1 John 1:9) and help you overcome this stumbling block in your life.

## FRIDAY

October 10, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5: 27-30

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** Jesus suggests radical action for people who have an issue with lust. Do you think He was being literal or figurative in suggesting what He does in this passage? If you think it is figurative, what would be a good way to interpret what He is saying here?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Jesus wants us to "do whatever it takes" to purge lust from our hearts and minds.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** If you have presently, or ever had in the past, an issue of lust, what are some of the things that would trigger that emotion? Are there ways to avoid those triggers to lust that would keep it from easily invading your thought life?

In today's culture, pornography is more available than ever before. Even if you have safeguarded your computers with filters, our culture is awash with what might have been seen as soft porn years ago in our advertising, movies, and television. As long as you have your eyesight, it is difficult to avoid the temptations that are all around you. However you can choose to look away from the magazine (flip the page), the television (change the channel), etc. as soon as you see something that appeals to your lust. The choice is up to you.

**PRAY:** Read God's promise to help us in our times of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). He will provide a way of escape, but you must do your part in coming to Him in prayer and then looking for what He provides you. If you are tempted easily into a lustful mindset, make this a part of your prayer to God each morning before you start the day, asking for His protection. If you are one to pray the Lord's prayer, don't do it by rote, but consider each phrase...particularly "...And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one..." (Matthew 6:13).

## SATURDAY

October 11, 2010

**READ:** Matthew 5: 21-30

**OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS:** As you conclude this week's devotional, review the entire passage that we used for last weekend's sermon message. How do you understand things differently now than you did a week ago regarding the issues of anger, language, and lustful thoughts?

**KEY CONCEPT:** In this passage, Jesus has raised the bar on what is considered sin. He expects us to govern our thoughts as well as our actions. We are promised God's help in doing so.

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Are you person who is self-made, independent, and hates to ask anyone for help? If so, is it hard for you to come before God and ask for His help in overcoming the challenges of this passage as it relates to your own heart and mind? Know that Jesus has come for people just like yourself. The Jews had tried unsuccessfully for years to keep the 10 Commandments. If they had been successful, His sacrifice on the cross would not have been necessary. Allow yourself to receive the loving help that our Lord wants to give you by first admitting to yourself the need for His forgiveness, and then opening your heart to receive it from Him.

**PRAY:** If you have not done so already, allow God to search your heart for any sinful thoughts or actions that He would want to bring to your attention...and then confess to Him (See Psalm 139: 23-24). Rest in the blessing of your forgiveness, and take joy in God's love for you!

